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Gintarė Malinauskaitė

Mediated Memories: Narratives and Iconographies of the Holocaust in Lithuania

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of the Holocaust in Lithuania

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apartment in the Kovno ghetto two weeks before his arrest]. Photograph. March 1944.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Yehudit Katz Sperling

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Vilnius, 2019

Gintarė Malinauskaitė

1 Introduction

A few buildings that have lost their facades look like huge dollhouses. They make me imagine a monstrous god, a gigantic and unruly brat who has amused himself by tearing them apart. Little is left untouched. Single walls, sole remnants of rooms that used to stage dramas of life stand alone against the sky.¹

This is how the Lithuanian Jewish painter Samuel Bak² remembers walking through Vilna's³ streets as a child with his mother for the first time after the war. His hometown had been turned into a ghost town where remnants of buildings were filled with invisible people, and the sidewalks and avenues were eerily empty. In his painting *Remnants*, Bak depicted these streets of Vilna filled with gigantic, phantasmagoric keys that remind us, as the literary scholar Lawrence L. Langer writes, "that they will never be used again to open the doors of the homes where their former owners once lived."⁴ These keys, however, have a double meaning: they not only mark the destruction of the Lithuanian Jewry but also signify the possibility of unlocking the past.

¹ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 43.

² The Lithuanian-born Jewish painter Samuel Bak is one of the most famous Holocaust artists worldwide. Born to a middle-class family in Vilna on August 12, 1933, Bak lived in the ghetto during the Holocaust and spent eleven months in hiding with his mother in a Benedictine convent. In March 1943, the renowned Yiddish poets Avrom Sutzkever and Shmerke Kaczerginski invited Bak to take part in an art exhibition in the ghetto. After liberation, Bak moved to Poland, and then to Germany, where he lived in the Landsberg DP [displaced persons] camp. Later he lived, studied, and worked in Paris, New York, Israel, and Lausanne; he now lives in Boston. In 2001, he visited Vilna for the first time since the Holocaust.

³ A note on place names: towns and villages in Lithuania have more than one name, as they can be written in Lithuanian, Yiddish, Russian, or Polish. In this work, the name Vilnius refers to the capital of Lithuania. However, references to Jewish culture use the name "Vilna," for example, the "Vilna ghetto." The Yiddish term for Vilnius is "Vilne," which is used in some instances in this work, usually when quoting Holocaust survivors. However, Lithuanian Jews also often use the English-language toponym "Vilna," which, according to Lipphardt, is less politically loaded than "Vilne." For more, see LIPPHARDT, p. 18.) In some cases, I use the Polish version of the name, "Wilno," for instance, when Czesław Miłosz speaks about the city. A similar case exists for Kaunas: I will also use the name "Kovno" when referring to the Jewish community, for instance, when talking about the Kovno ghetto. Moreover, the names "Kaunas" and "Vilnius" will be used to describe the cities during the period of the Second World War only if they refer to the Lithuanian administration or have been cited as such by other authors.

⁴ LANGER, *Illuminations*, p. 16.

This research thus aims to uncover these memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania by presenting how they have been mediated and interpreted differently since Lithuania gained independence in 1990. However, understanding the development of these narratives and iconographies requires a substantial examination of the construction of Holocaust memories in Soviet Lithuania and in the Lithuanian exile in the postwar years, as well. The Holocaust⁵ was one of the most traumatic experiences in Lithuania in the last century. Over the course of several months in 1941, more than 80 percent of the Lithuanian Jewry were exterminated.⁶ Only 5 to 10 percent of Lithuanian Jews survived the war; more than 195,000 of them were killed.⁷ This execution meant the annihilation of Jewish culture and community life in Lithuania, as well as the destruction of their material property and traditions. During the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, Jewish victims were turned into “peaceful Soviet citizens,” and their Jewish specificity was erased from the memory landscape of the Second World War for the coming fifty years.

In the 1960s, the Western countries, in contrast to the Soviet Union including Soviet Lithuania, experienced a “rise of consciousness of the Holocaust.”⁸ In the Western countries, the Holocaust was seen “as an unprecedented form of modern genocide.”⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that, in Western scholarship of memory research, the Holocaust serves as “a major point of reference for debates about memory”¹⁰ or “a par-

⁵ There are several possible terms for the destruction of the European Jewry. The Biblical term “*khurbn*” links the Jewish destruction with the first and second annihilation (of the Temple), where the mass murder of Jews is seen in direct connection to previous Jewish tragedies. The term “*Shoah*” (catastrophe) was first used in 1933, when the Nazi regime came to power; Jewish destiny was described as *Shoah*. According to sociologist Lentin, the *Shoah* term was “adopted as a deliberate Israeli alternative (to the Biblical *khurbn*, meaning destruction) to designate the specific, unprecedented murder of Jews.” For more in-depth discussion of these issues, see LENTIN, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah*, p. 125. The English word “Holocaust” started to be used to refer to the destruction of Jews only in the late 1950s. It was first used at the Second World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in 1957, and, in 1959, the Yad Vashem museum also replaced the Hebrew term “*Shoah*” with “Holocaust,” which they capitalized. According to the cultural studies scholar Angi Buettner, “capitalization was essential in giving the Holocaust its sacral and unique character that became so crucial for the discourse of the Holocaust”; see BUETTNER, *Holocaust Images*, p. 44-45. In the case of Lithuania, the term “Holocaust” was firstly used in the seventies in the media of the Lithuanian-American exile community. The word “Holocaust” was never used in Soviet Lithuania. After Lithuanian independence in 1990, the term “Holocaust” was widely used in the media and academia (both Lithuanian and international) when writing about the annihilation of the Lithuanian Jewry. This term is also used in the memoirs of the survivors. It is important to observe that in the Lithuanian language, the word “Holocaust” is officially written in small letters, i.e., “holocaust.” However, in some cases, people choose, supposedly as a certain form of protest, to capitalize it. In this research, for several reasons, I mostly use the English-language concept “Holocaust,” for three reasons: first, it is the term most widely used by Lithuanian Jewish survivors and scholars when talking about the destruction of the Lithuanian Jewry; second, according to Buettner, the term “Holocaust” is “a central term in Western culture and history” (*ibidem*, p. 45); and, finally, as Lentin notes, “names mould events in the image of a particular culture’s understanding of events. What make the Shoah [Holocaust] unique are its intentionality and its meaning.” LENTIN, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah*, p. 126.

⁶ BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 4.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ ROTHBERG, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*, p. 6.

adigmatic case for the relationship of memory and modernity.”¹¹ The historian Henning Grunwald, in his article on the Europeanization of Holocaust remembrance, asked if there was anything more cosmopolitan than the camps.¹² Similarly, historian Dan Diner has asserted that Holocaust memory in Europe is “a veritable foundational, a seminal event” which could unify common European memory.¹³

However, the development of memory and the representation of the Second World War in post-Soviet space, including the Baltic states, took a much different course. In these regions, the memory of the Holocaust plays a minor role, and the Holocaust is not generally acknowledged as a paradigmatic example of “evil-doer.” During the phase in which the memory of the Holocaust was emerging on a global scale, these states were occupied and culturally and politically colonized by the Soviet Union. Even though the Holocaust was not entirely erased from the collective memory of the inhabitants during this period of Soviet occupation; it was ideologized and its history was rewritten within the comforting communist narrative of the Second World War. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the collective memory of the more recent Stalinist history and the evaluation and assessment of the communist past overshadowed any memory of the Holocaust.

After Lithuania gained independence in 1990, the local culture of remembrance mainly focused on memorializing victims under Soviet rule and “ethnic Lithuanians.”¹⁴ The Lithuanian political scientist Dovilė Budrytė claims that: “the Soviet deportations [...] after World War II have become the basis and the main reason for long-lasting collective experiences.”¹⁵ She even calls these memories “the glue for ‘communities of suffering’ in all three Baltic States.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, such a culture of remembrance tends to exclude other “communities of suffering,” in this case Lithuanian Jews, Poles, or Russians, who shared these traumatic experiences.¹⁷ As the renowned contemporary Lithuanian philosopher Leonidas Donskis noted, Lithuania “is suffering from a new social disease,” which is characterized by “the loss of a sense of history.”¹⁸ According to him, a one-sided perception of history has fragmented and segmented Lithuanian society to “the point where it threatens democracy as well as [the society’s] very cohesion

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 4.

¹² GRUNWALD, p. 253.

¹³ DINER, p. 36.

¹⁴ Before the Second World War, Lithuania was a multiethnic state, which included Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, Russians, Belarusians, Roma, ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*), and others. In his work, the German scholar Christoph Dieckmann notes the problem of classifying Lithuanian citizens and claims that, if we followed the logic of the Lithuanian nationalists, we would have to speak about “Jewish Lithuanians,” “non-Jewish Lithuanians,” “Polish Lithuanians,” etc.; he suggests writing the words “Lithuanians,” “Jews,” “Poles,” “Russians,” etc., as these terms provide better readability and, furthermore, are in common use by Jews and Lithuanians. DIECKMANN, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, vol. 1, p. 11. In many parts of this work, I will use these simplified terms for these reasons. Nevertheless, in some cases, when it is important to make a distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish Lithuanians, the latter version will be used. It does not, however, mean that I consider one or the other nationality to be any less a part of the Lithuanian nation.

¹⁵ BUDRYTĖ, *Integration or Exclusion*.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ DONSKIS, *Another Word for Uncertainty*, p. 17.

and civic solidarity.”¹⁹ Donskis claimed that “many Lithuanians are still inclined to portray their country as an absolute victim of the twentieth century, without giving much consideration to the political faults and moral evils committed by their compatriots to their fellow Jewish citizens.”²⁰

This victims’ narrative, which has been adopted as an entire nation’s historical memory, does serve a certain function according to Budrytė. It “helps to create a perception of unity in society, and, arguably, can even help to create a sense of stability.”²¹ Similarly, the Lithuanian historian and memory scholar Rasa Čepaitienė argues that one main feature of the Lithuanian collective memory is a dominance of an “ethnic mono-perspective,”²² namely that history, written from the perspective of one nation, is marked by ethnic solipsism.²³ According to Čepaitienė, such a perception of history leads to “dichotomous thinking,” where there are only “good” and “bad” people—“victims,” “heroes,” and “perpetrators.”²⁴ As a result, “a victim narrative,” which is a much more comfortable version of Lithuanian history for the twentieth century, is the most widespread discourse on the past.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

This research aims to challenge this one-sided historical point of view by analyzing how the memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania have been mediated and how the narratives and iconographies of the Holocaust have been shaped since 1990. In addition, by examining the emergence and development of Holocaust memorialization in Soviet Lithuania and in the Lithuanian exile of the postwar years in depth, it seems to contribute to better understanding how these memories were constructed. This work defines mediation as both “the transmission of some existing message or content” and “a process of constructing meaning through communication by various media.”²⁵ This scholarship will contribute to the field of Holocaust memory studies in Lithuania, which has not yet been the focus of broad or systematic research. It assumes that, because memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania are transnational, the perspective of the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora is critical in answering its guiding questions, as well.²⁶

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 13.

²¹ BUDRYTĖ, *Taming Nationalism*, p. 179.

²² Unless otherwise credited, all translations are my own.

²³ ČEPAITIENĖ, p. 41.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ KALININA, *Mediated Post-Soviet Nostalgia*.

²⁶ This work uses two concepts related to the dispersion of people, namely the terms “exile” and “diaspora.” The term “exile” is traditionally defined as “banishment for a particular offense, with a prohibition of return.” NAFICY, p. 11. Exile can be both internal and external. In this research, the concept “exile” refers to external exile—i.e., forced migration across national borders. The term “diaspora” is usually defined as “the dispersal of a people from its original homeland.” BUTLER, *Defining Diaspora*, p. 189. Although originally associated with the dispersion of the Jewish population, the term “diaspora” has been used since the 1980s to refer to the dispersion of many different nationalities. Ibidem. In this work, the words “exile” and “diaspora” will be used depending on the context: the word “exile”—with its negative connotation—refers here to the emigration of non-Jewish Lithuanians during and after

Hence, *the first research question* is: how are the memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania represented in different mediating arenas? This work examines Holocaust narratives and iconographies as represented in the Lithuanian press, films, and photographs. Rather than passively serving as tools to transmit Holocaust memories, these media also play an active role in the shaping of Holocaust narratives and iconographies. In fact, in the case of the Holocaust in Lithuania, many different arenas mediate the past. Because research on print media in Lithuania and the narratives it commonly features has revealed that these sources typically address the memory of the Holocaust from a non-Jewish perspective, this study includes other forms of media, such as photographs and films, which allow for a discussion of other narratives that accord the memory of Lithuanian Jews more space.

The second research question is: how have memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania influenced by matters of gender? This question is answered by first examining the use/abuse of images of children from the Holocaust and then analyzing visual iconographies and narratives of Jewish female partisans, who in the postwar years were deprived of their narratives and overshadowed by the masculinized perception of the resistance. In addition, the representation of sexual violence in the feature film *Vilniaus getas* [*Ghetto*] serves as an example of how Jewish femininity and the female body are used to construct memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania. Because the question of gender is central to this topic, it is addressed repeatedly throughout the work and not confined to the section about gendered memories. I seek to explain how and why these gendered narratives emerged in the historiography of the Holocaust after 1990.

The third research question is: how was the Holocaust mediated in Soviet Lithuania and in the Lithuanian exile and how have these mediated representations changed since Lithuania became independent? This research divides the years since 1990 into several periods: The first of these (1990-1995) addresses the memory of the Holocaust in the initial years of independence, when the remembrance of the Soviet atrocities overshadowed memory of the Holocaust. The second period (1995-2004) is marked by critical reflection in Lithuania on the Holocaust and official state apologies. The third period witnessed the birth of “double memory” after Lithuania’s accession to the European Union in 2004. Following the integration process, Lithuanians used the European Union as an arena to speak out about the crimes committed during the Soviet regime, comparing these with the Holocaust.

the Second World War, as they were forced to escape from the Soviet regime and maintain their fight for Lithuanian independence from abroad. Lithuanian scholarship has tended to refer to this kind of emigration, for instance of Lithuanian-Americans, both in terms of “exile” and “diaspora,” applying these terms interchangeably without any clear distinction between the two. In the case of the Lithuanian Jews, I will mostly use the word “diaspora,” which better refers not only to their dispersal beyond Lithuania but also the cultural and communal networks and memory work done outside their homeland and focuses on positive aspects of their forced homelessness, as well.

1.2 State of Research: Historiography of the Holocaust in Lithuania

Historians sometimes assert that no discussion on the Holocaust took place in the Soviet Union in the postwar years, but this perception is not completely accurate. The American scholar Thomas C. Fox concludes rather that “an event of such magnitude could not be airbrushed from history books, not even communist ones, but it could be rewritten within the confines of a comforting teleological narrative.”²⁷ This was also the case for discourse within Soviet Lithuania, where the Holocaust was not entirely erased, even though the term itself was not used and Jewish victims were not always identified as such. In the late 1940s and 1950s, according to the Lithuanian Jewish historian Dov Levin, “condemnation of fascist atrocities was severed from direct and explicit mention of the Jewish identity of most of the victims, apparently as part of a consistent Soviet ‘pacification’ effort aimed at consolidating the new regime’s base among the local, non-Jewish inhabitants.”²⁸

In the 1960s and 1970s, both historical scholarship and the memoirs of Lithuanian survivors comprehensively documented the mass murder of Lithuanian Jews during the Second World War. The majority of these publications appeared between 1958—when a special department for publishing archival documents was created within the Academy of Sciences²⁹—and 1975.³⁰ The most significant of these works, an important two-volume primary source collection entitled *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944* [Mass Murders in Lithuania 1941–1944],³¹ was prepared between 1965 and 1973. The wealth of documents and photocopies it contains remains valuable to historians working today. Levin argues that Lithuanian works of history in the Soviet period, even those which were tendentious, “featured an accurate portrayal of the fate of Lithuanian Jews during the war.”³²

It is a further misconception that the issue of local collaboration in the Holocaust in Eastern Europe first became a topic of discussion in the late 1990s. In fact, a number of publications in Soviet Lithuania addressed the issue of collaboration, and, it was not only English-language scholarship that did so, but also works written in Lithuanian.³³

²⁷ FOX, p. 420.

²⁸ LEVIN, Lithuania, p. 343.

²⁹ The end of these activities could be connected to the death of the head of this department, Boleslovas Baranauskas. See more in KOHRS, p. 252.

³⁰ Soviet publications (selected list): BOLESLOVAS BARANAUSKAS (ed.): *Hitleriniai žudikai Kretingoje* [Hitlerite Killers in Kretinga], Vilnius 1960; KURGANOVAS; BOLESLOVAS BARANAUSKAS, GENOVAITĖ ERSLAVAITĖ (eds.): *Žudikai bažnyčios prieglobsty* [Murderers in the Shadow of the Church], Vilnius 1963; BOLESLOVAS BARANAUSKAS (ed.): *Hitleriniai parašiutininkai* [Hitlerite Parachutists], Vilnius 1966; JONAS BULAVAS: *Vokiškų fašistų okupacinis Lietuvos valdymas (1941-1944)* [The Rule of German Fascist Occupants in Lithuania 1941–1944], Vilnius 1969; BOLESLOVAS BARANAUSKAS, KAZIMIERAS RUKŠĖNAS, EUSIEJUS ROZAUSKAS (eds.): *Documents Accuse*, Vilnius 1970.

³¹ ERSLAVAITĖ, *Masinės žudynės 1 dalis*; ERSLAVAITĖ, *Masinės žudynės 2 dalis*.

³² LEVIN, Lithuania, p. 343.

³³ See, for example, *Do you know this man?* Vilnius 1963. In this publication, the Soviet judiciary pushed authorities in the USA and the citizens of Philadelphia to prosecute the war criminal Antanas L. Impulevičius. See also: BOLESLOVAS BARANAUSKAS, KAZIMIERAS RUKŠĖNAS (eds.): *Documents Accuse*, Vilnius 1970; LEONAS JONAITIS: *They Live in Your Midst*, Vilnius 1972. The latter book even included the addresses of the alleged criminals.

The Soviet regime emphasized the collaboration of nationalists with fascists, and Soviet-sanctioned scholarship included chapters on the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF)³⁴, Lithuanian police battalions, and their collaboration with the Nazi regime. This research aimed to tarnish the memories of the heroic members of the Lithuanian exile and to outline the war crimes committed by the anti-Soviet partisans, some of whom were helping the Nazis to eliminate the Jewish population in Lithuania. For instance, *The Fight of the Lithuanian People against the Fascist Occupation*, written by historian Algirdas Rakūnas, deals with the issue of collaboration: Rakūnas depicts not only the antisemitic policies of the Nazi occupants and the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust but also the role of local collaborators.³⁵ Most of these publications define the perpetrators very broadly as fascists. According to the American historian David Shneer, it was no accident that the Soviet regime tried “to shift the language of perpetration from ‘Germans,’ a clearly defined national category, to ‘fascists,’ a flexible ideologically defined one.”³⁶ This type of definition “opened up space including non-Germans into the category of perpetrator.”³⁷ Soviet publications thus favored the stereotype of the “bourgeois nationalists,” presenting these as abettors of the Nazi regime.³⁸

The German historian Michael Kohrs claims that some of these books serve as the fundament for research on the Holocaust in Lithuania even today.³⁹ While some of the publications had very specific ideological goals, they also served as official statements of historical fact that the Nazi regime murdered around two hundred thousand victims and that local Lithuanians had collaborated with the Nazi regime during these mass killings.⁴⁰ Of course, these books, press articles, and documents were not free of Soviet ideology, and, as mentioned above, they also conveyed a specific concept of the enemy. One of the main targets of the Soviet regime was the Lithuanian exile community, accused of having collaborated with the Nazi regime. In Soviet Lithuania, the issue of war criminals living in exile was a crucial topic debated not only in books but also in the Soviet Lithuanian press and even in documentary films.⁴¹ Lithuanian émigrés claimed that these historical publications aimed to discredit them in retaliation for their active fight against the Soviet regime from overseas. The Soviet regime branded all historical interpretations that emerged in exile as mere falsifications.⁴² Soviet historians not only

³⁴ LAF was the Lithuanian Activist Front, established in 1940 during the first Soviet occupation. The goal of this organization was to re-establish Lithuanian independence. Its activists contributed to the creation of the Lithuanian provisional government. Today this organization and its members are accused of having expressed antisemitic views during the war.

³⁵ RAKŪNAS.

³⁶ SHNEER, pp. 180-81.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 181.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ KOHRS, p. 258.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ See selected documentary films on war crimes trials related to the Holocaust in Lithuania: *Žudiką atsakomybėn!* [Killer to Justice!], Lithuanian Film Studio 1961, Direction: Antanas Maciulevičius; *Kodėl akmenys netyli* [Why the Stones Are Not Silent], Lithuanian Film Studio 1962, Direction: Leonas Tautrimas; *Nebaigtas dienoraščio puslapis* [Unfinished Page of a Diary], Lithuanian Film Studio 1964, Direction: Leonas Tautrimas; *Dialogas su sąžine* [Dialogue with Conscience], Lithuanian Film Studio 1980, Direction: Linas Lazėnas, Kornelijus Matuzevičius.

⁴² KOHRS, p. 254.

defined the anti-Soviet rebels—i.e., Lithuanian partisans—as “bandits” and collaborators, but also blamed the Catholic Church for its support of the Nazi regime.

After Lithuania obtained independence in 1990, Lithuanian historians broke their ties to Soviet historical research, which had been solely viewed as a mere ideological tool of the Soviet regime. This sparked a new phase of historical scholarship in which historians dealt with the recent phase of Soviet occupation and highlighted Stalinist crimes. The Lithuanian historian Arūnas Bubnys, one of the leading contemporary scholars in research on the Holocaust in Lithuania, has suggested that scholars’ reluctance to approach the topic of the Holocaust is tied to the fact that Soviet regime propaganda often instrumentalized the Holocaust by portraying opponents of the Soviet regime as former Nazi collaborators and war criminals.⁴³ Because this political agenda of the historical discipline was reflected in the publication of numerous “scholarly” articles, books, and documents under the communist regime, Bubnys argues, many Lithuanian historians remained suspicious of Soviet historiographical works on the Holocaust after 1990 and prioritized engagement with topics which had been prohibited during the Soviet era.⁴⁴ In the early 1990s, Lithuanian historiography was marked by nationalistic and ethnic attitudes towards the past.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, as the Lithuanian historian Liudas Truska has noted for this period, the Holocaust was not solely a historiographical but also a political and moral problem for Lithuanians.⁴⁶

As a result, this post-1990 period was dominated by a conservative or traditional historiography on the Holocaust, which emerged within conservative circles of the Lithuanian exile in the 1970s.⁴⁷ These scholars did not publish any separate historiographical works about the Holocaust but entered the debates via their press in exile, challenging the claims of Israeli and Western historians that the Lithuanians had participated in the mass murder of the Jews.⁴⁸ Most of those articles were journalistic, which reveals that the media was one of the main arenas in which the exile community could express its stance vis-à-vis Lithuanian history in the Second World War.⁴⁹ The authors were mostly non-Jewish Lithuanians, who had left Lithuania in the summer of 1944 ahead of the advancing Soviet forces and headed westwards. While most of these Lithuanian refugees decided to flee because they were apprehensive of Soviet occupation, there were Lithuanians among them who had collaborated with the Nazi regime during the war and feared punishment.

These historiographical narratives, constructed in exile, sought primarily to defend non-Jewish Lithuanians from the allegations of murdering Jews and justify their actions. Their main argument was that “Lithuanians only participated in the liquidation of Communist and Soviet activist Jews, while the mass killings were organized by

⁴³ BUBNYS, *Trumpa Holokausto Lietuvoje istorija*; see also IDEM, *Holokaustas Lietuvoje*; IDEM, *Holocaust in Lithuania*; IDEM, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ TRUSKA, *Litauische Historiographie*, p. 262.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*. The historian Truska suggests dividing the historiography on the Holocaust in Lithuania into two streams: traditional/conservative and critical.

⁴⁸ BUBNYS, *Bibliography of Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ This discussion will be considered in section 4.1.2.

the German Nazis and only the dregs of Lithuanian society took part in them.”⁵⁰ It is important to note the fact that some members of this conservative group of exiles, as discussed above, were closely involved in events in Lithuania during the war, for instance, some were followers of the Lithuanian Activist Front. Notable examples are Kazys Škirpa and Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis, who were the leading members of the Lithuanian provisional government under Nazi occupation.⁵¹ These members of the exile community actively developed a conservative historiographical approach to the Holocaust by publishing memoirs and presenting their versions of history in the Lithuanian-American⁵² media. Thus, this work will reveal that it was these conservative historical narratives constructed in exile that were transferred to independent Lithuania rather than competing narratives created in Soviet Lithuania or in liberal Lithuanian-American circles,⁵³ narratives which focused on the perpetratorhood of local collaborators. It was these conservative narratives that influenced the remembering of the Holocaust were recalled in the period of nation-state building.

Such conservative historiography on the Holocaust prevailed not only in Lithuania but also in other Eastern European countries. Historians argue that “the integration of the Holocaust into Eastern European history and memory has proved to be one of the biggest challenges” in the aftermath of the peaceful revolutions of the late 1980s and the early 1990s.⁵⁴ The historiography of Eastern Europe was focused, on “competitive martyrology,” in the words of Dean, who continues: “In many countries, especially in the Baltic States, any awareness of the suffering of the Jews has generally been obscured by the acute sense of national suffering at the hands of the Soviets.”⁵⁵ The publication in 2000 of Jan Gross’s book *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* [Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland] marked a new historiographical moment in the research on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.⁵⁶ The historian John-Paul Himka asserts that this book, which called attention to East Europeans engaging in the mass murder and dispossession of the local Jewish population,⁵⁷ “was a breakthrough, almost a paradigm shift” in the research on the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.⁵⁸ Gross in his book claimed:

⁵⁰ BUBNYS, *Bibliography of Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 29.

⁵¹ The discussion on the Lithuanian provisional government will be considered in section 3.1.

⁵² In this work, I hyphenate the term “Lithuanian-American” because the hyphenated form usually denotes dual nationalism. In many scholarly works on Lithuanian emigrants in the USA, Lithuanian identity, especially in the years of the Soviet occupation, is often described as incompatible with alternative identities. In this research, I deal primarily with Lithuanian-Americans in the period of the Cold War, when Lithuanian nationalism in exile was very strong, and Lithuania was seen as the only possible homeland. Thus, this hyphen reflects the fact these Lithuanian-Americans were highly conscious of the Lithuanian part of their identity, which was distinct from the American identity and could not merge with it.

⁵³ The Lithuanian exile community and its diverse perceptions of the Holocaust in Lithuania will be discussed in section 4.1.2.

⁵⁴ MICHLIC.

⁵⁵ DEAN, p. 123.

⁵⁶ HIMKA, p. 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

First and foremost I consider this volume a challenge to standard historiography of the Second World War, which posits that there are two separate wartime histories—one pertaining to the Jews and the other to all other citizens of a given European country subjected to Nazi rule.⁵⁹

Similarly, in the early 1990s, in Lithuania as well as in other Eastern European countries, the history of the Holocaust “has mostly been limited to a small academic élite.”⁶⁰ The emergence of a critical historiographical interest in the Holocaust in Lithuania coincided with Lithuania’s integration into Western organizations such as the European Union and NATO.⁶¹ Tony Judt once wrote that “Holocaust recognition is our contemporary European entry ticket.”⁶² Similarly, the historian Vyngantas Vareikis ascertains that “as Lithuania was trying to become a member of the NATO and the EU, the problem of the Holocaust consequences (the problem of legal prosecution of war criminals, returning the Torahs from Lithuanian repositories and libraries to the Jewish community, the question of restitution, etc.) affected many political meetings.”⁶³ Many Eastern European countries, prior to their admission to these organizations, not only officially apologized for the crimes and acknowledged the guilt of their nations⁶⁴ but also initiated the creation of historical commissions to work on these topics. As historians have noted, “the work of the three Baltic Historical Commissions, partly responding to international pressure, also reflects some of the historiographical developments.”⁶⁵ At the same time, scholars have criticized these commissions for examining Nazi atrocities within the framework of the Soviet occupations before and after the Nazi invasion.⁶⁶

The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania was established in 1998 by the decree of Valdas Adamkus, the president of the Republic of Lithuania. Its main goal was “to pursue historical truth” in relation to the crimes committed by the Nazi and Soviet occupation regimes.⁶⁷ This commission was comprised of experts and historians from the USA, Russia, Great Britain, Germany, and Israel. Vareikis thus argues that the year 1998 was “the turning point in the analysis of the Holocaust in Lithuania.”⁶⁸ Since then, the commission has published significant scholarly works on the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust in Lithuania as well as on the history of antisemitism in Lithuania, which

⁵⁹ GROSS, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁰ DEAN, p. 121. In independent Lithuania, the critical research on the history of the Holocaust started with an international conference in 1993, “The Days of Memory,” which was organized to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the liquidation of Vilna ghetto. International and Lithuanian scholars discussed the history of the mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews at this conference for the first time. This conference provided the impetus for Lithuanian historians to engage more profoundly with this topic, but the event’s influence remained confined to a small academic circle.

⁶¹ This discussion will be considered in section 4.2.3.

⁶² JUDT, *Postwar*, p. 803.

⁶³ VAREIKIS, *What Should Be Remembered*, p. 202.

⁶⁴ The politics of apology will be scrutinized in section 4.2.2.

⁶⁵ DEAN, p. 123.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

⁶⁷ The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania.

⁶⁸ VAREIKIS, *What Should Be Remembered*, p. 205.

provided the context for the persecution and mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews in the twentieth century.⁶⁹ The commission's publications, which are overseen by Saulius Sužiedėlis⁷⁰ and Christoph Dieckmann, have contributed significantly to the understanding of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The international commission's research has broken important ground in this field in Lithuania and contributed to the inclusion of the Holocaust in Lithuanian textbooks.

Another significant turning point in the historiography on the Holocaust in Lithuania was the year 2011, when Arūnas Bubnys and Christoph Dieckmann each published important scholarly works on the Nazi occupation and Holocaust in Lithuania. Bubnys, in his study on the Holocaust in Lithuania from 1941 to 1944,⁷¹ not only presented the classification (periodization) of the Holocaust in Lithuania and its characteristics, but also devoted his attention to the Holocaust in the provincial areas of Lithuania and to the participation of special Lithuanian police battalions and Lithuanian security police in the Holocaust.⁷² He thereby highlighted the issue of local collaboration and the role of the Lithuanian police⁷³ in the mass murder of Jews.

In the same year (2011), the German historian Christoph Dieckmann published one of the most seminal studies on the historical events during the Nazi occupation in Lithuania. This two-volume work deals not only with the German occupation policies in Lithuania but also with the mass atrocities and role of local collaborators—i.e. local policemen and administrators—as well as Jewish resistance and strategies to survive the war. Dieckmann includes other victimized groups of the Nazi regime, such as Roma, the disabled, and mentally ill people, whom research on the Holocaust in Lithuania had largely ignored.⁷⁴

Most of the research on the Holocaust in Lithuania focuses on describing historical events and collecting and verifying historical facts and numbers. As Vareikis points out:

The Holocaust research carried out during the last twenty years has provided much factographic material about the process participants [...]; nevertheless, the questions of the reception of the Holocaust crimes and the catastrophes of the Lithuanian Jews have remained topical in society.⁷⁵

The discussions between society and historians emerged only in 2016 with the publication of the controversial book *Mūsiškiai* [Our Own People] by the Lithuanian journalist Rūta Vanagaitė.⁷⁶ This book summarized the previously published works of Lithuanian historians on this topic rather than presenting any new historical findings as the work of Jan Gross had done. However, it “employed the narrative of the book

⁶⁹ DIECKMANN/SUŽIEDĖLIS.

⁷⁰ Saulius Sužiedėlis is a historian who belongs to the Lithuanian-American community. During the Soviet occupation, he fled to the USA, where he remained after the Soviet Union's dissolution. Sužiedėlis worked as a professor of history at Millersville University of Pennsylvania.

⁷¹ BUBNYS, *Holokaustas Lietuvoje*.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ See also in: IDEM, *Lietuvos policijos batalionai*.

⁷⁴ DIECKMANN, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, vol. 1; DIECKMANN, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, vol. 2.

⁷⁵ VAREIKIS, *What Should Be Remembered*, p. 203.

⁷⁶ VANAGAITĖ.

*Neighbors*⁷⁷ and provoked broad societal discussion on the role of Lithuanians during the Holocaust and their collaboration with the Nazi regime during the war.

It could, therefore, be claimed that there is still a lack of research dealing with the memorialization of the Holocaust and almost no research in the field of visual memory. The German historian Saul Friedländer—in Van Alphen’s words—has noted that “systematic historical research, which uncovers the facts in their most precise interconnection, provides little understanding of the Holocaust; on the contrary, it protects us from the past, keeps it at a distance.”⁷⁸ There is only a handful of publications related to the field of memory research; the Lithuanian historian Hektoras Vitkus has worked in depth on the historical memory of the Holocaust and written several works on this topic in which he presents theoretical problems, guidelines, and research methods.⁷⁹ In 2005, he claimed that “the relationship of the historical memory and the Holocaust, both in Lithuania and in other societies, may be defined by three principles of historicism.”⁸⁰ He accordingly highlights the importance of “distinguishing between various epochs, establishing the context, and analyzing the process of historical development.”⁸¹ In 2008, Vitkus defended his doctoral thesis on the memorialization of the Holocaust in Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania, in which he observes that, in the Lithuanian culture of remembrance, the memory of the Holocaust is still influenced by the reaction to the Soviet attempts to indoctrinate and control the memory of the war.⁸² Lithuanian Jews had not been allowed to speak freely about their past. In addition, Vitkus also examines how the global Holocaust memory exerts pressure on local memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania, a process that elicits the formation of new stereotypes.⁸³ However, in this work, I claim that Holocaust memory in Lithuania cannot be analyzed as a completely separate, local phenomenon. Lithuanian Jews present a cosmopolitan diaspora, spread across different cultural contexts, which naturally contributes to the formation of Holocaust memory in Lithuania. Rather than outlining a global Holocaust memory that exerts pressure on the local memory, it makes sense to conceive of Lithuanian Jewish memories as more diverse and scattered around the globe.

It is also important to note that, unlike in the broader discipline of memory studies, the perspective of gender had been entirely neglected in research on the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania, perhaps because of the male domination within historical scholarship on the Holocaust. This male domination in Lithuanian historical research stems from the Soviet times, when the majority of the officially recognized historians in the highest professional positions were male.⁸⁴ There is only one scholarly work to date on gender roles and relationships in the Jewish partisan movement, and their memorialization in the postwar years, namely an article by the German historian Ruth Leise-

⁷⁷ VAREIKIS, *What Should Be Remembered*, p. 203.

⁷⁸ FRIEDLÄNDER, as cited in VAN ALPHEN, *Caught by History*, p. 33.

⁷⁹ See more in VITKUS, *Holokausto atminties raida*.

⁸⁰ VITKUS, *Istorinė atmintis*, p. 65.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² IDEM, *Die Entwicklung der Holocausterinnerung*, p. 6.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁸⁴ See also ŠVEDAS, *Matricos nelaisvėje*.

rowitz entitled “In the Lithuanian Woods: Jewish and Lithuanian Female Partisans.”⁸⁵ She traces “the general changes in gender roles that took place as a consequence of war, occupation, and the extermination of the Jews.”⁸⁶ One of the most interesting aspects of Leiserowitz’s research, which is closely related to this work, is her analysis of photographic representation of Jewish female partisans. Leiserowitz observed that the photos of young Jewish partisan women with guns—i.e., images that testified to their active role within the partisan movement—disappeared from public imagery during the Soviet era and only re-emerged after 1989.⁸⁷ In this book, I will likewise discuss the visualization of Jewish women, including female partisans, especially depictions in films and photographs circulating in today’s Lithuanian media. My aim is to contribute thereby to memory research on the Holocaust in Lithuania by analyzing the debates about the Holocaust and its memorialization, not only through different media sources but also from a gender perspective.

1.3 Research Design: Methodological Framework and Sources

The philosopher Peter-Paul Verbeek writes that “the world in which we live, after all, is increasingly populated not only by human beings but also by technological artifacts that help to shape the ways we live our lives – technologies have come to mediate human practices and experiences in myriad ways.”⁸⁸ This study incorporates a broad variety of “artifacts” including written accounts like newspaper articles and memoirs as well as visual elements like photographs and films. These sources have mediated Holocaust memories in many different ways, which makes it impossible to rely on just one method of analysis.

One promising tool for better understanding how memories are mediated is the framework of narrative methodology, an interpretative approach that focuses on storytelling.⁸⁹ According to scholars, “memories are presented to us in a narrative structure” and “narrative as a mediation of memory is embedded in the dialogic moment of telling, which in turn implies a mediation, the mediation of language.”⁹⁰ Regarding the development of Holocaust memories, the narrative or the story itself became the main object of study, revealing how certain groups of individuals make sense of their past memories. I have investigated iconographies and narratives in order to uncover the main themes related to the Holocaust in Lithuania, focusing not only on the narratives which dominate in the media but also on less common, and often diametrical, perspectives. Most of the narratives in this research are presented in the form of a debate within a broader sociopolitical and historical context. This research approach allowed not only for the reconstruction of Holocaust narratives but also for the tracing of their development and changes in Lithuania over time.

⁸⁵ LEISEROWITZ, *In the Lithuanian Woods*, pp. 199-218.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 215.

⁸⁸ VERBEEK, p. 241.

⁸⁹ For more on this, see MITCHELL/EGUDO.

⁹⁰ VOSU/KORESAAR/KUUTMA, p. 250.

When appraising photographs, it is essential to consider how, by whom, and for what purpose an image was made, in addition to the concrete subject of the photograph; another important factor is the question of whether and how they were publicized and received. Films include the additional element of a plot, or narrative story; I was also interested in how the film was made and what the film director might have said about its presentation and the reaction of viewers and critics. In this research, I also observed interactions between media—namely, the transfer of one medium into another medium. This includes, for instance, the integration of photographs into documentary films or other visual art. Regarding such media interactions, the function of this transfer and how it helped to recount the story was of particular interest.

For the interpretation of the data collected, the hermeneutic tradition played a central role; retrospective and contemporary testimonies and historical knowledge gathered during my research provide a sort of “interpretative montage,” to use the words of the French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman.⁹¹ The application of the hermeneutic approach to the mediated memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania serves to highlight the multiple meanings and the particular socio-historical contexts of the objects of my study. The scholarship of hermeneutics has a very long history and has primarily been used to interpret ancient texts. According to the feminist theorist Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, “the leitmotif of hermeneutics is the irremediably mediated processes of human understanding and interpretation.”⁹² The sociologist Barry Sandywell claims that hermeneutics “proposes to read, retrieve, and reconstruct [...] texts of human experience in their particular personal, mythic, literary, social, and political contexts.”⁹³

Therefore, special attention will be also devoted to the socio-historical context of a particular period. For instance, in the case of apology, I will ask what national and international events might have sparked (real or feigned) remorse. In the case of photographs and films, the context in which they have been made is important. As the art critic John Berger claimed, “the aim must be to construct a context for a photograph, to construct it with words, to construct it with other photographs, to construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images.”⁹⁴ A first step for this study was the compilation of such contextual data, including the diaries and memoirs of survivors, scholarly publications, and magazine and newspaper articles, sources which originated not only in Lithuania but also in the various locations where Lithuanian Jews have settled since the end of the Second World War. While Berger was speaking explicitly about the analysis of photographs, the same tools of analysis may be applied to films and journalism. For instance, when analyzing the film *The World Was Ours*, made in New York by the Lithuanian Jew Mira Jedwabnik van Doren, it was critical to understand the context of memorial practices among the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora in New York. Understanding the importance of photographs for their culture of remembrance also made it possible to explore the photographs’ function in this documentary film.

