

The Soviet Memorialization of Babi Yar 1941-1976

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## INTRODUCTION

On 19 September 1941 the German army entered Kyiv, the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the largest Soviet city to fall under the Nazi occupation during World War II. Just ten days later, on September 29th and 30th, the Nazis began executing Jews at the Babi Yar (Babyn Yar in Ukrainian), a winding ravine stretching for 150 meters and fifteen meters deep.<sup>1</sup> These executions would continue for the next two years.<sup>2</sup> Today the park around the Babi Yar ravine is filled with over 88 monuments to those killed there, however the first of those monuments would not appear until 1976.

This paper will discuss the mass murder and analyze the memorialization of Babi Yar up until the establishment of the first monument in 1976. It will go over what took place at Babi Yar in 1941; what role the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee played in the memorialization of Babi Yar; how the Soviet Union represented Babi Yar after World War Two; the initial attempts at memorializing Babi Yar; and the monument that was constructed/unveiled at Babi Yar in 1976. The paper will address the struggle for the memorialization of the murdered Jews within the Soviet Union, focusing on the case of Babi Yar as a case study for the changing Soviet memorialization policies. This paper will demonstrate the disinterest and hesitance of the Soviet Union to memorialize Jewish civilians who had died and Soviet leaders' slow progress towards eventually acknowledging and memorializing the deaths. The Soviet state was unwilling to memorialize Babi Yar after World War Two due to their undervaluing of Jewish civilians' deaths during the war, but under the influence of international pressure brought about by increased media attention stemming

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<sup>1</sup> Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 68.

from publications on Babi Yar and subsequent protests, the state eventually erected a monument in 1976.

Of particular relevance to the discussion of Holocaust monuments is the work of Arkady Zeltser and his book *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*. A Belarussian Jew himself, Zeltser analyzes Holocaust monuments in the Soviet Union and the effort it took to get them approved and constructed. Through a mix of Soviet history and memory analysis, both from a Soviet and a Jewish perspective, Zeltser paints a picture of what it was like to memorialize a Holocaust site after World War Two in the Soviet Union. Of special interest is his description of Babi Yar as a *lieu de mémoire*, a term coined by Pierre Nora to describe a memorial that is a phenomenon on a national scale.<sup>3</sup> He describes Babi Yar's special meaning as resulting from the immense number of victims, the number of people whose loved ones perished there, and the negative reaction from the Soviet authorities regarding the demand that the Jewish victims be memorialized. The book is especially relevant having come out in 2018 long after the fall of the Soviet Union, allowing the author to reflect in an open manner on the Soviet Union and its impacts with the use of formerly classified documents.

In this study, I examine the manner in which the Babi Yar massacre in Kyiv was memorialized and the measures through which the Soviet Union memorialized Jewish massacres. Babi Yar has been the centre of a debate over the Soviet memorialization of the Holocaust since the end of World War Two. It has been ignored, built over, destroyed, memorialized in a way obscuring Jewish memory, and subsequently filled with monuments recognizing each social, religious and ethnic group killed there. As a result, even for the period before 1976 there is quite an extensive history of memorialization to discuss in order to determine what lead to the erection

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<sup>3</sup> Zeltser, Arkadii and International Institute for Holocaust Research. *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2018) 246

of the first Soviet monument 1976 and what that monument's shortcomings were. In addition to examining the history of Babi Yar, this paper will also analyze the history of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the Soviet Union and the role it played in getting events such as Holocaust massacres memorialized. It is especially important to examine memorialization such as that which has taken place at Babi Yar in light of the current war in Ukraine as the daily bombings on Kyiv threaten the memorial park with destruction.

In Chapter One I will examine the history of Babi Yar, specifically what took place there from 1941–1943 during the Nazi occupation of Kyiv. It is important to examine the history of Babi Yar in order to understand the struggles over its memorialization. The history of the ravine also provides important context as to whom is being memorialized. Had the victims at Babi Yar been regular Soviet citizens or ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, the response and memorialization would very likely have been very different. As will be explained further later, the Soviet authorities devised a social hierarchy of those who had died during World War Two and Jews were at the bottom if they were even mentioned at all as they were often excluded.

My main source for the events that took place at Babi Yar is the memoir of Anatoli A. Kuznetsov, a native to Kyiv who lived in the city throughout the entirety of World War Two and later interviewed Dina Pronicheva, a Ukrainian Jewish woman who was one of the few survivors of the Babi Yar massacre.<sup>4</sup> I conclude this chapter with an explanation of what took place after the massacre at Babi Yar before the Red Army retook Kyiv. This involved the burning of all the corpses of those murdered at Babi Yar and the spreading of their ashes throughout the gardens surrounding the ravine to dispose of the evidence. Kuznetsov recounts, thanks to the testimony of

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<sup>4</sup> Anatoliĭ, A., 1929-1979. *Babi Yar: A Documentary Novel*. (New York: Dial Press, 1967) 214

a Ukrainian POW, that the destruction of the bodies was so foul that the guards overseeing the prisoners doing the work were often drunk in order to stand the smell and sight of the bodies.

Chapter Two describes the events occurring concurrently to Chapter One but discusses the actions of the Soviet Union's Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee or JAFC. The JAFC was originally created by the Sovinformburo at the end of 1941 in order to exploit the wealth of western Jews to fund the Soviet effort in World War Two. However, the committee worked far beyond their mandate, advocating for the creation of a Jewish independent republic in Crimea, and assembling the first book documenting the horrors that took place during the Holocaust, *The Black Book of Russian Jewry*, which was not published until decades later. It would be this work that would contribute to the committee's ultimate disbandment, the murder of its chairman, and the trial of the key executive members. In this chapter I will explore the history of the JAFC and its contribution to the memorialization of Soviet Jews murdered in the Holocaust, because these developments explain the official Soviet stance on the Holocaust.

