

Monika Vrzgulová: *Oral History and the Holocaust in Slovakia*. (The Holocaust and Its Context.) Springer. Cham 2024. IX, 165 S. ISBN 978-3-031-73674-2. (€ 130,-.)

Monika Vrzgulová's *Oral History and the Holocaust in Slovakia* is a significant contribution to Holocaust studies, memory studies, and oral history methodologies. The book critically examines the role of oral history in understanding the Holocaust in Slovakia, shedding light on survivor testimonies, societal remembrance, and the evolution of historical narratives. Through a meticulous analysis of interviews with Holocaust survivors and non-Jewish witnesses, V. provides a nuanced perspective on collective and individual memory, as well as the socio-political frameworks that shape Holocaust remembrance in Slovakia.

The book's foundation in the methodology of oral history is both its strength and its central contribution. The author, an expert in the field, reflects on nearly three decades of conducting interviews, offering both theoretical and practical insights. She details her involvement in two major research projects: "Oral History: The Fates of Those Who Survived the Holocaust (1995–1997)," and "Crimes Against Civilian Populations during WWII (2011–2016)," both of which focused on gathering testimonies from Jewish survivors and non-Jewish eyewitnesses. The book also explores the ethical dilemmas of oral history, particularly in relation to survivor trauma, interview dynamics, and the responsibilities of researchers in shaping historical narratives. V.'s reflections on interview techniques, including her emphasis on an empathetic and participatory approach, provide valuable insights into the challenges of working with traumatic memories. Her discussions on the reliability and subjectivity of memory are particularly compelling, demonstrating how survivors' narratives are shaped by both historical events and contemporary socio-political discourses.

One of the book's central themes is the portrayal of non-Jewish Slovaks in survivor testimonies. V. carefully analyses how survivors retroactively constructed their identities in relation to their non-Jewish neighbors. She identifies four key phases in Jewish-Gentile relations during the Holocaust: (1) coexistence and integration, (2) exclusion and marginalization, (3) deportation and destruction, and (4) post-war attempts at reintegration. The narratives reveal a complex and often contradictory image of the Slovak majority, ranging from passive bystanders to active collaborators, as well as those who risked their lives to help Jews.

Another critical aspect of the book is its exploration of Holocaust remembrance in Slovakia from 1945 to the present. V. examines how Holocaust memory has been shaped by shifting political regimes, from the post-war Communist silence to contemporary nationalist narratives that attempt to downplay Slovakia's role in the Holocaust. Her analysis of media, education, and political discourse highlights the ongoing tensions between collective guilt, national identity, and historical responsibility.

In the introduction, the author outlines her 30-year engagement with oral history as a method for studying Holocaust survivors' testimonies, including her early involvement in a ground-breaking research project in 1996, which was part of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. V. discusses how oral history became central to her academic identity and introduces the book's structure and key themes, including memory, identity, and the socio-political context of Holocaust remembrance.

In the next chapter, V. provides her own perspective on conducting oral history research in Slovakia. She explores the ethical challenges, such as navigating trauma, the role of the interviewer, and the reliability of memory. The chapter also contrasts oral history with traditional historiography and discusses how non-Jewish witnesses remember the Holocaust.

Chapter 3 "Images of the Non-Jewish Majority in Holocaust Survivors' Memories" examines how Jewish survivors retrospectively construct their perception of Slovak society during the Holocaust. V. categorizes Jewish-Gentile relations into four phases: coexistence before the war; exclusion and marginalization; deportation and violence; post-war attempts

at reintegration. The book describes how survivors recall a complex and often contradictory portrayal of Slovak non-Jews, highlighting both bystanders and active perpetrators. The chapter also examines how survivors' memories are shaped by contemporary socio-political discourses.

In the following Chapter, V. flips the perspective, analyzing how non-Jewish Slovaks remember their Jewish neighbors. She identifies key themes, including the pre-war perception of Jews as ordinary community members; the role of local Slovak collaborators in deportations and expropriations; the "bystander dilemma"—some non-Jews justified their inaction, while others later expressed guilt or regret. Through interviews, the author explores how collective memory constructs an "us-them" divide, and how guilt and silence persist in post-war narratives.

In the fifth and final chapter, the author shifts focus to Slovakia's evolving memory of the Holocaust, analyzing state-sanctioned remembrance and public narratives from 1945 to today. She breaks down memory into three historical periods: 1945–1948, a brief period of Jewish reintegration and acknowledgment of the Holocaust, 1948–1989 (State Socialist era), the suppression of Jewish identity in favor of a broader anti-fascist narrative, and post-1989, a complex and sometimes contested process of remembering, with nationalist resistance to acknowledging Slovakia's role in World War II. This chapter also examines how public discourse, education, and media influence Holocaust remembrance.

V.'s conclusion emphasizes the importance of continued research on Holocaust memory and calls for more acknowledgment of Slovakia's historical responsibility. The book ends with a discussion on the challenges of integrating survivor and eyewitness testimonies into mainstream historical narratives.

While V.'s work is undeniably a crucial contribution to Holocaust and memory studies, some limitations warrant discussion. Firstly, although the book presents a thorough analysis of Jewish and non-Jewish narratives, there is limited engagement with other marginalized groups affected by the Holocaust, such as the Roma population. Given the growing body of scholarship on Romani Holocaust experiences, integrating these perspectives could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of wartime persecution in Slovakia. Additionally, the book's structure, though methodical, can at times feel overly detailed, particularly in its discussions of research methodologies. While these insights are valuable for oral history researchers, some scholars from other disciplines might find certain sections overly technical. There are a number of key facts about Slovak history which might be helpful to readers unfamiliar with the subject, yet those with a knowledge of the region and time period might find them distracting.

However, despite some areas that could have been expanded, this book is a commendable and thought-provoking study that enriches the discourse on Holocaust remembrance and historiography in Slovakia. Overall, it's an essential text for scholars of the Holocaust, oral history, and Central European studies. V.'s meticulous research, ethical reflections, and engagement with survivor testimonies offer profound insights into ways history is remembered and reconstructed. The book serves as a reminder of the power of oral history to challenge dominant narratives, recover lost voices, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of historical trauma.

Marburg

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Johannes Spohr: Die Ukraine 1943/44. Loyalitäten und Gewalt im Kontext der Kriegswende. Metropol. Berlin 2021. 558 S. ISBN 978-3-86331-600-6. (€ 34,-)

Das ukrainische Dorf Pen'kivka im Verwaltungsbezirk Vinnyčja südlich von Žytomyr zählte bei Kriegsbeginn 1941 etwa 1.700 Einwohner, die überwiegende Mehrheit war christlich-orthodoxen Glaubens. Seit 1921 gehörte das Gebiet zur Ukrainischen Sozialistischen Sowjetrepublik, was – wie andernorts auch – nicht nur Zwangskollektivierung, sondern in den 1930er Jahren auch stalinistische Repressionen bedeutete. Während der Hun-