⁹¹ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 89.

⁹² KINSELLA, p. 4.

⁹³ SANDYWELL, p. 368.

⁹⁴ BERGER, p. 59.

Sources

This study relies on a broad collection of source material, which can be divided into several categories including academic scholarship, journalism, photographs, films, memoirs, diaries, and biographies. The prehistory of Holocaust narratives in Soviet Lithuania and Lithuanian-American exile were traced through a variety of sources. For the analysis of Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania during the Soviet era, I used survivors' memoirs and diaries and works on this topic published in Soviet Lithuania.⁹⁵ I also looked for alternative sources of information and focused on scholarly articles about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and memoirs of the Lithuanian Jews written after 1990, some of which also reflected on Holocaust remembrance in Soviet times. The section about the emergence of Holocaust debates among exiled Lithuanians in the United States is based partly upon articles published in Lithuanian-American newspapers, especially the liberal newspaper *Akiračiai* [Horizons], beginning my research with 1977, when one of the first articles on Holocaust memory appeared⁹⁶ and finishing it with the year 1989. This exile newspaper was chosen as the main source to reconstruct these debates, because it was the only one which openly and critically discussed about the Holocaust in Lithuania and challenged the victimhood of non-Jewish Lithuanians during the war years. I also consulted other newspapers, such as the conservative *Draugas* [Friend] or *Tėviškės žiburiai* [Lights of Homeland], when their articles were discussed in *Akiračiai*. For the reconstruction of these debates, I have also relied on the work of the Lithuanian historian Alfonsas Eidintas, who has studied Holocaust debates among Lithuanian-American exiles.⁹⁷

The Holocaust narratives in Lithuania analyzed for the period from 1990 until the present is based largely on printed media, especially the two privately-owned Lithuanian national newspapers with the largest circulation: *Lietuvos Rytas* [Morning of Lithuania], with a readership of approximately sixty thousand, and *Respublika*⁹⁸ [Republic], which reaches about thirty-six thousand readers. While *Lietuvos Rytas* has been published under this name since 1990, it originated from the newspaper *Komjaunimo Tiesa* [The Truth of the Communist Youth]. *Respublika* has been published since 1989, when it had close ties to the Lithuanian independence movement *Sąjūdis* [Movement], but it has since become independent. The criteria for selecting these media sources were: 1) audience size (*Lietuvos Rytas* and *Respublika* are the most widely circulated national newspapers in Lithuania); and, 2) the period of issuance (*Lietuvos Rytas* and *Respublika* cover the research period after 1990). Naturally, a study of Holocaust narratives cannot rely solely on these two newspapers, but must also incorporate academic scholarship on the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania as well as work on the broader socio-cultural and political context of that period.

For the study of visual memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania, I have focused on photographs and films, choosing images taken by victims and perpetrators. This re-

⁹⁵ Discussed in more depth in section 4.1.1.

⁹⁶ VENCLOVA, *Žydai ir lietuviai*, pp. 4-5.

⁹⁷ EIDINTAS.

⁹⁸ In 2014, the newspaper *Respublika* was discontinued due to insolvency as a result of a large financial penalty levied for ethical violations.

search analyzed material such as the clandestine photographs of the Kovno ghetto taken by George Kadish. His photographs are addressed not only in the section focusing on his photography, but also in the context of iconography of Holocaust children in Lithuania. I have also studied images found in the film *The World Was Ours*, which drew primarily on photographs of Vilna families and their community life taken before the Nazi invasion. The chapter that seeks to engender partisan narratives examines photographs of the Lithuanian Jewish female partisans as seen through the lens of famous Soviet Jewish journalists and photographers like Ilya Ehrenburg or Yakov Riumkin. Images by perpetrators were also taken into account, for example, in the case of the massacre in the Lietūkis garage in Kovno, which German military photographers documented.

The visual media analyzed also includes films. I have chosen the film *Ghetto*, the only Holocaust feature film produced in Lithuania after independence, which is particularly interesting in terms of gender. There are also a number of documentary films that are representative and important for the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania. In these documentary films, I have focused on narratives of “homecoming.” The themes of returning home or revisiting sites of mass atrocities dominate the films created by Lithuanian Jewish survivors and other foreign filmmakers. Documentary films provided not only an arena for Jewish survivors to retell their past and commemorate relatives who were executed in Lithuania during the Holocaust, but also served as a form of therapy and a way of returning to their past. Thus, I will investigate the ways in which such “homecoming narratives” depict the Holocaust as the site of different memories.

This study does not include the films made by the Lithuanian filmmaker Saulius Beržinis, who has made the majority of the documentaries on the Holocaust in Lithuania. This is in part because the Lithuanian historian Rūta Šermukšnytė has analyzed most of these documentaries in her doctoral research.⁹⁹ As a result, I considered it preferable to select other documentaries in my own study of visual memories. Two documentaries in particular—both of which are included in the permanent Holocaust exhibition of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum—incorporate the homecoming theme outlined above: *The World Was Ours*¹⁰⁰ and *Out of the Forest*, a film produced by Israeli filmmakers¹⁰¹ that depicts Holocaust survivors returning to the site of atrocities in Lithuania. The chapter dealing with the visualization of female Jewish resistance introduces three additional documentary films: *Surviving Ostland*,¹⁰² made in the UK, and two Lithuanian documentary films *Amžininkai* [Contemporaries]¹⁰³ and *Fanios Vilnius* [Fania’s Vilnius].¹⁰⁴ It addresses both the production and reception of these films by consulting newspapers and online reviews of these films as well as published interviews with their filmmakers. In addition, scholarly articles about the Holocaust in general and Holocaust films in particular, as well as the memoirs and diaries written by Lithuanian Jews significantly enriched the analysis of the films in this work.

⁹⁹ ŠERMUKŠNYTĖ, Lietuvos istorijos aktualinimas.

¹⁰⁰ *The World Was Ours*.

¹⁰¹ *Out of the Forest*.

¹⁰² *Surviving Ostland*.

¹⁰³ *Amžininkai*.

¹⁰⁴ *Fanios Vilnius*.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Mediated Memories of the Holocaust

Holocaust memories matter not only to the survivors but are also significant for generations who did not experience the Holocaust directly—and even for those “for whom the Holocaust bears no distinct legacy at all.”¹ Holocaust scholars claim that Holocaust memory has already turned into a global icon,² and even that Holocaust memory in some cases “no longer requires the memory of the actual events, only their affective residue.”³ According to the literary scholar Michael Rothberg, the global emergence of Holocaust memory has also contributed “to the articulation of other histories—some of them predating the Nazi genocide, such as slavery, and others taking place later.”⁴ Mediation makes the memory of the Holocaust visible; in other words, “[Holocaust memory] is made to matter by and through the cultural forms and institutions that mediate the Holocaust in the present day.”⁵ These in turn create an arena for expressing “the desire for memory.”⁶ However, from the other side, in the words of French historian Pierre Nora, it might be also true that “we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.”⁷

During the last twenty years, the study of memory has become a central focus of interdisciplinary research.⁸ The history of the memory research, however, dates back into the 1920s; among the most influential works on the subject are those of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (d. 1945), who coined the term “collective memory” and observed that individuals remember only within the group context through communication within social networks and intermediate groups, such as families and social classes.⁹ Memory is thus, according to Halbwachs, an essentially social phenomenon that depends largely “on means of exchanging and sharing knowledge.”¹⁰ Many scholars have challenged Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory. The American histo-

¹ STIER, p. 1.

² ASSMANN/CONRAD, *Memory in a Global Age*, p. 109; see also LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*.

³ PINCHEVSKI, p. 261.

⁴ ROTHBERG, *Multidirectional Memory*, 6.

⁵ STIER, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁷ NORA, p. 7.

⁸ ERLI, *Cultural Memory Studies*, p. 1.

⁹ HALBWACHS, *On Collective Memory*.

¹⁰ ASSMANN, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 132.

rian Peter Novick observes, for instance, that this term “works best when we’re speaking of an organic (traditional, stable, homogenous) community.”¹¹ However, Novick questions its applicability for “very inorganic societies (fragmented rather than homogenous, rapidly changing rather than stable, the principal modes of communication electronic rather than face to face).”¹²

Halbwachs might be also criticized for refusing to accept the important role of individual memory in relation to collective memory. Whereas he claims that personal memory develops only in interaction with community and is never truly individual, the American historian Jay Winter rightly points out that sites of memory “are created not just by nations, but primarily by small groups of men and women who do the work of remembrance.”¹³ In the case of memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania, there are indeed individual Lithuanian Jews who do memory work in the name of the Lithuanian Jewry, trying to commemorate the life and death of their people. These individual memory acts influence the formation of group memories and are a key element to understanding the development and transmission of Holocaust memory. With regard to the distinction between memory and history, Halbwachs states that history is when the past “is no longer included within the sphere of thought of the existing groups.”¹⁴ The German Egyptologist and memory studies scholar Jan Assmann claimed that:

Once we remove ourselves from the area of everyday communication and enter into the area of objectivized culture, almost everything changes. [...] He [Halbwachs] probably thought that once living communication cristallized in the forms of objectivized culture—whether in texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities, or even landscapes—the group relationship and the contemporary reference are lost and there—fore the character of this knowledge as a *mémoire* collective disappears as well. “*Mémoire*” is transformed into “*histoire*.” [...] For in the context of objectivized culture and of organized or ceremonial communication, a close connection to groups and their identity exists which is similar to that found in the case of everyday memory.¹⁵

Assmann responded by introducing the terms of “cultural” and “communicative memories.” “Communicative memory” refers to what Halbwachs called “collective memory”; Assmann writes that the concept of the “communicative memory” “includes those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications.”¹⁶ “Cultural memory,” on the other hand, is “characterized by its distance from the everyday” and “it has fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time.”¹⁷ These fixed points are “fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation [...] and institutional communication.”¹⁸ Halbwachs

¹¹ STIER, p. 9.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ WINTER, p. 136.

¹⁴ HALBWACHS, *The Collective*, p. 106.

¹⁵ Italics in original. ASSMANN, *Collective Memory*, p. 128.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 126.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 129.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

relegated this kind of memory to history, to the past to which a society has no direct connection.¹⁹ The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has also criticized Halbwachs's perception of history, claiming that history can actually—in Kalinina's words—"support, correct, or contradict collective memory"²⁰ in a number of ways: first, memory lends meaning to the past; second, history allows for critical analysis of the past; and, third, history, with this potential for critical analysis, supplements and enhances the work of memory.²¹ Ricoeur's theory has been formative in developing the approach of the present study, as well.

The term "collective memories" is itself difficult to define. The American scholar James E. Young avoids the term "collective memory" and speaks instead of "collected memories," which he defines as "discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning [...]. If societies remember, it is only insofar as their institutions and rituals organize, shape, even inspire their constituents' memories."²² Young emphasizes the fragmentary nature of memories and the role of individual influence; for him, "collected" memories are memories that have already been gathered, which means that Young also highlights—in Oren Baruch Stier's words—"the 'pastness' of memory's representation."²³ Young conjectures as well that individuals cannot completely share another's memory; instead they tend to share "the forms of memory, even the meanings in memory generated by these forms, but an individual's memory remains hers alone."²⁴ Moreover, both "collective memory" and "collected memories" are negotiated, and, as Stier has observed, this negotiation "leads to the recognition of memory's nature as a kind of representation."²⁵ The scholar Jeffrey K. Olick claims in fact that "collective memory is something—or rather many things—we *do*, not something—or many things—we *have*."²⁶

Similarly, the term "cultural memory" is a controversial term which defies easy definition.²⁷ The German scholar Astrid Erll notes that cultural memory can be seen broadly as "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts."²⁸ Remembrance can be described "as the process of a 'bringing to the surface' and constructing the past" and memory as the storage place for these remembrances.²⁹ Hence, cultural memory must be understood as the result of certain cultural, political, and social processes; it must be studied within these specific contexts. The films, photographs, and print media which this study focuses on serve both as storage places for cultural memory and as catalysts for its further development. They not only retell the past, they also create narratives and foster certain societal symbols.

¹⁹ Ibidem, pp. 125-133.

²⁰ RICOEUR, as cited in KALININA, p. 32.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² YOUNG, p. XI.

²³ STIER, p. 13.

²⁴ YOUNG, p. XI.

²⁵ STIER, p. 11.

²⁶ OLICK, p. 159.

²⁷ ERLI, Cultural Memory Studies, p. 2.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ ERLI, Kollektives Gedächtnis, p. 7.

Therefore, in this research, I will focus on mediated memories of the Holocaust. The media scholar Amit Pinchevski defines mediated memories as “the various forms by which memory is formed and shared by means of media technologies, especially new media and multimedia.”³⁰ Films, photographs, accounts in the press—all of them are objects that could be “seen as agents in the constructions of memory,” and these objects are “mediated memories, material inscriptions of (historical) experiences that are always filtered through discursive conventions, social and cultural practices, and technological tools.”³¹ Thus, in this work, mediation is perceived as a process of transmitting memories and circulating meanings and symbols of social life through various media sources.³² Different forms of media will be treated as arenas for memory debates and as spaces where memories are redefined in the public sphere. Michael Rothberg, in his book on multidirectional memory, defines the public sphere as “a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others.”³³

Furthermore, memory mediates not only between collective and individual memories, but “media and memory transform each other,” as well.³⁴ The German scholar Tobias Ebbrecht asserts that media, and here he speaks mostly about films and TV series, “regulate the exchange of memories and perception of history among individual, social, and cultural memories.”³⁵ According to him, media organize and homogenize historical events and shape historical consciousness.³⁶ They generate images of history (*Geschichtsbilder*) which feed into public history and offers certain social framework (*Rahmen*) for memorialization.³⁷

Barbie Zelizer, who teaches at the Anneberg School for Communication, similarly claims about other forms of media and their actors, in her article “Journalism’s Memory Work,” that “journalists play a systematic and ongoing role in shaping the ways in which we think about the past.”³⁸ In Zelizer’s opinion, journalism thus not only functions “as one of contemporary society’s main institutions of recording and remembering”³⁹ but also as “a key agent of memory work, even if journalists themselves are averse to admitting it as part of what they do.”⁴⁰ This study of Holocaust memory in Lithuania also asks how media—represented by a variety of memory actors, including journalists and historians, perpetrators and survivors—acted as an agent of memory that shaped and reshaped different narratives about the past.

This research also seeks to trace what the media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call “remediation,”⁴¹ which Erll in turn defines as “the fact that memorable

³⁰ PINCHEVSKI, p. 253.

³¹ VOSU/KORESAAR/KUUTMA, p. 257.

³² See also KALININA, p. 40.

³³ ROTHBERG, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 5.

³⁴ VAN DIJCK, p. 21.

³⁵ EBBRECHT, p. 39.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

³⁸ ZELIZER, *Journalism’s Memory Work*, p. 379.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 386.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 385.

⁴¹ BOLTER/GRUSIN, pp. 311-358.

events are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media: in newspaper articles, photography, diaries, historiography, novels, films, etc.”⁴² Remembered events thus become “transmedial phenomenon”: their representation is not tied to one specific medium but is picked up across different media.⁴³ According to her, what we call our “cultural mind” could in many cases be seen as a “medial mind,” for “it is the patterns derived from the media culture we live in [...] that shape our idea of reality and our memories.”⁴⁴

Media and its role in memory work are also reflected in Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory⁴⁵ in relation to Holocaust photographs, or Alison Landsberg’s concept of prosthetic memories in filmography.⁴⁶ Hirsch’s discussion of postmemory centers on the “relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.”⁴⁷ Her research deals with Holocaust photographs—the medium of postmemory—which “reembody and reindividualize ‘cultural/archival’ memory” and allow the viewer to touch and reanimate the past.⁴⁸ The present study likewise engages with Holocaust photographs that evoke memories in the minds of Holocaust survivors and subsequent generations in Lithuania.

Holocaust photographs can be categorized based on the identity of the photographer—perpetrator, victim, bystander, or liberator. This identity is “a determining element in the photograph’s production, as it engenders distinctive ways of seeing and, indeed, a distinctive textuality.”⁴⁹ Photographs taken by Jews before the war capture the world that was destroyed; in Hirsch’s analysis of photos depicting Jewish families and their lives in the Eastern European *shtetls*,⁵⁰ she concludes that “it is precisely the utter conventionality of the domestic family picture that makes it impossible for us to comprehend how the person in the picture was, or could have been, annihilated.”⁵¹ Moreover, these pre-war images serve as testimonies of life before the tragedy. The French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes, in his *Camera Lucida*, claims: “The photograph does not call up the past [...]. The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed.”⁵² Hence, Holocaust photographs have the capacity “to hover between life and death” because they can bring back the past and, at the same time, show its irretrievability.⁵³ The pre-war photographs are analyzed in the chapter that deals with Mira Jedwabnik van Doren’s documentary film *The World Was Ours*, which draws largely

⁴² ERLI, *Literature, Film, and the Mediality*, p. 392.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 397.

⁴⁵ HIRSCH, *The Generation of Postmemory*.

⁴⁶ LANDSBERG, *The Prosthetic Memory*.

⁴⁷ HIRSCH, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 103.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

⁵⁰ The term “shtetl” predates the Holocaust and refers to small towns in Central and Eastern Europe which had a large Jewish population.

⁵¹ HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 21.

⁵² BARTHES, p. 82.

⁵³ HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 20.

on family and community photographs from pre-war Vilna. Even though these photographs do not depict the atrocities of the Holocaust, they are related to the memory of people who perished in the Holocaust or survived the war.

Another category of photographs are those taken by perpetrators. Brad Prager, whose scholarship deals with such perpetrator photographs, has called the camera “a metonymic extension of Nazi weaponry.”⁵⁴ The ethical questions raised by these pictures taken from the perpetrators’ perspective leave scholars uncertain about how to approach and evaluate them. In this volume, I will discuss images made during the mass atrocities in the Lietūkis garage in Kovno which capture the voyeuristic gaze of the perpetrators as they documented these moments of humiliation through the lens of a camera.

Victims also had occasion and opportunities to document what was happening to them. Georges Didi-Huberman called his study of the images of the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz, “images in spite of all”, since, according to him, they constitute a form of resistance by the Jewish victims.⁵⁵ Amateur photographers also took clandestine pictures in the Lodz ghetto, and, as outlined above, George Kadish’s images of the Kovno ghetto will be examined in some depth below.

After Allied forces had liberated the camps, Western journalists took photographs that circulated globally with media reports on the horror of the atrocities. In her book *Remembering to Forget*, Zelizer analyzed these images, claiming that these photographs “are of particular importance here, for the act of giving testimony against atrocity” and that they “tend to go beyond the mere authentication of horror and to imply the act of bearing witness, by which we assume responsibility for the events of our times.”⁵⁶ Moreover, Zelizer notes that after the war these photographs served as evidence of the experiences of suffering and confirmed that the individuals depicted had survived.⁵⁷ This study does not focus on the widely-researched topic of liberation pictures taken by Western journalists, but it does include some Soviet photography—namely, the images of liberation Soviet Jewish photographers took of Lithuanian Jewish partisans—which have received less scholarly attention than Western Holocaust liberation photography.⁵⁸ According to the American historian David Shneer, Soviet Holocaust photography was extraordinary in the respect that the photographers were of Jewish origin; he writes “‘the Jewish eye’ was definitely there.”⁵⁹

Landsberg similarly contemplates these mediated memories in her study of Holocaust films, both documentary and cinematic; she observes that their function is to create “prosthetic memories” and shape “alternative living memories” for those who did not experience the event.⁶⁰ Holocaust films give rise to these prosthetic memories when viewers have visceral experiences through the medium which “become part of one’s personal archive of experience” and shape one’s relationship to the past, present,

⁵⁴ PRAGER, p. 22.

⁵⁵ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 3.

⁵⁶ ZELIZER, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 158.

⁵⁸ These photographs will be considered in section 5.3.2.

⁵⁹ SHNEER, p. 5.

⁶⁰ LANDSBERG, *America, the Holocaust*, p. 66.

and future.⁶¹ According to Landsberg, the mass media create “transferential spaces,” “in which people are invited to enter into experiential relationships to events through which they themselves did not live.”⁶² As a result, viewers are able to gain access to different sorts of knowledge, including the subjective knowledge(s) of history.⁶³ The film scholar Joshua Hirsch, who speaks of “afterimages” and posttraumatic cinema, states that such cinema “not only represents traumatic historical events, but also attempts to embody and reproduce the trauma for the spectator through its form of narration.”⁶⁴ This study of the Holocaust in Lithuania also includes films,⁶⁵ asking what tasks they perform and what kind of visual narratives and iconographies of the Holocaust in Lithuania they construct. It also addresses the function of these visual memories both for audiences and the filmmakers themselves.

Hence, Hirsch and Landsberg along with other Holocaust scholars today focus on the mediation of memory and the representation of the Holocaust through different forms of media. The German scholar Gerhard Paul refers to this new mode of speaking about history as “a visual turn” in historical research.⁶⁶ According to him, historians had already started to pay more attention to the language and history of images, including film, by the end of the twentieth century.⁶⁷ This volume will contribute to this growing field of research and further development of the “visual turn” in historical studies in Lithuania.

Another important recent theoretical development in memory studies is the increasingly transnational perspective. As the literary scholar Aleida Assmann and the historian Sebastian Conrad observe in their book *Memory in a Global Age*, “memories are on the move,”—in other words, migrants, along with their heritage, also carry their memories and traumas with them, transferring these “into new social constellations and political contexts.”⁶⁸ Moreover, memories move and cross borders along various channels of mass media.⁶⁹ According to Assmann and Conrad, today nations are observed by other nations, and national identity is redefined “through the shaping and negotiating of issues of memory.”⁷⁰ The sociologists Levy and Sznajder also cast light on this transnational phenomenon within the field of the national collective memory; in their writing on the de-territorialization of memories, they claim that “culture can no

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² LANDSBERG, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 113.

⁶³ IDEM, *America, the Holocaust*, p. 66.

⁶⁴ HIRSCH, *Afterimage*, p. XI.

⁶⁵ See more studies on Holocaust films: OMER BARTOV: *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation*, Oxford 1996; LAWRENCE BARON, *Projecting the Holocaust*; OMER BARTOV: *The “Jew” in Cinema: From the Golem to Don’t Touch My Holocaust*, Bloomington 2005; JANET WALKER: *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, Oakland 2005; TERRI GINSBERG: *Holocaust Film: The Political Aesthetics of Ideology*, Cambridge 2007; CATRIN CORELL: *Der Holocaust als Herausforderung für den Film*, Bielefeld 2009.

⁶⁶ PAUL.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ ASSMANN/CONRAD, *Introduction*, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 5.

longer be understood as a closed national space, because it now competes constantly with other spaces.”⁷¹

The memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania cross national borders; they are spread among various groups of the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora. No study of the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania can thus be considered adequate unless it includes these mediated memories of the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora. After the Holocaust, Lithuanian Jews carried their memories to various parts of the world;⁷² this book highlights the mediated memories of the Lithuanian Jews in Israel and the USA, where the majority of Lithuanian Jews reside. Sznaider claims that “a cosmopolitan memory of the past emerges from the conscious and deliberate inclusion of the Other’s suffering—not from the idea of some community of fate, inspired by mythical delusions and serving to construct some false historical continuity.”⁷³ In the case of Lithuania, the cosmopolitan Lithuanian Jewish diaspora have continuously sought to articulate their suppressed memories and actively preserve them in their memory work and in Lithuanian historiography.

2.2 Media and Remembrance of the Holocaust: Does Gender Matter?

The German historians Sylvia Paletschek and Sylvia Schraut claim that “European national cultures of memory are male-connoted and orientated.”⁷⁴ The established framework of memorialization perpetuates a “dichotomy of *male – public* and *female – private*” and results in the invisibility of female memory actors.⁷⁵ It is, therefore, hardly surprising that “female scopes of action and female perspectives” are often “not perceived as political or as having an impact on society.”⁷⁶ As the German literary scholar Aleida Assmann observes in her research on memory, however, women are typically the ones “who remember.”⁷⁷ Assmann claims that “women are subjects but not objects of memory,” while “men are subjects—not objects of forgetting.”⁷⁸

Other scholars have likewise remarked on the extent to which the female perspective has been overshadowed in the body of research on the Holocaust for many years. The Irish Jewish political sociologist Ronit Lentin claims that Israeli society “constructed itself as ‘masculine’ in opposition to the alleged passivity, and ‘femininity,’ implied in the discourse of Jewish victims, ‘going to their death like sheep to the slaughter.’”⁷⁹ According to Lentin, Israeli accounts of the history of the Shoah ignored the gender aspect for many years and subordinated female survivors in a heroic masculine narrative.⁸⁰ Similarly, in the case of Lithuania, analyzing the cultural memory of the Holocaust and

⁷¹ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*, p. 26.

⁷² This discussion will follow in the section 3.2.

⁷³ SZNAIDER, p. 93.

⁷⁴ PALETSCHEK/SCHRAUT, p. 267.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 271.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ See, ASSMANN, *Geschlecht*, pp. 29-48.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ LENTIN, *Re-occupying the Territories of Silence*, p. 48.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 57

“breaking the conspiracy of silence” will also entail “breaking the hegemonic masculinity.”⁸¹ Therefore, it is vital to analyze “gender⁸² specific producers and consumers of collective memory, and gender traditions of remembering and subversive (re-)appropriations of hegemonic memories.”⁸³

The female voice and experience did not attract much attention in the field of Holocaust research until the 1990s, despite the fact that a number of women survivors had penned memoirs of their experiences.⁸⁴ According to the American philosopher John K. Roth, who co-edited one of the first books⁸⁵ on the Holocaust from the female perspective, “the scholarship had proceeded as if neither the writers, nor their texts, nor their readers were gendered” for many years; victims and witnesses were perceived as genderless.⁸⁶ The scholar Pascale Rachel Bos attributes the phallogocentric view which dominated Holocaust scholarship to historians’ assumption that male and female experiences were identical and subsequent decision to not differentiate between the accounts of men and women.⁸⁷ The narratives of male Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, or Viktor Frankl became publicly known. The Holocaust historian Zoë Waxman, who also wrote about the representation of women’s Holocaust experiences, ascertains that “studies of women and the Holocaust tend to portray female witnesses in much the same way as child witnesses, as simply being unproblematic victims.”⁸⁸ Lentin ascribes the absence of female voices to the fact that the field of Shoah studies has been dominated by male historians, who “do not take into account the experiences and perceptions of women during the Shoah.”⁸⁹ She observes that “these experiences tend to be neutralized into a so-called ‘human’ perspective, which on examination, turns out to be masculine.”⁹⁰ This is also true in the case of Lithuania, where the history of the Second World War has been mainly written by male historians, who have neither focused on female agency nor analyzed how Holocaust memory in Lithuania has been gendered.

The transformation in both feminist and Holocaust studies started in 1983 when historians Joan Ringelheim and Dovid Katz organized a conference on women and the Holocaust to challenge the male-centered body of research.⁹¹ In 1993, the historian Carol Rittner and the philosopher John K. Roth published a book entitled *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* in an attempt “to repair that neglect.”⁹² In this volume, which remains one of the most influential books on this topic, Rittner and Roth point out that Holocaust scholarship frequently “treats the Holocaust as if sexual and gender

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² The term “gender” refers to social-cultural constructions of the societal positions of men and women, while the category “sex” refers only to the biological nature and differences between women and men.

⁸³ GREVER/RIBBENS, p. 259.

⁸⁴ ROTH, p. 10.

⁸⁵ ROTH/RITTNER, *Different Voices*.

⁸⁶ ROTH, p. 10.

⁸⁷ BOS, p. 24.

⁸⁸ WAXMAN, *Writing the Holocaust*, p. 125.

⁸⁹ LENTIN, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah*, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ BAER/GOLDENBERG, p. XII.

⁹² ROTH/RITTNER, *Prologue*, p. XII.

differences did not make a difference” and, therefore, “the particularities of women’s experiences and reflections have been submerged and ignored.”⁹³ They claim:

That exploration and emphasis should occur not because women’s voices are necessarily clearer or better than men’s—though in many individual cases they are—but because they are women’s voices reflecting their own particular experiences in ways that no one else can do for them. The need, however, is not just to let women speak for themselves. Of equal, if not greater, importance is the need for them to be heard.⁹⁴

The American sociologist Lenore Weitzman and Israeli historian of modern Jewry Dalia Ofer also argue for the importance of women studies in the research on the Holocaust.⁹⁵ Even if “race” was the primary target of the Nazi regime, Weitzman and Ofer suggest, women’s experiences were not identical to those of their male counterparts; this means that “scholars studying Jewish responses to Nazi prosecution must be attentive to the differences between men and women just as we must be attentive to other social differences among Jews,” like religion or social class.⁹⁶ The American literary scholar Sonja Hedgepeth and Rochelle Saidel, the founder of the Remember Women Institute in New York, together edited a scholarly volume on *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women*, which was published in 2010. In this volume, they confirm that “there has been a resistance overall to looking at survivors’ experiences in terms of gender” because “for some historians, focusing on women means that you are taking away from the totality of the Holocaust experience” or “questioning who suffered more.”⁹⁷ The literary scholar Sara R. Horowitz, whose research focuses on gender and memory, notes that only this type of framework of analysis enables us to see “the complex and more complete account” of Holocaust atrocities.⁹⁸ Another literary scholar, Catherine Bernard, adds that “the inclusion of women’s voices, therefore, would broaden the spectrum of issues that Holocaust Studies could include within its domain.”⁹⁹

While the present study largely agrees with these scholars about the importance of addressing the gender question and including female voices in the research on the Holocaust in Lithuania, I would like to acknowledge that different perspectives exist in this field of research. The idea of differentiating between men and women in studying violence challenges scholars and creates space for debates. The Israeli journalist and Holocaust survivor Ruth Bondy as well as Lawrence L. Langer, who analyzes Holocaust literature, criticize this distinction. Bondy claims that it does not make sense to differentiate between men and women because “the same death swept them all away”; she is offended by “any division of the Holocaust and its sufferers according to gender.”¹⁰⁰ The victims, she thinks, should not be seen through the lens of binary categories

⁹³ Ibidem, XI.

⁹⁴ ROTH/RITTNER, *Different Voices*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ OFER/WEITZMAN.

⁹⁶ Ibidem, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ HOROWITZ, p. 364.

⁹⁹ BERNARD.

¹⁰⁰ BONDY, p. 310.

of men and women but should rather be viewed as a single category “united as human beings.”¹⁰¹ Langer also opposes the focus on the female victim category and the favoring of one group of individuals over others.¹⁰² He suggests abandoning this research design because “all efforts to find a rule of hierarchy in that darkness, whether based on gender or will, spirit or hope, reflect only on our own need to plant a life sustaining seed in the barren soil that conceals the remnants of two-thirds of European Jewry.”¹⁰³ Likewise, the American Jewish writer Cynthia Ozick claims that a gendered perspective trivalizes the Holocaust: “the Holocaust happened to victims who were not seen as men, women or children, but as *Jews*.”¹⁰⁴

Despite these criticisms, I do favor the intentional inclusion of women and examination of the gender perspective. The American historian Joan Scott has also highlighted the importance of gender, pointing out that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”¹⁰⁵ From this perspective, it is indeed an important element that demands attention.

Furthermore, I will also examine the overlap of gender, media, and Holocaust remembrance. Andrea Nachtigall, a German expert in gender studies, argues that visual cultures are often characterized by the prevalence of “militarized masculinity” and “peaceful femininity.”¹⁰⁶ Masculinity encompasses such virtues as determination, courage, rationality, and power, whereas femininity is associated with irrationality, emotion, unpredictability, weakness; these features “play a central role in the symbolic constitution of the nation.”¹⁰⁷ According to her, such “stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity not only shape the characterization of certain individuals, in particular the construction of the enemies, but also frame the construction of the nation.”¹⁰⁸

The British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, in her book *Visual and Other Pleasures*, describes the gender dichotomy in films and claims that “the male gaze is active and the female gaze is passive.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, “men need to make things happen, they are active, they forward the story. The man controls film and is the representative of power as the bearer of the look.”¹¹⁰ According to the German art historian Silke Wenk’s analysis of visual politics, memory, and gender, “the use of gendered images that feminize the victims apparently help us to cope with the violence of ‘total’ war.”¹¹¹ Moreover, she claims, “gender orders” represent safety, “even at a time when the safety contained in traditional orders is being sorely challenged”; this is especially true in her opinion of the representation of the mass murder of Jews in Nazi Germany.¹¹² Wenk

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, p. 325.

¹⁰² LANGER, *Gendered Suffering*, p. 362.

¹⁰³ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴ Bos, p. 49.

¹⁰⁵ SCOTT, pp. 1053-1075.

¹⁰⁶ NACHTIGALL, p. 107.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, p. 96.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, p. 95.

¹⁰⁹ MULVEY, *Narrative Cinema*, p. 67.

¹¹⁰ IDEM, *Visual*, p. 145.

¹¹¹ WENK, *Visual Politics*, p. 123.

¹¹² Ibidem.

argues that gender structures play a significant role “in forgetting acts of violence” as the “specific-gendered memory pictures or figures occur in particular when the order of modern societies [...] reach a state of ‘instability’ and ‘disorder.’”¹¹³ In the chapter of this book dealing with the use and abuse of Holocaust images of children, similar features of memory stabilization and possible erasure of the perpetrators are evident. It will show how images of anonymous children have been used to universalize and emotionalize the memory of the Holocaust and, in the case of Lithuania, to soften the notion of perpetratorhood and collaboration.

The section dealing with visual iconographies of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust will also address these gender aspects because the inclusion of women in the research on the Holocaust challenges the “traditional definitions of heroism and resistance.”¹¹⁴ For too long historians have ignored the female voice in their historical accounts and tended to portray partisan activities as masculine, while depicting women as passive fighters.¹¹⁵ I will also ask why the narrative focusing on women as perpetrators or passive bystanders is non-existent in Lithuania. In the research on the Holocaust, “women were defined as manipulated victims of the Nazi movement, and still seen as the better part of humanity” for many years.¹¹⁶ Only in the mid-1980s did female perpetrators become a topic of debate;¹¹⁷ in the case of Lithuania, however, there is still no research on female perpetrators or bystanders during the Holocaust.

A related matter is the issue of sexual violence and its cinematic representation. According to Hedgepeth and Saidel, the historiography on the Holocaust and its visual representation have entirely neglected the topic of sexual violence.¹¹⁸ Ringelheim attributes this to the fact that “the rape of mothers, grandmothers, sisters, friends, or lovers during the Holocaust is difficult to face.”¹¹⁹ She also rightly claims that it is impossible to dismiss these issues, because otherwise we cannot “understand the victimization of women. It may even make it impossible to really see Jewish women as victims, or visualize their victimization.”¹²⁰ In this book, the film *Ghetto* serves as a lens to discuss how the topic of sexual violence during the Holocaust was mediated in Lithuania through cinema. I will expose how sexual violence is hidden in film through the beautification and melodramatization of the Jewish female protagonist, thereby making Jewish women “disconnected from the political reality that determines their fate.”¹²¹ The film scholar Frank Stern has shown how sexualized violence “became a taboo after the war” and “resulted in the gendered neutralization of male remembrance,”¹²² in which

¹¹³ Ibidem.

¹¹⁴ BAER/GOLDENBERG, p. XXIV.

¹¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹¹⁶ JENSEN, p. 15.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem. See also: SUSAN EDWARDS (ed.): *Gender, Sex and the Law*, London 1985; ULRIKE WECKEL – EDGAR WOLFRUM (eds.): „Bestien“ und „Befehlsempfänger“: *Frauen und Männer in NS Prozessen nach 1945*, Göttingen 2003; ANETTE KRETZER: *NS-Täterschaft und Geschlecht: Der erste britische Ravensbrück-Prozess 1946/47* in Hamburg, Berlin 2009; LOWER.

¹¹⁸ HEDGEPEETH/SAIDEL, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ RINGELHEIM, p. 25.

¹²⁰ Ibidem.

¹²¹ BARON, *Women as Resistance Fighters*, p. 97.

¹²² STERN, p. 50.

women were turned into subjects of memory.¹²³ According to the Israeli film scholar Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan's research on the connection between history and film, "an overall survey of the films that refer to sexual abuse shows that very few Holocaust films address such themes."¹²⁴ Kozlovsky-Golan outlines a tendency in postwar cinema to conceal "the abuse of women in general and sexual abuse in particular"; if these films show it at all, they only hint at "the painful events that damaged their bodies and femininity."¹²⁵

Therefore, in my examination of the final facet of the overlap between gender and media, I will investigate not only how memories are gendered, but also how the media is gendered. The Germanist Vera Apfelthaler and cultural studies scholar Julia B. Köhne claim that "memory discourse is shaped and performed according to the political demands that are related to concepts of gender."¹²⁶ Moreover, according to them, "these 'gendered memories' always appear in form of a specific media, be it written text, a film, a theatre performance, or a material object."¹²⁷ Thus, I will analyze how the notions of male and female memories are manifest in different media sources, including the narrative and visual aspects of remembrance.

¹²³ Ibidem, p. 56.

¹²⁴ KOZLOVSKY-GOLAN, p. 235.

¹²⁵ Ibidem, p. 238.

¹²⁶ APFELTHALER/KÖHNE, p. 8.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

3 Historical Background: Prehistory, the Holocaust, and its Aftermath

3.1 The Holocaust in Lithuania: Historical Legacies, Mass Murder, Collaboration, Resistance, and Rescue

The mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews during the Second World War cannot be understood without reference to the historical legacies¹ and ancient prejudices that led some Lithuanians to collaborate with the Nazi regime during the Holocaust. In the interwar period, Lithuanian Jews also experienced the outbursts of antisemitism, first in the years from 1922 to 1924 and then again in the 1930s.² Between 1922 and 1924, Lithuania experienced an economic and political crisis for which some non-Jewish Lithuanians blamed Lithuanian Jews, even instigating antisemitic campaigns against Jewish inhabitants. The Lithuanian Riflemen's Union³ published antisemitic articles that sparked a number of campaigns, for instance, the destruction of Jewish inscriptions in shops, bakeries, and other Jewish businesses. Some of the members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union later became part of the Nazi *Sonderkommando*, also known

¹ For more on relations between Lithuanian and Jews in the nineteenth century, see: DARIUS STALIŪNAS: Anti-Jewish Disturbances in the North-Western Provinces in the Early 1880s, in: *East European Jewish Affairs* 34 (2004), 2, pp. 119-138; VLADAS SIRUTAVIČIUS: Notes on the Origin and Development of Modern Lithuanian Antisemitism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century, in: ALVYDAS NIKŽENTAITIS STEFAN SCHREINER et al (eds.): *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, Amsterdam 2004, pp. 61-72; VLADAS SIRUTAVIČIUS DARIUS STALIŪNAS: Kai ksenofobija virsta prievarta: lietuvių ir žydų santykių dinamika XIX a. – XX a. pirmojoje pusėje [When Xenophobia Turns to Violence: The Dynamics of the Relations between Lithuanians and Jews in the 19th Century until the Turn of the 20th Century], Vilnius 2005; LINAS VENCLAUSKAS: Moderniojo lietuviško antisemitizmo genėzė ir raida (1883-1940) [The Genesis and Development of Modern Lithuanian Antisemitism (1883-1940)], PhD diss., Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas 2008; KLAUS RICHTER: Die Reaktion der Litvaken auf Gewalt und rechtliche Diskriminierung in den litauischen Gouvernements (1881-1914), in: ULRICH WYRWA (ed.): *Einspruch und Abwehr. Die Entstehung des Antisemitismus in Europa und die Reaktionen des Europäischen Judentums*, Frankfurt a. M. 2010, pp. 313-334; DARIUS STALIŪNAS: Žydų klausimas XIX amžiuje [The Question of Jews in the 19th Century], in: VLADAS SIRUTAVIČIUS DARIUS STALIŪNAS et al (eds.): *Lietuvos žydai. Istorinė studija* [The Jews of Lithuania: A Historical Study], Vilnius 2012, pp. 191-203; DARIUS STALIŪNAS: Antisemitizmas XIX a. pab. – XX a. pradžios Lietuvoje [Antisemitism in Lithuania at the End of the 19th Century and Beginning of the 20th], in: VLADAS SIRUTAVIČIUS, DARIUS STALIŪNAS et al (eds.): *Lietuvos žydai. Istorinė studija* [The Jews of Lithuania: A Historical Study], Vilnius 2012, pp. 283-294.