Chapter Three discusses the initial attempts at memorialization at Babi Yar and in the Soviet Union more widely. It largely looks at the policies within the Soviet Union from 1948 until 1960 regarding memorialization and overall discussion of the Second World War. There was a general lack of enthusiasm in the years after the war to discuss what took place, especially amongst the Soviet state itself as exploration of the Holocaust could produce evidence of widespread collaboration. This chapter also details the small ways in which many of those who had lost relatives at Babi Yar memorialized the deaths of their relatives privately, including attending Yom Kippur services (the Babi Yar massacre began around Yom Kippur and took place for 2 years).

The fourth and final chapter discusses the period from 1960 until 1969 and the memorialization of Babi Yar that took place during this period. Babi Yar was first memorialized

officially in a poem by famous Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko's in *Babi Yar* published in 1961. Shortly thereafter, Anatoli A. Kuznetsov published his book *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel* in 1966 which, although heavily redacted, publicized for the first time the testimony of Dina Pronicheva, documenting what took place at Babi Yar in 1941. Although these publications generated little change in the official position, they did generate a social movement which culminated in a large memorial event at Babi Yar on the twenty fifth anniversary of the mass murder and the subsequent placement there of a stone promising the construction of a state-funded monument to Babi Yar in 1976.

In conclusion, by using the documentation of the massacre at Babi Yar and the subsequent struggle to memorialize Babi Yar this thesis shows that importance of international pressure, media pressure, and social pressure on the Soviet authorities to bring about the memorialization of such a vital site such as Babi Yar – the centre of such a horrific massacre.

## METHODOLOGY

The subject matter of a topic such as this is not easy to discuss without first establishing a definition of what memorialization is. The term memorialization stems from its root word, memorial, which is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as “an object, often large and made of stone, that has been built in honour of a famous person or event.”<sup>5</sup> To memorialize is defined by the dictionary as “to create a memorial (an object such as a statue) to honour a famous person or event” or “to make people remember a person or event, or to show that you remember them.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Memorialize,” Cambridge dictionary Online. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/memorialize> (accessed March 13, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

To memorialize has since been turned into an academic term – memorialization – which is defined by Holloway as:

The way in which a set of memories is laid down and recalled, including their form and content, by an individual, family, community or wider society following the death of a person or number of persons in a single event or historical episode. This formation of memory may take place over a period of time after the death(s) but achieves a stable presentation which can be revisited at significant times and events, but which, however, may be critically re-evaluated in the light of personal, social or political change.<sup>7</sup>

This can take many forms, including a form of address, petition, or ceremony of remembrance. Soviet memorialization of the Holocaust is an important topic, which, according to Arkady Zeltser, was “relegated to the fringes of research for many years.”<sup>8</sup> He singles out Babi Yar, where there was no monument until 1976, as an example that has long shaped the Soviet discourse regarding Jewish memorialization. Zeltser cites an article by Rebecca L. Golbert who “saw the work of the commemoration of the victims undertaken by Soviet Jews in the 1950–70s as the activism of a few intrepid loners rather than a mass phenomenon.”<sup>9</sup> It is also argued in Zeltser’s book that the “public space of Holocaust victim memorialization was largely defined by the state of Jewry in the Soviet Union and by the Jews’ perceptions of their own situation.”<sup>10</sup> My thesis builds on and develops Zeltser’s argument that the study of the early Soviet Holocaust

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<sup>7</sup>Holloway, Margaret. "Death Studies and Memorialisation." (*Mortality (Abingdon, England) 25, no. 1 2020*). 6

<sup>8</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, 19

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 27

memorialization in the Soviet Union indicates a need to revise our conceptions about the behaviour of Soviet Jews in the post-war period. This argument goes two ways. The Soviet authorities would not have constructed the monument if it were not for the social pressure of Soviet Jews and their supporters among the Russian and Ukrainian cultural figures. At the same time, the monument's design demonstrated the authorities' intention to deny the specificity of the Holocaust by universalizing the Jewish victims as "peaceful Soviet citizens." It was the state's memorialization rather than the Jewish one.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study relies on the previous work of many scholars whose close analysis of the memorialization of Babi Yar and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee has been integral to my research. This study owes much to the authors mentioned above and below who have traveled to Kyiv to study and analyze the Soviet monument erected in the Babi Yar Park as well as those who have translated Soviet documents into English. Work on the history of Soviet memorialization, especially in the case of the Holocaust and Ukraine that was central to this work includes *Babi Yar: The Absence of the Babi Yar Massacre from Popular Memory* by Jacqueline Cherepinsky, *Holocaust Remembrance in Ukraine: Memorialization of the Jewish tragedy at Babi Yar* by Aleksandr Burakovskiy, *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry* by Vasily Grossman, and *Constructing the Memory of the Holocaust: The Ambiguous Treatment of Babii Yar in Soviet Literature* by E. W. Clowes. Additionally, the memoir of Anatoli A. Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the form of a Novel* was integral to my understanding of what took place at Babi Yar and in providing primary source material, especially in the case of Dina Pronicheva's testimony.

In researching the literature on memorialization of Babi Yar, two opposite reactions to the Holocaust came to my attention. Arkady Zeltser illustrates them well in his description of his family and a neighbouring family's commemoration of their family members who died in the Holocaust. Zeltser's father, originating from Belorussia, upon being informed that his family had been murdered in the Holocaust never returned to the region of his birth.<sup>11</sup> Their neighbours, the Genins family however visited the sites of their relatives death on an annual basis, even bringing their children once they came of age.<sup>12</sup> These differing reactions illustrate one of the factors that contributed to memorialization of Babi Yar taking as long as it did – many family members found it just too painful to return to the site or even discuss the events that took place. However, my thesis focuses on the state and Jewish activists who actively campaigned for the memorialization of the Holocaust.



