

Conflicting Narratives: War, Holocaust and Politics in Lithuania

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The *Shoah* represents the bloodiest page in the history of modern Lithuania. Thus logically, the genocide of the Jews should occupy a central place in the nation's memory of wars and foreign occupations in the twentieth-century. However, it does not yet play a significant role, despite considerable change in perceptions of the Holocaust since the 1990s. Lithuania's Holocaust is part of a greater, more difficult conversation about the history of Jewish-Lithuanian relations, and is closely linked to the broader transformation of historical memory of the post-Soviet era. A number of topics are embedded within this subject: the context of wartime memory; conflicting postwar narratives concerning the *Shoah*; the emerging national conversation about the Holocaust since the late 1980s in both the academy and the public sphere, and domestic and international politics.

Lithuanian Jews and Holocaust Remembrance

The restoration of Lithuanian independence created the conditions for the reestablishment of the Jewish museum in 1991, formally rededicated as the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum in 1997. An exhibition about the Holocaust opened in 1991, the first in the former Soviet Union. Other early exhibitions included a memorial to the Righteous People of Lithuania in 1990; an exhibition on the Jews of Vabalninkas in 1992, as well as an exhibition titled *Jews in the Struggle against Nazism*. In cooperation with the Jewish community, the State Museum has posted Yiddish and Lithuanian signage in numerous Jewish cemeteries. A new registry of Holocaust-

related sites has been created, and new plaques and signs stressing the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust have been installed in many locales with the assistance of the Jewish community and local governments.¹ A new monument next to the Paneriai Memorial Museum was donated by Holocaust survivor Yeshayahu Epstein.

Lithuania's foremost center for Holocaust commemoration is the permanent Holocaust exhibition in the "Green House" at the Jewish Museum in Vilnius. The Holocaust is also commemorated in the Museum's Gallery of the Righteous, which is located in the main building.² In September 1999, the *Vilna Ghetto Posters* exhibition traveled to the United States Congress, where it opened with a program featuring speeches by Representative Tomas Lantos and Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat.³ Another main function of the museum is the preservation of the Jewish cultural and religious heritage destroyed in the *Shoah*, including the commemoration of the Great Synagogue and the restoration of the Kalvariju synagogue with the help of various funds donated from the United States. Another exhibition focused on the history of Jewish fighters for Lithuanian independence (1918-1920). The museum has published over thirty books, mainly in English, Russian, and Lithuanian.⁴

A long-sought goal of the Jewish community had been state recognition of Holocaust commemoration which was finally gained in 1990, when September 23rd was designated the Day of Commemoration of the Genocide of the Jews. Since 1994, this date, which marks the liquidation of the Vilnius/Vilna ghetto in 1943, is solemnly remembered at the Paneriai/Ponar Memorial with an annual service attended by the head of state and other high-ranking officials. An awards ceremony at the Presidential Palace notes individuals who rescued Jews during the war. The government

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1. See the listings in Levinsonas, *The Book of Sorrow*.
 2. The Righteous are listed and described in an ongoing series published by the museum. The latest edition is Sakaitė & Epšteinaitė (2005).
 3. Zingeris, *Vilna Ghetto Posters*.
 4. For a brief history and more information on the Jewish Museum, see the institution's website: <http://www.jmuseum.lt> (accessed July 14, 2009).

and public organizations throughout the country regularly organize commemorative events on this date, including activities in schools aimed at fostering mutual tolerance and educating the youth on the perils of racism, by visiting the killing sites of 1941.

The Political Context of Wartime Remembrance

Conventional wisdom holds that the war's Eastern Front, the bloodiest conflict in history, differed dramatically from the Western Front in terms of human cost, ideological fanaticism, and brutality. This contrast can be easily understood through the starkly different fates of Denmark and Lithuania under Nazi occupation.⁵ The different national communities comprising Lithuania's population have been emotionally committed to what are often irreconcilable Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, and Jewish versions of the war's meaning and impact. Generational and ideological divides also exist. With the exception of the extreme right, especially the skinheads and neo-Nazis, Lithuania's Western-oriented urban youth culture has tended to adopt a less nationalistic stance towards the past and a less apologetic view of crimes committed by indigenous Lithuanians. Older citizens, including veterans of the Red Army and some of the rural populace mired in nostalgia for the Soviet era, still find comfort in the narrative of the Great Patriotic War. But these groups have been considerably marginalized since Lithuania's independence. In any case, analysis of how the Holocaust is perceived in the Baltic states must take into account the violent period between 1940 and the early 1950s. Without this context, the conflicting narratives cannot be properly appreciated. The history of the war and postwar periods may be shared, but the memories remain divided.⁶

5. In terms of statistical violence, Denmark was certainly the safest area in Nazi-occupied Europe during the entire war; between 1940 and 1945 the approximately 4,000 deaths at the hand of the Nazis roughly equaled the total of California's highway fatalities in 2007. On the other hand, the General Government constituted arguably the worst place in the world during the war, or, in all of the twentieth century.