² SIRUTAVIČIUS, p. 404.

³ In Lithuania it is known as Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga, which was a nationalistic paramilitary organization, active from 1919 until 1940. After the independence of Lithuania in 1990, it was re-established.

as *Ypatingasis būrys*, which was responsible for the mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust.⁴

In the 1930s and 1940s, antisemitism became visible among all social groups; in November 1939, the new rector of Vytautas Magnus University, Stasys Šalkauskis, noted that “the complex and convoluted problem of the Jews is a true test of our social and moral development” and he warned Lithuanians that “the wave of antisemitism that has inundated the whole world during recent years has found a certain resonance among us as well.”⁵ However, Šalkauskis criticized only “an aggressive antisemitism,” stating that he did not consider “the Jewish nation either ideal or unable to be accommodated to those among whom it must live.”⁶ The global economic crisis exacerbated these tensions: new government policies promoted Lithuanian products and reinforced economic antisemitism,⁷ although “official antisemitism was not tolerated.” During the regime of the Lithuanian dictatorial president Antanas Smetona (1926–1940), there was no discriminatory legislation.⁸ Smetona emphasized his tolerance towards the Jews with public displays of solidarity like visiting their communities during national celebrations. Nevertheless, not everyone accepted the official regime’s tolerance towards Jews. In the early 1930s, for example, the business class came together to form the Lithuanian Business Association⁹ and subsequently demanded that the state should restrict Jewish economic competition; their magazine *Verslas* [Business] urged a boycott of Jewish businesses. There were rural incidents, as well, but the tensions in Lithuania did not escalate to the same extent as in neighboring Poland because Smetona’s regime opposed any interethnic violence.¹⁰

In the mid-1930s, the stereotype of “the communist Jew” became particularly strong in Lithuanian society. Jews were seen not only as economic rivals but also as enemies of the Lithuanian state and were encouraged to emigrate to Palestine.¹¹ Antisemitism ran deep within the notorious organization Iron Wolf,¹² a Lithuanian fascist organization founded in 1927 by Smetona’s opponent Augustinas Voldemaras. Many of its members later collaborated with the Nazi regime and took part in the executions of the Lithuanian Jewish population. This organization was led by young Catholic intellectuals and nationalists who claimed that all minorities were “incompatible foreign matter.”¹³

⁴ This issue will be discussed chapter 3.1; also see ARŪNAS BUBNYS: *Vokiečių ir lietuvių saugumo policija (1941-1944)* [German and Lithuanian Security Police (1941-1944)], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 1 (1997), pp. 160-175.

⁵ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *The Historical Sources*, p. 26.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ ATAMUKAS, *The Hard Long Road*.

⁹ Their members could become only “ethnic Lithuanians,” as no Lithuanian Jews were allowed to enter this association.

¹⁰ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *The Historical Sources*, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² In Lithuanian, it was called *Geležinis vilkas*. This organization was banned in 1930, but it continued functioning as an underground organization. See also, VYTAUTAS PETRONIS, *Paramilitary Associations in East Central Europe (1918–1944): Self-image, the Use of Force and Social Dynamics in the Example of the Iron Wolves in Lithuania*, Research project at Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe in Marburg.

¹³ ATAMUKAS, *The Hard Long Road*.

Antisemitism became increasingly radicalized from 1938 to 1939, when Lithuania lost Klaipėda and its environs to Germany.¹⁴ As a result of this loss, Lithuanian politicians were criticized for their tolerance towards minorities, who were blamed for the negative developments in Lithuania.¹⁵

The strongest anti-Jewish resentments in Lithuania emerged during the first Soviet occupation in 1940, in particular during the mass deportations of June 1941. The different geopolitical orientations of the Jews and non-Jewish Lithuanians influenced the growing animosity towards the Lithuanian Jewish population and became a prelude to the Holocaust in Lithuania. The historian Liudas Truska has described the myth of the Jewish role in the establishment of the Soviet regime in Lithuania that “took root not only in the consciousness of common Lithuanians but also in the minds of politicians, prominent intellectuals, and the leaders of the Church”¹⁶ as well despite the fact that “no Jewish institution made any anti-Lithuanian or pro-Soviet statements.”¹⁷ According to Truska’s research, the majority of the participants in the communists’ meetings were not actually Jews.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Jewish participation in communist activities “was perceived in absolute terms and applied to the entire community of the Lithuanian Jews.”¹⁹ In this historical moment, Jews were seen as national traitors who welcomed the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

The Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews: The Stages of Death in Lithuanian Towns and Provinces

Given this brief historical outline, it should be clear that antisemitism in Lithuanian society predates the Nazi invasion. Moreover, most Lithuanians greeted the invasion, which they hoped would liberate their state from Soviet occupation. The Lithuanian historian Arūnas Bubnys states that “the worst and most tragic period for the Lithuanian Jewry was the second half of 1941” because, “by December 1941, 80 per cent of Jews resident in Lithuania had been murdered.”²⁰ In fact, most of the Lithuanian Jewry perished during the first days of the war, even before the ghettos were created in July and August 1941; in provincial areas, many Jews were killed straightaway not far from their homes.²¹

The killings were carried out by both Nazi forces and Lithuanian collaborators. Nazi Germany sent operational groups, i.e. *Einsatzgruppen* with their special units,

¹⁴ In the interwar period, Klaipėda, with its surroundings, was taken away from Germany. Lithuania and Poland competed for their rights in the region. In 1923, after Klaipėda’s revolt, it was transferred to Lithuania. Nazi Germany wanted to seize the region; they succeeded in 1939. It was the last territory acquired by Hitler before the war. For more on Jews in Klaipėda, see also: RUTH LEISEROWITZ: Žydai tarpukario Klaipėdos krašte [The Jews in the Region of Klaipėda in the Interwar Period], in: VLADAS SIRUTAVIČIUS DARIUS STALIŪNAS et al. (eds.): Lietuvos žydai. Istorinė studija, Vilnius 2012, pp. 425-431.

¹⁵ SIRUTAVIČIUS, p. 404.

¹⁶ TRUSKA, *The Crisis*, p. 173.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 182.

¹⁹ VAREIKIS, *Preconditions of Holocaust*, p. 45.

²⁰ BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 4.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

smaller subgroups, known as *Einsatzkommandos*, and special command groups called *Sonderkommandos*, to Lithuania. The Nazi commander of the *Sicherheitspolizei*, Franz Walter Stahlecker (1900–1942), commanded *Einsatzgruppe A*, which entered Kovno on 25 June 1941. SS *Standartenführer* (Colonel) Karl Jäger (1888–1959) became the commander of *Einsatzkommando 3a* in Kovno; the detailed reports he kept for his superiors during the mass murders are known as the “Jäger Report.”²² In addition to these German officials, “Lithuanian administrative bodies were also involved in this process (district governors, mayors, and chiefs of rural districts), the Lithuanian police, and the troops of the auxiliary police, the so-called *baltaraiščiai*²³ (they wore white armbands)” likewise contributed significantly to the mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews.²⁴

Bubnys has outlined three phases of the Holocaust in Lithuania:

- (1) late June 1941–November 1941,²⁵ when the majority of Lithuanian Jews were killed;
- (2) December 1941–March 1943, known as the “stabilization period,” when Jews were forced to work in the ghettos, and during which time no mass killings occurred;
- (3) April 1943–mid-July 1944, when the liquidation of the ghettos started and the last Jews were annihilated or transported to various concentration camps (Dachau, Stutthof, or Auschwitz) or transferred to forced labor camps or to lagers in Latvia (Kaiserwald) and Estonia (Vaivara and Klooga).²⁶

Bubnys’s periodization resembles the stages proposed by historian Raul Hilberg, who divides the mass murder of the East European Jews into the first wave of killings, the intermediate phase, and the second wave of atrocities.²⁷

During the first stage of the Holocaust in Lithuania, the mass atrocities took place in those regions of Lithuania which shared a border with the German province of East Prussia, namely Kretinga and the district of Tauragė.²⁸ In July 1941, mass murders commenced in other parts of Lithuania, as Jews were slaughtered not only in the Sev-

²² See more on Karl Jäger in WETTE; see also IDEM: SS Standartenführer Karl Jäger, Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei (KdS) in Kaunas: Eine biographische Skizze, in: VINCAS BARTUSEVIČIUS JOACHIM TAUBER et al. (eds.): Holocaust in Litauen. Krieg, Judenmord und Kollaboration im Jahre 1941, Cologne 2003, pp. 77-90.

²³ *Baltaraiščiai* were Lithuanians who collaborated with the Nazi regime and participated in the mass killings of Jews. They were also known as the Lithuanian “Selbstschutz.”

²⁴ BUBNYS, Holocaust in Lithuania 1941–1944, p. 565.

²⁵ This period is also subdivided into two periods: from the end of June 1941 to mid-July 1941, when Jews were persecuted for political motives, and from the end of July 1941 to November 1941, when racial persecutions started, and almost all Jews in province were annihilated.

²⁶ BUBNYS, Įvadas, pp. 7-9.

²⁷ HILBERG, Die Vernichtung, pp. 286-410.

²⁸ BUBNYS, Įvadas, p. 8.

enth Fort²⁹ in Kovno, but also in Ponary³⁰ and other Lithuanian towns.³¹ The first days of the Holocaust were captured in the *Ponary Diary (1941-1943)*, written by the Polish journalist Kazimierz Sakowicz,³² who lived in the village of Ponary and observed the shootings from the attic of his house. The Lithuanian Jew, Holocaust survivor, and historian Yitzhak Arad judges Sakowicz's account to be the testimony of an "objective" observer.³³ The first entry in this diary, dated 11 July 1941, reads as follows:

Quite nice weather, warm, white clouds, windy, some shots from the forest. Probably exercises, because in the forest there is an ammunition dump on the way to the village of Nowosiolki. It's about 4 p.m.; the shots last an hour or two. On the Grodzienka³⁴ I discover that many Jews have been "transported" to the forest. And suddenly they shoot them. This was the first day of executions. An oppressive, overwhelming impression. The shots quiet down after 8 in the evening; later, there are no volleys but rather individual shots.³⁵

During this same period, between July and early September, the ghetto-building process—"an integral part of the history of destruction of the Lithuanian Jews"³⁶—started in Lithuania. There were both urban and rural ghettos, intended, according to the Nazi regime, "to protect the Jews from Lithuanian predators."³⁷ The urban population of Lithuanian Jews was sent to the ghettos of Vilna, Kovno, and Shavli. The Vilna ghetto, which was established in early September 1941,³⁸ was divided into the large ghetto (in which around thirty thousand Jews lived) and the small ghetto (which housed between nine and eleven thousand Jews).³⁹ In October 1941, the small ghetto was liquidated; all its Jewish inhabitants were killed in the Ponary forest, and only around twenty thou-

²⁹ The Seventh Fort was a defensive fortification in Kaunas. During the Holocaust, Jewish prisoners were held and killed there. Nazi officer Karl Jäger was in charge of these executions. During the Second World War, some parts of the remains of the Kaunas Fortress, which was constructed and renovated in the 19th century to protect the Western borders of the Russian Empire, were used by Nazi Germany for the detention and execution of Jews, for instance, the Ninth, the Seventh, and the Fourth Forts. Today, at the site of the Ninth Fort, there is a memorial and museum devoted to the victims of the mass murders, which took place there during the Second World War (the groups of victims commemorated in the museum: Jews, prisoners of war, communists and others).

³⁰ Ponary, located close to Vilna, was the site of mass executions in Lithuania. The Lithuanian name is Paneriai. In Yiddish: Ponar and in Polish: Ponary. The latter version will appear in this research, as it is usually used by the Yad Vashem and in English-language publications.

³¹ BUBNYS, *Įvadas*, p. 8.

³² SAKOWICZ. The diary was edited by Lithuanian Jewish historian Yitzhak Arad, and was published for the first time in Polish in 1999. Sakowicz died during the war years. His diary pages were hidden in different places near to his home in Ponary. Lithuanian Jew Rachel Margolis, who worked at the Jewish State Museum of Lithuania, collected them together.

³³ ARAD, Preface, p. XV.

³⁴ A reference to the Wilno-Grodno high road.

³⁵ SAKOWICZ, pp. 11-12.

³⁶ DIECKMANN/SUŽIEDĖLIS, p. 145.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Before the establishment of the ghetto, according to Bubnys, between 10,000 and 20,000 of Vilna Jews were killed. See more in: BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 21.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

sand Jews were left in the Vilna ghetto.⁴⁰ In the countryside, temporary Jewish ghettos were created, for instance, in Telšiai, Žagarė, and Jurbarkas. These ghettos were “provisional ghettos and gathering points” established as “holding areas for Jews awaiting their death”⁴¹ and were accordingly demolished after the extermination operations.

The formation of the ghettos coincided with mass atrocities throughout the rural areas,⁴² which, according to the Lithuanian historian Bubnys, “remains a ‘grey area’ in Lithuanian historiography.”⁴³ The mass murder of the Jews in the province can be broken into two stages: First, between the end of June and mid-July 1941, Jews were persecuted mainly for political reasons; most of them were supporters of the Soviet regime, and it was mostly male Jews who were executed.⁴⁴ Second, between the end of July 1941 and November 1941, in the words of Bubnys, a racial genocide began, in which Jews were killed because of their ethnicity.⁴⁵ During this period, almost all the rural Jews perished. The mass murders in the Lithuanian province were carried out by some members of the local administration, policemen from local police stations, the troops of the auxiliary police, known as *baltaraiščiai*, and the *Rollkommando Hamann*,⁴⁶ led by SS *Sturmbannführer* Joachim Hamann (1913–1945).⁴⁷ Bubnys attributes the speed with

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ DIECKMANN/SUŽIEDĖLIS, p. 145.

⁴² Province “refers to rural districts, who are differently administrated from the large towns of Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, Panevėžys.” BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in the Lithuanian Province*, p. 285.

⁴³ Ibidem. Research on the mass murder of Jews in the province is usually conducted only about specific places; no publication contains information about all the killings in the province. For more information about the Holocaust in different places in the Lithuanian province, see JOACHIM TAUBER: Garsden, 24 Juni 1941, in: *Annaberger Annalen*, 5 (1997), pp. 117-134; RUTH KIBELKA: Die Morde von Rainiai ir Pravieniškiai, in: WOLFGANG BENZ MARION NEISS (eds.): *Judenmord in Litauen: Studien und Dokumente*, Berlin 1999, pp. 91-96; RASA PUŠYTĖ: *Holokaustas Lietuvos provincijoje. Jurbarkas (1941 m. birželis – 1941 m. rugsėjis)* [Holocaust in Lithuanian Province. Jurbarkas (June 1941-September 1941)], in: *Lietuvos archyvai*, 13 (1999), pp. 77-85; VALENTINAS BRANDIŠAUSKAS: *Holokaustas Kėdainių apskrityje* [Holocaust in the District of Kėdainiai], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 17 (2005), 1, pp. 87-99; IDEM: *Mažeikių apskrities žydų likimas Antrojo pasaulio karo metais* [The Fate of the Jews of the Mažeikiai District during the Second World War], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 20 (2006), 2, pp.7-30; STANISLOVAS BUCHAVECKAS: *Holokaustas Raseinių apskrityje: Nemakščių valsčiaus žydų žūtis* [The Holocaust in Raseiniai County: Destruction of the Jewish Community in Nemakščiai Rural District], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 28 (2010), 2, pp. 31-53; IDEM: *Kelmės ir Vaiguvos valsčių žydų bendruomenės ir jų žūtis 1941* [Kelmė and Vaiguva Jewish Communities and Their Perishing in 1941], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 29 (2011), 1, pp. 7-29; IDEM: *Holokaustas Vikaviškio apskrityje: Pilviškių žydų bendruomenė ir jos likimas 1941* [The Holocaust in Vilkaviškis County: The Fate of Pilviškiai Jewish Community in 1941], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 30 (2011), 2, pp. 7-39; ARŪNAS BUBNYS: *Holokaustas Alytaus apskrityje 1941* [Holocaust in Alytus County in 1941], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 31(2012), 1, pp. 32-62.

⁴⁴ BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ *Rollkommando Haman* (i.e., Haman’s flying squad) was a small unit that committed executions of Lithuanian Jews in the province from July to October 1941. Haman was an officer of the *Einsatzkommando 3*, a killing unit of *Einsatzgruppe A*, responsible for thousands of Jewish deaths in Lithuania. In August 1941, this unit also carried out mass murders in the *Daugavpils* ghetto in Latvia, where they executed 9,102 Jews; see ANDREW EZERGAILIS (ed.): *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941-1944: The Missing Center*, Riga 1996.

⁴⁷ BUBNYS, *Holocaust in Lithuania 1941–1944*, p. 565.

which the provincial Jews were exterminated to the fact that they were not considered a very important labor force for the German military economy.⁴⁸

In December 1941, the second stage of the Holocaust, known as a “stabilization period,” began. It lasted until March 1943, when the liquidation of the ghettos advanced. After 1941, the only ghettos remaining in Lithuania were in Vilna, Kovno, Shavli,⁴⁹ and Svintsysan.⁵⁰ Kovno became the administrative center of the Nazi occupation regime. At this point, only 43,000 Jews were left in Lithuania: 20,000 in the Vilna ghetto, 17,500 in the Kovno ghetto, 5,500 in the Shavli ghetto, and 500 in Svintsysan.⁵¹ During this period, no mass killings occurred and imprisoned Jews were used as workers for the Nazi German economy.⁵² The ghetto became “a micro-state with its own economy, spiritual and cultural forms of life.”⁵³ The former prisoner and partisan of the Kovno ghetto Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson remembers this slave labor in her memoirs:

I remember the beginning of 1942 as an endless string of incredibly cold days. I had been working at the Aleksotas Airfield from the earliest days of the ghetto and the harsh outdoor work, the brutality of the German supervisor, and the constant hunger were becoming harder to withstand. Extreme cold and hard labor had become inextricably linked in my life, dominating every other aspect of my existence. Every day of the week was identical – an hour and a half walk to the airfield from the ghetto, nine hours of unbearably hard labor, and an hour and a half walk back.⁵⁴

The last stage of the Holocaust began in April 1943. By the end of 1943, the Vilna ghetto had been liquidated; around five thousand Jews were shot in the Ponary forest, and the rest were transported to concentration camps in Germany, Latvia and Estonia, or sent to work in the Kailis fur factory in Vilna.⁵⁵ Most of the ghettos were liquidated between April 1943 and mid-July 1944. However, the Vilna ghetto ceased to exist sooner than the ghettos in Kovno and Shavli, namely, on 23 September 1943. The Shavli ghetto was converted into a concentration camp in June 1943, and the Kovno ghetto shortly thereafter in autumn 1943. Many male prisoners were transferred to Dachau while female prisoners were deported to Stutthof; some of them were later transported to Auschwitz.⁵⁶ As the Soviet forces advanced the following summer, the Nazi regime used explosives to raze the Kovno ghetto and shot anyone who tried to escape the inferno. The Shavli ghetto was liquidated in mid-July 1943; most of the surviving Jews were later transferred to concentration camps abroad.

⁴⁸ IDEM, *Lietuvos mažieji getai*, p. 164.

⁴⁹ In Yiddish: Shavli; in Lithuanian: Šiauliai.

⁵⁰ In Yiddish: Svintsysan; in Lithuanian: Švenčionys.

⁵¹ BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 25.

⁵² See more in: LEISEROWITZ, *Litauen*, pp. 209-233.

⁵³ BUBNYS, *Holokaustas Lietuvoje*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 69; see also her memoirs in Lithuanian, IDEM: *Atminimo knyga. Kauno žydų bendruomenė 1941-1944* [Book of Remembrance: The Jewish Community in Kaunas 1941-1944], Vilnius 1999.

⁵⁵ BUBNYS, *Holocaust in Lithuania 1941-1944*, p. 566.

⁵⁶ IDEM, *Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 37.

In Lithuania, only a small percentage of Jews survived the Holocaust; most of these survivors escaped the ghettos, especially Vilna and Kovno, and became Soviet partisans.⁵⁷ Most of the Lithuanian Jews were killed during mass shootings in forests and fields even before the liquidation of the ghettos.⁵⁸ According to Lithuanian historians, it was the participation of Lithuanian institutions and local people that made it possible to execute so many victims.⁵⁹ They were motivated not only by antisemitic propaganda spread by the Lithuanian nationalist intelligentsia but also by the firm belief that Jews were communists and collaborated with the Soviet regime, supporting its invasion of Lithuania and the subsequent Soviet occupation.

Lithuanian historian Bubnys claims that the Holocaust in Lithuania has three specific characteristics:⁶⁰ First, the Lithuanian Jews were killed from the early days of the Nazi occupation; Lithuania was thus one of the first countries where the Nazi regime exterminated Jews. Second, most of the Lithuanian Jews, like their Polish or Ukrainian counterparts, perished near the places where they lived, unlike in Western Europe, where the majority of Jews were killed in concentration camps. Finally, the Nazi regime managed to involve not only a large proportion of the Lithuanian population but also Lithuanian administrative institutions. The mass atrocities were justified as revenge for the supposedly communist activities of the Jews and their “opposing geopolitical interests”; therefore, Bubnys argues, the executions can be considered a manifestation of “thriving antisemitism” in Lithuania.⁶¹

The Issue of Collaboration with the Nazi Regime: Between Antisemitic Discourses and Actions

Collaboration with Nazi Germany and the active participation of local Lithuanians in the mass atrocities are among the most complex issues surrounding the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania. The question of collaboration is politically charged and often has a very negative connotation in the Lithuanian public discourse.⁶² The German historian Christoph Dieckmann, who writes about the relations between Lithuanians and Nazi Germans, rejects the use of the collaboration concept.⁶³ Dieckmann suggests that one cannot ignore the interrelation between the occupiers and occupied, and suggests speaking about their spaces of action [*Handlungsräume*].⁶⁴ The Lithuanian historian Egidijus Aleksandravičius claims that “the shame of collaboration was often included in the price of freedom,” and that, in Lithuania, there was always “a tension between collaboration and resistance.”⁶⁵ The Lithuanian historian Sužiedėlis similarly notes that the Lithuanian pro-German orientation was due to the anti-Stalinist resistance and

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ IDEM, *Lietuvos mažieji getai*, p. 164.

⁵⁹ IDEM, *Įvadas*, p. 11.

⁶⁰ IDEM, *Holocaust in Lithuania 1941–1944*, p. 567.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 568.

⁶² ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, *Lithuanian Collaboration*, p. 174.

⁶³ DIECKMANN, *Kollaboration*, p. 130.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 139.

⁶⁵ ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, *Lithuanian Collaboration*, p. 174.

should be understood as part of the new Lithuanian nationalism.⁶⁶ This new nationalism—supported by the church—embraced “Christian ethics,” on the one hand, and emphasized the idea of a peaceful “New Europe” in which the smaller nations should play an important role.⁶⁷ On the other hand, it fostered fascist and authoritarian ideas and encouraged antisemitism.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, I agree with Aleksandravičius: the historiography on Lithuanian collaboration “is sparse, methodologically limited, and ideologically as well as emotionally tendentious, a condition for which the peculiarities of the Soviet period are responsible.”⁶⁹ In Lithuania, the perception flourishes that “the heroes are *one’s own*, while the sycophants, the collaborators belong to *the strangers*” or simply “have no nationality.”⁷⁰ An essential question is thus how collaboration with the Nazi regime in Lithuania evolved from an abstract question of discourse—expressed in the ideological positions of the right-extremist thinkers, the Lithuanian provisional government, and the Lithuanian Activist Front—to concrete, active participation in the extermination of the Jews by the Lithuanian Secret Police, different Lithuanian police battalions, local officials, and even ordinary citizens.

Fascist discourse in Lithuania stemmed in large part from the Lithuanian Activist Front, which was created on 17 November 1940 in Berlin under the supervision of Kazys Škirpa, who had been the Lithuanian ambassador to Nazi Germany before the Second World War. The LAF was one of the main underground resistance organizations fighting against the Soviets in Lithuania. While it was formally an “alliance of all non-Communist parties,” as Saulius Sužiedėlis observes, “but the leadership and direction of the LAF gravitated to the more militant nationalist political spectrum.”⁷¹ The LAF sought to free Lithuania and re-establish Lithuanian independence. The members of the LAF formed a provisional government during the last days of the first Soviet occupation and the first days of the Nazi occupation; the Lithuanian provisional government functioned from 23 June until 5 August 1941. Škirpa, who at that time was residing in Berlin, was supposed to become the Lithuanian prime minister, however, he was not allowed to leave Germany and was placed under house arrest.⁷² Škirpa’s pro-German stance was not shared by all Lithuanian politicians, and some diplomats of

⁶⁶ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Foreign Saviors*, p. 333. See more in: IDEM: *Lithuanian Collaboration during the Second World War: Past Realities, Present Perceptions*, in: JOACHIM TAUBER (ed.): “Kollaboration” in Nordosteuropa. Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen im 20. Jahrhundert, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 140-163.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 335.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, *Lithuanian Collaboration*, p. 174.

⁷⁰ Italics in original. *Ibidem*, p. 178.

⁷¹ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Foreign Saviors*, p. 334.

⁷² Nevertheless, in 1944 the Nazi regime sent Škirpa to a concentration camp in Bad Godesberg. He survived the camp and afterwards, in 1949, he emigrated to the USA. In 1979, he published his memoirs. Škirpa was arrested because he had sent a memorandum to the leaders of Nazi Germany in 1944 asking to end the occupation of Lithuania. Many Lithuanian officials, including some who had been pro-German, blamed Nazi Germany for not helping them to achieve Lithuanian independence. Therefore, some of them turned against the Nazi regime, and, in some cases, were even arrested. The LAF, a pro-Fascist nationalist organization, was banned in Lithuania in 1941 by the Nazi regime.

the older generation, who were not supporters of the Nazi ideology but oriented more towards Western capitalism, challenged his appointment.⁷³

Nevertheless, the LAF actively propagated antisemitic discourse in Lithuania during the Second World War. As the Lithuanian philosopher Leonidas Donskis has pointed out, “it was members of the LAF who launched antisemitic propaganda employing such pearls of the Nazi rhetoric as ‘the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy,’ ‘a plot of the Jewish bankers and communists,’ ‘the Jewish yoke and exploitation,’ and the like.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the detrimental role of the LAF during the Second World War is still one of the biggest taboos in Lithuanian history today. In Lithuanian historical memory, the members of the LAF are still regarded as national heroes who fought for Lithuanian independence.

The Lithuanian philosopher Antanas Maceina,⁷⁵ who penned the LAF’s ideological program, is by far one of the most important ideological architects of antisemitism in Lithuania. Maceina was of the opinion that Lithuanian ethnic dominance in the country should be defended, claiming that the country “cannot treat foreigners, or so-called ethnic minorities, in the same way that it treats Lithuanian compatriots.”⁷⁶ Another important thinker within the LAF and promoter of antisemitism was the polemicist Bronys Raila,⁷⁷ who, in the spring of 1941, drafted the LAF’s action program. Raila claimed that Smetona’s regime had “failed to defend the country against Jewish power and communism” and blamed the Jews for weakening the Lithuanian state.⁷⁸ Raila wrote that the Jew could never become part of Lithuanian society because “his peculiar Semitic race, the nature of this vagabond nation, seeks only a parasite’s life.”⁷⁹ Thus, he defined Jews as “parasites” and traitors of the Lithuanian nation.

In the words of Sužiedėlis, although “the LAF intended to expel and expropriate, rather than exterminate the Jews,” it nevertheless managed to “legitimize anti-Jewish hatred.”⁸⁰ In the 1980s, Tomas Venclova—an exiled Lithuanian philosopher and poet and a founding member of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group—was among the first to openly discuss the Nazi nature of the Lithuanian provisional government.⁸¹ He also pointed out that some Lithuanian politicians and intellectuals joined forces with national socialism and thereby “betrayed Lithuania and also turned down the values of the democratic world.”⁸²

⁷³ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Foreign Saviors*, p. 334.

⁷⁴ DONSKIS, *Loyalty, Dissent, and Betrayal*, p. 116.

⁷⁵ Antanas Maceina (b. 1908–d. 1987), in 1944, escaped to the West, and from 1949 he lived in Münster, Germany, where he later worked at the university as a professor of philosophy.

⁷⁶ DONSKIS, *Troubled Identity*, p. 117.

⁷⁷ In 1944, Bronys Raila (b. 1895–d. 1979) emigrated to France. Later, in 1948, he left for the USA, where he was active as a journalist in the Lithuanian-American media.

⁷⁸ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Foreign Saviors*, p. 336.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 337.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 340.

⁸¹ See more on this discussion in section 4.1.2.

⁸² Cited from DONSKIS, *Loyalty, Dissent, and Betrayal*, p. 116.

The most extreme members of the LAF, as mentioned previously, came from the paramilitary organization Iron Wolf, which was led by Augustinas Voldemaras.⁸³ Created to overthrow the authoritarian Lithuanian president Antanas Smetona, Iron Wolf was a paramilitary organization comprised mainly of young military officers. Due to its later collaboration with Nazi Germany, modern historians consider Iron Wolf to be one of the Baltic states' fascist movements, which aimed to invite young Lithuanians "to honor the new racial ideas of fascism and national socialism."⁸⁴ They spoke about the creation of the "Third Lithuania," which would cooperate with the Third Reich. Sužiedėlis concludes that "these self-styled Lithuanian Nazis had limited political impact, but they were to play their part as foot soldiers of the Holocaust."⁸⁵ Most of those military officers became members of the paramilitary police—which the Nazis called the *Schutzmannschaft* (literally, "protective unit"). They not only guarded the concentration camps but also participated in mass shootings.⁸⁶

Both the Lithuanian security police (LSP) and various Lithuanian police battalions played an important role in the extermination of the Jews. The LSP were subordinate to the Nazi Security Police and cooperated with other police forces, as well, including Lithuanian police battalions.⁸⁷ The LSP was mostly active in the first half of 1941 and, as Bubnys observes, "later, the 'issue of the Jews' became less relevant, as persecution of the Communist and Polish underground became more intense."⁸⁸ In the major towns like Vilna and Kovno, LSP activities were limited to "political and strategic" tasks, and they did not take part in the killings.⁸⁹ In rural areas, however, they not only conducted interrogations but also organized and supervised the persecution of the Jews.⁹⁰

⁸³ Augustinas Voldemaras (1883–1942) was the first prime minister of the independent Lithuania in 1918, and then again from 1926 to 1929. He, along with Antanas Smetona, organized a coup against the Lithuanian president, Kazys Grinius, in 1926. The coup ended successfully: Smetona became the dictatorial president of Lithuania and Voldemaras became his prime minister. However, in 1929, Smetona removed Voldemaras from the office, after which Voldemaras created the Iron Wolf. In 1934, Voldemaras organized an unsuccessful coup against Smetona and was arrested. In 1938, Voldemaras was released from the prison, under the condition that he leave Lithuania. Nevertheless, in 1939, he returned to Lithuania, where the Soviets arrested him in 1941 and accused him of being a German spy. He died in prison in Moscow in December 1942.

⁸⁴ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Foreign Saviors*, p. 338.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ For more, see MACQUEEN, *Massenvernichtung*, pp. 15-34.

⁸⁷ BUBNYS, *Lietuvos saugumo policija*, p. 380.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

One-third of Lithuanian police battalions⁹¹ took part in the Holocaust.⁹² This participation included guarding, transporting, and shooting the victims.⁹³ In 1941, the first (13th) Lithuanian police battalion, along with the Gestapo and auxiliary policemen, killed around 36,000 Lithuanian Jews and other foreign Jews⁹⁴ whom the Nazis had brought to Lithuania,⁹⁵ as well as 1,400 Jews in Belarus.⁹⁶ According to Bubnys, the first and the third companies of this Lithuanian police battalion were most active in the shootings; from the third company, 104 officers took part in the mass murder.⁹⁷ The second and 252nd police battalions from Lithuania not only transported Jews to the site of the mass shootings in Ponary but also guarded the Majdanek concentration camp and fought against Soviet partisans in Lithuania and Belarus.⁹⁸ The Lithuanian historian Alfredas Rukšėnas observes, for instance, that the Second Auxiliary Police Service Battalion, which was formed in Kovno in August 1941 and led by Major Antanas Impulevičius,⁹⁹ together with the German police battalion, participated in the killings in Belarus.¹⁰⁰ Rukšėnas has calculated that this Lithuanian police battalion “killed between 1.9 percent and 3.09 percent of all the Jews massacred in the prisoner of war camp in Minsk.”¹⁰¹ The Lithuanian police battalions, together with the Gestapo and local policemen, killed 78,000 Jews in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine during the Nazi occupation.¹⁰² It is also important to note that “the personnel of the irregular forces, police administration, and police battalions often overlapped.”¹⁰³

The German historian Dieckmann likewise views the local administration as having remained passive and thus bearing some responsibility for the course of events. He reminds readers that, from the end of July 1941, all the most important positions

⁹¹ See more in: STANG, *Kollaboration und Massenmord*; HANS HEINRICH WILHELM: *Die Einsatzgruppe A der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1941/42*, Frankfurt a. M. 1996; ARŪNAS BUBNYS: *Die litauischen Hilfspolizeibataillone und der Holocaust*, in: VINCAS BARTUSEVIČIUS JOACHIM TAUBER et al. (eds.): *Holocaust in Litauen. Krieg, Judenmord und Kollaboration im Jahre 1941*, Köln 2003, pp. 117-131; IDEM: *Litauische Schutzmannschafts-Bataillone und andere paramilitärische Einheiten während des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, in: *Yearbook. The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia 2004*, Riga 2005, pp. 13-33; IDEM: *Lietuvių policijos 1(13)-asis batalionas ir žydų žudynės 1941 m.* [The 1st (13th) Lithuanian Police Battalion and Killings of Jews in 1941], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija 20* (2006), 2, pp. 31-52; IDEM: *Lietuvių policijos 3(11)-iasis batalionas* [The 3rd (11th) Lithuanian Police Battalion], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija 23* (2008), 1, pp. 45-57; IDEM, *Lietuvos policijos batalionai*.

⁹² BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, p. 15.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ On 25 and 29 November 1941, around five thousand German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian Jews were killed in the Ninth Fort of Kaunas. See more in WETTE, pp. 124-129.

⁹⁵ BUBNYS, *Lietuvos policijos 1(13)-asis batalionas*, p. 406.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ IDEM, *Lietuvių policijos 2-asis*, p. 423.

⁹⁹ Antanas Impulevičius (1907–1984), a member of the Lithuanian auxiliary police battalion, was responsible for the mass executions of Jews in summer 1941 in Kaunas and later in Belarus. After the war, he emigrated to the USA. In the 1980s, the Office of Special Investigation started a case against him, but he died before his case reached trial.

¹⁰⁰ RUKŠĖNAS, p. 64.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰² BUBNYS, *The Holocaust in Lithuania: An Outline*, p. 211.

¹⁰³ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Foreign Saviors*, p. 345.

of the Lithuanian administration and police apparatus were filled by local, usually right-wing-extremist Lithuanians who supported the extermination of Jews.¹⁰⁴ In early 1944, Germans comprised only 3.3 percent of the Lithuanian administrative bodies, and the police forces were dominated by Lithuanians (80–90 percent), as well.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, Dieckmann declares that the Lithuanian administration had the potential power [*Machtpotenzial*] and space for action [*Handlungsräume*] to change the situation, however, they did not interrupt the mass shootings.¹⁰⁶

Hence, from the very beginning of the Nazi occupation, the Lithuanian Secret Police, Lithuanian police battalions with their auxiliary groups, and Lithuanian administrative bodies were involved in the Nazi regime's execution of the Lithuanian Jews.¹⁰⁷ Not only did the public authorities not question the atrocities, but the Lithuanian provisional government hope to gain in prestige by actively cooperating with Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁸ Sužiedėlis maintains that “public opposition to the massacres by the political leaders would not have saved the Jews, but it would have preserved the country's honor.”¹⁰⁹

The collaboration with Nazi Germany was particularly close in rural areas, where Jews were persecuted and killed by their own neighbors. Historian Michael MacQueen states that the rural killers “killed people they knew and with whom they had lived in close proximity for years” and concludes that “there was intimacy to their participation in genocide.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, they were motivated by the potential for “personal enrichment at the expense of Jewish victims.”¹¹¹ Sakowicz's entry in the *Ponary Diary* for August 1941 also mentions personal gain as a motive for these atrocities:

Shooting August 1 and 2, groups of more than 300 each. Kiejzik settled in at the Wereszkos'. The clothes are carried away after 9 in the evening, so that nobody will see, because no one can go out. They pass by us. I ask one of them if he will sell me the potatoes he is carrying in a sack on his back. Not saying anything he walks on the Wereszkos'. Kiejzik blackmails Jews such as the Ponas and the Szapiro families in the Ponary colony. At the Ponas house he stole a radio and, as I hear, many other things as well. He fakes inspections – “search for weapons” – and carries away clothing and other things. For the Germans 300 Jews are 300 enemies of humanity; for the Lithuanians they are 300 pairs of shoes, trousers, and the like.¹¹²

Dieckmann asserts that the killings of rural Jews were motivated by the potential for financial enrichment; he finds that most of the Jewish properties in the province were transferred to the local population, who even legitimized this crime by claiming that Jews had unfairly amassed their wealth at the expense of the Lithuanians.¹¹³ Thus,

¹⁰⁴ DIECKMANN, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, Vol. 2, p. 136.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ BUBNYS, *Holocaust in Lithuania 1941–1944*, p. 565.

¹⁰⁸ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Foreign Saviors*, p. 348.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 347.

¹¹⁰ MACQUEEN, *Lithuanian Collaboration*.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹² SAKOWICZ, pp. 15–16.

¹¹³ DIECKMANN, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, vol. 2, p. 138.

the dispossession of Jews was characterized as a socially responsible redistribution of property.¹¹⁴

Lithuanian Jewish Resistance: Armed and Spiritual Fight

The armed and spiritual resistance of the Lithuanian Jews, as noted by Vilna ghetto survivor Rachel Kostanian-Danzig, “both allowed the inhabitants of the Ghetto¹¹⁵ to sustain their humanity in the face of the Nazi aim to dehumanize and destroy the Jews.”¹¹⁶ There are numerous concrete examples of how armed and spiritual resistance were linked: proceeds from concerts spent to purchase weapons or the ghetto library which doubled as a hiding place for weapons.¹¹⁷ Moreover, songs and literary works by residents of the ghetto not only allowed listeners and readers to forget the cruel reality of daily life in the ghetto but also rallied their spirits to fight the enemy. Armed resistance was present in all remaining ghettos, but the most influential underground movements were those in the Vilna and Kovno ghettos.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, the Vilna ghetto was among the first ghettos under the Nazis to raise the idea of armed resistance during the Second World War.