Figure 1: The Babi Yar ravine as photographed by the Red Army at the end of World War Two.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, p. 13

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Shneer, David. "Ghostly Landscapes: Soviet Liberators Photograph the Holocaust." (*Humanity (Philadelphia, Pa.)* 5 (2) 2014)

## CHAPTER ONE: History of Babi Yar

The history of Babi Yar as a site of mass murder starts in Kyiv in 1941. Kyiv at the time was the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic or UkSSR, and in 1941 over 1.5 million Jews lived in the Ukrainian republic with over 85% concentrated in urban areas.<sup>14</sup> Jewish assimilation was low in rural Ukraine, where the Jewish population preserved the traditional lifestyle including the Yiddish language and Judaism, but considerable in the large cities like Kyiv, where most Jews were secular and assimilated into Russian culture.<sup>15</sup> The Wehrmacht entered Kyiv on September 19, 1941.<sup>16</sup> By September 19 over half of the Jewish population of Kyiv had been evacuated by the Soviet authorities because of their role in the economy or government or fled on their own, with a total of one third of Ukrainian Jews managing to flee.<sup>17</sup> Between Soviet Ukraine in its pre-1939 borders and the recently annexed regions of Poland (Eastern Galicia), in total 1.4 to 1.5 million Jews fell under Nazi rule. This region had been incorporated into Soviet Ukraine in 1939.<sup>18</sup> Despite many Jews fleeing, the advancing Wehrmacht were received with a “happy reception”<sup>19</sup> from Kyivans. The most accurate description of the welcome the Germans received was as a soldier noted in his diary:

The surprised population is in the streets. They still don't know how to behave. Here and there are a few timid greetings. Whenever German soldiers halt, they are immediately surrounded by a large crowd prepared to give friendly assistance and help.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Brandon, Ray and Wendy Lower. *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization*. (2008), 25

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Aristov, Stanislav. "Next to Babi Yar: The Syrets Concentration Camp and the Evolution of Nazi Terror in Kiev." (*Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29 2015),433

<sup>17</sup> Brandon and Lower, *The Shoah in Ukraine*, 25

<sup>18</sup> Brandon and Lower, *The Shoah in Ukraine*, 25

<sup>19</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, p. 28

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Many civilians came out to watch the new arrivals and some to help, however many were too busy looting to pay any attention to them. Overall, however, the reception of the Germans in Kiev was ambiguous to say the least.

Citation

As Karel Berkhoff points out in his book *Harvest of Despair*, the main reason the arriving German soldiers were so content upon entering the city was because there had been no battle in the city itself, and they had entered a city relatively intact.<sup>21</sup> Kyiv would not remain intact for long however as starting on the day of their arrival, there were several fires in houses, stores, and storage sites.<sup>22</sup> On September 20, the first of many mines would explode in the former arsenal next to the Monastery of the Caves.<sup>23</sup> After this, roundups of Jewish pedestrians were initiated as rumors (potentially started by the Germans) blamed the Jews for the Red Army's defeat – sparking anger amongst the local Ukrainians.<sup>24</sup> On September 24 and 25 more mines started exploding in the city centre—at the former Detskii Mir toy store, then at the Grand Hotel, the Arcade, and the Hotel Continental.<sup>25</sup> The explosions would continue to go off every few minutes over the course of the two days and the resulting fires would burn for four days in total.<sup>26</sup> In all, about 200 Germans lost their lives in the explosions and the aftermath and up to 25,000 people were made homeless.<sup>27</sup> Both Kyivites and Germans were outraged by the mine explosions; the latter exploited this opportunity to blame the sabotage on the city's Jews.<sup>28</sup> On the first day of explosions an angry

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<sup>21</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 29

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 32

mob started searching the city looking for potential culprits.<sup>29</sup> Houses searches also began and many Jews were arrested by the Germans and local auxiliary police.<sup>30</sup> Rumours spreading around town tended to blame only Jews. By September 27 the Nazis began moving the 1,600 Jews arrested on September 26 to Babi Yar to be shot – the beginning of the mass murders.<sup>31</sup> Sunday, September 28 saw the tensions come to a head when the Ukrainian auxiliary police posted announcements throughout Kyiv in Russian, Ukrainian and German declaring that on September 29 before 8 a.m. all the Jews of Kyiv and its vicinity had to appear at the corner of Melnykov and Dokterivska streets.<sup>32</sup> Jews were to bring with them their documents, money, valuables, warm clothing, and anything else of value. The order ended with the threat that any “yids” who disobeyed would be shot.<sup>33</sup> The next day on September 29, thousands of Kyivan Jews showed up to the intersection expecting deportation. There was a train station located nearby and many of those who arrived that day expected to be loaded on the trains and sent out of Kyiv or maybe even out of Ukraine, possibly to concentration camps.<sup>34</sup>

Kyivans, including the Jews, agreed on one thing – this new order had been triggered by the fires and mines. As Mr. Raizman said:

This is the work of those tramps (referring to the Bolsheviks) [bosiaki] (a pun on Bolsheviks). They decided to play on us Jews one last trick. Without these terrible explosions the Germans would have left us alone. <sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 32

<sup>31</sup> Aristov, *Next to Babi Yar: The Syrets Concentration Camp and the Evolution of Nazi Terror In Kiev*, 435

<sup>32</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 33

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 33

Although many Jews thought they were being sent to concentration camps in the Reich, some committed suicide the night before they were to assemble.<sup>36</sup>