6. For a recent in-depth study of this problem, see: Barkan et al., *Shared History*.

Most Lithuanians remember the 1940s quite differently from the prevalent Western narrative of a "good war". The usual dates of the Second World War (1939-1945) have little relevance to the experience of the majority of the Lithuanian population; demonstrably more ethnic Lithuanians were killed in the war's aftermath (1945-1953) than during the six preceding years of global conflict.⁷ The Grand Alliance narrative, with its emphasis on the positive role of the Soviet Union, has little resonance in the Baltics. This creates unique political challenges when dealing with the historic context of the Holocaust or, for that matter, any aspect of the war. Because Western perspectives and imagery of World War II do not reflect the experiences of most Lithuanians, they tend to see the Holocaust as a Western obsession, making it difficult for Lithuanians to appreciate the gravity of the *Shoah* and its centrality to their nation's history. Lithuania's confrontation with the Holocaust, as evinced by the country's political elites and scholarly establishment, as well as the general public's understanding of the genocide against the Jews, is situated in – and complicated by – wartime memories and the Soviet legacy, as well as the realities of post-independence politics and international relations.

General Trends in Lithuanian Historiography: Three Narratives of Old

Generally speaking, twentieth-century Lithuanian historiography has reflected three main trends: the Marxist (social progress through revolution), the liberal (stressing the empowerment of once socially subjugated groups), and the nationalist (collective self-realization through the nation-state). Such historical narratives are usually characterized by grand political missions, pretensions of objectivity, and a teleological world view that excludes other perspectives. All of these trends have

7. While this is not true of Eastern Europe as a whole, there are regions in the Balkans and western Ukraine where a statistical analysis of what are sometimes referred to as 'hidden wars' will reveal such data.

had an impact on Lithuanian perceptions of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Until the late 1980s, the Soviet version of Marxist historiography was prominent in Lithuania.

Much Lithuanian scholarship, especially during the 1990s, tended towards the nationalist narrative which, to a large extent, mirrors attitudes dominant during Lithuania's interwar period and reflects the considerable impact of the country's influential Western diaspora and its interpretations of the national past. Educational institutions in the post-Soviet Lithuanian state embraced the concept of a 'national school,' which claimed that the Republic of 1990 was the legal restoration of the independent state of 1918-1940. This meant inculcating a version of the nation's history as a story primarily of ethnic Lithuanians, well-designed for the nation-building struggle of the early 1990s. However, the interwar period's stress on national monoculturalism was ill-adapted to current trends, with an emphasis on multiculturalism and pluralism. Western-oriented political leaders identified nationalist ideology as a political obstacle for admission into European and trans-Atlantic organizations, specifically the European Union (EU) and the North American Treaty Organization (NATO). Lithuanian historians have recently begun to try to include the formerly excluded narratives of women, ethnic minorities and religious groups.⁸ All this has shaped collective memory of the past.⁹ The three historical narratives of Lithuania's Holocaust that dominated until the late 1980s are, to some extent, still relevant. Allowing for some simplification, they can be divided into the Soviet, Western and Lithuanian perspectives. Soviet historical works emphasized the service of Lithuanian 'bourgeois nationalism' to the Nazi cause, seeking to discredit both the anti-Communist diaspora in the West and the postwar armed struggle against the Soviet Union. Anti-émigré propaganda peaked during the sixties and seventies with the campaign to 'unmask' Lithuanian refugees

8. See, for example, Kaubrys, *National Minorities*; compare with the publication intended for schools by Potašenko, *Lietuvos tautinės mažumos*.

9. Ahonen, "Najui istorijos", pp. 294-295. For an extensive debate on the presentations of cultural memory and its relation to the collective memory, see: Šermukšnytė, *Lietuvos istorija*, pp.15-17.

and other displaced persons as Nazi war criminals hiding in the West, which coincided with high-profile trials of former police battalion members involved in mass shootings of Jews.¹⁰

One aspect of this campaign during the 1960s was the limited recognition of the genocide against Lithuanian Jews, including the publication of a short history of resistance in the Kaunas/Kovno ghetto, as well as an account of gentile rescuers. Some memoir literature by Jewish authors who published their wartime experiences (most notably Marija Ronikaitė in the Vilnius ghetto underground) appeared at the same time, however most of them were Party activists who dealt almost exclusively with Communist themes.¹¹ Such publications, however, were exceptions that did not counter the main thrust of the Soviet narrative on the Nazi occupation. While some useful academic work about the German occupation was published,¹² the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust was generally camouflaged as the murder of 'peaceful Soviet citizens'.

During the Putin era, the interest in Baltic pro-Nazi collaboration has been evident, albeit without the more ponderous Soviet/Marxist terminology. One recent Russian collection of documents has insinuated that the Lithuanian independence movement of the late 1980s, Sąjūdis, could well-nigh initiate another round of ethnic cleansing against the Russian minority and former Communists.¹³ The Soviet and contemporary

10. See the "Faktai kaltina" (Facts Accuse) series of pamphlets and mini-studies and numerous English-language propaganda publications, as well as more substantial documentary studies such as Rozauskas, *Nacionalistų talka*. The best example in English stressing the services of the Nazi "fifth column" during the German occupation is Rozauskas, *Documents Accuse*.

11. The more significant publications of the 1960s are listed in Toleikis, "Repress, Reassess, Remember", p. 2.

12. For example, see: Baranauskas & Rozauskas, *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje; Bulavas, Vokiškųjų fašistų okupacinis*; cf. Rukšėnas, *Hitlerininkų politika Lietuvoje*. It is instructive that this latter study, which is the most comprehensive, relatively propaganda-free Soviet-era examination of the Nazi occupation, has never been published.