The most renowned partisan unit in the Lithuanian ghettos was the United Partisan Organization (in Yiddish: *Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye*, FPO), which was founded in January 1942. In a secret meeting on New Year’s Eve, the poet Abba Kovner read a manifesto entitled “Let us not go like lambs to the slaughter!” The Lithuanian Jewish poet Avrom Sutzkever expressed similar sentiments in his poetry: “Our fingers stretched through bars to capture the shining air of freedom. We dreamers must now turn soldiers.”¹¹⁹ The members of the FPO fell along a broad political spectrum ranging from Zionists to Bundists to Communists.¹²⁰ The FPO aimed “to resist to the last breath,” in other words, not just to defend the dignity of Jewish victims but also to try to save the last surviving Jews.¹²¹ The Israeli Holocaust scholar Dina Porat notes: “it was the first public call to armed self-defense that was written, read, and distributed with the objective of rousing a rebellion in every ghetto, and it was done before any non-Jewish underground movement had been organized¹²² anywhere else in Europe.”¹²³ The FPO’s activities included acts of diversion and sabotage, for instance, placing mines along railroad tracks, sabotaging weapons in German factories, or constructing grenades inside the ghetto. The Vilna partisan organization, at that time, had around three

¹¹⁴ Ibidem. See also VALENTINAS BRANDIŠAUSKAS: Lietuvos žydų turto likimas Antrojo pasaulinio karo metais [The Fate of Lithuanian Jewish Assets during the Second World War], in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* 15 (2004), 1, pp. 86-107.

¹¹⁵ The word is capitalized in the original text.

¹¹⁶ KOSTANIAN-DANZIG, p. 22.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹¹⁸ BUBNYS, *Antinacinis žydų pasipriešinimas*, p. 481.

¹¹⁹ This is an excerpt from Sutzkever’s poem “The Lead Plates of Romm’s Printing House,” cited in: BART/CORONA, p. 90.

¹²⁰ KOSTANIAN-DANZIG, p. 22.

¹²¹ Ibidem, p. 23.

¹²² Except the partisans of Tito in Yugoslavia.

¹²³ PORAT, p. 72.

hundred members and included special subgroups for communication and military instructions.¹²⁴ The FPO also maintained contact with the ghettos in Warsaw, Kovno, and Shavli; Austrian sergeant major Anton Schmidt,¹²⁵ for instance, transported messages to Warsaw.¹²⁶

However, the FPO soon came into conflict with Vilna's *Judenrat* (Jewish Council). The chief of the *Judenrat*, Jacob Gens,¹²⁷ claimed that the FPO endangered life in the ghetto. Gens was forced to arrest one of the leaders of the FPO, Yitzhak Wittenberg, in July 1943,¹²⁸ when the Gestapo threatened that they would liquidate the ghetto otherwise.¹²⁹ This was the moment when the FPO changed its tactics, moving into the forest and continuing their fight from there. In September 1943, when Nazi troops entered the Vilna ghetto, the Jewish partisans tried to organize an uprising, but it ultimately failed due to a lack of support from the Jews who lived there. One reason for their refusal to take part in the uprising was their belief that they would be sent elsewhere to work rather than killed.

On 31 December 1941, the Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO) was established in the Kovno ghetto, under the leadership of the Yiddish writer and poet Chaim Yellin.¹³⁰ Alex Faitelson, a former partisan from the Kovno ghetto, remembers the Yellin's inaugural words and the creation of the AFO in his memoirs:

Chaim Yellin summarized in brief the aims of the movement: "We shall not abandon the ghetto. And our major aim is the open struggle against the Nazis within partisan ranks. A member of our movement is a partisan! ... This slogan—'we are partisans'—was unanimously accepted by all the progressive opposition groups in the ghetto who united on that evening into one organization and was adopted by all the movement cells."¹³¹

¹²⁴ BUBNYS, *Antinacinis žydų pasipriešinimas*, p. 474.

¹²⁵ Anton Schmidt, of Austrian descent, was drafted into the Wehrmacht in 1938. He was stationed in Lithuania in the autumn of 1941. Even though he was a sergeant in the Wehrmacht officer, he helped to save 250 Jews by hiding them or giving them false ID papers. On 13 April 1942, he was executed for high treason by his superiors.

¹²⁶ BUBNYS, *Antinacinis žydų pasipriešinimas*, p. 474.

¹²⁷ In June 1941, Jacob Gens was appointed by the Germans to serve as the director of the Jewish hospital. In September 1941, he was named the chief of the Jewish police of the Vilnius ghetto. In July 1942, the Germans dissolved the *Judenrat* and Gens became the head of the ghetto administration. On September 14, 1943, ten days before the liquidation of the ghetto, he was arrested by the Gestapo and shot.

¹²⁸ This arrest was known as the Wittenberg Affair. Yitzhak Wittenberg, together with Kovner, was the leader of the FPO. In June 1943, Sicherheitspolizei arrested two communist activists in Vilna, one of whom confessed to having connections with Wittenberg. The police demanded that Gens should arrest Wittenberg, who was in hiding. They eventually threatened that they would liquidate the Vilna ghetto unless Wittenberg were arrested. A hunt in the ghetto for Wittenberg ensued, and he finally gave himself up in July 1943. One day after the arrest, he was found dead in his prison cell.

¹²⁹ See more on Jacob Gens and Yitzhak Wittenberg in: NORMAN SHNEIDMAN: *The Three Tragic Heroes of the Vilnius Ghetto: Wittenberg, Sheinbaum, Gens*, Ontario 2002.

¹³⁰ In April 1944, Yellin was captured, tortured, and executed by the Gestapo.

¹³¹ FAITELSON, p. 99.

The AFO had around five hundred members, many of whom were pro-Soviet.¹³² In 1943, the partisan organization started sending its members to the Soviet partisan groups in the forests, where many of them joined the newly formed unit called “Death to Occupiers.” The Death to Occupiers unit sabotaged railways and performed other military operations.¹³³ The AFO also organized underground actions and insurrections; it contributed, for instance, to the famous escape of sixty-four prisoners from the Ninth Fort in Kovno.¹³⁴ In the Kovno ghetto, there was also an underground Zionist organization, which began to cooperate with the AFO in 1943. A former partisan from the Kovno ghetto, Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson, wrote in her memoirs about the cooperation between these two organizations during the mass escape of fighters from the ghetto. She quotes the Kovno partisan Dimitrijus Gelpernas as saying “the AFO organized the transportation and prepared fighters, while [Zionist] organizations closely linked with the administration helped to raise funds and orchestrate the action.”¹³⁵

According to the historian and former partisan from the Kovno ghetto Dov Levin, around two thousand Jews, or approximately two percent of all Jews in Lithuania in 1942, were active in the fight against Nazi Germany and its collaborators.¹³⁶ Those Jewish partisans from the Vilna and Kovno ghettos who survived established contacts with the Soviet partisans and joined their units. However, according to the ghetto diary of Avraham Tory, a survivor from the Kovno ghetto, it was not easy to join the Soviet partisans: “To achieve this, the camp must prove itself for an extended period of time by its ability and willingness to fight the enemy. The particular forest camp is, for the time being, merely a candidate to join the family of partisan camps in the forest.”¹³⁷ Many of these partisans later participated in the Soviet army’s liberation¹³⁸ of Vilna in July 1944. Afterwards many of the Jewish fighters were awarded honors and medals for their service in the Soviet army. After Lithuania gained independence in 1990, however, some of these partisans were criminalized and blamed for killing ethnic Lithuanians who fought against the Soviets for the nation’s freedom.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, in the words of Ginaitė-Rubinson, “without a doubt, the partisan movement had become one of the most effective means of combating the German occupiers.”¹⁴⁰

Some of the Jewish partisans were not only fighters but also writers and poets. They saw the necessity to raise political awareness and create a sense of community in the ghetto through cultural activities. Therefore, the armed opposition was accompanied by different forms of spiritual resistance: “songs were written in hide-outs, books were assembled in cellars, children were taught among the ruins.”¹⁴¹ In the Vilna ghetto, there was a system of childcare and education, literary and artistic associations, a music school, and even a library, which was arguably one of the most important cultural

¹³² BUBNYS, *Antinacinis žydų pasipriešinimas*, p. 479.

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁴ This escape will be discussed in section 4.1.1.

¹³⁵ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 94.

¹³⁶ LEVIN, *Trumpa žydų istorija*, pp. 182-184.

¹³⁷ TORY, p. 498.

¹³⁸ In Lithuania this liberation is perceived as the beginning of the second Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

¹³⁹ Read more about the criminalization of the Lithuanian Jewish partisans in section 5.3.2.

¹⁴⁰ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 125.

¹⁴¹ KOSTANIAN-DANZIG, p. 30.

institutions in the ghetto. Kostanian-Danzig remembered that, “during the first years of the ghetto, with massacres coming in succession, people mostly read detective stories and other light genres, but when the killings were suspended they turned once again to serious literature.”¹⁴² A Lithuanian Jewish boy, Yitskhok Rudashevski, wrote in his ghetto diary: “The reading of books in the ghetto is the greatest pleasure for me. The book unites us with the future, the book unites us with the world. The circulation of the hundred thousandth book is a great achievement for the ghetto and the ghetto has the right to be proud of it.”¹⁴³

The librarian Herman Kruk, a Polish Jew from the Vilna ghetto,¹⁴⁴ observed: “Even in November, during the great Aktions, when the population systematically declined by about 30 or 40 percent, the number of books borrowed increased by almost a third.”¹⁴⁵ Kruk was also recruited to work for one of the Nazi ideological leaders, Alfred Rosenberg, who, in 1941 became the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories. Rosenberg sought to confiscate the treasures of the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO)¹⁴⁶ and other Jewish libraries and to use these in the Nazi Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question, which was based in Frankfurt.¹⁴⁷ However, the librarian Kruk and poet Sutzkever managed to clandestinely rescue and hide many rare books. The librarian at Vilnius University Ona Šimaitė,¹⁴⁸ who smuggled both books and children out of the Vilna ghetto, remembered Kruk as “a little mouse, gathering grains one by one for its nest.”¹⁴⁹ As the Lithuanian-Canadian literary scholar Julija Šukys claims in her biography of Šimaitė: “the ghetto librarians archive[d] the destruction of their culture.”¹⁵⁰

In the ghetto, another form of survival and resistance was art. There was even an art exhibition held on 28 March 1943 in the ghetto’s theater.¹⁵¹ The main attraction of this exhibition was its youngest artist, nine-year-old Samuel Bak.¹⁵² In his memoirs, published in 2001, Bak reflects on this event:

Loaded with the unexpected gifts, I slowly descended the stairs and walked back to our room. The visit had vividly brought back the memory of the exhibition and my artistic “debut.”

¹⁴² Ibidem, p. 54.

¹⁴³ RUDASHEVSKI, p. 106.

¹⁴⁴ In 1939, Herman Kruk came from Warsaw to Vilna. During the war, he worked in the ghetto library. He died in 1943 or 1944 in the Klooga camp in Estonia.

¹⁴⁵ KRUK, *The Last Days*, p. 283.

¹⁴⁶ YIVO is the Institute for Jewish Research, which was founded in 1925, in Vilna, then Poland. In 1940, it was transferred to New York.

¹⁴⁷ Read more on Rosenberg’s activities in: ARŪNAS BUBNYS: A. Rosenbergo operatyvinio štabo veikla Lietuvoje: žydų kultūros vertybių grobimas ir naikinimas (1941–1944) [Activities of Rosenberg’s Special Commando in Lithuania: Seizure and Destruction of Jewish Cultural Assets, 1941–1944], in: *Lituanistica* 59 (2004), 2, pp. 22–46.

¹⁴⁸ Ona Šimaitė was allowed by the Nazi regime to enter the ghetto and to collect books that had been borrowed from the university library by Jewish students before the erection of the ghetto. Later, she was also granted access to the ghetto to collect antiquarian books.

¹⁴⁹ ŠUKYS, *Epistolophilia*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 156.

¹⁵¹ KOSTANIAN-DANZIG, p. 69.

¹⁵² Ibidem.

At that time the ghetto's population had been reduced by half. The massive "transports" were temporarily suspended. An old theater building that happened to be in the ghetto area had been brought back to life. Today, I can hardly fathom why the Nazi authorities permitted such a project, when it gave so much pleasure to the population imprisoned in those few narrow streets. It allowed for non-punishable escapes from dreary reality into imaginary realms of amusement and drama. This release explained why the theater, the choir, the cabaret became so popular.¹⁵³

The popularity of the theaters, choirs, and cabarets was directly linked to the fact that most of their productions dealt directly with life in the ghetto.¹⁵⁴ The performances in the ghetto theater, which was founded in 1942, offered not only an escape from reality by showing diverse revues created by the most talented prisoners of the ghetto, but many new melodies originated in the theater. The Lithuanian music historian Leonidas Melnikas notes that music was "the small niche the torturers forgot."¹⁵⁵ Music was usually chosen as the main spiritual weapon because it was not only "a channel through which Nazism's victims derived emotional comfort and support, but also a life-affirming survival mechanism through which they asserted solidarity in the face of persecution."¹⁵⁶ Music made it possible for Jews to express their feelings and be themselves.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the Lithuanian music scholar Danutė Petrauskaitė, who researched music in the Kovno ghetto, claims that, "for Jews, the song became the main source of hope, expression of pain, suffering, and method of wishing for revenge and dreams that would never come true."¹⁵⁸ Most of the ghetto's songs drew on popular melodies, including the hymn of Lithuania.¹⁵⁹ These songs varied from lullabies to religious hymns, included elements of the Aesopian language,¹⁶⁰ and were mostly sung in Yiddish.¹⁶¹ Sometimes the lyrics also included Lithuanian words or quoted Nazi speeches.¹⁶²

The Jewish partisans' songs became "the most prominent songs with which post-war Jewish communities associated the ghettos."¹⁶³ In the Vilna ghetto, in 1943, the Vilna resistance fighter Hirsh Glik wrote the popular song "Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg" [Never say that you are walking the final road]. This song was also popular in the Warsaw ghetto and became the hymn of resistance of the Eastern European Jews against the Nazi regime.¹⁶⁴ The opera star of the interwar period, Liuba Levitska, who was killed in 1943 in Ponary, also performed in the Vilna ghetto. She was called "the

¹⁵³ BAK, *Painted in Words*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁵⁴ WORLD ORT, Vilna.

¹⁵⁵ MELNIKAS, p. 188.

¹⁵⁶ GILBERT, *Music in the Holocaust*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ MELNIKAS, p. 188.

¹⁵⁸ PETRAUSKAITĖ, p. 116.

¹⁵⁹ MELNIKAS, p. 192.

¹⁶⁰ Aesopian language could be defined as a form of communication which conveys inadmissible content to an inside group which is not evident to outsiders, in this case the Nazi occupiers.

¹⁶¹ PETRAUSKAITĖ, p. 117.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*.

¹⁶³ GILBERT, *Music in the Holocaust*, p. 70.

¹⁶⁴ MELNIKAS, p. 192.

nightingale of the ghetto.”¹⁶⁵ The Kovno ghetto was known for its symphonic orchestra, created in 1942 and led by the famous Kovno musician, the Lithuanian Jew Michael Leo Hofmekler. The orchestra was comprised of almost forty musicians.¹⁶⁶ The orchestra performed around eighty concerts in the ghetto over the course of several years.¹⁶⁷ In this way, music—like the theater performances and art exhibitions—was a form of resistance and a latent expression of Jewish attitudes towards the Nazis. These techniques of spiritual resistance complemented and fostered more active militant resistance.

The Rescue of Jews: Remembrance and its Instrumentalization

Despite the fact that many Lithuanians collaborated with the Nazis in their mass executions of the Jewish population, there were others who worked to save the lives of Jews. In the archives of the State Jewish Museum of Lithuania, one can today find the names of almost two thousand five hundred people who rescued around three thousand Jews.¹⁶⁸ The state of Israel recognizes such cases by declaring such individuals “Righteous Among the Nations” and honoring them at the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Yad Vashem. Since 1992, the president of the Republic of Lithuania has marked the Lithuanian Day of Remembrance of Jewish Victims of Genocide—observed on 23 September, the anniversary of the dissolution of the Vilna ghetto—by awarding the Life Saving Cross to those who rescued Jews. Even though the rescue of the Lithuanian Jews during the Holocaust was the subject of intense discussion after Lithuania gained independence, there is still no comprehensive study on the topic.¹⁶⁹

The social backgrounds of those who worked to save Jews were very diverse; they included intellectuals—writers, musicians, lawyers, or doctors—office employees, and priests.¹⁷⁰ These people risked their own lives to save Jews despite the threat of severe penalties. Some rescuers were imprisoned or executed; for example, the Gestapo executed the Lithuanian Juozas Rutkauskas, who saved the lives of more than 150 Jews, in 1944.¹⁷¹ Another renowned rescuer of the Lithuanian Jews was Ona Šimaitė, a university librarian, whom the Gestapo sentenced to death for hiding Jewish children.¹⁷² Later her sentence was commuted; she was transferred to the concentration camp in Dachau and eventually to a camp in Alsace-Lorraine, which was liberated by the Allied forces in 1944.¹⁷³

In the postwar years, the topic of Jews’ rescuers was widely discussed in the Lithuanian exile. In 1947 and 1948, people in displaced persons camps in Germany filled out questionnaires about those who had intervened on behalf of Jews.¹⁷⁴ The exile media in the USA also devoted special attention to this issue; for instance, the Lithuanian émi-

¹⁶⁵ ŠUKYS, Algiers—Vilnius—Algiers, p. 92. Read more about Liuba Levitska in section 5.3.3.

¹⁶⁶ MELNIKAS, p. 202.

¹⁶⁷ PETRAUSKAITĖ, p. 116.

¹⁶⁸ SAKAITĖ, p. 561.

¹⁶⁹ See: SELČINSKAJA, Hands; KUODYTĖ/STANKEVIČIUS.

¹⁷⁰ SAKAITĖ, p. 561.

¹⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷² LATVYTĖ-GUSTAITIENĖ/JAKULYTĖ-VASIL, p. 28. Also see the biography of Šimaitė: ŠUKYS, Epistolophilia.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁴ KUODYTĖ/STANKEVIČIUS, p. 7.

gré Juozas Šalna published a series of articles in 1948 and 1949 in the Chicago-based newspaper *Naujienos* [News] under the title “Lithuanians in the Fight for the Freedom of Jews.”¹⁷⁵ The Lithuanian encyclopedia, published in Boston in 1966, also includes information about the rescue of Jews,¹⁷⁶ although it ignores the issue of collaboration. Between 1975 and 1977, a new wave¹⁷⁷ of émigré articles about Lithuanians who had rescued Jews coincided with the initial debates about Lithuanians’ collaboration with the Nazi regime during the Holocaust. In 1967, a volume of the book memories of Holocaust survivors, edited by Lithuanian journalist Sofija Binkienė, was published in the Soviet Union under the title *Ir be ginklo kariai* [Soldiers without Weapons].¹⁷⁸ This book remains one of the most important publications on the rescue of Jews. In 2004, the Lithuanian Jewish writer Icchokas Meras initiated a project called “Rescuers of the Jews – the Righteous Among the Nations,” with the aim of finding rescuers of Lithuanian Jews around the world. Meras himself was saved as a child during the Holocaust. He drew on his own childhood experiences of hardship during the war and wrote a fictional book (containing autobiographical details) about a Jewish child, *Geltonas lopas* [The Yellow Patch], which was published in 1960.¹⁷⁹

It was not a coincidence that Lithuanians in exile were so invested in this topic. They aimed to improve their public image. They wanted to be seen as heroes for saving Jews rather than as collaborators with the Nazis. Moreover, it was much easier for those recognized as rescuers of Jews to receive American citizenship. Even Aleksandras Lileikis, a top commander who had ordered the death of thousands of Vilna Jews, and who later became a respected manager of Lithuanian media in the USA, claimed to have saved Jews. In 2000, he was tried for crimes committed during the Holocaust. In his apologetic memoir *Pažadinto laiko pėdsakais* [In the Traces of the Awakening Time], Lileikis denied responsibility for the death of the Vilna Jews by presenting evidence of having saved Jews, namely a letter from a Jewish woman claiming to have been saved by Lileikis.¹⁸⁰ As this case shows, claims to have saved Jews could be instrumentalized or even falsified.

3.2 After the Holocaust: Postwar Displacement and Migrating Jewish Memories

After the war, most of the Jews who had survived the Holocaust in Lithuania or found themselves in postwar Germany chose emigration as a way to escape from their traumatic memories. They settled in Israel, the USA, Canada, Western Europe, or Latin America. However, the migration routes of the Lithuanian Jews are usually very difficult to follow, as many travelled through several locations before finding new homes. The painter Bak is a good example; he started in Vilna and continued through Lodz,

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 9.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, p.10.

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 11.

¹⁷⁸ BINKIENĖ.

¹⁷⁹ Read the memories of Meras in SELČINSKAJA, Hands, pp. 158-169.

¹⁸⁰ LILEIKIS. Lileikis died during the trial process in 2000, in Vilnius.

Berlin, Landsberg DP camp, Italy, and Israel before finally settling in the USA. His postwar displacement, with its many different stops, was a common occurrence among Lithuanian Jews. Zionist Jews from Lithuania like the poet Abba Kovner and his followers hoped to reach Palestine, a place where their dreams could be realized. Other Jews hoped to reconnect with relatives living in the USA, Canada, or Latin America or contributed to centers of Yiddish culture, which was especially strong at that time in New York and Buenos Aires.¹⁸¹ Hence, as the German cultural studies scholar Anna Lipphardt observes, Lithuanian Jews were a very diverse group of people with different political and ideological motivations, as reflected in their choices of destinations for emigration.¹⁸²

Intermediate Stations and Life in a "Waiting Room": Lodz and DP Camps in Postwar Germany

Many Jews who decided to leave Lithuania travelled first to Lodz, which was, until 1948, the *de facto* capital of Poland. Warsaw had been largely destroyed during the war, so that even some government officials had taken refuge in Lodz. Before the war, a third of the population of Lodz had been Jewish, but a majority of Lodz's Jews perished in the Holocaust. Lithuanian Jews, especially those from Vilna, saw Lodz as a city without a history or a character.¹⁸³ Before the Second World War, there was even a saying among Eastern European Jews that Lodz was the place to go if you wanted to earn money, but if you seek wisdom, you should go to Vilna.

Another factor influencing this decision was Lodz's role as a center of the Bricha movement, which was one of the most important organizations encouraging the mass exodus of Jews from Europe to Palestine between 1944 and 1948. The Bricha was mainly an organization supported by Zionist youth who were fascinated by the concept of the kibbutz. The idea of escape rose in the minds of many Jewish activists, including the famous Jewish partisan from Vilna, the poet Kovner, who became a leader of the Bricha movement.¹⁸⁴ He stated "but what was uppermost in our minds then was how to give a personal example [...] and to motivate the survivors to leave the land of destruction for the Land of Israel."¹⁸⁵ Kovner's goal was to gather the survivors in cities, from whence they could travel later to ports on the Mediterranean, Adriatic, and Black Sea and set sail for Palestine.¹⁸⁶

Eleven-year-old Bak, who had survived by hiding in the Vilna ghetto, came to Lodz with his mother in 1945. He observed that "Lodz looked strikingly different from Vilna. Since the city had barely been burned or bombed, it evoked something outlandish,

¹⁸¹ LIPPHARDT, p. 151.

¹⁸² Ibidem.

¹⁸³ Ibidem, p. 128.

¹⁸⁴ It is estimated that between 1944 and 1948 around 250,000 Jews left Eastern Europe. The majority of them were supported by the Bricha movement. This statistical data is cited from: ALEKSIUN.

¹⁸⁵ Cited from PORAT, p. 191.

¹⁸⁶ COHEN, *The Avengers*, p. 162.

something quite unlike the postwar devastation.”¹⁸⁷ Many Lithuanian Jews in this temporary city lived in harsh conditions. Bak remembers:

It was a humble neighborhood of prematurely aged buildings that had been hastily erected in the later years of the nineteenth century for housing poor textile workers. Our building, like many others, had a large prisonlike courtyard with wooden balconies that surrounded each floor. [...] I thought it over and realized that we were much, much better off in our poor lodgings in Lodz than we had been in our cell in the HKP camp.¹⁸⁸ Here there were no Nazis guards, the adults were not forced into slavery, and our lives were in no imminent danger. [...] Such was then our home, and as we were on our way to Palestine, these conditions were to be considered temporary.¹⁸⁹

Despite the poor living conditions, Vilna Jews managed to organize by creating the Union of Vilna Jews in 1946. It aimed to register survivors, to foster contacts with other Vilna communities (also known as *landsmanschaftn*) worldwide, to promote cultural work in Yiddish, and to search for war criminals who had committed Holocaust crimes in Lithuania.¹⁹⁰ Renowned intellectuals from Vilna including the poets Avrom Sutzkever, Shmerke Kaczerginski, Mark Dworzecki, and others tried to create the Central Historical Jewish Commission and continued smuggling important documents and archival material related to the Vilna Jews.¹⁹¹ Thus, Lodz became a temporary cultural center for the Lithuanian Jewry, marked by concerts, poetry readings, and evenings and meetings with famous Vilna writers.¹⁹²

The next location for many Lithuanian Jews was the DP camps in Germany. The category “displaced person” included all individuals forced to leave their homelands as a result of the Second World War.¹⁹³ Among the three hundred thousand¹⁹⁴ Jews housed in the DP camps, only a small number were Lithuanian, as most of the Lithuania Jews had been killed straightaway in their neighborhoods during mass executions or later during the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto. After liberation, only few Lithuanian Jews, “driven by anxiety and many by patriotism, decided to return to Lithuania as fast as their health allowed.”¹⁹⁵ They hoped to find relatives who had gone into hiding or fought as partisans. However, as the American historian Margarete Myers Feinstein has noted in her research on DPs in postwar Germany, “Polish and Lithuanian Jews returned home burdened by memories of neighbors and fellow nationals who had collaborated with

¹⁸⁷ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 394.

¹⁸⁸ The HKP camp or Heereskraftpark was a slave labor camp in Vilna, which was established in September 1943. Its activities involved mostly repairing German military automobiles. It was commanded by Wehrmacht Major Karl Plagge. The group of Jews who worked in this camp made up the largest population of Jews who survived the Holocaust in Vilna. The HKP was liquidated in July 1944.

¹⁸⁹ BAK, *Painted in Words*, pp. 395-396.

¹⁹⁰ LIPPHARDT, p. 128.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*.

¹⁹³ KÖNIGSREDER/WETZEL, p. 7.

¹⁹⁴ FEINSTEIN, *Jewish Displaced Persons*, p. 304. There are no exact numbers of the Lithuanian Jewish DPs.

¹⁹⁵ MISHALL, p. 357.

the Nazi persecution of the Jews.”¹⁹⁶ Those who returned also found “the physical ruin of their communities” and were met with hostility by their erstwhile neighbors, some of whom went as far as to murder¹⁹⁷ returning Jews in order “to retain ill-gotten Jewish property.”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the Lithuanian Jews who survived the Holocaust as well as those who returned home from the concentration camps decided to emigrate. Moreover, other Lithuanian Jews who had left rejected the possibility of return from the outset. William W. Mishell, a survivor from the Kovno ghetto, who was deported to the Stutthof concentration camp and later to Dachau, writes in his memoirs about his conflicting feelings about whether or not to return to Lithuania:

An irresistible drive to determine who was alive was drawing me towards Lithuania. Once more I was caught between conflicting emotions. I had a ghastly, empty feeling that there was nothing in Kovno to which to return. Lithuania was one big cemetery for Lithuanian Jews: the Ninth Fort, the Seventh Fort, dozens of little province towns. There was nothing left. The Lithuanian landscape had been inundated with Jewish mass graves. I could never find happiness there.¹⁹⁹

Hence, in summer 1945, Lithuanian Jews who had survived in hiding, the survivors of the concentration camps, and former partisans hoping to start a new life began entering the DP camps in Germany. Those Lithuanian Jews coming to the DP camps from Lithuania, passed through Poland, as mentioned above mostly through Lodz, and then entered Berlin. Bak remembers that Berlin at that time, with its “landscape of devastation,” reminded him of Vilna.²⁰⁰ The majority of Lithuanian Jews, resided only briefly in Berlin, before moving to the south of Germany, where they entered DP camps in the American Zone of occupied Germany. There were already many Lithuanian Jewish survivors in this part of Germany who had been transferred from Lithuania to the Dachau concentration camp during the war. Thus, Jewish DPs, including Lithuanian Jews “began rebuilding their lives in the land of their persecutors.”²⁰¹ Most of those who survived were older adolescents; few elderly people had survived in the concentration camps.²⁰²

The life in DP camps was regarded as a transitory phase before leaving Europe. In October 1945, a survivor from the Kovno ghetto, Zalman Grinberg, the first president of the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in the American Zone, delivered a public speech in Munich in which he characterized the condition of Jews in Germany

¹⁹⁶ FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ One of the most famous pogroms occurred on 4 July 1946, in Kielce, Poland. It was directed against the Jewish community and refugees gathered in Kielce. Forty-two Jews were killed by Polish soldiers and police officers, who claimed that Jews had kidnapped a non-Jewish boy and hid him in the basement. It was later found out that the boy lied in order to avoid punishment for wandering off without his parents' permission. This pogrom sparked fear among different Jewish communities, including Lithuanian Jews, and they were afraid to return to their hometowns, where they feared a repeat of such acts of violence.

¹⁹⁸ FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ MISHELL, p. 357.

²⁰⁰ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 410.

²⁰¹ FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, 2.

²⁰² *Ibidem*.

as a life in “a waiting room.”²⁰³ In Germany, he said, are “gathered the remnant of [Europe’s] Jews and here is our waiting room. It is a bad waiting room but we hope the day will come in which the Jews will be led to their place.”²⁰⁴ Bak remembers that “the DP camp was supposed to be a place of brief passage, but the world did not want us and we had nowhere to go. It often felt like belonging to some rare species in a zoo and being visited by well-meaning observers.”²⁰⁵

In the beginning, the conditions in the DP camps were very harsh. This was also marked in a report written by the commission of inquiry that the US State Department sent to Germany in 1945 to analyze the state of refugees in the American Zone. The commission, headed by Judge Earl G. Harrison, published a report on 24 August 1945 informing President Truman about “the crowded camps where survivors lived under military rule behind barbed wire; they met Jews living in stables; they spoke with people who ‘had no clothing other than concentration camp garb [...] while others were obliged to wear German SS uniforms.’”²⁰⁶ The report acknowledged the poor nourishment, and even starvation, in DP camps.²⁰⁷ The report somberly concluded that: “We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them, except that we do not exterminate them.”²⁰⁸ After this report, conditions in many DP camps in the American Zone were improved. General Eisenhower introduced a series of policies to be implemented; these included, for instance, the creation of Jewish-only DP camps, increased food rations, the construction of hospitals, and the removal of barbed wire. Nevertheless, not all the problems were solved; while food rations were increased, for example, they were not nutritious enough for people recovering from complete starvation.²⁰⁹

In the DP camp in Landsberg, which was the second largest in the American Zone, conditions were also difficult. This DP camp was erected on 9 May 1945 and, after October 1945, it was solely a Jewish DP camp. Ironically, Landsberg DP camp was located in the city in which Hitler had been imprisoned and written *Mein Kampf*. Former military barracks housed around five thousand Jews, mostly from Russia, Lithuania, and Latvia.²¹⁰ Landsberg was also known “for its severe problems with underfeeding, overcrowding, and lack of adequate housing and basic sanitation.”²¹¹ According to witnesses, new arrivals in Landsberg “slept in attics, some in basements, and others in disused garages.”²¹² However, some of the Lithuanian Jews who were residing in the DP camp in Landsberg remember it much more positively. Bak arrived in the Landsberg DP camp in late autumn 1945, when it was already considered to be one of the best camps. At that time, the camp had been enlarged by evicting German inhabitants. He remembers:

²⁰³ FRITZ, p. 255.

²⁰⁴ Cited from *ibidem*.

²⁰⁵ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 429.

²⁰⁶ GRODZINSKY, p. 55.

²⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

²⁰⁸ GROSSMANN, p. 296.

²⁰⁹ FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, p. 23.

²¹⁰ WORLD ORT, Landsberg.

²¹¹ *Ibidem*.

²¹² *Ibidem*.

The DP camp Landsberg in 1945 was an important oasis on the road of our nomadic postwar life. It was the place that allowed me to regain many of the pleasures of a “normal existence.” Things that people take for granted: a decent space to live, sufficient food and clothing, some schooling, direction and care from elders, close friendships, and the freedom from fear for one’s life.²¹³ [...]

We were initially lodged in one of the large dormitories, in a lugubrious building filled with dirt and noise. Later with Markusha’s²¹⁴ help, we found a small room in one of the buildings that had been recently added at the camp’s perimeter. It was heaven: in our new flat we shared a kitchen and a bathroom with barely more than a dozen people.²¹⁵

Mishell arrived in the DP camp in Landsberg at the end of July 1945, after residing in the DP camp in St. Ottilien,²¹⁶ near Munich. In the DP camp in Landsberg, he immediately joined the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)²¹⁷ and was involved in the formation of a Trade School for Organization for Rehabilitation through Training²¹⁸ (ORT). He also remembers life in the DP camp positively: “My room was quite plain, but for a DP camp it was rather elaborate, I had a bed, a sofa, a cabinet, a radio, and even a piano which I had appropriated from one of the halls in the block.”²¹⁹ However, here we also might observe that not all of the DPs lived under the same conditions; social networking and differences in the local administration of the DP camps could result in better housing conditions. As Bak writes in his memoirs, “I wonder if I was aware of the advantages that came from my parents’ leadership roles in the camp.”²²⁰ Nevertheless, survivors of ghettos and concentration camps likely had a different understanding of harsh conditions and definition of a normal life than those observers now appraising the DP camps. Landsberg’s DP camp resembled heaven for Bak, even if he had to share a kitchen and bathroom with a dozen people. Most of the survivors enjoyed the freedom and their primary source of joy was finding other surviving relatives; these were the most important factors in the normalization of their lives.

²¹³ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 421.

²¹⁴ Markusha was a survivor from the Kovno ghetto, where he lost his wife and two children. He was the first person from the Jewish administration whom Bak met when he with his mother arrived at Landsberg DP camp. Later his mother married Markusha, making him Bak’s stepfather.

²¹⁵ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 426.

²¹⁶ For more on St. Ottilien DP camp, see ROBERT J. HILLIARD: *Surviving the Americans: The Continued Struggle of the Jews After Liberation*, New York 1996. Robert J. Hilliard was stationed with the US army in Germany, and his memoirs focus on the events at the St. Ottilien hospital and DP camp.

²¹⁷ UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) was an international relief agency, with headquarters in New York. It was created in 1943 and became part of the United Nations in 1945. Its task was to coordinate relief measures in DP camps, which provided food, shelter, clothing, etc. See more in: SHARIF GEMIE et al. (eds.): *Outcast Europe: Refugees and Relief Workers in an Era of a Total War, 1936–1948*, London 2012.

²¹⁸ ORT was established in 1880 in St. Petersburg in tsarist Russia. Their aim was to help Russia’s Jews learn skilled trades. ORT also functioned during the Second World War by providing educational and social programs for Jewish refugees in the countries where there was no war. In DP camps, around eighty thousand Jews went through ORT education in order to prepare for a new life. Read more in: *WORLD ORT, ORT’s Work*.

²¹⁹ MISHELL, p. 365.

²²⁰ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 427.

Lithuanian Jews were geographically dispersed within Germany. Anna Lipphardt has researched Vilna Jews after the Holocaust and writes that in 1947 in the DP camp Feldafing near Munich, a list of Vilna Jews was made which revealed this scattering: 105 Jews were in Hofgeismar, 161 in Heidenheim, 130 in Ulm, 133 in Munich, and 146 in Feldafing.²²¹ Many Lithuanian Jews resided in DP camps in southern Germany, for instance, in various DP camps in Munich, Landsberg, or St. Ottilien. Many of the Lithuanian Jews, especially the survivors from the Kovno ghetto, were leaders in the DP camp organizations. Feinstein, in writing about Lithuanian Jews, reports that they were “overrepresented among DP leadership in the American Zone.”²²²

Zalman Grinberg, a survivor from the Kovno ghetto and renowned doctor, assumed one of the most important positions. Together with Rabbi Abraham Klausner from St. Ottilien DP camp, Grinberg founded the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in the American Zone, on 1 July 1945, after the first meeting of representatives of Jewish DPs in Feldafing.²²³ Grinberg was elected as chairman. According to the German historian Zeev Mankowitz, “the Central Committee viewed itself as the democratically elected representative of the Surviving Remnant, responsible for their welfare and rehabilitation while in Germany and committed to expediting their early departure to either Palestine or any other destination.”²²⁴ On 27 January 1946, the congress of liberated Jews was held in Munich; this event was also incidentally attended by David Ben-Gurion, the future prime minister of Israel.²²⁵ During this congress, Grinberg was re-elected as chairman of the Committee of the Liberated Jews in the American Zone. These elections resulted in an increase in the number of representatives from the Landsberg faction “while the achievements of the Polish group were more modest and the leadership remained primarily Lithuanian.”²²⁶

Dr. Grinberg, who had been the director of the Kovno ghetto hospital and survived the Dachau concentration camp, was also one of the founders of the Jewish hospital in St. Ottilien. Grinberg also became known among Jewish DPs on 27 May 1945, when he organized the first official meeting of Jewish survivors in DP camps. The Israeli historian and Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer named this event as “the first performance of *She'erit Hapletah* [Surviving Remnant].²²⁷ It was a meeting to mark the anniversary of the liberation, but the clothing of many survivors was still “Dachau-striped.”²²⁸ Many Jewish survivors from different DP camps in Bavaria were present at the anniversary

²²¹ LIPPHARDT, p. 139.

²²² FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, p. 221.

²²³ MANKOWITZ, p. 101.

²²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 102.

²²⁵ This congress was also filmed by Rabbi Klausner, who made a 35mm film *These Are the People*. The opening scenes of the film show Ben-Gurion, Grinberg, and other speakers. Read more about this film in RONNY LOEWY: *These Are the People. Zu Abraham J. Klausners Film über das Zentralkomitee der befreiten Juden in der amerikanischen Zone*, in: *Überlebt und unterwegs. Jüdische Displaced Persons im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, Frankfurt a. M. 1997, pp. 119-128 (*Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust*).

²²⁶ MANKOWITZ, p. 120.

²²⁷ WALTER, p. 41. *She'erit Hapletah* is a biblical term used by Holocaust survivors to designate those who survived.

²²⁸ *Ibidem*.

concert.²²⁹ In his speech, Grinberg spoke about the ambiguous feelings that dominated the life of many DP survivors:

We have met here today to celebrate our liberation, but at the same time it is a time of mourning for us. For every bright and joyful day at present and in the future is shadowed by the tragic events of the past years. One per cent survived to see the liberation, and 99 per cent of this one per cent are very ill. Can you enjoy liberation?! Are you able to celebrate?! [...] We are free now, but we do not know how to begin our free but unfortunate lives. It seems to us that for the time mankind does not comprehend what we have gone through and what we have experienced during this period of time. And it seems to us, that we shall not be understood in [the] future. We have forgotten how to laugh, we cannot cry any more, we do not comprehend our freedom yet, and this because we are still among our dead comrades. Let us rise and stand silent to commemorate our dead.²³⁰

The meeting was marked by a performance—including works by Mahler and Mendelssohn—by the St. Ottilien orchestra, which was established by Hofmekler and eight other former members from the Kovno ghetto orchestra,²³¹ who resided in the St. Ottilien DP camp.²³² The American Leo W. Schwarz, who served in the United States army and was responsible for the operations of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) from 1946 to 1947, remembered this concert in his memoirs: “the concert was a symbol, an act of faith; a weathervane indicating that the instinct to live was stronger than any anguish or remorse.”²³³ Grinberg held the position of chairman of the Committee of the Liberated Jews in the American Zone until July 1946, when he immigrated to Palestine and became the director of Beilinson Hospital in Petah Tikva. His position as chairman was taken over by another survivor of the Kovno ghetto, an accountant and journalist named David Treger.