There are only a couple testimonies of what took place at Babi Yar from the victim's perspective. Dina Pronicheva, a Kyivan Jew married to a Russian is one of the few survivors of Babi Yar, and her testimony is widespread in writing on the Ukrainian Holocaust. Although the announcement had called for Jews to line up at 8 a.m. on September 29, people started lining up hours before, in the early morning. As he reports in his book, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, Anatoli A. Kuznetsov a Kyiv local, Pronicheva, despite not planning on leaving Kyiv herself decided she would take her parents down to Melnykov and Dokterivska street.<sup>37</sup> She collected her parents early in the morning and took them down to the intersection. Artem Street was completely jammed, and it was not until midday that they reached the Jewish cemetery.<sup>38</sup> By the cemetery there were anti-tank obstacles and barbwire lining the street with a gap in the center through which people passed, although no one returned.<sup>39</sup> With such a large crowd it was difficult for Dina to tell what was happening, but some shooting could be heard in the distance.<sup>40</sup> At the barricade they were putting everyone's belongings to one side, it was nothing like a train station.<sup>41</sup> As Dina approached the barricade, she began to understand what was going on. She entered a long corridor formed by rows of soldiers with dogs.<sup>42</sup> Blows rained down on people as they passed through, eventually stumbling out into a field.<sup>43</sup> In the field people were told to strip.<sup>44</sup> It was at

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<sup>36</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 33

<sup>37</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, 99

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 101

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 102

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

this point that Dina tried to escape as, as her mother told her to run, because she did not look Jewish.<sup>45</sup> She claimed to be non-Jewish and was told by a soldier to sit to the side and wait, she would be let out later.<sup>46</sup> Dina watched as the nightmarish scene played out. Naked men, women and children were forced to line up and walk through a gap dug in a pile of sand.<sup>47</sup> Only Germans came back through that gap.<sup>48</sup> It started to get dark when a car drove up with an officer inside.<sup>49</sup> He told to soldiers that those who had been waiting with Dina to be let out had seen too much and had to be shot.<sup>50</sup> Otherwise, he explained they would tell others and no more Jews would show up in the following days. Dina was stripped and sent through the gap in the second group.<sup>51</sup> She walked through and came to a small sand quarry.<sup>52</sup> Here she was hurried along a narrow ledge beneath which was a sea of bodies, covered in blood.<sup>53</sup> Germans started shooting at them from across the quarry.<sup>54</sup> Dina jumped before she was shot.<sup>55</sup>

Dina was one of the very few people to survive the initial days of the Babi Yar massacre. From September 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> 34,000 Jewish people were killed and buried in a mass grave at Babi Yar.<sup>56</sup> Some historians believe that this figure does not include the non-Jewish spouses and relatives of Jews who were also killed at Babi Yar. It was one of the first and the largest massacre

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<sup>45</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, 107

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, 107

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 108

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 109

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 110

<sup>56</sup> Naimark, Norman M. "The Many Lives of Babi Yar: One of the Blackest Chapters of World War II: The German Massacre of Kyiv's Jews. the Horror of Babi Yar, Suppressed in the Soviet Era, may be Finding its Proper Place in European Memory at Last." (Hoover Digest: 2017) 177

of Jews in the Nazi campaign of mass murder. This was not the end of the Nazi terror however, but its zenith.<sup>57</sup> In the following months the killing of Jews continued sporadically.<sup>58</sup> Kyivan Romas were killed at Babi Yar in October as well, although we are unsure how many Roma died there.<sup>59</sup> By the end of November 1941 by some estimates 42,000 people had been killed at Babi Yar, 40,000 of which were Jews.<sup>60</sup> The total number of people killed at Babi Yar continues to be debated to this day with some listing it as 40 000 and others as 100,000.<sup>61</sup> The discrepancy can largely be attributed to the fact that the bodies of those killed at Babi Yar were burned by the Nazis, making it impossible for subsequent Soviet investigators to count the bodies.

Babi Yar would continue to serve as a killing site until 1943 when the final phase of the ravine's dark history began. During this phase, the Nazis used prisoners of war from the Syrets or Babi Yar POW camp nearby to dig the earth out of the pits and expose the bodies.<sup>62</sup> The prisoners were then made to haul the bodies out of the pits with hooks (a frightful ordeal) and drag the bodies to the makeshift outdoor stoves.<sup>63</sup> At first "prospectors" had pliers to pull out gold fillings and crowns from the dead.<sup>64</sup> "Cloak room attendants" as they were called then removed anything that was still whole from the bodies such as boots, etc.<sup>65</sup> "Builders" then constructed the fires using the headstones from the Jewish cemetery as a base.<sup>66</sup> Each pile would consist of around 2,000 bodies which were then sprayed down with oil and lit on fire by the hair.<sup>67</sup> Once the bodies were burned, "crushers" dealt with the ashes crushing any bones that were not burnt and passing the ashes

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Aritsov, *Next to Babi Yar: The Syrets Concentration Camp and the Evolution of Nazi Terror in Kiev*, 437

<sup>61</sup> Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 306

<sup>62</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, 370

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 374

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 375

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

through a sieve looking for gold.<sup>68</sup> “Gardeners” then scattered the ashes around Babi Yar and on vegetable gardens.<sup>69</sup> In his book *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, Kuznetsov recounts that this process was brutal and gave off quite a pungent smell.<sup>70</sup> As a result of the awful smell, many of the German guards turned to alcohol in order to get through supervising the prisoners of war – meaning many of the guards were drunk for most of the process.<sup>71</sup> Due to the inebriation of the guards as well as their poor management of the POWs, fourteen men managed to escape in a nighttime rebellion, during which many POWs were killed.<sup>72</sup> The fourteen men eventually made it back to the Red Army where they recounted their stories and provided testimony against the Germans for their efforts to cover up the crimes they had committed at Babi Yar. The testimony delivered by the escaped POWs was integral in uncovering the events that took place at Babi Yar despite the extensive covering up of the crimes the POWs were forced to commit under German command. It is because of the bravery of these fourteen POWs that we know the story of Babi Yar today.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 376

<sup>69</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, 376

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 375

<sup>71</sup> Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, 374

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 388

## CHAPTER TWO: The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee

Following the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC) was formed in Moscow by the Sovinformburo – the leading Soviet news agency - under the orders of its head Aleksandr Shcherbakov with the aim of mobilizing the opinion and resources of the Jews worldwide in support of the Soviet war effort.<sup>73</sup> The committee was led by the leading cultural figures of Soviet Jewry.<sup>74</sup> Their contacts with Jewish organizations outside the Soviet Union were closely monitored yet the JAFC played a central role in the articulation of the Jewish identity within the Soviet Union during the war and its members developed increasing responsibility towards Jews—a development the Soviet authorities disliked. By mid-December Solomon Mikhoels—the director of the Moscow Jewish Theater—was appointed the committee’s chairman.<sup>75</sup>