13. As in the text accompanying Yakovlev, *Tragediia Litvy*, and its English version, *The Tragedy of Lithuania: 1941-1944; New Documents on Crimes of Lithuanian Collaborators during the Second World War* (Moscow 2008). Despite its title, this latter collection

Russian governments' narrative suffers from both its transparent political agenda and selectivity of documentation. On the other hand, Western accounts of Lithuania's wartime history focused on the fate of the Jews, which inevitably shone the spotlight on native collaboration with the Final Solution.¹⁴ The assertion that the genocide of the Jews in the East could not have been carried out without the participation of indigenous killers is, at best, an unproven hypothesis.¹⁵ Until recently, Western academics paid little attention to the various national struggles and Soviet occupation of 1939-1941 as preludes to both the Holocaust and the inter-ethnic conflicts of 1941-1945 that devastated much of Eastern Europe.¹⁶ An ongoing problem of Western scholarship is the unfamiliarity of most non-Baltic researchers with the indigenous languages, which denies them two important sources: the mass of primary documents from the 1940-1945 period now available, and numerous studies published in Baltic languages, especially since the mid-1990s.

Uninformed Western narratives can lead to a 'German-less Holocaust,' confusion concerning the nature and extent of collaboration,¹⁷ and even

contains few documents that had not previously been published in Soviet-era compendiums.

14. For example, Hilberg's seminal work, *The Destruction of the European Jews* and subsequent scholarly accounts. Among more popular surveys, Dawidowicz's general indictment in *The War against the Jews* is not atypical: "[t]he Baltic and Ukrainian populations [our emphasis] collaborated voluntarily with the Germans in murdering the Jews" (p. 541).
15. One should distinguish the notion that local assistance was indispensable to the Nazi program of annihilation from the well-established fact that native collaboration facilitated the murder of the Jews. Browning's ground-breaking work, *Reserve Police Battalion 101*, portrays the manner in which a single German police battalion murdered tens of thousands of Polish Jews and transported countless others to Treblinka. Browning's account makes clear that, at least in this instance of genocide, local assistance was helpful, but not essential, to the operational success of the unit.
16. An exception is Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*.
17. In 2002, during Lithuania's most comprehensive conference on the Holocaust a researcher from Yad Vashem presented a paper based on testimonies that strongly suggested that Germans acted only as 'observers' in the massacres of 1941, as in Shaul, "Jewish Testimonies". Lithuanians in the audience understandably rejected

misstatements of fact.¹⁸ Several examples will suffice: Jews have been dramatically over-represented among the 35,000 deportees by the Soviets in June 1941; the infamous pogrom leader Klimaitis was named head of the anti-Soviet partisans, and some 100,000 anti-Soviet rebels were reported as having participated in the uprising of 1941 that coincided with the German invasion. The last myth, relating to the mass insurgency, can be seen as evidence of either great patriotism (Lithuanian authors) or extensive collaboration (Jewish writers).¹⁹ The actual number of insurgents was at least five-fold less.

The third and most problematic narrative on the genocide emerged from

this notion, but German, American, and Israeli scholars at the meeting also criticized the presentation. In a 1996 *Washington Times* article, Amos Perlmutter, an American political scientist, flatly declared that "most of Lithuanian people" collaborated with the Nazis and suggested that Lithuanian participation was instrumental in transporting Jews to Auschwitz (Perlmutter, "Act of Repentance"). Leonard Dinnerstein, in his acclaimed book, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (1982) makes the assertion that "most" Baltic DPs had been members of the Nazi Party. This charge, originating with a German official trying to persuade American authorities not to grant housing to Baltic DPs at the expense of local Germans, is uncritically relayed in Peterson's *The American Occupation of Germany* (1977), p. 295. Indigenous Balts, of course, were as a rule ineligible for Nazi Party membership.

18. As seen in the error-laden treatise of Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord*, as reviewed in the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 29:1 (1998), 84-88. By contrast, see the more insightful study of Szarota, *U progų zaglady*, pp. 199-266.
19. Based on documentation available in the late 1980s, the number of deportees to the Soviet Union in June 1941 was about 18,000. Klimaitis' extraordinary promotion began as Raul Hilberg's misreading of a German document, incorrectly identifying a certain Klimatis (actually Algirdas Klimaitis) as the "chief of the Lithuanian insurgents" in June 1941 (*Destruction of the European Jews*, p. 203). It is probably from here that Littman, *War Criminal on Trial*, p. 42, promoted Klimaitis to the head of the rebel anti-Soviet Lithuanian provisional government. In fact, Klimaitis, who played a marginal role in the 1941 anti-Soviet uprising and is unknown to most Lithuanians, was a small-time journalist, avid anti-Semite, and killer, shunned by even pro-Nazi Lithuanian elements. The claim of 100,000 rebels has been a long-standing assertion among many Lithuanians, originating with nationalist leaders early in the war, in order to both impress the Germans with the Lithuanian contribution to the war against Bolshevism and convince themselves of the massive nature of the uprising. On the same number, see: Shner-Neshamit, "Lithuanian-Jewish Relations", p. 170. The realistic estimates are in Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkuri Lietuvos*.

within the postwar Lithuanian diaspora. Many Lithuanians, trapped between Stalin and Hitler, prayed that the war would end with a Soviet collapse, followed by either a German defeat or Berlin's rapprochement with the Western powers. They anticipated the liberation of their homeland by the Americans or British and a return of the status quo ante.