At the same time, another survivor from the Kovno ghetto, a former judge in Memel, Samuel Gringauz, was elected even three times as head of the Jewish Committee of Landsberg. Gringauz also served as the chairman of the Council of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria, which was the second most important body in the Jewish administration with a task of policy-making, until his emigration to the USA in 1947, where he took up work in the United Restitution Organization (URO).²³⁴ Gringauz was born in Tilsit in Eastern Prussia. He studied economics, philosophy, and law in Germany, Switzerland, Russia, Italy, and France.²³⁵ In 1933, he became a judge

²²⁹ See also, SHEPHARD, p. 99.

²³⁰ GRINBERG.

²³¹ St. Ottilien orchestra was later renamed as the Ex-Concentration Camp Orchestra and became known as the Representative Orchestra of the She’erit Hapletah.

²³² Some members of the Kovno ghetto orchestra, including the conductor Hofmekler, were sent, after the liquidation of Kovno ghetto in 1944, to Stutthof and then Dachau concentration camps. In April 1945, Hofmekler was evacuated and liberated close to Landsberg, he and other members of the orchestra, who survived concentration camps, stayed in the DP camp in St. Ottilien.

²³³ SCHWARZ, p. 9.

²³⁴ URO was established in 1948 with the aim to help victims of the Nazi regime, who lived outside Germany, to make indemnification claims against Germany and Austria.

²³⁵ MANKOWITZ, p. 174.

in Memel. Imprisoned in the Kovno ghetto after 1941, Gringauz was deported to Stuthof in 1944, and later transferred to Dachau. He was liberated in April 1945 near Schwabenhäusen. In the Landsberg DP camp, which became the center of Jewish cultural and political life in the American Zone, Gringauz was one of the publishers of the *Landsberger Lager Tsaytung* (later the *Yiddishe Tsaytung*), which soon “came to play a significant role in informing public opinion in Germany and abroad.”²³⁶ Many of this newspaper’s articles were related to Jewish life in pre-war Lithuania.²³⁷

The German scholar Michael Brenner notes that democratic elections were held in Landsberg in order “to prevent the old leadership class of the concentration camps from becoming a new elite in the DP camps as well.”²³⁸ However, Gringauz and his Zionist Unity Bloc were supported “by the old Lithuanian leadership class.”²³⁹ His candidacy “was challenged by a group composed primarily of Polish Jews led by the chief of the Jewish camp police.”²⁴⁰ Gringauz had worked in the Zionist underground organization in the Dachau (Kaufering) concentration camp, where he used to write articles for the underground journal *Nitzotz* (Spark).²⁴¹ Bak remembers this revival of political life in the Landsberg DP camp: “in this ferment of awakening, old political parties began to reconstruct themselves, class-consciousness resurfaced, and even the age-old ethnic antagonisms revived the traditional tensions between the *Litvaks* and the *Polishe* (the Lithuanian and Polish Jews). It was another proof of the resilience of Jewish collective memory.”²⁴²

There was also a remarkable lack of women present in the leadership of the DP camps. Even Ben-Gurion wondered where the female delegates were during the First Congress in January 1946: “Don’t the women [...] who endured so much and showed so much courage have anything to say here? In Palestine, I met women who fought in the ghettos. They are our greatest pride. Isn’t it sad enough that you lack children? Must you in addition artificially eliminate the women and create a population of men only?”²⁴³ Women in DP camps, in contrast to their role as active resistance fighters in the ghettos, were mostly seen as mothers who had to dedicate themselves “physically and mentally to the renewal of the Jewish people.”²⁴⁴ American historian Atina Grossmann claimed that “Jewish women survivors, living in a kind of extraterritoriality on both German and Allied soil, were prefiguring on their pregnant bodies a kind of imaginary nation which they hoped [...] to realize in Palestine/Eretz Israel.”²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, it must be also acknowledged that the most active female Jewish partisans from Lithuania were simply not in the DP camps in postwar Germany. Some of them, like the Vilna partisans Vitka Kempner-Kovner or Rozka Korczak—the coura-

²³⁶ Ibidem, p. 162.

²³⁷ Ibidem.

²³⁸ BRENNER, p. 33.

²³⁹ Ibidem.

²⁴⁰ Ibidem.

²⁴¹ Read more about Nitzotz in: LAURA WEINRIB (ed.): *Nitzotz: The Spark of Resistance in Kovno Ghetto & Dachau-Kaufering Concentration Camp*, Syracuse 2009.

²⁴² Italics in original. BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 426.

²⁴³ GROSSMANN, p. 316.

²⁴⁴ FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany*, p. 157.

²⁴⁵ GROSSMANN, p. 315.

geous women to whom Ben-Gurion was most probably referring in his speech—were already on their way to Palestine. Other partisans, like Rachel Margolis from Vilna or Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson from the Kovno ghetto, stayed in Soviet Lithuania. They did not want to leave because they already had children and husbands, mostly their fellow ghetto inmates, and decided to rebuild their lives in postwar Lithuania. Margolis writes in her memoirs: “Many of our friends left Lithuania, but I never wanted to leave the country. I was living in the city of my birth, I had a family and interesting work.”²⁴⁶ Moreover, she recalls, “my whole life was bound up with this land. My murdered parents, my little brother, and my friends were lying here.”²⁴⁷

The establishment of administrative and political institutions in DP camps was followed by the creation of historical commissions.²⁴⁸ On 10 October 1945, the first historical commission was established by Jewish DPs in the British Zone; it included the Polish-born journalists Paul Trepman, Dovid Rosental, and Rafael Olewski. Most of the Lithuanian Jews worked in the historical commission (a subdivision of the cultural office of the Central Committee for the Liberated Jews) that was created in Munich in the American Zone on 28 November 1945. It was led by Polish-born Moyshe Yoysef Feigenbaum and Israel Kaplan, a native of Belarus who had survived in the Kovno ghetto.²⁴⁹ The historical commission sought to document the years before 1939 by compiling contemporary written sources, recording eyewitness testimonies, and collecting folkloric material.²⁵⁰ Laura Jockusch, whose research concentrates on the work of historical commissions in DP camps, claims that Kaplan and Feigenbaum “understood their work as a first step toward both establishing a central memorial and a new field of historical research.”²⁵¹

Kaplan’s primary focus was collecting the testimonies of child survivors.²⁵² Kaplan had been a teacher in Kovno before the war, and he and Feigenbaum, the head of the Central Historical Commission, initiated the idea of collecting children’s testimonies.²⁵³ By August 1941, Kaplan was already surreptitiously recording “the goings-on in the ghetto”²⁵⁴ and made “chronicling the ghetto’s history”²⁵⁵ a personal mission. Later deported to the Riga ghetto, Kaplan managed to write and send a report about his group of deportees to the Kovno ghetto.²⁵⁶ Between 1946 and 1948, the historical commission published a series of children’s testimonies in the first-ever Holocaust research journal *Fun Letsten Hurbn* [From the Last Extermination], of which Kaplan was the editor.²⁵⁷ Kaplan’s main aim in collecting children’s testimonies was not to collect facts

²⁴⁶ MARGOLIS, A Partisan from Vilna.

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 499. Margolis immigrated to Israel in 1994.

²⁴⁸ Read more about these historical commissions in: LAURA JOCKUSCH: *Khurbn* Forschung—Jewish Historical Commissions in Europe, 1943-1949, in: Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 6 (2007), pp. 441-473.

²⁴⁹ JOCKUSCH, p. 33.

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

²⁵² COHEN, *Representing the Experiences of Children*, p. 75.

²⁵³ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁴ GHETTO FIGHTERS HOUSE ARCHIVES.

²⁵⁵ COHEN, *Representing the Experiences of Children*, p. 76.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

but rather to show a “child’s understanding, his approach and reaction to what happened to him; how the events affected him.”²⁵⁸ My own research suggests likewise that children’s experiences, narratives, and their visual representation were also significant elements of Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania after 1990.

In addition to children’s testimonies, the historical commission also collected songs. Between 1946 and 1947, Shmerke Kacerginski, a renowned Lithuanian Jewish poet and partisan, worked along with other Jewish intellectuals in the Central Jewish Historical Commission to collect Jewish songs. Kacerginski had been an important figure in the cultural life of the Vilna ghetto; he was a former member of the literary group *Yunge Vilne* [Young Vilna], which had organized literary evenings and theater performances in the ghetto, and even wrote songs himself. After emigrating to Lodz, he continued²⁵⁹ the collection of Jewish songs. After the Kielce pogrom of 1946, Kacerginski moved to Paris, but he visited occupied Germany, where he not only lectured in the DP camps but also continued collecting material.²⁶⁰ According to the Holocaust music scholar Shirli Gilbert, Kacerginski and his colleagues perceived songs as “illuminating specific dimension of history: not how the victims were acted upon as passive objects but rather the ways in which they, as historical subjects with agency, [...] actively responded to what was happening.”²⁶¹ Kacerginski claimed that this material would enable later historians “to document what had happened”:

Few documents were preserved that would allow even a partial picture of the practical, official existence and the way of life of Jews in the occupied territories. Therefore, I think that the songs that Jews from ghettos, death camps and partisans sang from their sad hearts will be a great contribution to the history of Jewish martyrdom and struggle. [...] The daily Jewish life in the ghetto with all its accompanying phenomena, like arrests, death, work, Gestapo, Jewish power-mongers, internal way of life, etc. – are reflected in precisely this bloody folklore. It will help future history-writers and researchers as well as readers to fathom the soul of our people.²⁶²

After the war, Kacerginski published many important anthologies of Jewish music: In 1947, he contributed a chapter of ghetto and partisan songs to the first Jewish anthology of songs published in the postwar Poland, named *Undzer Gezang* [Our Song]. In the same year, his book of Yiddish songs and poems from Vilna appeared under the title *Dos Gezang Fun Vilner Geto* [The Songs of Vilna Ghetto]. His most well known anthology *Lider Fun di Getos un Lagern* [Songs of the Ghettos and Concentration Camps] was printed in New York in 1948.²⁶³ This book, “comprising some 435 pages

²⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 77.

²⁵⁹ Kacerginski started collecting Jewish songs in Vilna, directly after the war. Later he continued this work in Lodz and Germany.

²⁶⁰ Read more about Kacerginski in: WORLD ORT, Shmerke Kacerginski.

²⁶¹ GILBERT, *We Long For a Home*, p. 302.

²⁶² Cited from ibidem, pp. 302-303. Originally published in: SHMERKE KACZERGINSKI HALPERN LEIVICK (eds.): *Lider fun di Getos und Lagern* [Songs of the Ghettos and Concentration Camps], New York 1948.

²⁶³ DP historical commissions had close relationships with the YIVO in New York.

with 223 songs and poems, remains an indispensable point of reference for research in the field of Jewish folk and popular music of the Holocaust period.”²⁶⁴ Kaczerginski thus fulfilled his mission by editing one of the most important documents related to the Holocaust because “songs—taken alongside other documents such as testimonies and photographs—have potential to open a distinctive window onto this larger historical picture.”²⁶⁵

Many of the best known leaders of Vilna’s Yiddish culture, however, were not present in the life of the DP camps. As mentioned previously, Kaczerginski went to Germany only for short visits because he lived in Paris while he was collecting songs. Similarly, the famous poet Avrom Sutzkever and other intellectuals lived in Lodz.²⁶⁶ Lipphardt notes that there was “a lack of strategic cultural planning” in the activities fostering Yiddish culture from Vilna in the DP camps.²⁶⁷ Additionally, in the DP camps, unlike in Lodz, Yiddish culture was overshadowed by Zionism; more than 90 percent of the camps’ Jewish population supported the idea of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, despite the fact that not all of them emigrated to Palestine/Israel.²⁶⁸ In the DP camps, the new Jewish man and woman were redefined, and, according to historian Feinstein, “the values of the pre-war era were modified to include revenge and national consciousness as Jewish male and female traits. [...] The new Zionist man fought back, sought revenge and prepared for battle and productive labor in Palestine.”²⁶⁹

Zionist ideas were widespread among Lithuanian Jewish survivors, especially those from the Kovno ghetto, who were quite influential in the Jewish administration in the DP camps in the American Zone. Gringauz was, as mentioned above, an important political figure and the publisher of one of the most important Yiddish newspapers; he also favored the ideas of *She’erit Hapletah* and agreed with other writers and journalists who “tended to favor Hebrew as the national language of the Jewish state but strongly adhered to the use of Yiddish in the Diaspora and its cultural community in Israel.”²⁷⁰

Hence, even though Yiddish was used in the DP camps to communicate between Jews of different origins, Hebrew was still regarded as “the language of Jewish strength and independence” that “represented the Jewish future and Zionist values.”²⁷¹ Yiddish was slowly turning into the language of the past, “a relic of the Diaspora,” while Hebrew was becoming “the language of the future Jewish state.”²⁷² Therefore, the DP camps—even though they were seen as “the last *shtetl* in Europe,”²⁷³ whose cultural content included popular Yiddish theater performances, the reading and writing of Yiddish books, and the publishing of around 150 Yiddish newspapers²⁷⁴—ultimately rep-

²⁶⁴ WORLD ORT, Shmerke Kaczerginski.

²⁶⁵ GILBERT, *We Long For a Home*, p. 303.

²⁶⁶ LIPPHARDT, p. 139.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁶⁸ GRODZINSKY, p. 225.

²⁶⁹ FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, p. 156-157.

²⁷⁰ LEWINSKY, p. 321.

²⁷¹ FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, p. 221.

²⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 224.

²⁷³ LIPPHARDT, p. 141.

²⁷⁴ LEWINSKY, p. 308.

resented “the moment of cultural downfall”²⁷⁵ for Lithuanian Jews and the Lithuanian/Vilna Yiddish culture.

In postwar Germany, along with the cultural differences among the Lithuanian Jews, there was also a tension between the Lithuanian Jews and non-Jewish Lithuanians, even though most of them lived separately.²⁷⁶ Around sixty thousand non-Jewish Lithuanians had sought refuge in Germany.²⁷⁷ Some Lithuanian Jews who survived the Holocaust “alleged Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis, physically beat Lithuanians, and handed them over to the Allied administration”; some of those accused were even imprisoned in Dachau.²⁷⁸ Munich became the center of Lithuanian Jewish activities; in April 1947, a general congress of the Union of Lithuanian Jews was held there at which Lithuanian Jews condemned the collaboration of the entire Lithuanian nation with the Nazis.²⁷⁹ In the meantime, Lithuanian refugees responded with a project that aimed to record historical data confirming that Lithuanians had not killed but rather rescued Jews.

In the words of the Lithuanian historian Alfonsas Eidintas, “Lithuanians and Jews failed to find common ground even after the refugee period in Germany, when many Lithuanian and Jews had emigrated to the United States.”²⁸⁰ Later, many of them lived in the same neighborhoods and had “startling run-ins.”²⁸¹ Bak notes in his memoirs that top commander Lileikis, whose “hands were stained with Jewish blood,” “lived quietly undisturbed” in a suburban community not too far from his home in Weston, Massachusetts, before being arrested, accused of mass killings of Lithuanian Jews, and extradited from the USA.²⁸²

Emigration to the USA and Israel: In Search of a New Homeland

After temporary stays in the DP camps or other locations, Lithuanian Jews chose different directions for their new lives. Bak remembers that “the DP camp’s inhabitants were mainly divided into two groups, one making aliyah²⁸³ to Israel, and the other waiting for affidavits²⁸⁴ to the USA. Few Jews desired to continue their life in Germany.”²⁸⁵ The largest percentage of the Lithuanian Jews went to New York.²⁸⁶ This was no coincidence, for, as the American historian Beth B. Cohen has pointed out, in 1948, 40 percent of all American Jews lived in the city, which “was the center of American Jew-

²⁷⁵ LIPPHARDT, p. 141.

²⁷⁶ EIDINTAS, p. 339.

²⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 338.

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 339.

²⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 344.

²⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

²⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁸² BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 89.

²⁸³ “Aliyah” refers to the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel.

²⁸⁴ Applicants for visas to enter the USA needed to submit statements of supports—i.e., “affidavits.”

²⁸⁵ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 443.

²⁸⁶ LIPPHARDT, p. 165.

ish life.”²⁸⁷ Moreover, New York had “a substantial Yiddish culture, both secular and religious, represented in the press, schools, theater, and radio programs that appealed to the many Yiddish-speaking newcomers.”²⁸⁸ Most of the *landmanschaftn*, “countryman associations,” that were created by Jews from the same towns or villages and offered support networks for the newcomers were likewise based in New York. Thus Lithuanian Jews from Vilna found old Vilna organizations, including Vilna *landsmanschaftn* there. However, Lipphardt observes that Lithuanian Jews were met as victims in New York and were also identified as poor people.²⁸⁹ In the *Friends of Vilna Bulletin*, older generations of New York Jews from Lithuania wrote:

What is in store for those unhappy Vilna Jews? Those naked, hungry, homeless, without relatives and among hostile strangers in foreign devastated countries? Will they be able to hold out without our help? [...] Help those survivors become once again equal members of human society. [...] Let us help the newcomers establish themselves in their new home and enable them to forget as quickly as possible the gruesome experiences of the past five years.²⁹⁰

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research became a central place to go for Lithuanian Jews newly arrived in New York. YIVO was founded in 1925 in Vilna, then part of Poland, and, later, in 1940, to New York. Its aim was “to record the history and pioneer in the critical study of the language, literature and culture of the Jews of Eastern Europe.”²⁹¹ It was also a contact point to find out information about survivors and their destinies during the Holocaust. Lipphardt observes, “for Vilna Jews YIVO was their homeland, even though YIVO saw themselves as a homeland of all European Jews.”²⁹² Hence, in New York, Lithuanian Jews from the DP camps managed to integrate into different Jewish institutions and communities, most of whom spoke Yiddish and had nostalgic memories of Lithuania before the Holocaust. These nostalgic memories play a significant role in my analysis of the film *The World Was Ours*, which was made in New York by the Lithuanian Jew Mira Jedwabnik van Doren.²⁹³

The Nusach Vilne Federation of Jews from Vilna in the USA was one of the most important organizations of Lithuanian Jews, not only in the USA but also internationally; it cooperated with other Lithuanian Jewish communities abroad and carried out transnational memory work for the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora. It was founded by Holocaust survivors from Vilna and surrounding areas in New York and has been active since 1947.²⁹⁴ This federation has organized cultural events, supported writers, coordinated commemorative ceremonies in memory of Holocaust victims, and contributed

²⁸⁷ COHEN, *Face to Face*, p. 140. See also: DOROTHY RABINOWITZ: *New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America*, New York 1976; WILLIAM B. HELMREICH: *Against All Odds – Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America*, New York 1996; BETH B. COHEN: *Case Closed – Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America*, New Brunswick 2007.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁹ LIPPHARDT, p. 175.

²⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 177.

²⁹¹ YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH, *About YIVO*.

²⁹² LIPPHARDT, p. 185.

²⁹³ This film is discussed in depth in section 5.1.2.

²⁹⁴ YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH, *Nusach*.

financially to many initiatives related to Vilna and its Yiddish history.²⁹⁵ Since in the 1960s, Nusach Vilne Federation was actively involved in transnational memory work related to the memory of Yiddish Vilna. In 1970, its members, along with people from Vilna “countryman associations” in Paris and Israel, unveiled a memorial plate for Holocaust victims in the concentration camp cemetery in Schöenberg, Germany.²⁹⁶ Around four hundred Lithuanian Jews are buried in this cemetery.²⁹⁷ In 1972, this federation also opened a “Vilna Hall” in the Ghetto Fighters Museum in Israel; this exhibit focuses not on the Holocaust but on the history of Vilna before the Holocaust. Lipphardt notes that this was not a common perspective of Jewish life in those years in Israel.²⁹⁸

The relationship between non-Jewish Lithuanians and Lithuanian Jews in the USA was very complicated. There were constant conflicts and accusations from both sides. However, the relationship was not only antagonistic; the Lithuanian Jewish writer Meras or the Lithuanian Jew and political scientist Aleksandras Štromas, for instance, were always welcomed and seen as important intellectuals by the Lithuanian-American community. Meras was one of the most respected writers of the Lithuanian exile after his forced emigration from the Soviet Union to Israel in 1972, and his books were reviewed by the most important literary scholars in exile. He was always encouraged to write more, especially by Vytautas Kavolis, who was the editor of the exile magazine *Metmenys* [Dimensions].²⁹⁹ The Lithuanian-American émigré community supported Meras’s emigration from the Soviet Union and in 1976 even published his novel *Strip-tizas* [Striptease], which was negatively evaluated by the Soviet regime. In the same year he received the Lithuanian Writers’ Association of America Literature Prize.³⁰⁰ In his acceptance speech, Meras spoke of two themes that are reflected in his work: “his intense personal experience of the Holocaust itself and, at the same time, the realization that the Nazi genocide was a grotesque manifestation of a more universal alienation and dehumanization.”³⁰¹

Aleksandras Štromas was a prominent Lithuanian political scientist and dissident. He lost his family during the massacre in Lietūkis garage, but he himself was saved by a Lithuanian family and later adopted by one of the leaders of the Lithuanian communist regime, Antanas Sniečkus.³⁰² Štromas nevertheless became an opponent of the Soviet regime and left the Soviet Union. He was very active in the activities of the Lithuanian émigrés, was a member of the liberal organization *Šviesa-Santara*,³⁰³ and published articles in the Lithuanian-American media. In 1997, he supported a Lithuanian-American candidate, Valdas Adamkus, during the presidential elections in Lithuania. After Adamkus’s election, Štromas served as an advisor in his administration. Štromas has also voiced his position about the Holocaust in Lithuania; in contrast to many Lithuanian

²⁹⁵ Ibidem. This organisation was officially dissolved in 2004.

²⁹⁶ LIPPHARDT, pp. 205-206.

²⁹⁷ Ibidem.

²⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 212.

²⁹⁹ MAČIANSKAITĖ/VILIMAITĖ, p. 15.

³⁰⁰ SUŽIEDĖLIS, Icchokas Meras.

³⁰¹ Ibidem.

³⁰² In the interwar years, Sniečkus was friends with Aleksandras Štromas’s father.

³⁰³ See more on this organization in section 4.1.2.

Jews, he did not blame the entire Lithuanian population for the collaboration with Nazi Germany. Moreover, Štromas even wrote: “We Jews should also confess our guilt” and “understand that the defeats and losses of the nations with which we were living are also our defeats and losses.”³⁰⁴

The Lithuanian-American exile community, however, especially its conservative circles, did not welcome all Lithuanian Jews. In many cases, communication was characterized by confrontation and accusations instead of dialogue. This is very well demonstrated in the observations of historian Eidintas:

The atmosphere for a Jewish-Lithuanian dialogue was not favorable in the context of an ideological confrontation between two worlds, and when Lithuanian émigrés were practically being directly accused of defending war criminals. Open discussion in the Lithuanian émigré community about the relationship between Jews and Lithuanian was impossible. As a result, such important subjects as moral responsibility and Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis were not examined or mentioned. At public Lithuanian émigré events, there were no allusions to the Jews and their fate in Lithuania.³⁰⁵

Hence, the cases of Meras and Štromas were exceptions in the exile community. Lithuanian-Americans saw them as friends and not as enemies seeking to defame the Lithuanian nation. Moreover, they were seen as allies against the Soviet authorities, as both of them had emigrated from the Soviet Union as dissidents. A Lithuanian Jew from Plungė named Leonid Olschwang, who lost his mother during the Holocaust and also immigrated to the USA after the war, is a contrasting example. Olschwang was silent about his past for many years, but, in 1982, he sent an article to the Lithuanian exile newspaper in Canada *Tėviškės žiburiai*, blaming the entire Lithuanian nation for collaboration with Nazi Germany.³⁰⁶ The Lithuanian media rejected his article because it “very directly brought up the issue of Lithuanians’ moral responsibility for their role in the Holocaust.”³⁰⁷ The editor of *Tėviškės žiburiai* and Catholic priest Pranas Gaida in his letter to Olschwang, claimed that the articles’s “tone and content would not contribute to a peaceful dialogue between Lithuanians and Jews.”³⁰⁸ Moreover, Gaida wrote, “the Lithuanian community would reject your article as unreliable merely for the fact that you were a Soviet army officer.”³⁰⁹ Two years later, however, in 1984, Olschwang did manage to print the article, in which he spoke of Lithuanian Nazis and their crimes, not in the Lithuanian émigré media but in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*.³¹⁰ It could therefore be argued that the dialogue between non-Jewish Lithuanians and Lithuanian Jews in the USA was very ambivalent; those who harshly criticized the stance of non-Jewish Lithuanians during the Holocaust were silenced, while those who tried

³⁰⁴ ŠTROMAS, p. 192.

³⁰⁵ EIDINTAS, p. 366.

³⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 379. See also OLSCHWANG.

³⁰⁷ Ibidem.

³⁰⁸ GAIDA, p. 4. English translation from EIDINTAS, p. 381.

³⁰⁹ Ibidem. English translation from EIDINTAS, p. 381.

³¹⁰ OLSCHWANG, pp. 123-126.

to distance the Lithuanian nation from Holocaust events, avoided making accusations, and showed their antagonism towards the Soviet regime were allowed to speak.³¹¹

Another destination for the Lithuanian Jews was Palestine/Israel. Jewish DPs in the camps were encouraged to emigrate to Israel and “to enter the embrace of kibbutzim and to dream of a Jewish state.”³¹² The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948 was a catalyst for DPs to emigrate there and “fulfilled the DPs longing for a home, for recognition of being a nation like all others.”³¹³ In 1945, Lithuanian Jews in Tel Aviv founded an association of Vilna Jews known as Irgud Yotse Vilnah ve-Hasviva, which was amalgamation of two different organizations, namely an older Vilna association created in 1935 in Tel Aviv, and the Help Committee that had been established by newcomers.³¹⁴ Many Lithuanian Jewish newcomers came to Israel by bypassing the DP camps via emigration routes provided by the Bricha movement.

Similar Lithuanian Jewish associations were established later in Haifa and Jerusalem, but they only began cultural and memory work in the 1960s after the waves of immigration, including the ones coming from the Soviet Union in 1956, were over.³¹⁵ The atmosphere in these Israeli settlements was quite different than in the communities of Lithuanian Jews in New York, Paris, or Buenos Aires; the Israeli communities found themselves in a very different political and cultural context because “the initial Israeli reaction to the Shoah was silence,” and “the events of the Shoah were disappearing from Israeli memory.”³¹⁶ In Israel, the Shoah “was an event which ‘had no witness,’ because the Nazis did all they could to wipe out not only the Jews, but also their memory.”³¹⁷ The survivors “were also silenced by pre-state and early state Zionist narratives that privileged heroic myths constructed around the partisans and around Eretz Israeli youth.”³¹⁸ Bak, who immigrated to Israel from the DP camp in 1948, remembers:

I did learn Hebrew, though it took a long time and a very great effort. But the language never became part of my inner self (I still count in Yiddish). I also learned not to speak of the Holocaust. In the years before the Eichmann trial, young Israelis had little patience for this subject. Like everyone else, I wore the short khaki pants, khaki shirts, and sandals that gave all of us pre-army age a uniform look. But I never felt like a Sabra,³¹⁹ nor did I want to.³²⁰

Moreover, the Yiddish language was marginalized in Israel. In 1945, Rozka Korczak, who fought with the Vilna partisans, came to Palestine as one of the first witnesses to tell her story of survival in Yiddish. Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Jewish community, and later the first prime minister of Israel, said after her speech: “You have now listened

³¹¹ See more on this issue in section 4.1.2.

³¹² FEINSTEIN, *Holocaust Survivors*, p. 279.

³¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 289.

³¹⁴ LIPPHARDT, p. 235.

³¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 236.

³¹⁶ LENTIN, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah*, p. 71.

³¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁹ “Sabra” is a slang word that refers to Israeli Jews, born in Israel.

³²⁰ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 461.

earnestly to words spoken to you in an unpleasant language, but it is the language of those who died.”³²¹ Thus, the Shoah was seen “a catastrophe which happened not to ‘us’ Israelis, but to a diaspora Jewish ‘other.’”³²² The newcomers were perceived as “the others” in Israeli society. The first memorial events, which were organized by Vilna Memorial Fund Committee in Tel Aviv in 1949, were conducted in Hebrew and not in Yiddish.³²³ According to the Judaic scholar Rachel Rojanski, Israel’s attitude towards Yiddish culture in the 1950s was the following: “as long as there were sporadic popular attempts to revive Yiddish as a daily language, to present it as one of the languages of the Jewish people, and to bring it back into Israeli street, the establishment rejected it, even fought against it.”³²⁴

The peak of the activities of the Lithuanian Jewish community was between 1965 and 1975.³²⁵ One of their aims was to transfer the ashes of the eighty thousand Jews who died in Ponary from Soviet Lithuania to Israel, but the Soviet Union rejected this idea.³²⁶ Nevertheless, newcomers from Soviet Lithuania smuggled ashes into Israel, where they were buried during official ceremonies.³²⁷ In Israel, not only were commemorative events organized, but books and magazines were also published. One of the most important publications was the periodical *Pinkas*, which featured essays on Vilna history, memory, art, and poetry. *Pinkas* included Yiddish poetry by such important Lithuanian Jewish and Israeli poets as Avrom Sutzkever, who, even though he was a Zionist, wrote in Yiddish.

Abba Kovner also supported these Yiddish language cultural activities, even though he served as the symbol of Hebraization within the diaspora.³²⁸ His ambivalent relationship with Yiddish culture reveals the complexity of the Lithuanian Jewish community in Israel very well. On the one hand, he supported the preservation of *Yiddishkeit*; on the other, he was the example of the Zionist Israeli narrative, the partisan and fighter for Israeli independence. Kovner lived in Israel, on the kibbutz *Ein Hahoresh*, where he tried “to create a community with all its joys and sorrows” with a certain synthesis of old and new Jewish tradition, until his death in 1987.³²⁹ In contrast to the prevailing Zionist narrative at that time in Israel, Kovner stated that “Jews immigrating to Eretz Israel did not have to deny their roots and start a new identity. Their old identity was no less respectable; moreover, no one can start anew without roots.”³³⁰ Kovner also contributed to the planning of the main exhibition in the Diaspora Museum, which opened in 1978.³³¹ In this museum he wanted to show “what had been lost,” but “not how it had

³²¹ COHEN, *The Avengers*, p. 183.

³²² LENTIN, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah*, p. 2.

³²³ LIPPHARDT, p. 239.

³²⁴ ROJANSKI.

³²⁵ LIPPHARDT, p. 247.

³²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

³²⁷ *Ibidem*.

³²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

³²⁹ PORAT, p. 295.

³³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 304.

³³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 292-293. This museum was criticized for omissions in its portrayal of Jewish life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly for not showing the secular, socialist, leftist, and non-Zionist tendencies within Judaism during this period. The museum favored the Eastern European Jews

been lost.”³³² His close friend, the poet Sutzkever, captured Kovner’s ambivalence very well in the eulogy he delivered at his funeral when he declared that “it was impossible to explain who or what Abba Kovner had been, [and] agreed to say merely that he was a person in whose presence one felt the eternity of the Jewish people.”³³³

The diversity of Lithuanian Jewish cultural and political life that existed in pre-war Lithuania was transferred to temporary shelters in Lodz and DP camps in Germany after the Holocaust. In postwar Germany, Vilna Yiddish culture started to deteriorate as its leaders and organizers emigrated to different locations. In the meantime, Zionist Lithuanian Jews from the Kovno ghetto dominated the leadership of the Jewish administration in the American Zone; they favored emigration to Israel and encouraged the speaking of Hebrew as the language of their new motherland. After living temporarily in DP camps, Lithuanian Jews mostly emigrated to existing Lithuanian Jewish communities in Palestine/Israel or the USA. In the case of New York, they found Lithuanian Jews who had emigrated from Lithuania in the nineteenth century or during the interwar period and had already created a rich network of Lithuanian Jewish organizations. The destinies of those Jews who emigrated to Western Europe prior to the Second World War, and settled for instance in Paris—known in the interwar period as “Vilna on the Seine,” due to the immigration of many Lithuanian Jewish intellectuals—remains unknown.³³⁴ The new lives of Lithuanian Jews in Latin America, especially in Argentina, where Yiddish culture blossomed, also desperately need to be pieced together. Nevertheless, this chapter has endeavored to show how the roots of the transnational Holocaust memory were formed and fostered. In the following sections, many of these Jews will return to Lithuania, not only physically but also visually through filmmaking and other memory work commemorating the lives of their relatives and their communities that perished there during the Holocaust.

and largely ignored other Jewish communities, like those in the USA and other places around the world. As a result of the criticism, Kovner later redesigned this exhibition and opened a new wing of the museum.

³³² Ibidem, p. 271.

³³³ Ibidem, p. 336.

³³⁴ See also, FRIEDLANDER.

4 The Development of Holocaust Narratives: From National to Transnational Memories?

4.1 Holocaust Memories in Soviet Lithuania and Exile in the Postwar Years: Conflicting Narratives

4.1.1 The Jews and Holocaust Remembrance in Soviet Lithuania: “The Jewish Island” in the Soviet Union

Official Soviet discourse did not treat the Holocaust and fate of Jewish victims as a unique, distinct aspect of the Second World War, although it acknowledged that six million Jews had been killed. Most of those victims, however, were not identified as Jews but rather as “Soviet people.” The term “Holocaust” was not used in the Soviet Union—“the particular Jewish loss had no name” and only began to be used in most of the post-communist states in the 1990s.¹ The Yiddish press only used the Yiddish word *khurbn* (destruction).² In the Soviet Union, the Holocaust was seen as an integral part of all the mass killings which had taken place during the Second World War; many civilians had been murdered, including Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Romanians, and people of other ethnicities and nationalities.³ The Judaic studies scholar Olga Gershenson observes that “there was no consistent policy regarding the Holocaust, but the tendency was to silence any discussion of the matter.”⁴ Such Soviet politics of memory led to the universalization of the Holocaust “by subsuming it into the general Soviet tragedy, with Jews euphemistically labeled ‘peaceful Soviet citizens.’”⁵ Jewish studies scholar Zvi Gitelman, who researches Jewish identities in the post-communist states, notes that the Soviet regime viewed the Holocaust as “a natural consequence of racist fascism” and “the ultimate expression of capitalism,” which was explained by the theory of “scientific socialism.”⁶ In the Soviet culture of remembrance of the Second World War, selective forms of Holocaust memory emerged in which many people—“first and foremost, Jews”—were excluded from the memorialization.⁷

¹ GITELMAN, *Bitter Legacy*, p. 60.

² *Ibidem*.

³ IDEM, *History, Memory and Politics*, p. 26.

⁴ GERSHENSON, *The Missing Links*, p. 55.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ GITELMAN, *Bitter Legacy*, p. 18.

⁷ GERSHENSON, *The Missing Links*, p. 55.

There have been several explanations for this Soviet policy. Timothy Snyder claims that “the Holocaust complicated the Stalinist story of suffering of Soviet citizens as such and displaced Russians and Slavs as the most victimized of groups” and that “it was the communists and their loyal Slavic (and other) followers who were understood as both the victors and the victims of the Second World War.”⁸ Second, according to the historian Amir Weiner, the Soviet regime avoided positioning the memory of the Second World War around Jewish suffering; a focus on the Jewish history of the war would have undermined “the ethnonational hierarchy of heroism.”⁹ In other words, the aim of the Soviets was not to “Judaize” this myth, and, therefore, the Jewish memory had to be excluded.¹⁰ Harvey Asher has also argued that, “there was a concern that Judaizing the Holocaust might weaken the sense of unity and resolve that the invasion had created among the Soviet people.”¹¹ Thus, in most parts of the Soviet Union, there was no memorialization of the Holocaust, neither in museums nor in research.¹² Weiner states that the Jewish survivors had neither special status nor recognition and were politically invisible.¹³

Nevertheless, there were sharp contrasts in the treatment of the Holocaust within the Soviet Union. In Lithuania and the other two Baltic states, numerous works of popular non-fiction dealt with Holocaust memory, especially after the death of Stalin. Lithuanian Jewish writers who wrote about how they had survived the Holocaust were mildly censored but became popular throughout the Soviet Union and East Germany.¹⁴ Despite the publication of such books, however, Holocaust remembrance varied among different republics within the Soviet Union, and most Soviet citizens “hardly ever got a full picture of the extent of the annihilation of Jews by the Nazi regime of terror established in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.”¹⁵

“Nowhere are the inconsistencies of Soviet Holocaust policy more apparent,” claims the historian Asher, “than in the checkered history of the publication of *The Black Book*.”¹⁶ At the end of the war, the Soviet authorities were “on the verge of approving” the publication of *The Black Book*,¹⁷ which contained testimonies of victims, their relatives, bystanders, and perpetrators about the mass murder of Jews during the Second World War: “They are stories from Jews who lived in pits, in walled-off corners of apartments, in attics, in basement dugouts, unable to walk outside.”¹⁸ The famous Soviet Jewish journalists and writers Ilya Ehrenburg and Wassili Grossman recorded these memories, but the initial idea to publish this account about the atrocities against Jews on Soviet terrain had emerged in the USA. In late 1942, Albert Einstein, the Polish Jewish writer Shalom Asch, and other Jewish intellectuals sent a telegram to the newly

⁸ SNYDER, *Bloodlands*, p. 376.

⁹ WEINER, p. 222.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

¹¹ ASHER, p. 48.

¹² GERSHENSON, p. 3.

¹³ WEINER, p. 227.

¹⁴ Books by Grigorij Kanovič, Icchokas Meras, and Maša Rolnikaitė were also published in East Germany.

¹⁵ LÖWE, p. 33.

¹⁶ ASHER, p. 45.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ RUBENSTEIN, p. VII.

formed Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)¹⁹ and suggested a joint publication.²⁰ However, while they were discussing this publication, Ehrenburg was already collecting his accounts on Nazi crimes.²¹ The historian Shimon Redlich notices that “Ehrenburg conceived the idea of publishing evidence on Nazi crimes against the Jews concurrently with the emergence of similar plans within the JAFAC^[22].”²³

The Black Book was one of the JAC’s most important projects; its publication was planned in English in the USA, in Yiddish and Russian in the Soviet Union, and in Hebrew in Palestine. The Lithuanian part of *The Black Book* was prepared by the Yiddish poet Sutzkever—a partisan from the Vilna ghetto—together with Ilya Ehrenburg in a hotel in Moscow. Sutzkever and Ehrenburg “worked day and night” on the Lithuanian chapter²⁴ of *The Black Book*.²⁵ Later Sutzkever’s name was removed from the publication because he immigrated to Palestine in 1947.²⁶ However, in 1947, the head of the Soviet Department of Agitation and Propaganda, Georgy Alexandrov, ordered a halt in publication because he judged the book to be “inexpedient.”²⁷ The book supposedly presented “a distorted picture of the real character of fascism” because it suggested that “the Germans fought against the Soviets only in order to annihilate Jews.”²⁸ Soviet authorities were also upset that *The Black Book* had already been published in the USA without informing them first.²⁹ According to Asher, “the Soviets had no desire to raise Jewish consciousness, as the policy of recognizing their ‘specialness’ and some of the content of *The Black Book* had the potential to do.”³⁰ This negative position of the Soviet authorities towards the publication of *The Black Book* was followed by much harsher actions. In 1948, the JAC was liquidated. In Klier’s words, “all the assignments they

¹⁹ The JAC, established in February 1942, was one of the five anti-fascist committees (in addition to those for women, young people, scientists, and Slavs). The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, the famous actor and director of the Jewish theater in Moscow. Many well known figures joined the committee, including Jewish writers, poets, and even Soviet politicians of Jewish origin, for example, the wife of the Soviet foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, Polina Zhemchuzhina.