*Figure 2:*

*Members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee – Michoels third from left & Fefer fourth from left<sup>76</sup>*

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<sup>73</sup> Kostyrchenko, Gennadi. “Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Stalin’s Russia.” Prometheus Books. 31

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Rausenbaum, Alan. “The Holocaust in the Soviet Union in Real Time.” (The Jerusalem post 2019) unpaginated

The proposed activities of the JAFC consisted of the collection of information concerning the fate of Jews under Nazi rule including resistance and the publication and dissemination of materials on Jewish topics connected to the war. They had an additional secondary purpose, to use their contacts amongst western Jews to fundraise to support the efforts of the Red Army in the war.<sup>77</sup>

The first public event held by the JAFC was the Second Jewish Radio Rally in Moscow in May 1942, with the first being held before the JAFC's formal establishment.<sup>78</sup> This event was an appeal for resistance and financial contributions to the defeat of the German army.

Discussion of the JAFC's goals and functions was a prominent topic during its first plenary session in late May 1942. There was conflict between the visions of the JAFC as a foreign propaganda organization and that of a meaningful Soviet institution representing Soviet Jews. However, by the spring and summer of 1944 the JAFC saw an expansion of membership and the standing committee presidium was established.<sup>79</sup> Fearing the JAFC may ferment Jewish nationalism within the Soviet Union, the authorities pressured the committee not to see itself as a ministry of Jewish affairs. The goal was for the JAFC to influence world opinion in favour of the Soviet Union through propaganda, contacts with international Jewish organizations, and the collection of western financial aid. The JAFC was to be the master key to American wealth.<sup>80</sup>

To achieve these aims, in 1943 the Soviet authorities dispatched best-known Jewish cultural figures on the committee, the theater director Solomon Mikhoels and the writer Itsik Fefer

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<sup>77</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 33

<sup>78</sup> Redlich, Shimon, K. M. Anderson, and I. Al'tman. 1995. *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR*. (Vol. 1;1.;. \*United States;Luxembourg;: Harwood Academic 1935) 28

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

<sup>80</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 33

(also known in English as Feffer) on an American tour.<sup>81</sup> Having been invited by Reuben Saltzman, the head of the Jewish section of International Workers, an American pro-communist trade union, Mikhoels and Fefer traveled to the United States and Canada.<sup>82</sup> They toured New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Detroit, Boston and more.<sup>83</sup> All of these tour stops were organized by American journalist Ben Zion Goldberg.<sup>84</sup> It was intended to be a glamorous propaganda event.

Back in the Soviet Union the JAFIC's Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman started to organize the first collection of documents on what is now called the Holocaust in 1943.<sup>85</sup> Written by a total of twenty-seven writers, the volume they put together included eyewitness accounts and other testimonies of the Nazi crimes against Soviet Jewish citizens.<sup>86</sup> The book, now known as the Black Book of Russian Jewry, was completed in 1946 but was never published in the Soviet Union.<sup>87</sup> Fragments of the book appeared in Russian in the journal *Znamia* and, in Yiddish, in the JAFIC's newspaper *Eynikayt* and the collection *Merder Fun Felker* (Murderers of Peoples, 1944).<sup>88</sup> The full volume was finally published in Israel in the 1980s featuring a chapter on Babi Yar.<sup>89</sup>

Immediately after the war, the Soviet government severely restricted the JAFIC's international contacts and denied every attempt for the members to meet with foreigners. Before getting down to business of vanquishing the JAFIC, ostensibly for endorsing the idea of a Jewish

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>82</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 33

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 66

<sup>86</sup> Clowes, Edith W.. "Constructing the Memory of the Holocaust: The Ambiguous Treatment of Babii Yar in Soviet Literature." (*Partial Answers* 3 (2): 2005) 160

<sup>87</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 69

<sup>88</sup> Clowes, *Constructing the Memory of the Holocaust: The Ambiguous Treatment of Babii Yar in Soviet Literature*, 160

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Soviet Republic in Crimea, the special services launched an operation to expose a mythical American-Zionist plot.<sup>90</sup> The main purpose of this plot was to liquidate the leader of Soviet Jewry – Solomon Mikhoels and then put on trial the rest of the JAFC.

In January 1948 Mikhoels was sent to Minsk to judge a play for the Stalin Prize.<sup>91</sup> While there he was invited to the house of the head of the Soviet Belarussian State Police.<sup>92</sup> There he was murdered, his body left crushed by a truck on a quiet side street near his hotel.<sup>93</sup> Mikhoels was a central figure of the Jewish community in the Soviet Union. His involvement in the mythical American-Zionist plot against Stalin and endorsement of the Jewish Soviet Republic in Crimea made him a substantial threat that needed to be eliminated. Stalin's dislike for him likely had just as much to do with politics as it did with him being Jewish. After Mikhoels' death, that of his fellow JAFC members was soon to follow. On November 20, 1948, Item 81 on the JAFC appeared on the agenda of the Ministry of State Security tasking them with the immediate dismissal of the JAFC.<sup>94</sup> The next morning MGB officers arrived at JAFC headquarters to search and confiscate documents.<sup>95</sup> This search would later be followed by the order to arrest Fefer and Zuskin, the leaders of the JAFC following Mikhoels death.<sup>96</sup> Fefer's arrest in particular was unexpected as he was a spy in the JAFC for the MGB.