The majority of Lithuanian émigrés could not accept the Western narrative of the war, that included the enormous sacrifice of the Soviet people's struggle against fascism, nor did many fully appreciate Nazism's genocidal nature. The diaspora proved largely immune to serious analysis of the Holocaust for at least four decades. The émigré story rested on an intensely anti-Soviet attitude and a denial of native participation in the murder of the Jews, which was, at times, accompanied by overt or covert anti-Semitism. However, Lithuanian nationalist Holocaust denial differs from the 'revisionists' of the Institute of Historical Review and other such organizations; it does not question the existence of the Holocaust, but rather its manner, usually insisting that the native killers constituted but a 'handful of rabble'.

Accustomed to perceiving themselves as victims, particularly the older generation of exiles reacted vehemently to any suggestion of Lithuanian guilt. The émigré narrative that resonated among anti-Soviet dissidents has continued to enjoy an after-life well into the post-Soviet era. Suggestions by the minority of Lithuanian-American liberals that society needed to own up to an unpleasant past, despite the manipulation of the Holocaust by the Soviet regime and others with political agendas, were met with accusations of a pro-Soviet bias, if not downright treason against the nation's freedom. The collaboration of Lithuanians with the genocide against the Jews proved to be the most contentious and sensitive aspect of wartime history for the Lithuanian diaspora.

Scholarship and Debate in the 1990s: Lithuanian-Jewish Relations as Changing Narratives

Since the restoration of independence, a number of Lithuanian historians have entered the field of Jewish and Holocaust studies, including younger researchers who have begun re-examining questions that many from the previous generation had preferred to let rest.

The discussion about the *Shoah* has had a beneficial effect on the overall study of Lithuanian-Jewish relations, as younger scholars in particular took an interest in the history of a vanished community; some even studied Hebrew and Yiddish to better understand the relevant sources. New works have appeared on the anti-Judaic policies of the Catholic Church, the emergence of modern Lithuanian anti-Semitism,²⁰ the nature of Jewish-Lithuanian relations between the wars,²¹ and the social

20. The Lithuania History Institute has considerably expanded the research on the nineteenth and early twentieth century context of Jewish social life and Jewish-Lithuanian relations: Staliūnas & Sirutavičius, *Žydu klausimas Lietuvoje*; cf. the collection edited by the same authors, *Kai ksenofobija virsta priedarta*, and their *Žydai Lietuvos ekonominėje-socialinėje struktūroje*. See also: Boruta, "Katalikų bažnyčia", pp. 1-23; cf. Vareikis, pp. 81-82; see also: Vareikis & Truska, *Holokausto prielaidos*. The new research highlights the importance of Catholic anti-Judaism in promoting harmful stereotypes and the import of modern economic and racial anti-Semitism based on French, Austrian and German influences, which affected some of the founders of modern Lithuanian political nationalism, most notably Vincas Kudirka (1858-1899). Yet the emerging picture is one of nuance: there were periods of anti-Tsarist cooperation between Jews and Lithuanians during the early 1900s and some Jews played a part in founding the First Republic.

21. Gustaitė, "Vyskupas jurgis matulaitis", pp. 105-113; Sužiedėlis, "Historical Sources", pp. 119-154; Valkauskas, "Žydu tautinės autonomijos", pp. 64-71; also the essay by Liekis, "Žydai: kaimynai ar svetimieji?" pp. 114-120. Cf. Bendikaitė, "Dvi ideologijos", pp. 255-271. The most recent general study of the autonomy issue is the analysis of Liekis, *A State within a State?* The two decades of independent Lithuania presented a rich and contentious history: the beginnings of Lithuanian linguistic assimilation by some segments of Jewish society; a surge of anti-Semitic attitudes, especially during the later 1930s, amplified by the alarming geopolitical situation; a relatively tolerant attitude towards Jews on the part of the Smetona dictatorship (1926-1940); the polarization of society on the eve of the Soviet invasion. The First Republic did not pass a single anti-Semitic statute during its two decades of existence

and political impact of the crises that led to foreign occupations in the 1940s. The years of the First Republic (1918-1940) have come to be seen as significantly transformational: the first modern polity dominated by ethnic Lithuanians, which decisively impacted inter-communal relations, especially between Lithuanians and Jews.²²

The late 1930s, and particularly the first Soviet occupation of 1940-1941 immediately preceding the Nazi invasion, became the foci of considerable attention, but the latter period presented a conundrum. Just as the persistence of Judeo-Bolshevik stereotypes distracts from appreciating the gravity of the Holocaust, so academically rigorous studies that would demythologize the role of Jews in the demise and sovietization of independent Lithuania would seem essential, if only as a credible counterpoint to the 'theory of two genocides'. This idea, which has gained some acceptance among a few academics and the general public, posits that the collaboration of the Lithuanian rabble with the Nazi murder of the Jews was a regrettable, but understandable, response to the 'genocide' perpetrated by Jewish collaborators during the first Soviet occupation.²³

The challenge for Lithuanians is difficult because Soviet rule is tied to the Lithuanian experience of the Nazi occupation in a number of ways, both

and provided subsidies for Jewish education and religious and cultural life. There is no official record of deaths in anti-Jewish pogroms during the interwar years. Despite the persistence of widespread anti-Semitic attitudes, the fact that the Nationalist (*tautininkai*) regime protected the country from the political extremes of left and right, largely (if not entirely) contained ethnic violence, allowed cultural diversity, and criticized Nazi racism, may be discomfiting for holders of the stereotype of a fascist interwar state.