²⁰ ASHER, p. 45.

²¹ REDLICH, p. 97.

²² Another form of abbreviation for the JAC.

²³ REDLICH, p. 97.

²⁴ This chapter included accounts of the Vilna ghetto; A. Jeruschalmi’s diary of about the death forts and fighters in Kovno; the memories of Elena Kutorgienë-Buivydaite; and a report on the destiny of Jews in Telšiai. See also, GROSSMAN.

²⁵ LUSTIGER, pp. 11-13.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ ALTMAN, p. XXXIII. This book remained unpublished for many years. Nevertheless, Ehrenburg collected some of the material in the form of letters and donated it to the Jewish State Museum of Lithuania in Vilnius. Later it was transferred to the Yad Vashem. In the 1960s, Ehrenburg again tried to publish the book, but he was unsuccessful. It was finally published in 1980 in the Yad Vashem, however, without the section on Lithuania, because it had reached Yad Vashem in 1946 without this chapter. The first complete edition in Russian was published in Lithuania in 1993 and in Germany in 1995. *The Unknown Black Book* was also published in Moscow in 1993. That edition—prepared by the Yad Vashem—includes the material which was initially rejected because of censorship. For further discussion on this issue, see ALTMAN, p. XXXVI-XXXVII.

²⁸ ARAD, Holocaust, p. 543.

²⁹ ALTMAN, p. XXXII.

³⁰ ASHER, p. 48.

had been ordered to perform were now transformed into criminal acts,” and the JAC was now depicted as “an anti-Soviet criminal organization.”³¹ The JAC members were portrayed as “Jewish bourgeois nationalists” and were arrested in 1948; after a series of trials, they were executed in 1952.³² Klier claims that, with this action, “the Soviet secret police completed the task that the Nazis had begun—the destruction of Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe.”³³ Therefore, Stalin’s antisemitism meant that the years from 1948 to 1953 are often identified as “the black years” for the Soviet Jewry.³⁴

After Stalin’s death, antisemitism hardly disappeared. The best example of Soviet antagonism towards the Jews is the debate over the Babi Yar memorial in Ukraine, where both Jews and non-Jews were executed. Babi Yar was not only the first atrocity mentioned in *The Black Book* but had also become a central place of memorialization for Soviet Jews and appeared in Yiddish poems and novels.³⁵ In the late 1950s, Soviet authorities rejected the idea of a monument; when one was finally built in 1976, it made no reference to the Jews.³⁶ As Klier notices, the memorial simply “transformed the 34,000 Jewish victims into ‘citizens of the city.’”³⁷ During the 1970s, an anti-Zionist campaign began in newspapers and publications; the Soviet regime equated fascism with Zionism, which was attributed the characteristics of Nazism.³⁸ Zionists were blamed for forming a “united anti-Soviet front of Hitlerism ... [and] West European and American capitalism at the end of World War II.”³⁹

The situation of the Lithuanian Jews and Holocaust remembrance in Soviet Lithuania resembled the memory context in the Soviet Union, nevertheless, as will be shown, there are some factors that made Lithuania a different space for Jewish memorialization. The political situation for Jews in Soviet Lithuania can be categorized as follows:

- (1) The period after the war until 1948 was marked by the revival of the Jewish community and positive relations with the Soviet regime.⁴⁰
- (2) During the period of Stalinist repression (1948–1953), Jewish institutions were closed, and the community was persecuted.
- (3) The post-Stalinist period (1953–1989) witnessed a reduction in repression, but antisemitism was still present. Lithuanian Jews nevertheless sought to foster their culture and nourish their community life, at times clandestinely.⁴¹

From the end of the war until 1948, Lithuanian Jews tried to recover from the Holocaust and recreate their community and institutions. In 1945, Jews started postwar exhumations. In Kovno, Lithuanian Jews were too weak to conduct exhumations on their own; the Soviet regime supported them by sending German prisoners of war to help uncover

³¹ KLIER, pp. 285-286.

³² Ibidem, p. 286.

³³ Ibidem, p. 287.

³⁴ ARAD, Holocaust, p. 544.

³⁵ KLIER, p. 289.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 292.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ GITELMAN, Bitter Legacy, p. 29.

³⁹ Ibidem. Gitelman quotes here some anti-Zionist works.

⁴⁰ BARNAJUS, Žydai sovietinėje Lietuvoje. Atgimimas, p. 485.

⁴¹ For instance, in the underground Yiddish newspapers or illegal religious organizations.

dead bodies. The historian and Lithuanian Jewish activist Solomon Atamukas notes a sort of morbid irony for both the Lithuanian Jews and the former Nazi Germans, who had participated in their killing and now had to exhume the bodies.⁴² The recovered corpses were buried in Lithuanian cemeteries according to Jewish customs. In 1945, a memorial in Ponary was also built to commemorate the Jewish victims killed during the Second World War in Lithuania. It is important to note that, at that time, Holocaust memorials were mainly funded by Lithuanian Jews and Lithuanian Jewish communities from the USA and South Africa. The inscriptions on these gravestones and monuments were multilingual in Lithuanian, Russian, Yiddish, and other languages, and the victims were identified as Jews.⁴³ Annual ceremonies of remembrance in Ponary, the Ninth Fort, and other memorial places were initiated.

In 1944, Jews were also allowed to open the State Jewish Museum in Vilna; however, the reestablishment of the YIVO, the Jewish publishing house, and the Jewish newspapers was prohibited.⁴⁴ Even so, approximately sixty literature evenings and concerts involving Lithuanian Jewish writers took place between 1945 and 1948.⁴⁵ The Lithuanian Jewish poets and partisan fighters Kovner and Sutzkever, with the help of other Lithuanian Jews, opened primary schools for Jewish children in Vilna and Kovno.⁴⁶ Jewish religious life was also revived; a new Synagogue in Vilna was established in 1945. Lithuanian Jews testified during the Nuremberg Trials. The Yiddish poet Sutzkever, for instance, flew to Moscow⁴⁷, where he in 1946 testified, on behalf of the Soviet prosecution at the Nuremberg trials,⁴⁸ against Franz Murer,⁴⁹ who had murdered his mother and son.

Despite the positive postwar developments for the Jewish community in Soviet Lithuania, antisemitic violence and rhetoric did not disappear, especially in provincial areas. Some Lithuanians opposed the return of the Jews to their homes, going as far as to blow up their houses in villages or even execute them. The Lithuanian Jew Samuelis Feifertas, for instance, who devoted his life to searching for lost Jewish children, was killed in 1948 in Rietavas.⁵⁰

The Soviet authorities also created an Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the German Fascists Invaders and their Accomplices.⁵¹ However, their findings were not published until much later, in 1957.⁵²

⁴² ATAMUKAS, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, p. 304.

⁴³ Atamukas reports, however, that correspondence with state officials shows that the authorities sought to mark their graves as victims of the fascist regime rather than identifying these individuals as Jews. See more in: *ibidem*, p. 305.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 306.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 307. At that time, Jewish writers had their own section in the association of the Lithuanian writers.

⁴⁶ BARNAJUS, *Žydai sovietinėje Lietuvoje. Atgimimas*, p. 486.

⁴⁷ This flight was arranged by one of the leaders of the communist regime in Lithuania, Justas Paleckis.

⁴⁸ YAD VASHEM MUSEUM, Sutzkever, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Franz Murer, an Austrian SS officer, was known as the “butcher” from Vilnius. He organized and ruled the Vilna ghetto before Bruno Kittel.

⁵⁰ BARNAJUS, *Žydai sovietinėje Lietuvoje. Atgimimas*, p. 487.

⁵¹ EIDINTAS, p. 349.

⁵² See, *Pranešimas apie hitlerinių grobikų nusikaltimus Lietuvos Tarybų Socialistinėje Respublikoje* [Report on the Crimes of the Hitlerite Invaders in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic], Vilnius 1957.

One of the members of the commission was Antanas Sniečkus, who was also the first secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party. It is interesting to observe that Sniečkus had adopted a Lithuanian Jewish boy after the war named Aleksandras Štromas, who later became one of the most important Lithuanian Jewish philosophers in exile.⁵³ In addition, Sniečkus' wife, Mira Bordonaitė, was Jewish—and also a convinced communist who had served several prison sentences in the interwar period. The Soviet commission on the Holocaust collected evidences of war crimes and prepared a list of collaborators which included almost a thousand names.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Jewish victims were not identified separately.

In the Soviet Union, the penalty for the murder of “Soviet citizens,” including Jews, was usually capital punishment or long-term sentences. Between 1944 and 1947, 257 individuals were convicted of Holocaust-related crimes and sentenced to death; in the 1950s, among the sentenced persons were also some members of the Vilna *Sonderkommando*, who had been responsible for many deaths during the Holocaust.⁵⁵ It is estimated that from 1965 until 1978 in Soviet Lithuania some people earlier convicted of murdering Jews “were rearrested for the second time and sent to penal labor camps or sentenced to death by shooting.”⁵⁶ It could be explained by the fact that in the 1960s the Soviet authorities ordered the KGB to review all old or unfinished judicial cases. After all, the exact numbers of how many people were punished in relation to the crimes of the Holocaust in Soviet Lithuania from 1944 to 1989 remains unknown. The Lithuanian historian and journalist Rimgaudas Geleževičius calculates that during the period of Soviet Lithuania's existence there were around 219 people who were executed as *žydšaudžiai*⁵⁷, namely as the murderers of Jews.⁵⁸

However, between 1948 and 1953, attitudes towards the Jews changed radically. Stalin's antisemitic campaign portrayed Jews as “rootless cosmopolitans;”⁵⁹ here, he referred mostly to Jewish intellectuals who lacked enthusiasm for communist ideals. This campaign also affected the Lithuanian Jewish community. The memorial built in Ponary was destroyed in 1952; Jews were not identified as victims of the Holocaust, the victims now were the Soviet (*tarybiniai*) people. The Yiddish inscriptions disappeared from the monuments. Jewish educational and cultural institutions disappeared, Jewish street names were changed, and the Jewish cemeteries in Užupis were destroyed. By 1953, all the national Jewish institutions except for two synagogues had been forcibly closed.⁶⁰ As Samuelis Barnajus writes, the regime officially justified the closure of the cultural and religious institutions with claims that the Lithuanian Jews' interest in

⁵³ Sniečkus was befriended with Štromas's family before the war. However, after Stalin's death, their paths diverged: Štromas radically changed his attitude towards the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism. He joined the movement of political dissent and left Soviet Lithuania, moving first to the United Kingdom and later to the USA. See more in: LEONIDAS DONSKIS (ed.): XX a. žmogus: Aleksandro Štromo portretai [The Man of the XXth Century: The Portraits of Aleksandras Štromas], Vilnius 2008.

⁵⁴ EIDINTAS, p. 350.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 353.

⁵⁶ VINOKURAS, p. 68.

⁵⁷ “Žydšaudys” is a Lithuanian word meaning “Jew shooter.”

⁵⁸ GELEŽEVIČIUS, *Holokausto teisingumas*, p. 39.

⁵⁹ LAQUEUR, p. 15.

⁶⁰ BARNAJUS, *Žydai sovietinėje Lietuvoje. Atgimimas*, p. 488.

participating in Jewish community life had decreased, which in reality was not true.⁶¹ Moreover, some part of Lithuanian society welcomed the Soviet regime's antisemitism. They not only encouraged the defamation of Jews but also tried to get rid of Jewish neighborhoods entirely and even suggested evicting them from Lithuania.⁶²

The situation changed again after Stalin died; once again, Jews were allowed to foster their culture. Nevertheless, there was no public criticism or condemnation of Stalin's antisemitic policies. Soviet textbooks still ignored the long history of Jews in Lithuania, and the newspaper *Sovetskaja Litva* [Soviet Lithuania] continued publishing antisemitic articles. Therefore, it is not surprising that the first wave of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union to Israel started in Soviet Lithuania in the 1950s. This emigration was evoked by a new wave of antisemitism in the Soviet Union. Between 1950 and 1953, articles printed in national media in Lithuania blamed Lithuanian Jews for the atrocities committed during the first Soviet occupation and encouraged removing Jews from important public positions, such as teachers at schools.⁶³ As a result of such propaganda, emigration increasingly appealed to Lithuanian Jews in the 1950s, but this social atmosphere also encouraged Jews from other Soviet republics to come to Soviet Lithuania.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Atamukas contends that the Lithuanian Jewish community during the period of de-Stalinization represented a special case. According to him, the Soviet regime did not manage to restrict the activities of the Lithuanian Jewish community, unlike in other Soviet states, where these restrictions were initiated immediately.⁶⁵ Jewish literary works were published in Soviet Lithuania, for instance; the books of the Jewish writers Icchokas Meras⁶⁶ and Grigorij Kanovič,⁶⁷ which described Jewish suffering during the war, became popular in Soviet Lithuania and were widely read.⁶⁸ The autobiography of the Vilna ghetto prisoner Maša Rolnikaitė, entitled *Turiu papasakoti* [I Must Tell],⁶⁹ was published in Soviet Lithuania in 1963, receiving national and international acclaim. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Soviet authorities ideologized this book and used it to attack Zionists.⁷⁰ According to the historian Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, Rolnikaitė's book sparked the defamation of Zionist leaders, because it blamed them for collaborating with the Nazis in the ghettos and beyond.⁷¹ In 1967, the

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ TATARŪNAS, Lietuvos žydų nacionalinis judėjimas, pp. 117-129.

⁶⁴ It was easier for Soviet Jews to leave the Soviet Union through Soviet Lithuania.

⁶⁵ ATAMUKAS, Lietuvos žydų kelias, p. 322.

⁶⁶ For more on Meras and his publications, see, Icchokas Meras, Books from Lithuania, URL: <http://www.booksfromlithuania.lt/lt/node/162> (2014-12-20).

⁶⁷ His most important novels include: *I Gaze at the Stars* (1959); *Private Life* (1967); the *Candles in the Wind* trilogy—*Birds over the Cemetery* (1974), *Bless Both the Leaves and the Fire* (1977), and *Lullaby for a Snowman* (1979)—set in the vanished world of the East European Jewry and the Holocaust during the years 1937–1943; and *There's No Heaven for Slaves* (1985).

⁶⁸ Some of Kanovič's books sold nearly three hundred thousand copies in the Soviet Union. See more in: DIANA ROSOCHAVTSKAJA: Grigorijus Kanovičius. Mes visi esame išėiviai iš miestelio, in: bernardinai. It from 2014-06-16, URL: <http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2014-06-16-grigorijus-kanovicus-mes-visi-esam-iseiviai-is-miestelio/118848/comments> (2014-11-20).

⁶⁹ ROLNIKAITĖ.

⁷⁰ LÖWE, p. 48.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

collection of memoirs *Ir be ginklo kariai* [Soldiers without Weapons], was published by the Lithuanian journalist Sofija Binkienė, the widow of a famous Lithuanian poet.⁷² This work—often named as one of the most valuable books on the Holocaust published in Soviet times⁷³—this edited volume tells about the rescue of the Jews during the Nazi occupation in Lithuania. It was one of the first books in the entire Soviet Union on the rescue of Jews and their fate after the Holocaust.⁷⁴

In the 1970s and 1980s, anti-Zionist discourse became widespread in Soviet Lithuania. In 1980, Lithuanian Jewish journalist and chief editor of the magazine *Komunistas* [The Communist] Genrikas Zimanas published a book entitled *Sionizmas: ideologija ir praktika* [Zionism: Ideology and Practice], criticizing Zionists for their passivity during the war.⁷⁵ Zimanas claimed that Zionists did not encourage Jews to fight against the Nazis.⁷⁶ He also condemned them for their collaboration with the Nazis in the Lithuanian ghettos.⁷⁷ According to Löwe, such anti-Zionist campaigns were often connected with “the Soviet Union’s rather one-sided support of the Palestinians and Arabs” and with “deep-seated antisemitism,” which became widespread again “by the revival of a strong Jewish self-consciousness” in the 1970s.⁷⁸

In this period, Jews from Soviet Lithuania also started to re-establish relations with their relatives abroad, hoping for both moral and financial support.⁷⁹ Emigration became one of the most important goals of many Lithuanian Jews. From 1971 to 1976, Soviet Lithuania became the “corridor” for the Soviet Jews who came to Lithuania with the aim of leaving the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ The authorities of the Soviet Union decided to allow the emigration of the Lithuanian Jews from Soviet Lithuania to Israel. As a result, Soviet Lithuania became the country with the highest number of permissions issued for emigration.⁸¹

The historian Barnajus notes that the Lithuanian Jewish community during the Soviet times avoided complete Sovietization, different from other republics of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the leaders of the Jewish community supported the Lithuanian wish for independence by supporting its independence movement during the *perestroika* period.⁸² Nevertheless, one of the biggest losses for the Jewish community, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, was the new wave of Jewish emigration which started again in 1987 during the years of *perestroika*, and which included the most respected members of their community.⁸³

⁷² Sofija Binkienė and her husband, the renowned Lithuanian writer Kazys Binkis, also saved Jews.

⁷³ BINKIENĖ.

⁷⁴ ZINGERIS, p. 9.

⁷⁵ ZIMANAS, p. 23. See also GENRIKAS ZIMANAS: *Sionizmas imperializmo ginklas* [Zionism—Weapon of Imperialism], Vilnius 1971.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 26-27.

⁷⁸ LÖWE, p. 52.

⁷⁹ TATARŪNAS, *Kova su sionizmu*.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² BARNAJUS, *Žydai sovietinėje Lietuvoje*, p. 117.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

The Medialization of the Mass Murder of Jews in Soviet Lithuania

In Soviet Lithuania, the memorialization of the Second World War, including the Holocaust, was represented not only through written historical works (memoirs) but also widely medialized. The dominant narrative was a male story of resistance and survival. The best example of this masculinized narrative is the story of the partisans from the Kovno ghetto and the prisoners of the Ninth Fort, who were the main protagonists of the Soviet memorialization of bravery during the Second World War. This narrative was not only channeled through media but also institutionalized: In 1958, the Soviet regime created an official memorial and museum in Kaunas' Ninth Fort, where around fifty thousand people of different nationalities, including thirty thousand Jews, prisoners of the Kovno ghetto, and people from other places in Lithuania and abroad were murdered between 1941 and 1944. The museum added an exhibition about the Nazi occupation and the crimes of the Hitler regime in 1959,⁸⁴ and Soviet officials began investigating the mass murders in this area in 1960. The mass executions of the prisoners from the Kovno ghetto and other prisoners of war became an important element of the mainstream Soviet narrative about the Nazi German regime. This narrative was marked, however, by both ideological and gendered constructions of memory, for the Soviet heroes and the victims of the Ninth Fort were usually depicted as a closed community of men (fig. 1).

This central episode in this story involved the legendary escape from the Ninth Fort on 25 December 1943, when sixty-four prisoners, mostly Jews, escaped from the cellar in which they had been imprisoned. These prisoners had been brought to the Ninth Fort as a labor squad to exhume and cremate the bodies of murder victims as Soviet forces advanced. The prisoners managed to drill through the metal doors, pass through a tunnel, and build ladders to climb over the high wall of the fortress. They escaped while the security guards were celebrating Christmas Eve. Most of the escapees fled to the forest and joined the partisans; others were taken in by local Lithuanians. One of the main leaders and organizers of this escape was the Lithuanian Jewish partisan Alex Faitelson. However, the escape was noticed by the guards, and "thirty-two escapees were quickly rounded up," while other eight "were caught on their way to the ghetto."⁸⁵

It is interesting to observe that this male perspective was a common tendency in the historical narrative of the Second World War in the Soviet Union. Irina Gradinari, who has analyzed Soviet war films with regard to gender, has claimed that "war has no female face" in the Soviet Union.⁸⁶ According to her, women, because they are usually shown "as mothers, sisters, daughters, wives or lovers of the soldiers" and as "the objects of love and sexuality" during their wartime duties, are defined first through the private and then through the social dimension.⁸⁷ They are portrayed through "female clichés," meaning that they "collect flowers, do their hair, dance, change their clothes,

⁸⁴ KAUNAS NINTH FORT MUSEUM.

⁸⁵ GILBERT, *The Holocaust*, p. 60. This Soviet narrative and the male imaginary of the resistance has been reproduced in the following publications: KURGANOVAS; ELINAS-EGLINIS; ELINAS-EGLINIS/GELPERNAS (which also includes visual imagery of some female partisans).

⁸⁶ GRADINARI, *Der Krieg hat kein weibliches Gesicht*, pp. 337-356.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 343-344.



Fig. 1:
[Former prisoners of the Ninth Fort explain the escape]. Photograph. 1959. MEJERIS ELINAS-EGLINIS: *Mirties fortuose* [In the Forts of Death], Vilnius 1966, courtesy to the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

[... and] speak about men and children.”⁸⁸ Thus, as Gradinari observes, even though female combatants participated in the war, they are usually used in film solely to construct the “identity of masculinity” and its “remasculinization” after the war.⁸⁹ It is thus not surprising that in Soviet Lithuania the female partisan fighters did not have a chance to express their female narrative of the war and were sacrificed to masculinize the war’s narrative.⁹⁰

However, the Soviet media not only imposed such gendered clichés on the representation of the war but went a step further by using misleading cinematic representations to falsify historical events. Therefore, an important feature of Soviet medialization of the Nazi occupation was the anonymization of victims by portraying victims without ethnicity. The Jews were simply described as “peaceful Soviet citizens” who perished during the war. An exception, as mentioned before, was only made during the first postwar years, when Jews were identified as victims of the war crimes. After 1948, all elements explicitly memorializing Jewish victimhood were removed and Jewish victims were de-ethnicized.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, p. 344.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 346.

⁹⁰ This discussion will be considered in section 5.3.2.

The example of such cinematic falsification of Holocaust memory was also visible in Soviet Lithuanian films, which very clearly referenced the Holocaust. The 1962 film *Žingsniai naktį* [Footsteps in the Night], directed by Raimondas Vabalas, who would become one of Lithuania's most influential film directors, narrates the story of the prisoners' escape from the concentration camp in the Ninth Fort near Kovno on Christmas Eve in 1943. The Ninth Fort is a part of Kaunas fortress, and during Nazi occupation was a site where Jews, captured Soviet soldiers, and others were executed. Most of those who perished in the Ninth Fort were Jews—almost ten thousand of them were taken from the Kovno ghetto and murdered here, but the film does not mention these facts. In reality, all the prisoners who escaped were Jews, whereas the film portrays only one of the escapees as a Jew; the others are portrayed as komsomolists, also known as the communist youth. Thus, as Lukasz Hirszowicz observes, although the Soviet films “portray the Holocaust as a sign of the times,” they still “avoid emphasizing it.”⁹¹

The screenplay for the film was written by the poet and writer Vladas Mozūriūnas and was imposed by the Soviet authorities on Vabalas as a graduation project “with the requisite to turn Jews into ‘Young Communist League fighters from Kaunas.’”⁹² The main character of this film was named Alex after the real-life protagonist of the escape, Alex Faitelson. Gradinari notes that in the 1960s quite often in the Soviet films the ethnicity of Jewish figures is evident only in their names, but that the Jewish figure “plays no specific role for the filmic narration and for the expression of Jewish identity.”⁹³ The main idea of Vabalas's film was to show Soviet youth the fighting spirit of the komsomolists against the Nazi Germans. Antanas Raguotis, who was a member of the Council of Ministers of Soviet Lithuania from 1962 to 1968, predicted that “this film will play a significant societal role, because [Soviet Lithuanian] youth is well informed about the Ninth Fort, and will watch it with interest.”⁹⁴ Therefore, it is no surprise that the Soviet leadership in Moscow received the film very well, too.⁹⁵

Audiences in Lithuania were nevertheless less enthusiastic about the film than the Soviet authorities expected, most likely due to the film's tragic and unhappy ending, in which what was actually a heroic escape is presented as unsuccessful.⁹⁶ In a retrospective interview after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the director Vabalas stated that he was very dissatisfied with Mozūriūnas's screenplay, especially with its representation of prisoners as an unknown mass of people rather than as individual characters and with the erasure of the Jewishness of the escapees.⁹⁷ Vabalas and his colleagues realized even as they were filming that the shooting scenes between the communists and Nazis in the city of Kaunas that had to be portrayed in the first part of the film were irrelevant, for they did not reflect what had really happened in the Ninth Fort.⁹⁸ He could not, how-

⁹¹ HIRSZOWICZ, p. 57.

⁹² VALIŪNAITĖ.

⁹³ GRADINARI, *Der glatte Raum der Revolution*, p. 80.

⁹⁴ Cited from MIKONIS-RAILIENĖ/KAMINSKAITĖ-JANČORIENĖ, p. 207.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ BAIKŠTYTĖ.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

ever, confront the prescribed scenario or change its ideological content.⁹⁹ Therefore, in the second part of his film, he focused more on the portraits of the prisoners of the Ninth Fort and discussed the condition of a human being in captivity.¹⁰⁰ He admitted that he had later apologized to members of the Lithuanian Jewish community for having represented the escape this way and that he still regretted not having been able to speak directly about the executions of Lithuanian Jews in the Ninth Fort.¹⁰¹

The Lithuanian film critic Mantė Valiūnaitė claims that Vabalas' film, despite of all ideological agenda, was not “naked propaganda” and that the filmmaker “managed to convert the project into his first *auteur* film,” presenting the Nazi occupation in his own distinct cinematic style.¹⁰² For instance, Vabalas at least sought to have several Jewish actors on his movie set, and he managed to cast two Jewish actors in his film, Giršas Šarfšteinas and Julijus Kacas, who were famous artists in the Jewish folk theater in Vilnius. With this inclusion of Jewish actors, Vabalas at least managed to add specifically Jewish traces to the story of the escape from the Ninth Fort.

Similarly, another film which dealt with the mass murder of Jews is *Ave, vita!* (1969), written by the Lithuanian Jewish writer Grigorij Kanovič and directed by Almantas Grikevičius. This film presents heroes who opposed the Nazi regime, but, once again these heroes lack a Jewish background. According to Grikevičius, one scene in this film, namely the column of people included Aesopian language which remained unnoticed by censors in Moscow.¹⁰³ Grikevičius claims that Kanovič's intention in this scene was to allude to Jews going to their death through this column of people.¹⁰⁴ In 1987, Vytautas Žalakevičius presented *Savaitgalis pragare* [Weekend in Hell], another film related to this topic, which tells about life in a Nazi concentration camp. However, even though this film did not refer to Germans as fascists, as was the norm in the Soviet discourse, it tells the story of how Russian and Lithuanian prisoners escaped; Jews do not appear as victims in the film.¹⁰⁵ As these examples have shown, the Soviet media sought to propagate the idea that the main victims of the Nazi regime were not Jews but communists and komsomolists.

All the films which tried to avoid such anonymous representation of Jews turned mostly, in the words of Olga Gershenson, to “phantoms.”¹⁰⁶ These films¹⁰⁷ existed only on archival shelves and were sometimes distributed in illegal copies; in another sense, however, they did not exist—“they had no physical presence,” since they were not distributed on DVDs or shown at festivals or in movie theaters when they were released.¹⁰⁸ Some of them never got past the screenplay phase and never passed the Soviet censorship. One of the best examples is the screenplay *Dievas su mumis* [God Be with Us],

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ MIKONIS-RAILIENĖ/KAMINSKAITĖ-JANČORIENĖ, p. 208.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² Italics in original. VALIŪNAITĖ.

¹⁰³ ŠVEDAS/KAMINSKAITĖ-JANČORIENĖ, p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ MACAITIS.

¹⁰⁶ GERSHENSON, *The Phantom Holocaust*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ According to Gershenson, twenty films about the historical events of the Holocaust were produced in the Soviet Union.

¹⁰⁸ GERSHENSON, *The Phantom Holocaust*, p. 80.

written by Žalakevičius and Kanovič, which tells the story of a Catholic priest saving a Jewish boy; this screenplay was rejected by the Ministry of Culture in Moscow in 1963.¹⁰⁹ The Soviet censors did not officially question the Jewish topic but were disturbed by the attention to the church and wanted the film to reveal “the moral bankruptcy of the church”¹¹⁰ more. In fact, while Soviet film studios were never officially issued any directives ordering them to avoid the issue of the Holocaust, they implicitly understood that they were “to avoid any on-the-record discussion of Jewish topics, why effectively trying to suppress it.”¹¹¹ *Dievas su mumis* could have become the first Soviet Holocaust film since *The Unvanquished*,¹¹² directed by Mark Donskoy in 1945.¹¹³ It was no accident that the screenplay was written in Lithuania; as Gershenson observes, the “Baltic republics were part of the Soviet Union, they had a more Western orientation, politically and culturally, so they could discuss the Holocaust there before it was possible in Moscow.”¹¹⁴ After it was rejected, the screenplay was published in the Lithuanian literary journal *Pergalė* [Victory], but it “was essentially buried, made inaccessible to a wider readership.”¹¹⁵

Historians Solomon Atamukas and Samuelis Barnajus, the two foremost experts on Jewish life in Soviet Lithuania, have both noted that the Soviet Lithuanian government was relatively liberal towards the Jews compared to the authorities in other Soviet republics, and Lithuania was seen as “an island” where Jews could foster their cultural heritage.¹¹⁶ According to Atamukas, there are several reasons why Lithuanian Jews enjoyed this relative privilege: First, Jewish national consciousness in Lithuania had traditionally been high.¹¹⁷ Second, as both Barnajus and Atamukas acknowledge, in Lithuania, unlike in other Soviet states including Latvia and Estonia, many of leading communist officials were Lithuanian natives. Some of these politicians had strong ties to the Jews, having spent years together in prison or fought side-by-side against the Nazi Germans.¹¹⁸ Justas Paleckis, the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR until 1967,¹¹⁹ was friends with Avrom Sutzkever.¹²⁰ Therefore, these historians argue, these communist officials were more likely to confront the antisemitic policies coming from Moscow. Moreover, the Soviet regime promoted Vilna as a representative city for Jewish culture and heritage in order to show the world that Jewish culture was also blossoming in the Soviet Union.¹²¹ The Soviet news agency

¹⁰⁹ HIRSZOWICZ, p. 57.

¹¹⁰ GERSHENSON, *The Phantom Holocaust*, p. 79.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹² It is the first Soviet film on the Holocaust to portray the mass executions of Soviet Jews even before the death camps were established. The execution scenes were filmed in Babi Yar in Kiev, which symbolized the Holocaust in the Soviet imagery. The film starred the famous Soviet-Yiddish actor Veniamin Zuskin.

¹¹³ GERSHENSON, *The Phantom Holocaust*, p. 78.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

¹¹⁶ BARNAJUS, *Žydai sovietinėje Lietuvoje*, p. 115.

¹¹⁷ ATAMUKAS, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, p. 321.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁹ The Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.

¹²⁰ SUTZKEVER, p. 37.

¹²¹ ATAMUKAS, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, p. 322.

used to issue international reports on the cultural activities of the Vilna Jews.¹²² The historian Aurimas Švedas has a different view of this situation. He agrees that antisemitism in Soviet Lithuania was less intense than in other parts of the Soviet Union, but argues that this difference was not the result of Antanas Sniečkus's politics or the "soft" position of the Lithuanian Communist Party. Instead Švedas attributes it to the fact that so few Lithuanian Jews had survived the Holocaust, meaning that the main object of Soviet antisemitism had simply perished.¹²³

4.1.2 Emergence of the Holocaust Debates in the Lithuanian Exile Media: Memory Actors, Conflicts, and the American Context

The first extensive debates on the Holocaust emerged within the Lithuanian exile community in America in the mid-1970s.¹²⁴ The exile media¹²⁵ became the main arena for dredging up past conflicts. This resulted in numerous polemic publications written by renowned Lithuanian-American journalists, scholars, and writers. The complexity of these debates, their actors, and the context which enabled the emergence of these historical conflicts is thus worth studying more closely.

Memory Actors and Conflicts in the Exile Media: Liberals vs. Nationalists

At the end of the Second World War, Lithuanian political refugees and exiles fled from the communist regime to the West. DP camps served as temporary shelters before they moved to the USA, Canada, Australia, and other countries. Around thirty thousand of these displaced persons landed in the USA, half of whom settled in Chicago.¹²⁶ As the Lithuanian social anthropologist Vytis Čiubrinskas notes, their image of the homeland was constructed from a refugee's perspective; they saw themselves as victims and missionaries, who needed to help regain the nation and retain its culture.¹²⁷ Moreover, it is important to note that their experience in the DP camps became "a resource of social memory for the later generations"¹²⁸ and they saw themselves as "the firmest bearers of Lithuanian nationalism in the whole Lithuanian diaspora."¹²⁹

These exiled individuals were mostly middle- and upper-class Lithuanians, some of whom had belonged to the country's political and cultural elite before the war. Among them were also military officers: Stasys Raštikis, who had been the Minister of Defense in the Lithuanian provisional government, settled in Los Angeles; Kazys Škirpa, a Lithuanian military officer and diplomat, went to live in Washington, D.C. and likewise Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis, who served as the acting prime minister of the

¹²² Ibidem.

¹²³ ŠVEDAS, Irena Veisaitė, p. 232.

¹²⁴ Mostly in the USA, but also in some Lithuanian-Canadian newspapers.

¹²⁵ Lithuanian exile media refers to the media of the Lithuanian-Americans who fled during or after the Second World War and emigrated to the USA or Canada. Most of the journalists and writers in this media were non-Jewish Lithuanians, with several exceptions such as Aleksandras Štromas.

¹²⁶ ČIUBRINSKAS, Transatlantic Migration, p. 89.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, p. 90.

¹²⁸ IDEM, Diaspora as a Resource, p. 109.

¹²⁹ IDEM, Transnational Identity, p. 63.

Lithuanian provisional government from 23 June 1941 to 5 August 1941, emigrated in 1948 to the United States, and started to work under the name of Juozas Brazaitis in the Catholic newspaper *Darbininkas* [The Worker], based in New York. The actions of these military officers during the Nazi occupation were (and remain) very controversial; they were often accused of having collaborated with Nazi Germany. American authorities, for example, did not remove Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis, one of Lithuania's most respected politicians during the Second World War, from the list of alleged Nazi war criminals until 1975, and the leader of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel, Efraim Zuroff, maintains his claim that the Americans simply did not have enough data to prove the former prime ministers's Nazi connections.¹³⁰

However, Lithuanian exiles in the USA were never a monolithic body, and tensions started to emerge between diverse ideological camps. Generally speaking, there are distinct groups among these exiles, namely the conservatives—characterized by strong nationalist and religious identities—and the liberals.¹³¹ This distinction is widely acknowledged, not only among Lithuanian historians but also among intellectuals in exile. In 1953, the Lithuanian émigré, pedagogue, and journalist Kazys Mockus wrote in the exile newspaper *Aidai* [Echoes] that Lithuanian emigrants had also brought their political and ideological differences with them from their homeland.¹³² These differences had started to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century, the Lithuanian historians claimed, and become especially evident during the years of the anti-Nazi resistance.¹³³ The media thus became one of the most important tools for institutionalizing and dispersing the ideas of these different groups within the Lithuanian exiles. Catholic and nationalist values were preserved by the daily newspaper *Draugas* [Friend] in Chicago and the Lithuanian weekly *Tėviškės Žiburiai*, which was published in Canada and widely read in the USA.¹³⁴ These two newspapers played an important role in debates and conflicts with the liberal media over the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania.

The liberals in the Lithuanian exile were seen for long time as “the others.” They were outnumbered by the conservative Lithuanian nationalists, and the liberals' activities in exile were more cultural than political.¹³⁵ They became organized in the USA only in the late 1970s.¹³⁶ In Chicago, liberals started publishing the journal *Metmenys*, which Lithuanian intellectuals in Soviet Lithuania also read.¹³⁷ The liberal wing, unlike the hard-line conservatives, intentionally established and maintained relations with organizations in Soviet Lithuania. The Soviet regime hoped that such connections with exiled Lithuanians could serve as a conduit for spreading their ideas among Lithuanian intellectuals abroad. The liberals responded positively to such overtures and established

¹³⁰ VILNEWS.

¹³¹ DAPKUTĖ/BUČINSKYTĖ, p. 23.

¹³² MOCKUS, p. 309.

¹³³ DAPKUTĖ/BUČINSKYTĖ, p. 23.

¹³⁴ *Draugas* has been published since 1905 and *Tėviškės Žiburiai* since 1949.

¹³⁵ DAPKUTĖ/BUČINSKYTĖ, p. 28.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*. One of the strongest Lithuanian liberal organizations in the USA was Santara-Šviesa, officially established in 1957. It was made of two separate organizations: Šviesa was created in 1946 in Germany. Santara was founded in the USA in 1954. It was mostly the organization of the Lithuanian academic youth.

¹³⁷ VĒLAVIČIENĖ, pp. 37-56.

relations with Soviet writers and intelligentsia beginning in 1966.¹³⁸ In this manner, the exiled Lithuanians tried to foster critical thinking in Soviet Lithuania, for example, by smuggling Western literature including their journal *Metmenys* into the country. The conservative wing of exiles viewed such relationships as a betrayal of Lithuanians and as an obstacle to Lithuanian independence.

In 1968, the liberals started to publish the monthly newspaper *Akiračiai*,¹³⁹ which they described as “the newspaper of an open word”—i.e., open for divergent ideologies and opinions. This newspaper addressed the most controversial topics, including the Holocaust, and encouraged an end of conservative thinking. The newspaper employed very different personalities, for instance, both the Lithuanian historian Vincas Trumpa and the journalists and “softer” nationalists (*tautininkai*) Bronys Raila and Vincas Rastenis. In addition, members of the younger Lithuanian-American generation, including the journalists Liūtas Mockūnas and Vytautas Rekašius and the philosopher Vytautas Kavolis, voiced their opinions in this newspaper.¹⁴⁰ After Lithuania gained independence in 1990, a number of historians, including Alfonsas Eidintas, Saulius Sužiedėlis, and Alfred Erich Senn, published articles on the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania in *Akiračiai*.

The majority of the journalists who wrote in *Akiračiai* belonged to the young generation of the Lithuanian liberals in exile who had studied at renowned American universities and grew up in a different cultural context than their elders. Among these people was the Lithuanian-American sociologist, literary critic, and cultural historian Vytautas Kavolis, who received his doctorate from Harvard University. Kavolis founded and edited the aforementioned Lithuanian-American journal *Metmenys* and was also the main ideologist of the liberal organization *Santara-Šviesa*. Another important person was the Lithuanian-American journalist and cultural critic Liūtas Mockūnas, who graduated from Drexel University in Philadelphia. Mockūnas founded and edited the monthly newspaper *Akiračiai*. Tomas Venclova, a literary scholar and poet who emigrated from Lithuania to the USA in 1977, working first at the University of California, Berkeley, and later at Yale University, where he earned his doctoral degree. Because these intellectuals challenged the myth of victimhood and questioned Lithuanian innocence regarding the mass murder of Jews, they might be regarded as the first critics of the Lithuanian culture of remembrance.