Despite its short lifespan, the JAFC's fate demonstrates an important lesson on the treatment and valuing of Jewish people in the Soviet Union. The committee was largely created for its financial benefits in accruing donations from wealthy western Jewish people to fund the

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<sup>90</sup> Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*, 78

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 112

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 113

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Soviet cause. This funding however was not enough to keep the committee and its members alive. Ultimately the Soviet state's reluctance to accept the specificity of the Holocaust's focus on Jewish people and the existence of a large Jewish culture within its borders led to the destruction of the committee and Mikhoels' death. A lesson such as this would become increasingly poignant over the coming years.

## CHAPTER THREE: 1948—1960

After the liberation of Kyiv in November 1943, the Soviet government was making few but impactful statements. In this case, what the Soviet government was saying about Babi Yar was very significant in regard to memorialization. Official discourse determined what memorialization could take place and what form it would take. Babi Yar is a great example for this as it has long shaped scholarly and public discourse regarding Jewish memorialization.<sup>97</sup> It is an example of the unwillingness of the Soviet government to appreciate the wartime sacrifice of the living and the dead civilians, but especially Jewish civilians. Between 2.5 and 2.6 million Holocaust victims had died within Soviet territory in its June 22, 1941 borders and very few of them were acknowledged in any official capacity during the 1950s.<sup>98</sup> Authorities insisted that all those who had died were Soviet civilians—ignoring their ethnicity—and did little to memorialize them.<sup>99</sup> The year 1947 saw the state downplaying the very significance of the war, reorienting propaganda from the military mobilization of the war to festive socioeconomic reconstruction, Victory Day becoming a workday and combat veterans having their privileges revoked.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, strict control of literature, movies and theatre was imposed to control the narrative about the war that was being disseminated to the people. Anything that extended past the official ceremonial presentation of the war was subject to harsh criticism.<sup>101</sup>

By the early 1950s the number of publications about the war had declined. Political ambiguity of the authorities towards civilians who had perished in the war continued with survivors not fairsing much better. The authorities promoted open suspicion of anyone who had

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<sup>97</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, 20

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 88

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 89

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

been under German occupation during the war, although worker shortages undermined this.<sup>102</sup> This apprehension prompted the intentional neglect of the memory of those who perished, and it continued to grow. Fear of persecution deterred the population from taking part in any informal public memorialization activities, however some continued to take place despite this.

Despite the persecution of those who sought memorialization, there was no clear stance by the Soviet government on those Jewish civilians who had perished during the war. Those who attempted to memorialize their loved ones at events such as September 29 gatherings were often arrested. Government policies only applied to those who had been killed while actively resisting the enemy such as the Red Army and partisans. In practice however local authorities could not ignore the civilians who had perished.<sup>103</sup>

An important deterrent to any memorialization was the unwillingness of persons who had taken part in the mass violence to dredge up the past.<sup>104</sup> This was especially true of any former police personnel who had been involved in any punitive actions against civilians.<sup>105</sup> The *Politsai* were an example of this, an ethnically non-defined auxiliary police force that was responsible for many of the atrocities committed at the Babi Yar ravine during the massacre. Many of those Jews who returned from evacuation were similarly disinclined to discuss the destruction of those near and dear to them. It was only later with the distance of time that society began to feel the need to make sense of these traumatic events and form a cohesive memory of the war.<sup>106</sup> Some would never recover from the horror of the Holocaust and would stay silent on the horrors they saw for the remainder of their lives. Soviet society's faint interest in publicly discussing the memory of

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<sup>102</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, 90

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 92

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 94

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 96

the victims in the first years after the war was thus not unusual although specific conditions in the Soviet Union took on a particular meaning – central authorities' disdainful policy towards civilian casualties. It was only in the late 1950s after Stalin's death and the lifting of his oppressive regime that commemorative activity began to grow.

Further reasoning against memorialization for Jewish casualties from the war came from the perceived passivity of the Jews during the Nazi occupation. This was a stereotyped notion of Jewish behaviour. As is quoted by Arkady Zeltser in his book *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*:

It was simply said by someone somewhere: a monument? But why a monument? To people who voluntarily went to their deaths? Without resistance, without any protest? We don't put up monuments to cowards in this country??<sup>107</sup>

The initial attempts at memorialization for Jewish casualties from the Nazi occupation were accompanied by a heavy risk. Any activity in the ethnic sphere including memorialization would likely lead to accusations of nationalism and disloyalty.<sup>108</sup> Despite this in many places in the Soviet Union, the date of the Babi Yar massacre became a sort of Memorial Day for Holocaust victims. The mass attendance of Jews in synagogues on Yom Kippur in 1951 may indirectly corroborate the influence of this anniversary on Jewish ethnic behaviour – as the Babi Yar massacre fell just days before the holiday. Attending a synagogue service for the high holidays during this period should be considered an ethnic reaction to the Holocaust and anti-Semitism on the part of many

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<sup>107</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, 109

<sup>108</sup> Golbert, R. L.. "Holocaust Sites in Ukraine: Pechora and the Politics of Memorialization." (*Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2): 2005). 224

Jews, especially those who did not actively practice the religion. Soon however memorialization styles would be able to shift into a more public sphere.

## CHAPTER FOUR: 1960—1976

Following Stalin's death in 1953, everything changed in the Soviet Union with the introduction of Khrushchev's Thaw. A series of newspaper publications about Babi Yar become a significant episode in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

However, the first monumental event in the memorialization of Babi Yar was the publication of Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem "Babi Yar" in September 1961.<sup>109</sup> Yevtushenko was a prominent young Russian poet, often supported by the state but at other times criticized for his ideological transgressions. Nevertheless, he never became a political dissident and his popularity among the Soviet youth gave him a license to write on controversial topics. It was for this reason that he was able to write the poem about Babi Yar and publish it. The poem appeared in the *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, the official newspaper of the Writers' Union that also had more leeway in raising controversial subjects and was subject to less censorship. Yevtushenko's poem is particularly famous for its opening line, "No monument stands over Babi Yar. A drop sheer as a crude gravestone. I am afraid." – which served to highlight the lack of memorialization at the site.<sup>110</sup> This poem and the negative reaction to it on the part of conservatives in the party and among the intelligentsia turned Babi Yar into the central symbol in the Holocaust on Soviet territory.