22. Some interesting new details of old stories have also been revealed. There is new evidence concerning Sugihara's relationship with the Polish secret service while he carried out his well-known rescue in Kaunas, described in Ivanovas, "Chiune (Sempo) Sugiharos", pp. 7-14. New archival sources are casting light on the Lithuanian government's attempts to provide a safe exit for Jews in consultation with the USSR during the same period, as indicated by Altman, "Dokumenty Rossiiskikh Arkhivov".
23. This idea is summarized in the article by Mikelinskas, "Teisė likti nesuprastam". For a more documented study of the 'two genocides' without the anti-Semitic baggage, see: Gražiūnas, *Lietuva dviejų okupacijų*.

politically substantively and symbolically. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the subsequent period of Soviet-German cooperation, for example, galvanized the Baltic independence movements around historical grievances, stunningly apparent in the "Baltic Way" of August 23, 1989, when more than one million participants saw no sharp dividing line between Nazism and Communism, between what happened during 1940-1941 and what transpired after the German invasion. The connection between the two foreign occupations may provide opportunities for political manipulation, but such a firmly rooted collective memory cannot be ignored. Self-perception as victim, together with the stereotype of the other as perpetrator, are deeply ingrained in wartime memories.

Confronting the Holocaust (I): Institutions and Educational Instruments

It has been proposed that "the degree to which a particular country has made progress in ... recognition of the Holocaust is also the degree to which that country has internalized modern European values", and that an "understanding of the Holocaust serves as a barometer of the progress of civil society." If true, it would seem essential for the *Shoah* to become part of the national "historical imagination."²⁴

In May 1998, the three Baltic presidents approved in principle the creation of international commissions to investigate the Soviet and Nazi occupations and publish their findings. The new body in Vilnius, with the rather cumbersome title of the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania (henceforth referred to as the Commission),²⁵ was established by presidential decree on September 7th of that year. Emanuelis Zingeris, the only Jewish member of the Seimas, was named chairman of the group,

24. Cited by Michlic & Himka, "The Memory of the Holocaust".

25. Recently, the agency has adopted a shorter English title (International Historical Commission), without abandoning its formal title. In Lithuanian it is often referred to as Istorinio teisingumo komisija, which can translate as the Commission for Historical Justice, or the Commission for Historical Truth.

which initially included Lithuanian, American, German and Russian scholars and community leaders.

The Commission was immediately attacked by Jewish survivors in Israel, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, as well as some Jews in the West, as both an awkward and offensive conflation of Nazism and Communism and a cynical gambit, nothing more than 'white washing' intended to advance Lithuania's candidacy for the European Union and NATO. Some Lithuanian émigrés, suspecting (correctly) that the Commission would undertake an investigation of native collaboration in the Holocaust, charged that the President's initiative was a Jewish-financed plot or, at best, a sop to the West due to American pressure. In fact, at the third plenum meeting, held on August 29, 1999, the Commission committed itself, as both a practical matter and a point of principle, to deal with research on the Nazi and Soviet periods separately, by creating two distinct working groups, "to clearly distinguish between the crimes committed by the two occupation regimes and to avoid superficial analogies during their analysis and evaluation."²⁶

The Commission's Nazi crimes panel undertook several investigations: anti-Semitism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (before June 1941); the mass murder of the Jews during the summer and fall of 1941, as well as the role of Lithuanian police battalions in the Holocaust; the looting of Jewish assets and property; the persecution and murder of the Gypsies; the mass murder of Soviet POWs; and Nazi persecution and murder of non-Jews. Further research was to include the problems of forced labor, Lithuania's ghettos, and other aspects of the German occupation.²⁷

The work of the Commission expanded to an outreach program of conferences, Holocaust education and commemoration, as well as the development of school curricula on inter-ethnic tolerance. The

26. See: Commission Archive, "Mission Statement of the Commission meeting of November 17, 1998", as well as "Mission Statement of the meeting of March 2, 1999". Also refer to the "Outline of the Work Plan" as cited at <http://www.komisija.lt/en/body.php?&m=1173548714> (accessed July 5, 2009).

27. For a list of publications and ongoing research projects, see the Commission's website: <http://www.komisija.lt> (accessed August 26, 2009).

Commission has initiated a number of agreements with Lithuanian government agencies and institutions of higher education, including the military and police academies, to facilitate instructional programs on genocide.²⁸

Another institution that has dealt with the Holocaust is the Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania. It sponsors a separate department to conduct Holocaust research, with books that have dealt with Nazi concentration camp survivors, the killings in Paneriai, and rescue. The Center's journal focuses mainly on the 1940-1941 and postwar Soviet occupations, but has also published a number of articles on Lithuanian police battalions, the 1941 Holocaust in the provinces, and problems of Holocaust remembrance.²⁹ However, the Center's scant attention to the Holocaust in its museum's public exhibitions and, conversely, its primary emphasis on Soviet crimes, has engendered considerable criticism from Jewish and Western observers and is increasingly seen as a problem by more liberal elements within the country.