At that time their opponents were Lithuanian-American nationalists, who identified strongly with ethno-nationalism and the values of the Catholic Church; these conservatives defined the Lithuanian nation from a very narrow, mono-ethnic perspective. The conflict with the liberals, especially over contested memories of Lithuanian involvement in the Holocaust, was a matter of national importance for them. In some cases, the aggressive tone and personal insults suggest that for many this debate was not simply a discussion about the past. Many emigrants were still living in the past. The older exile generation, coming from the displaced persons camps, sought to redefine their past via

¹³⁸ STREIKUS, p. 43.

¹³⁹ From 1968 to 2005, *Akiračiai* was published in Chicago; since 2005, it has been published in Vilnius, Lithuania.

¹⁴⁰ TAMOŠAITIS.

their journalistic publications, books, and conferences. The younger generation tried to challenge these perceptions of history which they viewed as one-sided and nationalistic, while also seeking to understand why the antisemitism that had prevailed in Lithuania during the Second World War re-emerged within the Lithuanian exile.

For a long time, the exile media was silent about the Holocaust in Lithuania. Polemic articles in the media started to appear, however, in the mid-1970s. The catalyst for these debates was an article Tomas Venclova published in *Akiračiai* in 1977, which was widely read not only within the American exile community but also abroad, including in Soviet Lithuania.¹⁴¹ The publication of this article correlated with Venclova's expatriation from the Soviet Union, and is also, of course, linked to the Holocaust debates within the mainstream American media that were taking place during this period, as well.

This initial break in this tradition of silence and changes in discourse which followed can be traced in the reporting of the liberal newspaper *Akiračiai* and the way journalists perceived and portrayed the Second World War and the events of June 1941, namely the uprising which led to the formation of the provisional government¹⁴² and the mass deportations which were conducted by the Soviet regime in June 1941, just before the Nazi occupation. In each year's June edition, *Akiračiai* printed a small dedication to the victims of the Second World War. In June 1969,¹⁴³ the *Akiračiai* editorial referred solely to Lithuanian victims, especially the deportees who had been forced to leave their homeland. However, by June 1978, the editorial already dedicates its remembrance not only to the Lithuanian victims of the Soviet occupation, but also remembers the victims of the Nazi occupation, mentioning not only ethnic Lithuanians but also the Jews, the Romany people, and the prisoners of war. The changed perception of history in *Akiračiai* by 1978 reflects a broader debate about the Holocaust in the media and among exiled Lithuanians which peaked in these years.

The year 1978 was somewhat of a watershed year: not only did numerous articles on the Holocaust in Lithuania appear in exile media outlets, but scholars also addressed these topics at two important conferences which received widespread media coverage. The first of these was the meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies in Toronto in 1978, where the program included the issue of the Holocaust in the Baltic states. At a panel entitled "Holocaust and Baltic Jewry," the Estonian Jew (born in Vilnius) Emanuel Nodel, at the time a member of the history department at Western Michigan University, presented a paper on "The Role of the Baltic Peoples." The nationalist exile media—for example, the newspapers *Draugas* and *Tėviškės žiburiai*—objected to Nodel's lecture, whereas the liberal newspaper *Akiračiai* appraised the conference positively.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ VENCLOVA, *Žydai ir lietuviai*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴² The June uprising of 1941 was organized during the first Soviet occupation. Lithuanian rebels (partisans) fought against the Red Army and set up the Lithuanian provisional government after the Soviet retreat. The organizers of this uprising are blamed for cooperating with the Nazi regime. Just several days after the uprising, the first pogroms against the Lithuanian Jews took place. This uprising will be analyzed in section 4.2.1.

¹⁴³ This was the first issue of *Akiračiai*, which featured the June uprising on its first page.

¹⁴⁴ GEDRIMAS, pp. 2-3.

The second event came several months later in Michigan: the liberal organization *Santara-Šviesa* had chosen “the Jewish question” as the central topic of its twenty-fifth annual summit. The discussion led by Aleksandras Štomas, Tomas Venclova, Vincas Rastenis, and Rimantas Idzelis aimed to understand why Lithuanian exile media had been so hostile towards the Jews and how this antagonism might shape the moral character of Lithuanian society. In the discussion, they examined and questioned nine of the most widespread myths in the Lithuanian exile media about the Jews and the Holocaust.

Most of the antisemitic articles in the media not only reinforced widespread stereotypes about Jews in Lithuania but also denied Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust. One of the most popular accusations in the exile nationalist media was that Jews were not only communists, but that they were also to blame for the executions and deportations of Lithuanians during the first Soviet occupation. In 1974, the newspaper *Tėviškės žiburiai* published one of the first articles accusing Jews of Lithuanian genocide; a journalist using the pseudonym J. Valdaikis analyzed the massacre in the village of Pirčiupiai and deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia. In June 1944, pro-Soviet partisans attacked Nazi Germans in Pirčiupiai. In response, the German forces sent a punishment squadron and burned almost all of the village’s inhabitants, around 119 people, alive.¹⁴⁵ The article published in *Tėviškės žiburiai* proclaimed that Jews bore the sole responsibility for these horrible deaths, because the leader of pro-Soviet partisans who had organized the attack on the Nazis and thus provoked the execution of the Lithuanians, had been a Lithuanian Jew named Genrikas Zimanas.¹⁴⁶

Interestingly, Valdaikis shows more compassion for the Nazis who were killed than for the Lithuanian victims. According to Valdaikis, Nazi Germans were later unfairly sentenced to death for this crime. Thus, Valdaikis views the Nazis as the true victims of this story, and, furthermore, as victims of Soviet Jewish partisans. Along with the victimization of the Nazi officers, Valdaikis accuses Lithuanian Jews of collaborating with the Soviets and of deporting Lithuanians to Siberia. Nevertheless, he omits the fact that Jews were deported along with the Lithuanians. The newspaper *Akiračiai* immediately responded by criticizing this seemingly antisemitic stance and Valdaikis’s expressions of sympathy for the Nazis. They even entitled their article “Compassion for Murderers.”¹⁴⁷ *Akiračiai* stated, on the one hand, appreciation for the fact that *Tėviškės žiburiai* printed such an article because “now we will know that we have such people among us,” but also expressed surprise at the fact that the editorial board of *Tėviškės žiburiai* had not distanced itself from the author of the article nor made any remark emphasizing that the article reflected only the personal opinion of the journalist.¹⁴⁸

Another stereotypical position claiming that Jews had deserved to be killed was presented in Antanas Musteikis’s antisemitic article “They Blame Us...,” which appeared in *Tėviškės Žiburiai* in 1976. Musteikis’s article was a reaction to the Lithuanian Jewish historian Dov Levin’s claims in *The Journal of Baltic Studies* that Lithuanians

¹⁴⁵ AVERKIENĖ.

¹⁴⁶ Valdaikis’s article published in *Tėviškės Žiburiai* was also discussed in the newspaper *Akiračiai*, see REKAŠIUS, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem.

had executed Jews during the Nazi occupation. In his article, Musteikis stated that if Lithuanians had killed Jews, it was only because of their communist stance and participation in the executions of Lithuanians during the first Soviet occupation: “The Jewish contribution to the killing of Lithuanians was enormous and painful and therefore it might have caused such reaction when the regime changed.”¹⁴⁹ *Akiračiai* claimed that this dispute had managed to reopen the “wound” of Lithuanian historical memory and that both sides were too emotional and accusatory.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, other articles published in nationalist exile media outlets not only denied Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust but also claimed that such accusations were Soviet propaganda, as the Soviet regime sought to prosecute its opponents in this manner. They were as far as to suggest that the Nazi regime in Lithuania had tried to discredit Lithuanian military officers and partisans by wearing Lithuanian uniforms themselves while killing Jews.¹⁵¹ Finally, the newspapers *Draugas* and *Tėviškės Žiburiai* blamed Western media—which, according to them was entirely owned and manipulated by the Jews—for all accusations of Lithuanian collaboration.¹⁵²

Such antisemitic articles provoked the liberal media to track down and unmask Lithuanian Nazis. In 1978 *Akiračiai* published an editorial “About Lithuanian Jewish Relations” urging the creation of a list of Jewish killers (*žydšaudžių sąrašą*), because otherwise they believed that the nationalist media would try to obfuscate on the matter.¹⁵³ Moreover, Liūtas Mockūnas, the editor of *Akiračiai*, argued that whenever the American media¹⁵⁴ tried to expose Lithuanian perpetrators, the nationalist media rallied to defend them straightaway. The liberal media often called former Lithuanian Nazis or other war criminals “reorgos” or “reorganized” persons.¹⁵⁵ According to *Akiračiai*, the exile media wrote a lot about criminality in America but avoided mentioning criminals within the exile community. Such a position could be perceived as a strange “acrobatics of morality.”¹⁵⁶ *Akiračiai* quite often questioned whether those people publishing under pseudonyms and denying Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust might not be directly related to the war crimes in Lithuania.¹⁵⁷ One of these “reorgos,” according to *Akiračiai*, was the Lithuanian bishop Vincentas Brizgys. Vytautas Rekašius had published an article criticizing this Brizgys’ book about the Lithuanian Catholic Church during the war, which was published in the USA in 1977. He called this book apologetic and antisemitic and challenged not only Brizgys’s stance and behavior during the

¹⁴⁹ Musteikis’s article, as cited in *ibidem*.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*

¹⁵² *Ibidem*.

¹⁵³ MOCKŪNAS, pp. 10–11.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*. American media in this case refers to the *Daily News*, which suggested that Jakys killed Lithuanian Jews. The newspaper *Draugas* defended him.

¹⁵⁵ N.N., *Žmogus*, p. 9. The author of this article remained anonymous, indicated here with the acronym N.N.

¹⁵⁶ VYTAUTAS REKAŠIUS: Tautinis solidarumas ir nerami sąžinė [National Solidarity and Restless Conscience], in: *Akiračiai* from September 1983, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ ŽEMELIS, p. 1.

Nazi occupation but also questioned whether the Catholic Church could be considered “innocent” for its actions during the Second World War.¹⁵⁸

In 1977, in an article about the amateur filmmaker Petras Bernotas, a Lithuanian who created films out of Nazi and Soviet newsreels, mentioned how “reorganized” persons and Nazis with swastikas had opposed the screening of his films at an event at the Lithuanian Youth Center in Chicago.¹⁵⁹ *Akiračiai* even called Bernotas “a person who scared Chicago Nazis.”¹⁶⁰ According to the newspaper’s claims, Bernotas’s newsreel films revealed Lithuanian sympathies for Nazi Germany and how enthusiastically Lithuanians had greeted the invading Nazis.¹⁶¹ In the article, Bernotas tells the story of how he had received anonymous calls and letters urging him to leave Chicago and call off the screenings of these newsreels. The newspaper *Draugas* was reluctant to print advertisements for these screenings, and one Lithuanian radio in Chicago lied, reporting that the film evening had been cancelled.¹⁶² It thus came as no surprise in 1978, when another screening of Bernotas’s film *The Baltic Tragedy* was announced, that *Akiračiai* decided that rather than simply printing an announcement of the event, they would also reprint a snapshot from the film which shows inhabitants of Kaunas greeting Nazi Germans with flowers.¹⁶³ According to *Akiračiai*, some of the individuals depicted were living in exile and defending Nazi crimes.

Akiračiai, based in Chicago, also tried to unmask Nazi collaborators in Los Angeles. In 1976, the Los Angeles-based bilingual Lithuanian magazine *Lietuvių diena* [Day of the Lithuanians] marked Adolf Hitler’s birthday by publishing a photo of his birthday celebration in 1939, in which a Lithuanian delegation had participated.¹⁶⁴ *Akiračiai*, in their section named “Guard of Discipline”, criticized such commemoration of Hitler’s birthday in the Lithuanian exile media,¹⁶⁵ arguing that, Lithuanians may have had to attend this celebration in 1939, but that there was no reason a Lithuanian newspaper needed to commemorate that day with such a publication in 1976.¹⁶⁶

Reconstruction of Media Debates on the Holocaust: Mediation of Open Letters Between Exile and Homeland

The turning point of this discussion were the debates between Venclova, the Lithuanian dissident Antanas Terleckas, and unknown activist(s) writing under the pseudonym “Žuvintas” in reaction to the article on “Lithuanians and Jews” that Venclova published in *Akiračiai* in 1977. These debates can only be adequately understood if the contexts of the participants and their different social-political backgrounds are considered. Venclova was known to be an active member of the anti-Soviet dissident movement

¹⁵⁸ VYTAUTAS REKAŠIUS: Apologetika ir antisemitizmas prisiminimų knygoje [Apologetics and Antisemitism in the Memoirs], in: *Akiračiai* from May 1978, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵⁹ N.N., *Žmogus*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*.

¹⁶³ N.N.: Istorija kino juostoje [History in Film], in: *Akiračiai* from July 1978, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ N.N.: Adolfui Hitleriui, p. 15.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

during the Soviet era. Ironically, he was the son of Antanas Venclova, a poet and Soviet politician who in 1940 along with other pro-communist intellectuals to request the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁷ However, Tomas Venclova distanced himself from his father's political stance, and, in 1976, was among the founders of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group. In 1977, he was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and had to emigrate from Soviet Lithuania. He went to the USA, where the famous Polish poet Czesław Miłosz helped him become a lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley.¹⁶⁸

It is only after *Akiračiai* published Venclova's article in 1977 that it was widely read and became a hot topic of discussion, but Venclova had written it—at the behest of the Jewish activist Felix Dektor—while he still lived in Lithuania. Originally written in Russian, the article had already been published in 1975 in the unofficial Jewish newspaper *Evreii v SSR* [Jews in the USSR] and reprinted in the Israeli magazine *Nasha Strana* [Our Land] in 1976 before the *Akiračiai* published it.¹⁶⁹ It was also read during one of Radio Liberty's broadcasts, which is when Žuvintas (pseudonym) heard it. He responded with an open letter—published both in the Lithuanian underground newspaper *Aušra* [Dawn] and in *Akiračiai*—criticizing Venclova for not understanding the Lithuanian motives for executing Jews. Until this day, Žuvintas's true identity remains unknown. Venclova claimed he was told later that different Lithuanian priests used this pseudonym. Venclova referred to him in his response as “the underground voice of Lithuania.”¹⁷⁰

Terleckas was another important actor defending Venclova's position in these debates. Terleckas, like Venclova, was an active Lithuanian dissident. As result, he had been arrested and sent to Siberia for four years in 1958; in 1973 he was arrested and imprisoned once again in Lithuania. He was very active with declarations on the restitution of the Lithuanian independence and was heard via the radio stations of Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and Vatican Radio. His activities, which included organizing protests and publishing anti-Soviet literature, peaked in 1978, when he and his followers formed the resistance movement Lithuanian Liberty League.

Hence, between 1977 and 1978, these three (or more)¹⁷¹ activists sparked the debate about Lithuanian participation in the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania. *Akiračiai* named this series of articles a “dialogue between exiled Lithuanians and Lithuania.”¹⁷² Of course, such debates among Lithuanian intellectuals and dissidents were at that time officially forbidden in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in the foreign exile media and underground media outlets in Lithuania, the discussion emerged. The terminology used was not what a modern reader might expect: at that time the term “Holocaust” was not

¹⁶⁷ Antanas Venclova was also the author of the lyrics for the anthem of the Lithuanian SSR. In 1947, he received the Stalin Prize. Between 1954 and 1959, he was the chairman of the Lithuanian Writer's Union.

¹⁶⁸ While working at the University of California, Berkeley, Venclova became friends with a Lithuanian-Polish poet Czesław Miłosz and Russian poet Joseph Brodsky.

¹⁶⁹ VENCLOVA, *Žydai ir lietuviai*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷¹ It is unknown whether Žuvintas was one person or a group of people.

¹⁷² TERLECKAS, pp. 4-5.

used; instead, the authors of these articles spoke of the “destruction,” “massacre,” and “tragedy” of the Lithuanian Jews.

Venclova saw his publication as the possible beginning of a “spiritual repentance.”¹⁷³ He stated, “we must speak about everything which took place, without trying to protect ourselves, without any internal censor, without propagandistic distortions, without national complexes, without fear.”¹⁷⁴ Venclova claimed that it is impossible to understand the massacres of Jews in Lithuania. According to him, “if one can consider the nation a greater self—and direct experience says that this point of view is the valid and fair one in the moral world—then all members of the nation, both the righteous people and criminals, are included in this self.”¹⁷⁵ However, Žuvintas responded with an open letter to Venclova, published in the Lithuanian unofficial newspaper *Aušra*¹⁷⁶ in 1977 and in *Akiračiai* in 1978; he acknowledged the guilt of Lithuanians, but he also tried to understand why Lithuanians had killed Jews, reminding readers of the myths of Jewish communists who had been responsible for the deaths of Lithuanians during the first Soviet occupation. Venclova responded straightaway with a new article, which he wanted to publish in *Aušra*. When that paper rejected it, it was published only in *Akiračiai*.

In his article, Venclova counters Žuvintas’s position by claiming that “criminal acts contain hidden within them ‘a transcendental residue’ (as do acts of heroism), which cannot be explained rationally or deterministically.”¹⁷⁷ According to him, “one cannot lay all the blame on the system (or on the state of war), since it is possible to behave differently even within the selfsame system” and claimed that “moral issues are not solved arithmetically.”¹⁷⁸ Beyond this central issue in their debate, there is an interesting semantic difference, namely a radically different understanding of the Lithuanian nation. Venclova, in his articles, always spoke about a nation in the singular that included both Lithuanian and Jews. In contrast, Žuvintas used the word nation in the plural and, in this manner, excluded Lithuanian Jews from the Lithuanian nation, presenting them as a different nation and, consequently, as separate from Lithuanian history.

In October 1978, Terleckas joined in this debate by publishing an article entitled “Once Again on the Jews and Lithuanians” in *Akiračiai*.¹⁷⁹ He presented a very different Lithuanian underground voice than Žuvintas on this issue and actually revealed the disagreement and heterogeneity on this question among the Lithuanian dissident movement. First, he criticized the unofficial newspaper *Aušra* for refusing to publish the Venclovas’s response to Žuvintas. Unlike Venclova, he called Žuvintas’s article antisemitic. His response was much harsher than Venclova’s, and his rhetoric was much more offensive; he directly compared Žuvintas to the NKVD¹⁸⁰ sadist Eusiejus Rozaus-

¹⁷³ VENCLOVA, *Žydai ir lietuviai*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁶ The Lithuanian community in Poland founded the newspaper *Aušra* in 1960. One of its founders was the renowned Lithuanian poet Justinas Marcinkevičius. *Aušra* published articles about life in Soviet Lithuania, and its aim was to foster the life of the Lithuanian community in Poland.

¹⁷⁷ VENCLOVA, A Reply to A. Žuvintas, p. 459.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁹ TERLECKAS, p. 4.

¹⁸⁰ NKVD was the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs. It was closely associated with the Soviet secret police, and it was the predecessor of the KGB (Committee for State Security).

kas (Ovsiei Rozovskii.¹⁸¹ Moreover, Terleckas also included the stance and duties of the Lithuanian Catholic Church in his article, claiming that the Catholic Church should play a leading role in this debate and condemn the crimes of the Lithuanians against the Jews, not only by issuing verbal statements but also by taking action, for instance, by building memorials. Terleckas closed with an appeal to certain Lithuanian priests in which he asked them to dedicate Masses to Lithuanian and Jewish reciprocity and cooperation.¹⁸²

Thus, the first Lithuanian debate on the Holocaust emerged through the exile media. These articles, as well as the activities of other exile intellectuals remain important until today. In 1988, Venclova wrote a post scriptum to these debates and claimed that everything that had been discussed remained relevant, because even now *Žuvintas's* arguments are very popular in Lithuania, especially within the exile community in the USA.¹⁸³ At the end of his response to *Žuvintas*, Venclova wrote that “in the meantime, we cannot meet and talk in person, but if we are already sending one another uncensored letters across the ocean, then at some point in time we will be able to talk freely.”¹⁸⁴ Over the course of the media debates analyzed in this study, Venclova never met *Žuvintas*, but he was eventually able to argue freely in the independent Lithuanian media. Nevertheless, in some cases his arguments were questioned and opposed even more harshly in independent Lithuania than in *Žuvintas's* letter in Soviet times.

Situating Lithuanian Exile Media Debates within the American Context of the Holocaust: Racism, Antisemitism, and Lithuanian Nationalism

The debates on the Holocaust among the Lithuanian exile did not take place in a vacuum. It was no mere coincidence that the Lithuanian émigré media started discussing the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania in the 1970s but rather a result of the fact that the Holocaust “moved to the center of American culture”¹⁸⁵ during this period, which was characterized by public discussions over the significance of the Holocaust within American society. According to the American historian Peter Novick, a series of events—including the Eichmann trial, the controversies over Hannah Arendt’s book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and a play by the young German playwright Rolf Hochhuth, called *The Deputy*,¹⁸⁶ which was shown on Broadway in 1964—“broke fifteen years of near silence on the Holocaust in American public discourse.”¹⁸⁷ It was in this context that “a distinct *thing* called the Holocaust” emerged and the focus of the debate shifted from perpetrators to Jewish victims.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸¹ TERLECKAS, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*.

¹⁸³ VENCLOVA, A Reply to A. *Žuvintas*, p. 461.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 460.

¹⁸⁵ NOVICK, p. 112.

¹⁸⁶ This play criticized the silence of Pope Pius XII, who did not denounce the Holocaust while it was occurring.

¹⁸⁷ NOVICK, p. 144.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

Novick observes that, during the 1970s, the Holocaust became “an appropriate symbol of contemporary consciousness” and was seen as an “emblem for an age of diminished expectations.”¹⁸⁹ The events of the previous decade—the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, the dashed hopes of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the presidential scandal of Watergate—had taken its toll¹⁹⁰; the sociologists Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder argue that these events contributed to an “emerging tale of American suffering,” especially among minorities and disadvantaged ethnic groups within America.¹⁹¹ The Holocaust meshed well with the new catchwords of racism and discrimination.¹⁹² African American politicians started not only to borrow themes from Jewish history, for instance, describing the transportation of African slaves as the “Black Holocaust,” but also to make connections between black slavery and Jewish slavery in Egypt.¹⁹³ Moreover, Zionism influenced the Black Nationalist Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement was “important for both blacks and Jews.”¹⁹⁴ Levy and Sznajder claim that, whereas in Germany and Israel the Holocaust debate revolved around the issues of fascism and antisemitism, in America “racism” was the catchword while talking about the Holocaust.¹⁹⁵

These catchwords and themes were also reflected in discussions of the Holocaust within the Lithuanian exile media. In the pages of the liberal newspaper *Akiračiai*, as well as in the American media, some members of the Lithuanian-American community in Chicago were presented both as racists and antisemites. Some publications also clearly linked racism and antisemitism. In January 1969, *Akiračiai* depicted the racist stance of the Lithuanian-Americans for the first time in an opinion piece entitled “Negroes, Jews and Lithuanians.” The journalist Aleksandras Pakalniškis Jr. writes that Lithuanians living in Chicago perceived the desegregation of schools and the federal open housing law (passed to prevent racial discrimination) as a danger to their “white” community.¹⁹⁶ The article observes the “negroes” hate Jews because the food prices in shops owned by Jews in the districts where African Americans live are so high.¹⁹⁷ The article also explains that Lithuanians in Marquette Park¹⁹⁸ in Chicago have created a Community of House Owners to protect their neighborhood from new residents, namely, African Americans. The aim of this article was actually to publicly address and criticize such racist acts on the part of Lithuanians living in Chicago. The journalist finishes his article with the statement that no one should be denied legal property rights because of their skin color.¹⁹⁹ Thus, with this publication *Akiračiai* became a vocal critic of the

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 112.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*, p. 113.

¹⁹² Ibidem.

¹⁹³ Ibidem, pp. 113-114.

¹⁹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem, p. 114.

¹⁹⁶ PAKALNIŠKIS, p. 13.

¹⁹⁷ The term “negroes” was used in this article.

¹⁹⁸ The district of Chicago Lawn, including the Marquette Park, is predominantly inhabited by European-immigrant community, mostly Lithuanians, Germans, and Poles.

¹⁹⁹ PAKALNIŠKIS, p. 13.

nationalistic attitudes of the Lithuanian community and also aimed to reveal the racist beliefs that many members of this community harbored.

So the racist behavior of some members of the Lithuanian community as being linked to their antisemitic stance, as well. The antisemitism within the Lithuanian-American community was publicly discussed both in the mainstream American media and outlets that catered to Lithuanian exiles. The most influential factor that led to increased debates among the Lithuanian exiles over the Holocaust was the neo-Nazi movement in Chicago and the screening of the miniseries *Holocaust* in 1978 on NBC. A constitutional case over the right of American Nazis (i.e., the National Socialist Party of America) to conduct a march in Skokie, Illinois, became known as the Skokie affair. Skokie was home to many Holocaust survivors, and half of its population was Jewish. The residents sought to prevent the march, but the United States Supreme Court ruled not only that the march must be allowed on First Amendments grounds, namely, the right to free speech, but that the display of the swastika should also be considered an expression of free speech.²⁰⁰

The newspaper *Akiračiai* subsequently asked in their July 1978 issue whether Lithuanians were the followers of Nazis.²⁰¹ Lithuanian-American journalist Henrikas Žemelis questioned the silence of the Lithuanian community towards these neo-Nazi activities, including their plans to march in Skokie through the neighborhood of the Lithuanian-American community.²⁰² According to *Akiračiai*, many Americans had started to question why neo-Nazis lived in Marquette Park and why Lithuanians did not protest against them.²⁰³ The counter-protesters were mostly Jews, African Americans, and Mexicans, but, they lacked the support of Lithuanians, who made up the majority of the area's inhabitants.²⁰⁴ These neo-Nazi activities within the Lithuanian community were opposed publicly only by the Lithuanian-American Youth Association, which according to *Akiračiai*, some members of Lithuanian community saw as "ill youth."²⁰⁵ This youth association was the only Lithuanian group that went to Marquette Park to protest against the neo-Nazis and in this manner tried to "save the reputation of the Lithuanian colony in Marquette Park."²⁰⁶ They also published a proclamation and the article "Whom They Serve?" in the newspaper *Draugas*. However, as *Akiračiai* observed, Lithuanian media in Chicago was silent about these events; *Draugas* did not even discuss the proclamation and article by the Lithuanian-American Youth Association that was published in that very newspaper.²⁰⁷

The attitude of the Lithuanian community towards the neo-Nazis in Chicago was a topic of discussion in the mainstream media. The New York-based weekly tabloid *The Village Voice* published an article on the American Nazis in Chicago, noting that the residents of Marquette Park were proud of their racist history. The journalist who wrote

²⁰⁰ NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY V. SKOKIE.

²⁰¹ ŽEMELIS, p. 1.

²⁰² Ibidem.

²⁰³ Ibidem.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem.

this article had spoken with many Lithuanians from that area who had said that they were ready to throw stones and bottles at the African-American protesters.²⁰⁸ According to the Lithuanian-American Youth Association, such racist proclamations coming from some Lithuanians “do not help to create a good name for Lithuanians,” especially when such thoughts are stated in the context of the activities of American neo-Nazis in their neighborhood.²⁰⁹ Therefore, *Akiračiai*, in its coverage of the Supreme Court decision on the march in Skokie and the debate over the display of the swastika, compared “undercover” Lithuanian-American Nazis with American Nazis, claiming that the latter publicly show their antisemitic attitudes, whereas the Lithuanian Nazis carry their swastikas “cunningly hidden under patriotic vests.”²¹⁰

Another American media event, in the debates on the Holocaust among Lithuanian exiles, was the miniseries *Holocaust*.²¹¹ Broadcast on NBC from 16–19 April 1978, *Holocaust* reached an audience of over one hundred million Americans, who watched all or some of the four parts.²¹² Novick calls this miniseries “without doubt the most important moment in the entry of the Holocaust into general American consciousness.”²¹³ According to the American sociologist Robert Wuthnow, the miniseries’s success was due to the fact that for most Americans it was not only relevant to the history of the Holocaust but seen more “as a symbol of present evil” in the context of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal.²¹⁴

The television drama *Holocaust*, directed by Marvin J. Chomsky²¹⁵ and filmed in Austria and West Berlin, presented ten years in the lives of two families, namely, of a German Jewish family, the Weisses, and the family of a high official of the SS who becomes a war criminal. The miniseries shows all the most important events, such as the *Kristallnacht*, the Nuremberg Laws, the Wannsee Conference, the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and the establishment of concentration camps at Buchenwald, Theresienstadt, and Auschwitz. Moreover, it refers to Christian antisemitism and the silence of the church during the Holocaust, as well as the collaboration of Eastern Europeans with Nazi Germany.²¹⁶ In 1984, *Der Spiegel* published an article on the Holocaust in Lithuania alleging that the original screenplay for this miniseries had called for the inclusion of Lithuanian Nazi characters in the Warsaw ghetto, but that Lithuanian-American had lobbied to have these scenes cut from the film.²¹⁷

This drama won several awards and was enthusiastically received by American journalists, but the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel criticized the series as “untrue” and “offensive.”²¹⁸ According to the film scholar Aaron Kerner, the NBC miniseries “marks a critical turning point in the representation of the Holocaust, and is responsible for

²⁰⁸ Cited from *ibidem*.

²⁰⁹ Cited from *ibidem*.

²¹⁰ VINCAS RASTENIS Svastikos [Swastiques], in: *Akiračiai* from July 1978, p. 2.

²¹¹ MOCKŪNAS, pp. 10–11.

²¹² NOVICK, p. 209.

²¹³ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁴ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*, p. 116.

²¹⁵ He also directed the TV mini-series *Roots* (1977), which focused on the history of slavery in the USA.

²¹⁶ NOVICK, p. 210.

²¹⁷ OLSCHWANG, pp. 123–126.

²¹⁸ WIESEL, *Trivializing*.

disseminating widespread knowledge of the event.”²¹⁹ The miniseries influenced Holocaust debates not only in the USA but also in Germany, where it was a media success. The miniseries “shook and shaped” public and political discourse in West Germany²²⁰; Levy and Sznajder credit it with influencing younger generations by inspiring changes in school curricula and turning the Holocaust into a central issue in debates about German identity since the end of the 1970s.²²¹ In the USA, the miniseries prompted President Jimmy Carter to convene a presidential commission, whose work culminated after many years in the construction of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.²²² Kerner claims that, despite “all its lackluster qualities, the NBC miniseries has perhaps had more material effect than all the representations of the Holocaust combined.”²²³ According to the scholar of modern Jewish culture Jeffrey Shandler, “the response to its broadcast in the United States and abroad arguably proved to be a more noteworthy cultural landmark than the miniseries itself.”²²⁴ The central characters and sites of the Holocaust shown in the miniseries became part not only of the American but of the global media landscape, as well.²²⁵

This miniseries was also widely discussed in Lithuanian exile media in 1978 in connection with the reactions to the conference organized in Toronto by the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. As mentioned above, this conference took up the issue of the Holocaust in the Baltic states. While reading a summary of other exile media coverage which was presented about the conference in *Akiračiai*, it becomes evident that other Lithuanian exile media focused not on the content of the conference in their reports but rather published antisemitic articles and reactions to the alleged production of a “Holocaust industry” in the Western world.²²⁶ In the newspaper *Draugas*, the Lithuanian folklorist Jonas Balys confronted the Association for the Advancement of Baltic States and claimed that, after having seen the propagandist miniseries *Holocaust*, it was also obvious that the conference panel “Holocaust and Baltic Jewry” would be filled with similar propaganda.²²⁷ According to Balys, *Holocaust* aimed solely to justify Israeli intervention in Lebanon; furthermore, Balys accused the Estonian Jew Emanuel Nodel, who had given a speech on “The Role of the Baltic People,” of having repeated the central ideas of the miniseries and blaming the Baltic people for the death of Jews during the Nazi occupation.²²⁸ In his article, Balys notes that contemporary Americans suffered from different sorts of “guilt complexes” stemming from slavery and the Vietnam war.²²⁹ According to him, the African Americans²³⁰ living in America at that time

²¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 28.

²²⁰ See also, DREISBACH, pp. 76-97.

²²¹ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, p. 118.

²²² KERNER, p. 28.

²²³ Ibidem.

²²⁴ Cited from ibidem, p. 159.

²²⁵ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*, p. 117.

²²⁶ GEDRIMAS, pp. 2-3.

²²⁷ Cited from ibidem.

²²⁸ Ibidem.

²²⁹ Ibidem.

²³⁰ He used the term “negroes.” Interestingly, in 1978, *Akiračiai* often referred to “blacks” whereas the newspaper *Draugas* preferred “negroes.”

drove cadillacs and were better off than African American people anywhere else.²³¹ Balys claims that these “guilt complexes” should be seen as “mental illnesses” which are contagious and already widespread among the Lithuanian-American youth.²³²

The newspaper *Akiračiai* reacted to this publication by stating that it had been obvious for a long time that Balys himself had a case of “antisemitic and anti-communist illness” and that such articles were a disgrace to *Draugas*. The antisemitic tone is also evident in the Lithuanian-Canadian newspaper *Tėviškes Žiburiai*, which claimed that the miniseries *Holocaust* had suggested that the politics of Lithuanian-Americans, based on the “ostrich posture of self-defense,” in other words, on hiding their head in the sand and not speaking out loudly, had damaged the Lithuanian reputation.²³³ They called for Lithuanian exile politicians to defend Lithuanians from such accusations.²³⁴ The newspaper *Darbininkas*, published by Lithuanian-American Catholics in New York, printed an article in 1978 entitled “Where Is the Beginning of the Film?” They defended Lithuanians against accusations of collaborating with the Nazis and claimed that the roots of the film *Holocaust* could be found in the October Revolution of 1917 when Jewish Bolsheviks assisted in killing seventy million people.²³⁵

This section has summarized how, after the decades of silence, the first media debates on the Holocaust in Lithuania emerged in the Lithuanian-American exile media. The exile press became the main venue for addressing past memories and conflict. In these debates, the Lithuanian “myth of innocence” during the war was challenged and the participation of the Lithuanians in the mass murder of Jews was remembered. This media memory work was influenced by the fact that the Holocaust emerged as an important topic in American culture and public discourse during this period. The following sections discuss the influence and legacies of these debates for the memorialization of the Holocaust in Lithuania after 1990.

4.2 Holocaust Memories in Lithuania after 1990: Shifting Narratives

4.2.1 Holocaust Memory and Lithuanian Nation-State Building: Media Narratives of the June Uprising in Lithuania

The June uprising, which occurred between the first Soviet and Nazi occupations in June 1941, might be perceived as the historical event where two Lithuanian pasts meet each other: on the one hand, a heroic uprising of Lithuanians seeking to regain their country’s independence from the Soviet regime, on the other hand, the beginning of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The historian Christoph Dieckmann captures this controversial nature in his claim that the uprising, which involved massacres of the Jews, “formed a dark prelude to further monstrous murders of the Jews of Lithuania,”²³⁶ but

²³¹ Cited from GEDRIMAS, pp. 2-3.

²³² Ibidem.

²³³ Ibidem.

²³⁴ Ibidem.

²³⁵ Cited from OLSCHWANG, pp. 123-126.

²³⁶ DIECKMANN, Lithuania in Summer 1941, p. 356

that “non-Jewish Lithuanians experienced June 22nd as a promising prelude to better days.”²³⁷

Historical Background: The June Uprising as a Prelude to the Holocaust

The uprising was caused by the violence of the Soviet regime: In August 1940 the Soviet Union invaded Lithuania and against its will incorporated it into the Soviet Union. Mass arrests of political activists and their deportations to Siberia ensued. Those who managed to escape the arrests and deportations built an active resistance; they organized armed-resistance groups against the Soviet regime and hid in the Lithuanian forests. One of the most active organizations in the uprising was the Lithuanian Activist Front, which formed in the fall of 1940 under the command of Kazys Škirpa in Berlin, where he was serving as a Lithuanian diplomat. The LAF’s goal was to organize an anti-Soviet revolt and declare Lithuanian independence. In March 1941, members of the LAF in Berlin published a memorandum to their “Dear Enslaved Brothers” whose aim it was to organize different groups of anti-Soviet fighters for the uprising. Dieckmann thus contends that the uprising was “a combination of central planning and local spontaneous action.”²³⁸

Lithuanian rebels started the anti-Soviet uprising when the German military attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The uprising resulted in the declaration of Lithuanian independence and the formation of the Lithuanian provisional government. On the morning of 23 June, one of the most active organizers of the revolt, Leonas Prapuolenis, read the declaration of Lithuanian independence and named the ministers of the Lithuanian provisional government on the radio in Kaunas. In his memoirs, the Lithuanian Jew William W. Mishell,²³⁹ who in August 1941 along with other Jews from Kovno was forced to move into the Kovno ghetto, remembers hearing that radio broadcast on 23 June:

We put on the radio. The station was indeed under the control of the Lithuanian partisans, who for some reason chose to play the same march over and over again. In between they made announcements to the Lithuanian population telling them that Lithuania was free at last. After each statement the march came on. This march suddenly became to me synonymous with this fateful day in the history of the Jews in Lithuania and with the fate of my family. The chapter of the Russian occupation was closing and a new, bitter chapter was now to begin.²⁴⁰

The former Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus, fifteen years old at the time, remembers this moment differently:

²³⁷ Ibidem.

²³⁸ Ibidem, p. 373.

²³⁹ William W. Mishell was confined in the Kovno ghetto from 1941 to 1944, after which he was sent to Dachau concentration camp. After the camp was liberated, he resided in a DP camp in Germany. In 1949, he emigrated to the USA. In 1961, Mishell moved to Skokie neighborhood in Chicago, where he worked as an engineer. He died in 1994.

²⁴⁰ MISHELL, p. 13.

I well remember that minute when the sounds of the Lithuanian national anthem issued forth from the Kaunas radio-phon and it is difficult to explain what made that high school student open the windows and turn that radio around as much as it could be turned so that the sounds of the Lithuanian anthem would ring out across the entire courtyard [...] for the neighbors. And those first words which were announced on the restoration of Lithuania's independence. This will never fade from my memory. And I remember well when I ran quickly from the house to be with those who went out to the street.²⁴¹

Thus, for both Jews and for non-Jewish Lithuanians, that day remains in their memories until today, though the memories and emotions which surround the event diverge. The uprising was marked not only by the painful victory over the Soviet regime, but it was also the beginning of the Holocaust. Many narratives of Holocaust survivors give 22 June as the day when the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania started—i.e., as the “day it all began.”²⁴² One of the most extensive massacres, known as the Kaunas pogrom, began on 25 June.²⁴³ A Lithuanian Jew, Avraham Tory,²⁴⁴ known today as the archivist of Kovno ghetto life, wrote about these days in his memoirs. His ghetto diary *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary* was published in Hebrew in 1983 and five years later in English. He remembers:

It was a sunny Sunday morning, June 22, 1941, in the provisional capital of Lithuania. [...] War! The news spread quickly in Kovno, as in all parts of the world, this sunny morning. Meanwhile, a number of Lithuanian border towns were already engulfed in flame. Heavy bombing raids carried out by German bombers around Kovno. [...] The Lithuanians did not conceal their joy at the outbreak of the war: they saw their place on the side of the swastika and expressed this sentiment openly. [...] Toward evening, suspicious Lithuanian characters appeared in the midst of the nervous crowds filling the streets, serving blows against the Jews: “Hitler will be here before long and will finish you off.” That these attacks on the Jews were not accidental is attested by the fact that they took place simultaneously in different parts of town. In fact, it later became clear that the attackers were members of the Lithuanian “partisan” gangs, acting on the instruction of the fifth column of the indigenous local Nazis.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Cited from DEFENDING HISTORY, Eyewitness Account. The blog Defending History is run by the Lithuanian Jew Dovid Katz. The quotation of Adamkus was cited in this blog and taken from a speech he delivered at the premiere of the documentary film *Rising of the Enslaved* (22 June 2011).