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<sup>109</sup> Burakovskiy, Aleksandr. "Holocaust Remembrance in Ukraine: Memorialization of the Jewish Tragedy at Babi Yar." (*Nationalities Papers* 39 (3)2011) 375

<sup>110</sup> Naimarr, *The Many Lives of Babi Yar*, 181

One's attitude towards Yevtushenko's poem became an indicator of belonging to a definite camp: the international liberals or nationalist conservatives. Public discussion surrounding Babi Yar clearly showed that a statistically significant segment of the population supported the Soviet universalistic approach to the victims of the war and was convinced that it would be incorrect to differentiate those who had perished by ethnicity.<sup>111</sup> In Soviet documents not intended for publication and in published texts where the ethnicity was indicated, the victims were listed in order of Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, etc. if Jews were included at all. This attests not only to an attempt to downplay the particular nature of the Jewish victims but also to the drive of the functionaries at various levels to advance their own ethnic narrative of martyrdom.

The year 1961 became a landmark year after the publication of the poem.<sup>112</sup> The poem became the first true monument to the Jews at Babi Yar.<sup>113</sup> It cultivated public interest and opened the doors to the world to show the almost official anti-Semitism that was present in the Soviet Union.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, it provoked the beginning of a debate about the events at Babi Yar.<sup>115</sup> In Ukraine the poem was met with official silence and its reading in public was forbidden in Kyiv for 23 years.<sup>116</sup>

The second monumental event in bringing the tragedy of Babi Yar to the attention of the world was the serial publication in the Soviet journal *Yunost* (1966) of Anatoli Kuznetsov's brilliant memoir *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*.<sup>117</sup> Although large sections of the book were excised in this publication, the structure of the book, which included long passages

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<sup>111</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, 152

<sup>112</sup> Burakovskiy, *Holocaust remembrance in Ukraine: memorialization of the Jewish tragedy at Babi Yar*, 375

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Naimark, *The Many Lives of Babi Yar*, 182

from several survivor's testimonies, created a powerful impression of the horror of the Babi Yar tragedy, along with a history of its purposeful forgetting. On a trip to London in 1969 Kuznetsov asked for political asylum and proceeded to publish his novel in its entirety.<sup>118</sup> The influence of Kuznetsov's novel in the twenty-fifth year since the killings most likely influenced people to hold ceremonies at Babi Yar.<sup>119</sup>

The largest ceremonies at Babi Yar took place in September 1966.<sup>120</sup> The first one took place on September 24 on Yom Kippur, during which the Jewish activists Immanuel Diamant and Garik Goldovsky hung a banner on the wall of the Jewish cemetery saying "Babyn Yar, September 1941–September 1946" in Russian and Hebrew.<sup>121</sup> Five days later, on September 29 there was an unauthorized meeting of over 500 participants (according to the KGB – the organizers gave a much higher figure) at the site of the massacre of the "Soviet people" by the German fascist occupiers at Babi Yar.<sup>122</sup> This was reported by O. Bovyn, a CPU (Communist Party of Ukraine) agent, to the CPU Central Committee.<sup>123</sup> It was recorded as being a spontaneous meeting at the site of the massacre on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>124</sup> Those in attendance were mainly young Jews but also included notable names such as the writers Ehrenburg and Viktor Nekrasov, as well as the famous heart surgeon Nikolai Amosov.<sup>125</sup> This is additionally significant because both Nekrasov and Amosov were Russian and thus more connected with those opposing the memorialization than those

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Naimark, *The Many Lives of Babi Yar*, 182

<sup>120</sup> Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. *The Paradigm-changing Day: The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Babyn Yar and Ukrainian-Jewish Relations*. (Harvard: *The Journal of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University*, 2021) unpaginated

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Khanin, *Documents on Ukrainian Jewish Identity and Emigration 1944-1990*, 145

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Petrovsky-Shtern, *A Paradigm-changing Day: The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Babyn Yar and Ukrainian-Jewish Relations*

advocating for it. The event was filmed by a crew from the Ukrainian Documentary Film Studio.<sup>126</sup> At this gathering, people gave uncensored speeches including that given by Nekrasov.<sup>127</sup> During Nekrasov's speech the police arrived, dispersed the crowd, and confiscated the video footage.<sup>128</sup> The Soviet government would then summon Nekrasov and others for many interrogations about what took place.<sup>129</sup> A couple of weeks later a granite stone suddenly appeared at Babi Yar with an inscription calling for the plans for the establishment of a memorial at Babi Yar dedicated to the memory of the "victims of fascism."<sup>130</sup> This was an attempt by the Soviet authorities to reclaim the initiative from the public and indicate the only acceptable interpretation of Babi Yar. This granite stone would remain in its place for ten years until it was replaced by a monument in 1976.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a tightened control over grassroots Jewish commemorative activity, such as the twenty-fifth anniversary memorialization – something that had already been regarded with suspicion since the 1940s.<sup>131</sup> This is a departure from the more lenient period during which Yevtushenko and Kuznetsov's writings came out. During the "stagnation" period, as before, there was no centralized policy with regard to Jewish memory of the war or to the Holocaust – only a loose trend of tolerating local familial memorialization at events such as Yom Kippur. The boundaries of what was permitted were defined at the local level and varied widely between regions.<sup>132</sup> The situation regarding monuments to Jewish victims

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Petrovsky-Shtern, *A Paradigm-changing Day: The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Babyn Yar and Ukrainian-Jewish Relations*

<sup>130</sup> Cherepinsky, Jacqueline. 2014. "Babi Yar: The Absence of the Babi Yar Massacre from Popular Memory." In *The Holocaust*. 162

<sup>131</sup> Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, 157

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 173

became even more ambiguous. Authorities approach at the local level remained not unequivocally prohibitive but averse or indifferent.<sup>133</sup> The Jewish nature of Babi Yar remained largely suppressed. The state seized the opportunity as public interest in Babi Yar increased and the state got out in front of it and took control of the narrative—so the granite stone was placed.