The bilingual work of the Commission on the Nazi occupation³⁰ coincided with an increase in Lithuanian academic publications including translations of important foreign-language sources and studies,³¹ as well as student dissertations and theses dedicated to the history of anti-Semitism during the interwar period, the role of anti-Semitic propaganda

28. See: <http://www.komisija.lt/en/body.php?&m=1150465846> (accessed July 5, 2009).

29. See, for example, the Center's bilingual edition of concentration camp memoirs, Epšteinaitė, *Su adata sirdyje*; the translation of Kruk's monumental study, *Paskutinės Lietuvos*; Kuodytė & Stankevičius, *Išgelbėję pasaulį*; also in English, Kuodytė et al., *Whoever Saves a Life*. Between 1997 and 2008, two dozen articles in the Center's journal, *Genocidas ir rezistancija*, have dealt with the Jews and the Nazi occupation, but these constitute only about a fifth of the periodical's studies. The disproportionality is starkly evident in Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva*, a 600-page history of the German occupation, of which 90% deals with Nazi oppression of ethnic Lithuanians.

30. For example, Vareikis & Truska, *Holokausto prielaidos*; Dieckmann & Sužiedėlis, *Lietuvos žydų persekiojimas*; and Dieckmann, Toleikis & Zizas, *Karo belaisvių*.

31. Two examples: Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, published as Tory, *Kauno getas*, and Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, published as Hilberg, *Nusikaltėliai, aukos, stebėtojai*.

leading up to the Holocaust, and the role of Lithuanian collaboration.³² In 1998, the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences published a volume of proceedings on the Church and anti-Semitism, which included articles on Lithuania's Holocaust. Although a significant first step, the apologetic tone of some contributions nonetheless reflected the tension that the *Shoah* tends to trigger in Lithuanian society.³³ In April 2000, the country's Catholic Bishops' conference issued a public apology for "children of the Church who lacked charity towards the persecuted Jews, failed to undertake all possible means to defend them and especially lacked courage to influence those who assisted the Nazis." The bishops acknowledged "past manifestations of anti-Semitism that burden the memory of the Church."³⁴

Confronting the Holocaust (II): Wedge Politics, Society, and Divided Memories

Lithuania suffers all the actual and potential problems of the post-Communist era, as well as those that are broadly European: a population buffeted by social and economic crises and thus susceptible to populist demagoguery; an extremist neo-Nazi fringe; xenophobia, openly racist discourse and physical violence. Despite the official identification as a liberal democracy and the endorsement of tolerance, anti-Jewish prejudices still play well, noticeably during times of political turmoil. The most important points of conflict, aside from the protection of the country's Jewish cultural and religious heritage, include: restitution of communal property; the response, or lack thereof, by the authorities

32. One example is available in English: Puišytė, "Holocaust in Jurbarkas" (B.A. thesis), later edited and published as "Holokaustas Lietuvos provincijoje. Jurbarkas", pp. 77-85. The English text can also be found at <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/yurburg/bathesis.html> (accessed June 15, 2009).

33. The proceedings of the conference and relevant published materials are in Milius, *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo*, pp. 11-329.

34. Published in Levinsonas, *Šoa*, pp. 231-232.

to continuing public expressions of anti-Semitism, made worse by the government's slack attitude towards extreme right-wing movements; and recent attempts by the courts to investigate alleged crimes committed by Soviet Jewish partisans during the war.

In June 2007, the Lithuanian procurator's office requested Israel's cooperation investigating war crimes involving the activities of Soviet Jewish partisans who had escaped from the Vilnius ghetto and had been active in eastern Lithuania. The subject of the investigation was Dr. Yitzhak Arad, former director of Yad Vashem, a noted author on the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania and a member of the Commission. The inquiry centered on the massacre of 38 villagers in the hamlet of Kaniūkai/Koniuchy by a Soviet partisan unit in January 1944.³⁵

Not surprisingly, the inquest evoked strong foreign protests, and even criticism from Lithuanian President Adamkus. The failure of the Lithuanian judiciary to press the investigation of Nazi collaborators, as evidenced by the delayed legal process and trial against the former head of the Lithuanian Security Police in Vilnius, Aleksandras Lileikis, and others, gave rise to charges of hypocrisy and questions concerning the motives behind the investigation of Jewish partisans. In one stroke, the procurator's office derailed the official research apparatus on Nazi war crimes. The Yad Vashem Directorate protested the investigation of Arad, a "victim of Nazi oppression", and suspended Israeli participation in the Commission. In solidarity, the Commission refused to convene any further meetings until the case was resolved.³⁶

The Arad affair exemplifies the difficulties, distractions, and paradoxes that complicate the introduction of the Holocaust into Lithuania's historical imagination. The judiciary's inane and politically clueless move

35. For a preliminary outline of the Kaniūkai incident, see: Zizas, "Žudynių Kaniūkuose pėdsakais", pp.149-165. A comprehensive account is reported to be near completion. Punitive action against local peasants, albeit on a much smaller scale, is described in Arad's memoir, *The Partisan*, p. 158.

36. Shalev to Zingeris, September 5, 2007; Zingeris to Shalev, September 28, 2007 (letters courtesy of Emanuelis Zingeris). However, the Commission has continued to foster Holocaust education and commemoration activities.

provided much grist for speculation and conspiracy theories regarding its motives. Those in favor of prosecuting of Jewish partisans, as well as the anti-Semitic elements that exploited the situation, clearly chose their moment well. Despite the damage to Lithuanian-Jewish relations and Lithuania's image abroad, any action by the president or prime minister to halt the investigations could be countered by charges of unconstitutional interference in judicial proceedings. More importantly, from political and psychological perspectives, the Arad controversy opened a wound at the most painful point of Lithuanian and Jewish historical imaginations, where divided wartime memories are at their most irreconcilable.

In September 2008, the Lithuanian procurator's office reluctantly closed the case against Dr. Arad with a clumsily worded announcement, but this did little to mollify critics of "the latest campaign to prosecute Soviet anti-Nazi Jewish partisans."³⁷ The outside world and even some Lithuanians viewed the entire case as a contemptible farce. Unwilling to try Nazi collaborators, the judiciary had prepared a case against Arad, a teenage ghetto survivor who, faced with an existential choice, had fled to the forest and joined the battle against the fascists. It was obvious that the scale of the killings at Kaniūkai paled in comparison to the *Shoah*.

The Lithuanian Ministry of Justice stubbornly insisted that the investigation of partisan activities as potential 'war crimes' rested on objective legal criteria, which allowed the prosecution of pro-Soviet occupiers and collaborators. Currently, the law defines genocide broadly, as seen in this formal definition of Lithuanian Procurator General Rimvydas Valentukevičius:

Genocide is the murder of the people of Lithuania, their torture and deportation during the Soviet and Nazi occupations and during the Soviet annexation [of Lithuania]. Genocide also includes actions that seek to physically destroy all or part of the inhabitants who belong not only to ethnic, racial, national or religious groups, but also are members of social

37. "Wiesenthal Center Protests Lithuanian Judicial Campaign to Discredit Jewish Heroes of anti-Nazi Resistance" (press release, May 28, 2008); "Wiesenthal Center: Closure of Fabricated Case against Dr. Arad" (press release, September 25, 2008), both at http://www.operationlastchance.org/LITHUANIA_PR.htm (accessed August 1, 2009).

and political groups. The inclusion of this definition of genocide into Lithuanian law is a rightful aim of the democratic country of Lithuania in order to evaluate crimes committed by the occupation regimes and private persons.³⁸

Attempts to prosecute Jewish former members of the Soviet partisan movement on the same basis as other Soviet collaborators in Lithuania reflect the ideologically charged atmosphere in which the very concept of genocide has been subject to political manipulation.

The connection between the partisan movement and the German occupation of Lithuania and Belarus was not the focus of interest to the authors and memoirists of the anti-fascist struggle. In part, this may be explained by the fact that the oral histories and memoirs of the former partisan fighters describe regions with divergent popular attitudes towards the Nazis and Soviets, as well as disparate experiences of the Nazi occupation, specifically, the starkly different wartime environments of Belarus and Lithuania. A closer study of the history of the armed struggle in eastern Lithuania, removed from political noise and popular versions of the anti-fascist struggle, reveals a past more nuanced and intractable than one would gather from the fierce rhetorical political battles it has engendered.

The historical issue of partisan warfare is particularly vexing in terms of its psychological implications. In Lithuanian collective memory, the anti-fascist guerillas, whatever their ethnicity, cannot be easily unlinked from their connection to the Soviet cause. Naturally, given their uniquely desperate circumstances, one can exempt the Jewish fighters as a special case. But many Lithuanians cannot view Soviet partisan leaders as anything other than Stalinists, who were, by official definition, 'anti-fascists'. Thus, the label does not automatically evoke positive emotional connotations, as it does in the West.

The perspective of most Lithuanian Jews, especially the elderly survivors,

38. The text as written by the Lithuanian General Procurator, Valentukevičius, *Nusikaltimų žmoniškumui*, <http://www.genocid.lt/Leidyba/5/nusikalt.htm> (accessed December 1, 2008).

is understandably different and embedded in the straightforward language of the contrasting narratives. This perspective clashes with Lithuanian wartime memory, with its many negative images of the Stalinist past and, for that matter, anything associated with the USSR.

Warring Narratives and Distractions

The acrimony engendered by the Arad/partisan case underlines the importance of understanding divided wartime memories and the manner in which they impact Lithuanian society's ongoing struggle to understand the Holocaust. One persistent theme that has gained new momentum is anti-Semitism which, according to some, is now expressed in Lithuania by politicized attempts to equate Nazism with Communism. As in the case with the establishment of the Commission in 1998, charges of a false symmetry between the two totalitarian systems as an effort to conceal the scope and extent of Lithuanian criminality during the Holocaust are again being heard. The phenomenon of a 'new anti-Semitism' in Europe, based on political rather than racial motifs (e.g. criticism of Israel's occupation policy) has gained attention in the past decade, but in Lithuania, anti-Sovietism is the alleged mask of the new anti-Semitism. As can be expected, the Arad controversy has considerably sharpened the tone of discussion on this issue. It is important to understand the political dynamic, even if the divisive rhetoric distracts the conversation from the genocide of the Jews.