Figure 3: Banner hung in memory of Babi Yar<sup>134</sup>

Even before the 1966 commemorations, the international horror and discussion triggered by Yevtushenko’s poem and the Kuznetsov’s book forced Soviet officials to confront the issue of a permanent memorial. This led to the decision to conduct an architectural competition to design the memorial that would stand at Babi Yar.

In 1965 the Soviet authorities announced a closed architectural competition for a monument to be placed at Babi Yar.<sup>135</sup> The guidelines for the competition were that

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Petrovsky-Shtern, *A Paradigm-changing Day: The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Babyn Yar and Ukrainian-Jewish Relations*

<sup>135</sup> Burakovskiy, *Holocaust Remembrance in Ukraine: memorialization of the Jewish tragedy at Babi Yar*, 376

Monuments must artistically reflect heroism and the unbending will of our people in the fight for the victory of the great ideas of communism...courage and fearlessness of the soviet citizens before the face of death....<sup>136</sup>

This competition was seen as an opportunity for freedom of memorialization, yet the winning submission was rejected by the party leaders based on the “inadequateness of the work” of the winning submission.<sup>137</sup> A second competition was subsequently held, and the results of that competition were rejected as well.<sup>138</sup> Finally in 1972 party officials commissioned a statue.<sup>139</sup> It was designed by a team headed by the architect A. Ignashchenko.<sup>140</sup> The monument was unveiled on July 2, 1976 with little publicity.<sup>141</sup> It was identified as a monument to the Soviet people honouring citizens, soldiers and prisoners of the war shot by the Nazis at Babi Yar.<sup>142</sup> In 1991 an additional series of plaques with inscriptions in Russian, Ukrainian and Yiddish would be added to the monument. The plaques read:

In this place during 1942-1943 the German-Nazi occupiers shot one hundred thousand of Kyiv residents and POWs.<sup>143</sup>

There no further action would be taken by a state government to further commemorate Babi Yar by Soviet authorities between 1976 and 1991.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Burakovskiy, *Holocaust Remembrance in Ukraine: memorialization of the Jewish tragedy at Babi Yar*, 376.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 377

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid



Figure 4: Babi Yar Monument erected by the Soviet Government in 1976<sup>144</sup>

The monument itself has been highly criticized by academics and civilians alike since its installation.<sup>145</sup> The monument depicts Red Army soldiers at the first level with civilians standing behind them. This is an inaccuracy as there were very few Red Army soldiers killed at Babi Yar. Additionally, the monument does not mention the over 40 thousand Jews murdered at the site, referring to them only as Kyivan residents. It is for this reason that the 1976 Soviet monument to Babi Yar is now one of 88 monuments on the site of the ravine itself. Eighty-seven of which were funded either privately or through public fundraisers, but not by a government.

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<sup>144</sup> Geider, Roland. *Babi Yar monument in Kyiv, Ukraine*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kyiv/Evolution-of-the-modern-city#/media/1/317542/230676> (Access date, April 1, 2022)

<sup>145</sup> Peterson, Joan. 2011. "Iterations of Babi Yar." (*Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46 (4) 2011) 598.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, at the end of World War II the Soviet Union did not want to memorialize the Jewish civilians who had died in massacres such as Babi Yar unless they were subsumed under the universalizing category of peaceful Soviet citizens. Moreover, Soviet civilians were not seen as an important category of victims for commemoration purposes. The official discourse signalled that a true Soviet death was dying in battle or resisting the enemy and it did not condemn the widespread antisemitic stereotype of Jewish passivity and service evasion during the war. Additionally, the state did not want to emphasize the specificity of Jewish experience under the Nazi occupation as opposed to that of Russians and Ukrainians. Any emphasis on the Holocaust was bound to raise uncomfortable questions about the local collaborators, especially in the case of Babi Yar where many policemen involved were Ukrainian. In addition, with the Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union to Israel beginning in the 1970s, the authorities saw Jews as less than loyal Soviet citizens.

The families of the dead, their communities, and the JAFC members felt differently. The JAFC, having been created to raise support and money for the Red Army from amongst the global Jewish community, extended past their mandate to create the *Black Book of Soviet Jewry* and advocate for Jewish causes. The treatment of the committee serves as an example, demonstrating the treatment of Jews overall within the Soviet Union. This is especially significant due to the way the committee was destroyed, with its chair, Mikhoels being brutally murdered in 1948 and the 1952 trial of the committee's other prominent members.

Although some Jews would never recover from the trauma of the Holocaust and did not speak of it, many families fought to memorialize their loved ones even in small ways. Under Stalinist control families memorialized their loved ones by attending Yom Kippur ceremonies and

making small memorialization gestures on the anniversaries of the massacres, such as laying flowers at the site. Eventually, with Khrushchev's Thaw the families of the dead were able to expand their memorialization. Under international pressure brought about by increased media attention stemming from publications on Babi Yar this memorialization continued to expand. Following the September 29, 1966, twenty-fifth anniversary commemoration of Babi Yar the Soviet government was forced to confront the memorialization of Babi Yar head on. In order to get control of the narrative, the Soviet government erected a granite stone pledging to build a monument to Babi Yar. Although this granite stone was not replaced by a monument for ten years, the Soviet government was able to take control of the narrative and lead the memorialization of Babi Yar for a time. Ultimately, however, control of the memorialization of Babi Yar was transferred to Ukraine with the fall of the Soviet Union, but the subsequent erection of 87 monuments by different social groups, ethnic groups, and communities showed the devolution of this control to the society. The Jewish monument in the form of a menorah has become the usual stop for foreign dignitaries visit on their trips to Kyiv. Every year on 29 September, Ukrainian presidents bring flowers there.

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