In May 2009, Dovid Katz published an attack on what he termed the official Lithuanian "genocide industry", including the Commission chaired by Lithuania's best-known Jewish politician, who, he claimed, had the sole aim of "Holocaust obfuscation". This controversy was born out of the Prague Declaration of June 3, 2008, signed by Vaclav Havel, Vytautas Landsbergis, Emanuelis Zingeris, and a number of other Eastern European politicians and former dissidents. The Declaration called on European institutions to evaluate and condemn the crimes of Communism, based on the model of the Nuremberg Trials, and to educate the public on

the criminal natures of both Nazism and Communism. Katz claimed that the purpose of equating between the two systems was none other than a crafty attempt to obscure the collaboration of local populations with the Nazis during Holocaust. Jewish Lithuanians who disagreed with Katz's position were dismissed as obsequious 'show Jews'.³⁹ In the *Jerusalem Post*, Efraim Zuroff also attacked the Prague Declaration, citing it as a threat to the "unique status" of the *Shoah* and warned against "a new and distorted World War II historical narrative".⁴⁰ Both authors claimed that Soviet crimes had not been genocidal in nature. However, their attack against conflating Communism and Nazism made no mention of scholarly literature on the topic, nor did it explain why the historiography of comparative totalitarian systems was somehow suspect or illegitimate.⁴¹ Katz and Zuroff have thus framed the issue in terms of the politics of memory.

The explosive and politicized relationship between Communism and Nazism has led to a bitter impasse on the international stage. The debate took a nasty turn at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly in Vilnius in July 2009, when the Lithuanian delegation successfully proposed a resolution titled, "On Divided Europe Reunited", which condemned both Stalinism and Nazism and designated August 23 as a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism. The Greek Communist representative, Costas Alissandrakis, ridiculed the notion of a Soviet occupation of Lithuania and termed any talk of Soviet mass deportations there as "folk tales", prompting an angry retort and walk-out by the speaker of the Seimas, Arūnas Valinskas. The Russian delegation denounced the resolution and boycotted the vote, while Russia's foreign ministry angrily

39. Katz, "Prague's Declaration", and more extensively in "Genocide Industry". For the text of the Prague Declaration, see: <http://praguedeclaration.org/> (accessed August 1, 2009).

40. Zuroff, "A Combined Day of Commemoration".

41. For example, see the massive volume by the well-known historian of the Third Reich, Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler*.

denounced the remembrance resolution as an insult.⁴²

It is an inconvenient reality that the Western narrative about the Second World War remains largely irrelevant to most Lithuanians. While serious scholars have argued that Soviet Communism was the lesser evil of the two totalitarian systems, doubtlessly true for Poles,⁴³ Jews, Gypsies and Western Europeans, this proposition would hardly convince ethnic Lithuanians whose past experience was quite different, as are the very statistics of death.⁴⁴ Addressing the genocide committed by the Nazis and their collaborators in Lithuania would likely be facilitated if the public does not automatically perceive all critical research on the wartime past and Soviet role in the Eastern Front as a sacrilege.

Prospects

While Lithuanian elites, the academy, and society have made progress in engaging with the Holocaust, it is clear that much still remains to be done. The acceptance of the Holocaust into the historical imagination of Lithuanians requires a reorientation of national history to include

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42. See: "A. Valinksas pareikalavo", *Lietuvos rytas*, July 3, 2009; also "Statement by communist members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE in Vilnius", at <http://inter.kke.gr/News/2009news/2009-07-parl-assembly/> (accessed July 30, 2009); and DW-Worldwide, OSCE Resolution, July 9, 2009, at <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,4468156,00.html> (accessed July 31, 2009).
 43. On some recent right-wing Polish scholars who argue that Communist occupation was as evil, or worse, than Nazi rule, see: Michlic, "Anti-Polish and Pro-Soviet?", pp. 67-102.
 44. The polemics of Dovid Katz and Efraim Zuroff give the impression that the crimes of mass murder (that is, of Communism) are somehow morally less repugnant than those we can label as genocide (carried out by Nazism), and implicitly reject any comparative analysis. A more nuanced discussion of conflicting memories concerning Soviet and Nazi atrocities is in Struve, "Eastern Experience", pp. 53-66. Cf. Snyder, "The Holocaust: The Ignored Reality", pp. 14-16, and Snyder's exchange with Pacho Lane (August 13, 2009), p. 76. In his recent book, *Bloodlands* (2010), Snyder provides a sophisticated view of the relationship between the Nazis and Soviets and how they interacted within the same geopolitical space in Eastern Europe.

three essential narrative elements: recognition of Jewish life and culture as intrinsic to Lithuania's past; the understanding, acceptance, and commemoration of the *Shoah* as a central event in the modern history of the country; and a thorough examination of the behavior of the Lithuanian people during the annihilation of the Jews. None of this requires Lithuanians to reject their own historical experience or internalize other narratives, such as the Soviet liberation story, which violate their collective memory and historical logic. There is no reason that the struggle against anti-Semitism cannot coexist with legitimate judicial proceedings and historic research vis-à-vis Soviet war crimes, as well as the acceptance of a complex past replete with contradictory memories of heroes and villains. In addition to the question of enriching the past with new perspectives, there remains the problem of confronting those who trivialize genocide by treating it as a political tool, and the task of countering negative trends of racism, xenophobia and Holocaust denial. Dealing with the fear mongering and demagoguery associated with issues of compensation and property rights will not be easy. In the end, the police and judiciary must deal with outbreaks of extremism, while economic development and inclusion in the trans-Atlantic community will enable the political and cultural elites to strengthen civil society. How this will unfold is impossible to predict; by definition, societies in transition rapidly change. But one hopes that the journey towards understanding will attract more travelers in an ever-changing land.

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