²⁴² DIECKMANN, Lithuania in Summer 1941, p. 356.

²⁴³ For more on the pogrom in Kovno and the massacre in the Lietūkis garage, see section 5.2.2.

²⁴⁴ Avraham Tory (1909–2001) was born in Lazdijai, in Lithuania, in 1909. During the first Soviet occupation, he worked for the Soviet construction administration, which was building military bases in Lithuania. He was forced to move into the Kovno ghetto in August 1941, where he kept a diary of his experiences. In May 1942, he became a member of the ghetto's Ältestenrat; one of his duties to manage the ghetto's secret archive. In September 1943, when the Kovno ghetto was turned into a concentration camp, Tory tried to escape but he did not succeed until March 1944. He hid on a farm outside Kovno. In 1947, he emigrated to Tel Aviv, where he died in 2001, at the age of 92. See also, KLEIN.

²⁴⁵ TORY, pp. 3-4.

Tory spent the first days of the German occupation of Kovno in his sister's house, where they waited for the whole night for a wagon and horses to take them to Kovno railway station, so that they might board a train to the Russian border. However, Tory never left Lithuania, and after a month he was forced to move into the Kovno ghetto.²⁴⁶ Another Lithuanian Jew, Harry Gordon,²⁴⁷ who was also imprisoned in the Kovno ghetto, also depicts the day of 22 June in his memoirs. The first day of the war: "was a Sunday morning. [...] The birds sang so sadly that it seemed they also felt that a black cloud was coming over us."²⁴⁸ Gordon remembers the first pogroms of Slobodka²⁴⁹ in the city of Kovno:

On Wednesday, June 25, at 7:00 PM the purge started. Large gangs of Lithuanian partisans began throwing all the Jews out of their houses. When they had a big group of women, children, and men, they put them in rows and told them to run to the river. As they came to the river, there were more gangs of Lithuanian partisans with machine guns who told everyone to take off all their clothes and run into the lake. As they ran into the lake, they were machine gunned. This continued two days.²⁵⁰

The Nazi regime encouraged these pogroms and local Lithuanians who participated in the executions supported them. Even those who did not get physically involved in the task of rounding up their Jewish neighbors could kill with their looks and antisemitic words. The Lithuanian Jew Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson recalled the reaction of local people during these days in Kovno: "I felt as though all Lithuanians despised me and wanted me dead. When I went to the shop to buy milk, I felt the hateful looks of the customers and the storeowner who refused to serve me. Not a single neighbor ever came to ask if we needed anything."²⁵¹

This revolt marked the beginning of the violence against Jews and communists, who were blamed for having supported the Soviet Union. During the first days of the war, many Lithuanian Jews were arrested on accusations of being communists, which is very well illustrated in the memoirs of the German painter and author Helene Holzman, whose German Jewish husband, a famous bookseller in the interwar years in Kovno, Max Holzman, was arrested and interrogated about his involvement in communist activities. After the interrogation, he disappeared and never came back. Similarly, her daughter, who had connections with the communist youth in interwar Lithuania, was imprisoned and later killed.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 5.

²⁴⁷ Harry Gordon was born in Kovno in 1925. In 1941, he was forced to move into the Kovno ghetto, and in 1944, Gordon was sent to Dachau. After the liberation, he lived in a DP camp in Germany. In 1949, Gordon immigrated to the USA. He died in 2010, in Madison, Wisconsin.

²⁴⁸ GORDON, p. 23.

²⁴⁹ Slobodka is a suburb of Kovno, also known today as Vilijampolė. It was an area filled with Jewish community and synagogues, and was also home to the famous Slobotker Yeshiva, a rabbinical school. The neighborhood was very poor, with wooden houses many of which lacked a sewer system. During the Nazi occupation, this neighborhood was turned into the Kovno ghetto.

²⁵⁰ GORDON, p. 37.

²⁵¹ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 19.

²⁵² For more about this family, see KAISER/HOLZMAN.

The Lithuanian provisional government and its leadership did not condemn the pogroms.²⁵³ This government, which coordinated the rebirth of Lithuanian independence, was a temporary political institution formed mainly from the members of the LAF, who had been known before for their antisemitic slogans and ideology. For instance, in their writings they highlighted “racial purity” and “guest rights” for Jews in Lithuania and encouraged the expulsion of Jews from Lithuania.²⁵⁴ Nazi Germany did not recognize the provisional government. Nevertheless, the actions or, better said, ignorance of this government towards the Jews of Lithuania, raised much controversy. Saulius Sužiedėlis notes that while “no one doubts their sincerity in seeking to restore Lithuania’s independence,” the problem emerges “when one considers the kind of Lithuania they were seeking to build.”²⁵⁵ They aimed, in fact, to create “a racially exclusive ‘Aryan’ Lithuanian state.”²⁵⁶ The historian Egidijus Aleksandravičius claims that “despite the fact that the Lithuanian provisional government lasted barely a month and that it wasn’t a sincere collaborator of the Nazis, its goal to earn their trust plunged it into the bloodiest events marking the onset of the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust in Lithuania.”²⁵⁷ Similarly, Dieckmann observes: “neither LAF, nor the provisional government, nor the Catholic Church, which had been asked by Jewish representatives for assistance, undertook any timely or sufficiently forceful measures to stop the pogroms and massacres.”²⁵⁸ Thus, the June uprising has a double history: on the one hand, it represents a heroic fight for independence against the Soviet Union, but, on the other hand, it demarcates the beginning of violence against the Lithuanian Jewry.

Exilic²⁵⁹ and Soviet Narratives of the June Uprising: Divergent Historiographies

During the postwar Soviet occupation, the rebels of the June uprising were condemned and persecuted, some even deported to the Gulag. However, the events during the uprising have never entered the written history of Soviet Lithuania. The anti-Soviet partisans became the anti-heroes in the Soviet narrative of the Second World War. The uprising nevertheless served as a source of inspiration for the underground anti-Soviet fight in the occupied Lithuania.²⁶⁰ According to Lithuanian historians, the uprising had very important psychological value for the future resistance.²⁶¹ It was a sign that Lithuanians had been forced to join the Soviet Union and were fighting against this act of aggression.

In the meantime, the Lithuanian exile community generally regarded the uprising as a positive event; the rebels were portrayed as heroes and their fight for the Lithuanian independence was mythologized. In such accounts, Lithuanian heroism overshadowed

²⁵³ DIECKMANN, *Lithuania in Summer 1941*, p. 356.

²⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 372-373.

²⁵⁵ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *The Burden of 1941*.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁵⁷ ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, *Lithuanian Collaboration*, p. 185.

²⁵⁸ DIECKMANN, *Lithuania in Summer 1941*, p. 375.

²⁵⁹ “Exilic narratives” refer to the narratives described in section 4.1.2.

²⁶⁰ BUBNYS et al., *Lietuvių tautos sukilimas*, pp. 602-603.

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

the beginning of the Holocaust and Jewish victims. The uprising was widely commemorated in exile media and also in the memoirs of former rebels. Many former participants of the uprising, including its leadership, were forced to leave Lithuania and found a new homeland in the USA. It is hardly surprising that they justified and glorified the partisans' actions to legitimize the history of the uprising. For many of them, these historical events remained a central element of their everyday reality and their personal identities. According to Aleksandravičius, for many members of the émigrés of this generation, everything was centered around history, history was substituted for reality, or even more served as a compensation for its brutality.²⁶²

The most influential works written by émigré authors about the June uprising were Kazys Škirpa's book *Sukilimas* [Uprising] and Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis's book *Vienų vieni* [All Alone].²⁶³ Not only had Škirpa created the Lithuanian Activist Front after the first Soviet occupation, but he was also active in the anti-Soviet resistance. After the Nazi invasion, he had been a member of the Lithuanian provisional government. In 1944, however, he was arrested in Berlin²⁶⁴ and not permitted to leave the city. According to the *Encyclopedia Lituanica*, which was published in Boston by exiled Lithuanians, Škirpa was arrested because the Nazis understood "his anti-collaborationist designs."²⁶⁵ Following his arrest in 1944, he was sent to the concentration camp in Bad Godesberg. After its liberation, he fled to the USA, where he worked at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Škirpa published his memoirs in 1973; this text portrays the fight of the Lithuanians in June 1941 as heroic and encourages Lithuanians to continue the fight for independence from the Soviet Union.²⁶⁶ The publication was financially supported by many members of the Lithuanian exile community, including former rebels, such as one of the organizers of the June uprising, Adolfas Damušis, and former members of the LAF.²⁶⁷ Škirpa called his book a documentary survey of the uprising, but it also documented the activities and goals of the LAF. The Lithuanian-American historian Sužiedėlis, however, later challenged the authenticity of some documents presented in this book. According to him, they were modified in order to fit Škirpa's narration; for instance, Sužiedėlis claimed, Škirpa omitted antisemitic material which the LAF had widely distributed in Lithuania.²⁶⁸

Another important book, Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis's *Vienų Vieni* was published in 1964.²⁶⁹ Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis served as acting prime minister of the Lithuanian provisional government, when Škirpa was unable to take this position because he was under house arrest. Later Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis became the chairman of the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania, which was active in the USA until Lithuanian independence in 1990. In the USA, he was involved in the Lithua-

²⁶² ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, Praeitis, p. 298.

²⁶³ BRAZAITIS. Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis published this book under the name N. E. Sudūvis. In America, he shortened his name to Brazaitis.

²⁶⁴ Škirpa served for many years (from 1927 to 1930 and from 1938 to 1941) as the Lithuanian representative in Germany.

²⁶⁵ KAPOČIUS, p. 206.

²⁶⁶ ŠKIRPA, p. 8.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 11.

²⁶⁸ SUŽIEDĖLIS, 1941 metų sukilimo, pp. 6-7.

²⁶⁹ BRAZAITIS.

nian exile media, for which he also wrote some historical articles. He worked for the Lithuanian-American newspaper *Darbininkas*²⁷⁰ and edited the magazine *I laisvę* [To Freedom].²⁷¹ Like Škirpa, Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis edited the documents included in his book to omit statements which showed sympathy for Nazi Germany, Hitler, and its military.²⁷² Nevertheless, in his book, he noted that during the war “Lithuania’s number one enemy is the Soviet Union, and the number two enemy is Nazi Germany fighting with the number one enemy.”²⁷³ According to Aleksandravičius such perception of the two enemies shows that in the years of the war “in the Lithuanian mass consciousness [prevailed] the authority of German civilization and order” and, therefore, “the idea of collaboration with the Germans fell on sufficiently fertile ground.”²⁷⁴

It was quite common within the Lithuanian exile community to legitimize the rebels’ actions in this manner. The community did, after all, include the most famous leaders of the Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance. Hence, for many years the émigrés did not question “the pro-German stance of the provisional government.”²⁷⁵ In her account of this period, Ginaitė-Rubinson also criticized this historiography of Lithuanian-American exile: “The memoirs of most Lithuanian émigrés, some of whom participated in the administration, describe only the Lithuanians’ suffering under the Soviet regime. They recount the country’s struggle for freedom and independence [...]. Generally, the Lithuanian émigré press has not said a single word about the anti-Jewish LAF proclamations.”²⁷⁶

However, the exile community also contained a small group of skeptics who questioned such a “heroic” historiography of the uprising. One of the first, who spoke about the LAF’s pro-German orientation was the former Lithuanian president Antanas Smetona, whose authoritarian dictatorship was overthrown after the Soviet invasion. In 1941, after forced displacement in several different European countries, Smetona emigrated to the USA, where he started writing his memoirs and giving interviews about Lithuanian history to the American press. According to Eidintas, Smetona “judged the uprising to be German inspired.”²⁷⁷ Any influence Smetona might have had on the debate was cut short for he died in a fire at his son’s house in Cleveland in 1944. Another critical voice in the exile community belong to the historian Vincas Trumpa, who also raised doubts about the June revolt. In 1976, Trumpa reviewed Škirpa’s memoirs and discussed “the correctness of the LAF line” and Škirpa’s relationship to Nazi Germany.²⁷⁸ In 1991, Sužiedėlis likewise examined the antisemitic stance of the Lithuanian

²⁷⁰ It is a Lithuanian Catholic newspaper, published in New York since 1950. In the 1950s, its editor was Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis.

²⁷¹ In Lithuania, this newspaper was published by the LAF, after its activists occupied the publishing house on 23 June 1941. The first edition, proclaiming the restoration of Lithuanian independence, was issued on 24 June 1941. In 1953, the publishing operations were transferred to the USA.

²⁷² SUŽIEDĖLIS, 1941 metų sukilimo, pp. 6-7

²⁷³ BRAZAITIS, p. 75, translation taken from ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, Lithuanian Collaboration, p. 185.

²⁷⁴ ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, Lithuanian Collaboration, p. 185.

²⁷⁵ EIDINTAS, p. 229.

²⁷⁶ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 30.

²⁷⁷ EIDINTAS, p. 218.

²⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 229.

provisional government in a number of articles.²⁷⁹ The view of the June uprising expressed by these historians, however, did not coincide with the dominant landscape of the exile community memory.

Media Debates about the June Uprising after Independence in 1990

After independence in 1990, Lithuania started its nation-state building process. Modern Lithuanian identity was recreated in the 1990s, similar to the process in the early twentieth century, when the independent Lithuanian state was created through “the negotiations of its attributes with other ethnic groups.”²⁸⁰ The Russification process in the nineteenth century was now changed by the memories of the recent Soviet occupation, which caused an anti-Russian stance. Economic competition with Jews—which, at the turn of the twentieth century and in the interwar period, had evoked “traditional Catholic antisemitism”—did not exist in 1990 because almost all the Jews had been killed. Some Jews, however, were seen as betrayers of Lithuania and were blamed for collaborating with the Soviet regime. Finally, the Polish Lithuanian conflict over cultural heritage, which continues today, retained the same boundaries which were created at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Lithuanian nationhood was seen as “an essentially anti-Polish project.”²⁸¹ All these factors which had been important Lithuanian nation-state building in the early twentieth century, turned out to be important elements in this process once again after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The official nation-making discourse not only rekindled heroic narratives from the era of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Lithuanian national movement, and the interwar period, but also found heroes in the underground anti-Soviet resistance. The heroic narrative of the June uprising has become an important part of the collective memory of Lithuania. It became a symbol of the fight against the Soviet occupation. Its status in national consciousness means that it is worthwhile to consider how the June uprising figured in discourse in Lithuania after 1990. These debates shaped not only the politics of memory in post-Soviet Lithuania, but also raised the questions about morality and remembrance. The memory of the June uprising has also served as a paradigmatic example revealing how Lithuanian history was written, not only in words, but also in pictures, namely through nationalistic documentary films. In these films, the twofold nature of the uprising was ignored and the memory of how Jews were killed by the thousands was erased.

Political Debate: The Role of Media on Parliamentary Law Making

After Lithuania gained independence in 1990, the exilic narrative of the June uprising was reborn. One of the most important moments in the construction of this historic narrative about the June uprising occurred on 12 September 2000, when the Lithuanian parliament voted to pass a law honoring the June uprising by declaring its anniversary

²⁷⁹ Ibidem.

²⁸⁰ BALKELIS, p. 123.

²⁸¹ Ibidem.

an official Lithuanian Day of Remembrance. The law legitimized the Lithuanian provisional government whose actions during the Nazi occupation were very controversial. Not surprisingly, this new holiday evoked debates both in the Lithuanian media and within the international community. Some journalists even claimed that this law might create obstacles to Lithuania's becoming a member of the European Union and NATO.²⁸² Furthermore, the law was passed just before the parliamentary elections, which meant that the media debate was strongly politicized. The main participants in these debates were politicians, historians, members of the Jewish community, and former rebels who had taken part in the June uprising. Many Lithuanian intellectuals, the Lithuanian Jewish community, and other civic organizations condemned this law.

After the law was passed, *Lietuvos Rytas* printed an article stating that the Lithuanian Jewish community was devastated by the decision of the Lithuanian parliament.²⁸³ It included a statement from the chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish community, Simonas Alperavičius, who said, "It is painful to realize that the day which symbolizes the beginning of the Holocaust will become a day of national celebration in Lithuania."²⁸⁴ In the same article, the Lithuanian historian Gediminas Ilgūnas similarly claimed that the fact that the Lithuanian parliament had officially acknowledged the activities of the Lithuanian provisional government meant that it also acknowledged documents related to the Holocaust that were filled with antisemitic slogans.²⁸⁵ By the proclamation of this holiday, Ilgūnas argued, the parliament had paved the way for the world to blame the Lithuanian state and all Lithuanians for the Holocaust.²⁸⁶ Interestingly, *Lietuvos Rytas* published an editorial on the "Signs of Time" that questioned whether such a law might be related to the personal family history of Vytautas Landsbergis, the head of the Conservative Party, whose father, Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis,²⁸⁷ had been a minister in the Lithuanian provisional government.²⁸⁸

One of the first who started to defend the law honoring the June uprising and to react to the articles in the Lithuanian media was Adolfas Damušis, who had been an activist within the anti-Soviet resistance and one of the organizers of the June uprising in 1941. He was also the military chief of staff of the LAF. During the Second World War, Damušis was incarcerated in camps in Germany. Afterwards, in 1947, he emigrated to the USA, where he was very active in Lithuanian exile organizations. He returned to Lithuania in 1997 and became an active defender of the Lithuanian partisans and the rebels of the June uprising. In the opinion section of *Lietuvos Rytas*, Damušis wrote letters expressing gratitude to the Lithuanian parliament for finally objectively evaluating

²⁸² FERDINANDAS KAUZONAS: Dar viena konservatorių bomba [Another 'Bomb' of the Conservative Party], in: Respublika from 2000-09-14, p. 4.

²⁸³ ILGŪNAS: Praeities šešėliai, p. 4. This article also included the opinion of the head of the Lithuanian Jewish community, Simonas Alperavičius.

²⁸⁴ Ibidem.

²⁸⁵ Ibidem.

²⁸⁶ Ibidem.

²⁸⁷ Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis (1893–1993) left Lithuania and went to Germany in 1944. In 1949, he emigrated to Australia and, afterwards, in 1959, he returned to Soviet Lithuania, where he was a renowned engineer and architect. His wife, Ona Jablonskytė-Landsbergienė, saved a Jewish child in 1944 by sheltering it at their home.

²⁸⁸ RIMVYDAS VALATKA: Laiko ženklai [The Signs of Time], in: Lietuvos Rytas from 2000-09-14, p. 4.

Lithuanian history and the June uprising.²⁸⁹ He wrote that he, as the former minister of industry within the Lithuanian provisional government, completely rejected any allegations of antisemitism, which he claimed was entirely foreign to him and to the rest of the provisional government.²⁹⁰ He also blamed the Soviet regime for the falsification of historical documents related to the uprising and the provisional government, falsifications which, according to him, had misled Lithuanian historians up to that point.²⁹¹ Sužiedėlis responded to Damušis's letter, claiming that it was not contemporary historians who had ideologized and politicized the June uprising, but the Lithuanian exile community who had never critically evaluated Lithuanian history.²⁹² According to him, the Lithuanian provisional government did not deserve to be hailed as heroic because by discriminating against some of its citizens, it had violated the spirit of the Lithuanian Constitution.²⁹³

Among Lithuanian members of the parliament, this law was criticized most by a member of the Conservative Party, which was mainly responsible for its passage.²⁹⁴ A member of the Lithuanian parliament who was also an active member of the Jewish community, Emanuelis Zingeris, called this law honoring the June uprising "Lithuanian garbage."²⁹⁵ According to him, the restoration of independence proclaimed by the provisional government in 1941 could not be compared with the restorations of Lithuanian independence in 1918 and 1990.²⁹⁶ His brother Markas Zingeris, a Lithuanian writer, journalist, and publicist, who was at that time the head of the State Jewish Museum, claimed in *Lietuvos Rytas* that such an evaluation of the uprising revealed a "pseudo-romantic" perception of Lithuanian history among the members of the Lithuanian parliament and damaged Lithuania's image in the international arena, even as it was seeking to be integrated into Western organizations.²⁹⁷ Moreover, in the year 2000 a collection of historical documents dealing with the June uprising appeared which was edited by the Lithuanian historian Valentinas Brandišauskas.²⁹⁸ This publication revealed the anti-heroic side of the uprising and showed that non-Jewish Lithuanian partisans harbored animosities against their Jewish neighbors.

Together with some other politicians, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus condemned the law, which he called "a disgrace, indicating a serious gap in awareness among certain segments of the population."²⁹⁹ He repealed the law, but it had already had many negative repercussions in the international arena. The historian Solomon Atamukas claimed that the "passage of this law indicated a glaring lack of sensitivity if

²⁸⁹ [SECTION OF OPINIONS]: Istorija perrašyta, p. 4. This article includes many different reactions to this historical event.

²⁹⁰ Ibidem.

²⁹¹ Ibidem.

²⁹² SUŽIEDĖLIS, IŠ istorijos, p. 10.

²⁹³ Ibidem.

²⁹⁴ The Conservative Party, at that time, had the majority in the Lithuanian Parliament, and most of its members voted for this law.

²⁹⁵ Cited from SUŽIEDĖLIS, IŠ istorijos, p. 10.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem.

²⁹⁷ [SECTION OF OPINIONS], Istorija perrašyta, p. 4.

²⁹⁸ BRANDIŠAUSKAS, 1941 m. Birželio sukilimas.

²⁹⁹ Cited from ATAMUKAS, The Hard Long Road.

not outright ignorance among members of parliament who voted for it, presumably in the name of nationalistic pride and patriotism.³⁰⁰ This debate thus reveals that in this case media served as an arena for a number of intellectuals, historians, and politicians to influence the lawmaking process. After these debates, the law was revoked and, as the Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius³⁰¹ stated, the law was “frozen” and given to the State Archive. He admitted that such law would have been a mistake, because the country should not evaluate the history of the uprising without remembering the mass murder of Jews.³⁰² Furthermore, Kubilius claimed that this issue should not be a topic for politicians but a research field for Lithuanian historians.³⁰³ Hence, in this case, media debates served as a monitoring institution, which challenged the process of Lithuanian history writing through laws and politicization.

Moral Debates in the Media: Reburial as a Form of Coming to Terms with the Past?

Political debates were also often related to moral debates on how one should memorialize this double past. These political debates were also transferred to Lithuanian cemeteries, where the reburial of the remains of the most significant personalities of the uprising took place in 1995 and 2012. The reburial of the heroes of the June uprising, namely Škirpa and Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis, became a way to convey a certain political recognition on the June uprising. While the law honoring these events was rejected in 2000, in 2012 Lithuanian politicians organized a state reburial of Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis, and it could be claimed that they thereby tried once again to legitimize the June uprising.

The treatment of these dead bodies of combatants and the honors paid them are reflective of an underlying historical narrative. As the American cultural anthropologist Katherine Verdery claims in her book *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, “politics around a reburied corpse benefits from the aura of sanctity the corpse is presumed to bear, and from the implicit suggestion that reburial (re)sacralizes the political order represented by those who carry it out.”³⁰⁴ Moreover, dead bodies serve very well for re-writing histories, precisely because they are speechless.³⁰⁵ As this analysis of media debates over the reburials of the uprising’s partisans in Lithuania also suggests, “a body’s symbolic effectiveness does not depend on its standing for one particular thing.”³⁰⁶ On the contrary, though a corpse is speechless, its ambiguity can foster “multivocality, or polysemy.”³⁰⁷ As the evolution of Lithuanian historiography clearly shows, dead bodies “do not have a single meaning but are open to many different readings.”³⁰⁸

³⁰⁰ Ibidem.

³⁰¹ After these debates, the leaders of the Conservative Party, Andrius Kubilius and Vytautas Landsbergis, acknowledged that this law was a mistake.

³⁰² BNS.

³⁰³ Ibidem.

³⁰⁴ VERDERY, p. 32.

³⁰⁵ Ibidem, p. 29.

³⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 28.

³⁰⁷ Ibidem.

³⁰⁸ Ibidem.

The two most controversial state reburials of the June uprising not only occurred in different time periods, but also evoked different reactions and debates on the Lithuanian historical past within the media. Škirpa was reburied in 1995, while Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis's remains were relocated in 2012. The divergent reactions to their reinterment are indicative of the gradual development of Lithuanian memory culture and show how, over time, the perception of the June uprising changed from a heroic evaluation to more critical accounts. In 1995, the ceremony surrounding Škirpa's reburial featured the narrative of a glorious and heroic past of anti-Soviet resistance. There were no extensive media debates on controversial aspects of the uprising and the subsequent massacre of Lithuanian Jews. In 2012, on the other hand, the reburial of Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis provoked extensive discussion in the Lithuanian media. It is not surprising that the transfer of human remains attracted such media attention. The historians Jane Hubert and Cressida Fforde, in their book *The Dead and their Possessions*, claim that "the return of human remains and important cultural objects from traumatic events of the past can begin to heal the wounds of the people as a group and help them to come to terms with the past."³⁰⁹ As is shown in this section, however, reburial can also open up historic wounds and allow people to critically discuss what belongs to their own past and what is not part of their historical memory.

The reburial ceremony for Škirpa, sponsored by the Lithuanian state, took place in Kaunas in 1995. Škirpa was reburied as the hero of the Lithuanian nation; his military activities and philosophical ideas were praised by the Lithuanian Prime Minister Adolfo Šleževičius.³¹⁰ The antisemitic ideology of the LAF which Škirpa had developed went unchallenged in the media, which arguably reflects a general acceptance of the heroic narrative of the June uprising at that time.

By 2012, however, when Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis's remains were transferred, the landscape of historical memory in Lithuania had changed dramatically. Lithuanian historians and intellectuals published an open letter in the Lithuanian media concerning the solemn reinterment of Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis.³¹¹ It was signed by a number of renowned personalities including the historians Egidijus Aleksandravičius, Šarūnas Liekis, and Alvydas Nikžentaitis, intellectuals like Tomas Venclova and Leonidas Donskis, the Holocaust survivor Irena Veisaitė, and the chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish community Faina Kukliansky.³¹² In this open letter they objected to the official state-sponsored reburial of Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis and claimed that:

The recent state-sponsored commemoration of Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis's life and legacy that took place on the occasion of his reburial was an egregious error of moral judgment. It exalted a would-be leader who showed no regret or remorse for having failed the most basic test of principled leadership: standing up for justice and for the innocent.³¹³

³⁰⁹ FFORDE/HUBERT, p. 6.

³¹⁰ VALDAS SUTKUS: Pulkinko K. Škirpos palaikis priglaidė gimtoji žemė [The Remains of the Colonel K. Škirpa Was Laid to Rest in His Homeland], in: Lietuvos Rytas from 1995-06-17, p. 7.

³¹¹ ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, Atviras laiškas, p. 4.

³¹² Kukliansky replaced Alperavičius as the chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community in 2010.

³¹³ ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, Atviras laiškas, p. 4. The translation of this letter into English is taken from: HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING INSTITUTE IN LITHUANIA: Open Letter. Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis, URL:

They reminded that the uprising was prefaced by antisemitic rhetoric and violence against the Jewish population. According to them, Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis was responsible for the activities of the Lithuanian provisional government which “did not distance itself from the pro-Nazi policies actively supported by Kazys Škirpa’s Lithuanian Activist Front.”³¹⁴ A number of responses to their open letter appeared in the Lithuanian media. The Lithuanian dissident and political activist Algirdas Patackas wrote that the authors should be seen as “betrayers of a nation” and everybody should remember their names.³¹⁵ He compared these Lithuanian historians and intellectuals to “quislings,”³¹⁶ namely traitors, who by signing their letter had stated in effect that they are “against their own nation.”³¹⁷

Thus, the debate evoked by the dead bodies centered around the question of moral compromise for the sake of Lithuanian independence. The narrative that justified any means in Lithuanian partisans’ fight for freedom was questioned. Those Lithuanian historians and intellectuals who had signed the open letter wanted to show Lithuanian society the moral errors hidden behind the heroic perception of the Lithuanian history. According to them “a government which consigned an entire class of its citizenry to discrimination and persecution [...] cannot properly claim to be defending freedom.”³¹⁸

Visualizing the June Uprising: Towards New Enslavements of Memory?

It was not only Lithuanian political institutions and Lithuanian newspapers which created narratives around the history of the June uprising; Lithuanian television also shaped perceptions of the event with its visualizations and broadcasts. According to the media scholar Tobias Ebbrecht, “television thus creates an archive of historical images that, together with popular discourses on historic events [...] create a collective image of history that is on the one hand composed from many different ‘stories’ but on the other hand is a stereotype, a collectively shared version of history.”³¹⁹ Lithuanian national television produced and showed dozens of films concerning the memory of the anti-Soviet resistance, and it seems that fostering historical consciousness of its audience became an official mission of the Lithuanian national radio and television (LRT). However, these broadcasts tended to cast Lithuanian history in a romantic light, which according to the Lithuanian literary scholar Karolis Klimka, is “concerned with promoting and re-affirming the nationalist narrative centered on the Nation as its main protagonist.”³²⁰ Rūta Šermukšnytė has pointed out that most Lithuanian documentary films and programs, especially in the period of the national revival before 1993, “failed to provide a new, individual take on the history of Lithuania; rather, they reproduced

http://www.hrmi.lt/uploaded/PDF%20dokai/Pranesimai%20spaudai/Open_letter_Ambrazevicius-Brazaitis_20120612.pdf (2014-10-12).

³¹⁴ Ibidem.

³¹⁵ PATACKAS, p. 4.

³¹⁶ The term “quisling” is typically applied to those who collaborated with the Axis forces during the World War II.

³¹⁷ PATACKAS, p. 4.

³¹⁸ ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS, *Atviras laiškas*, p. 4.

³¹⁹ EBBRECHT, p. 222.

³²⁰ KLIMKA, p. 38.

interpretations of Lithuanian history produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”³²¹

It does indeed seem that the television programs and documentary films related to the June uprising which LRT broadcasts tend to be one-sided interpretations of the events surrounding the uprising. This can be illustrated by examining two different LRT programs that focused on the June uprising and were shown in two different periods of time, i.e. in 1995 and 2013. These are *Būtovės slėpiniai* [The Hidden Record of the Past]—one of the most famous Lithuanian television programs related to Lithuanian history—and the documentary *Pavergtųjų sukilimas* [The Rising of the Enslaved].

Būtovės slėpiniai was created by two leading Lithuanian historians, each representative of a generation: the historian Alfredas Bumblauskas represented the young generation of historians, and his colleague Edvardas Gudavičius, who was an active historian in the Soviet era, represented the older generation. The program was based on dialogue between these two historians and their invited experts on a range of historical epochs. The focus was on the history of Lithuania in the Middle Ages, because the two hosts worked in this field. They did not, however, avoid more contemporary historical issues. In 1995, they broadcast an episode which dealt with the June uprising. The invited guests included a participant in the uprising, Juozas Pajaujis, and a historian from Vilnius University, Sigitas Jegelavičius. Furthermore, the host Gudavičius reported both as a historian and as an eyewitness of the events during the June uprising. He is actually also one of the historians who defined this fight as “one of the greatest moments of the Lithuanian history,” even if it had “few dark blemishes.”³²²

This television program evoked harsh criticism from the historian Gediminas Ilgūnas, who challenged its depiction of the events of June 1941 by publishing an article in the opinion section of the newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas*.³²³ First, Ilgūnas challenged the historians’ conclusion that there had been no antisemitism evident among the members of the Lithuanian provisional government and participants in the June uprising. Ilgūnas claimed that this position, which both Pajaujis and Jegelavičius had harshly defended contradicted the historical documentation, which proves the opposite.³²⁴ Furthermore, he questioned the choice of the guests, which had not included a single Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. He argued that such a choice of participants could only imply a one-sided perspective.³²⁵ According to Ilgūnas, this television program, which claimed to reveal “The Hidden Record of the Past” should not conceal past events but, on the contrary, reveal the past’s hidden secrets and silences.³²⁶

On 23 June 2013, the commemoration day of the June uprising, the LRT screened the documentary film *Pavergtųjų sukilimas* [The Rising of the Enslaved], directed by Algis Kuzmickas and produced by one of Lithuania’s most influential television producers, Saulius Bartkus. This two part historical documentary retells the events of the June uprising through interviews with witnesses, participants in the uprising, and his-

³²¹ ŠERMUKŠNYTĖ, *Istorijos mokslo*, p. 86.

³²² Cited from SIMANONYTĖ.

³²³ ILGŪNAS: Kodėl “Būtovės slėpiniai” slepia tiesą?, p. 4.

³²⁴ *Ibidem*.

³²⁵ *Ibidem*.

³²⁶ *Ibidem*.

torians. The first part deals with the period between the summer of 1940 and summer of 1941, marked by deportations carried out by the Soviet regime. The second part of the film deals with the beginning of the war and the revolt itself. The film's synopsis claims that "the events of June 1941 mark the resistance and battle of the whole nation against occupation and terror, aiming at turning the nation from a victim to a subject, empowered to govern its own country and institutions."³²⁷ This film was created for the seventieth anniversary of the June uprising. Its first screening, on 22 June 2011, was attended by many famous Lithuanian figures, including the former Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus, who opened the screening with a speech:

I would say that this is for me not just an exciting opportunity but also a chance to return back in my mind to the day which you will see today. Although it has been said that this is in part a propaganda film, I am here in order to see historical facts from that period, events of that historical period, and I don't know how many people there are in this room who experienced, who were living witnesses to those days. But before you stands a 15-year-old who was there at that time, that minute when these events arose, and they are alive in my memory after seventy years. [...] I won't undertake to go into all the different interpretations, and as we put distance between ourselves and those events perhaps there will be more realistic, truer interpretations. Today we hear all sorts of judgments on that period, on that period by those who hadn't been born yet, those who today speak and even concoct different theories on whether this was necessary, whether it was realistic, whether it some special kind of nonsense that the declaration of Lithuanian independence and the thirst for freedom are unjustifiable by any arguments.³²⁸

Thus, Adamkus invited people to watch this film solely from the heroic perspective of Lithuanian history. The beginning of the Holocaust and the fate of the Jews were not mentioned. Moreover, the head of the parliament, Irena Degutienė, after the premiere screening, called the film "an important contribution to the Lithuanian culture, history and patriotic education" and expressed her gratitude to the filmmakers.³²⁹

Pavergtujų sukilimas belongs to the genre of docudrama: in other words, it uses actors and a script to "recreate" the events of the uprising. Critics allege, however, that mixing drama and documentary in this manner sometimes leads to "false or bogus exercises" in which "the boundary between fact and fiction is becoming dangerously blurred."³³⁰ The dramatic scenes, especially the reenactments of partisans with Lithuanian flags being shot, are aimed to create dramatic suspense and engage the viewers' emotions. The use of Lithuanian symbols, such as flags, aims to legitimize the partisans' actions in the uprising, showing them as defenders of Lithuanian statehood. The film is also filled with patriotic music, which aims not only to create suspense but also to foster the audience's empathy with the partisans. It ends with documentary photographs showing the corpses of people who were executed by the Soviet regime in

³²⁷ INSTITUTE OF DOCUMENTARY FILM.

³²⁸ DEFENDING HISTORY, Eyewitness Account.

³²⁹ DEGUTIENĖ.

³³⁰ PAGET, pp. 1-2.

Lithuania, mostly in the early phase of the occupation. The use of this imagery at the end of this film might aim to validate the actions of the partisans who fought against the annihilation of the Lithuanian nation, but the film includes no images of the Jewish pogroms which occurred simultaneously with the uprising.

Alongside these reenactments, the viewer hears the voices of people being interviewed. The film's protagonists are mainly witnesses of and participants in the June uprising, for instance, the anti-Soviet resistance activist Aleksandras Bendinskas. Bendinskas was a LAF activist, and, in June 1941, he was the head of the LAF administrative political headquarters in Kaunas.³³¹ Bendinskas was one of the uprising's participants who, after the war, stayed in Soviet Lithuania. The film team also went to the USA to meet with former participants and witnesses.³³² None of those they spoke to, however, were Lithuanian Jews, whom the film does not mention at all, even though this uprising also marked the beginning of the Holocaust in Lithuania. One of the filmmakers, the journalist Vidmantas Valiušaitis, claimed that "it won't be possible to avoid mentioning this topic, although, obviously, this is a different topic, demanding very careful and sensitive attention"; he viewed the Jewish issue as "exclusively the affair of German special services."³³³

Thus, this documentary film, too, must be seen to focus only on a glorified version of the June uprising. The aim of the film is patriotic education, which is the main goal of the entire production company (E2K) that created this film. This company is headed by TV producer Saulius Bartkus and coordinated by a former member of the Lithuanian parliament and the chairman of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party, Gintaras Songaila. Bartkus claimed that he completely agrees with those who say that this film is propagandistic; he claims that this is "Lithuanian propaganda" which aims to show Lithuanian heroes.³³⁴ This film received the official support of the Lithuanian parliament and has been shown during different events commemorating the June uprising since 2011.

The Lithuanian national broadcaster, which is directly accountable to the Lithuanian parliament, is thus largely responsible for popularizing and institutionalizing this heroic narrative. According to the Lithuanian journalist Žygyntas Pečiulis, the LRT is still not free from political influence even today, because, after each election, the question of delegating two members of the Lithuanian parliament to the management board of the LRT arises.³³⁵ In the case of the film *Pavergtujų sukilimas*, the LRT and the Lithuanian parliament cooperated on production and screenings. In this manner, they also publicized their position and contributed to the establishment of the heroic narrative of the June uprising. However, it is also important to observe that other forms of media, such as the daily newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas*, offered possibilities for presenting different narratives and criticizing the LRT's historical programming. This shows that while the media can certainly contribute to such monolithic narratives, it can also serve as a certain public monitoring institution controlling other forms of media.

³³¹ Bendinskas was later arrested and sent to the Gulag, where he stayed from 1945 to 1956.

³³² SIMANONYTĖ.

³³³ Ibidem.

³³⁴ LABUTYTĖ.

³³⁵ PEČIULIS.

In addition to their mono-ethnic perspective which led to the exclusion of Jews and the Jewish perspective on these events, this film—like nearly all of the narratives of the June uprising—adopt a gendered viewpoint, i.e., a male perception of the events in which the female narrative is invisible. The German historians Maren Röger and Ruth Leiserowitz observed that “World War II in Central and Eastern Europe is still seldom discussed with regard to gender relations and gender roles.”³³⁶ Leiserowitz, who analyzes Jewish and Lithuanian female partisans, highlights the disappearance of the female dimension. For example, photographs of Lithuanian resistance fighters showed women “only very rarely with the whole formation.”³³⁷ Moreover, until 1989, photos which included female partisans in the resistance “were forbidden in public.”³³⁸ This absence of a female narrative in Lithuanian historiography can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century, when the first modern history of Lithuania was written. In that period, like after 1990, women remained “non-dominant and lacking historical agency.”³³⁹ In that standard accounts of Lithuanian history, women were usually seen solely as “providers of patriotic education and guardians of ethnic culture.”³⁴⁰ However, their activities were usually carried out privately, while men and their heroic actions were always part of the public life. Thus, as Tomas Balkelis affirms, “the social respectability of women was to be achieved through the process of their domestication, not through participation in public politics.”³⁴¹ The Lithuanian sociologist Vytautas Kavolis has observed—in Balkelis’ words—that, in Lithuanian historiography, “the only form of authority that a woman-patriot could exercise over a male-patriot would be a moral or poetic.”³⁴² Women could serve as a source of inspiration but not as “an equal partner in national politics.”³⁴³ The Lithuanian exile community that has taken an active role in the writing of the history of the June uprising was also a community publicly dominated by males. Kavolis, who also lived in the USA at that time, has noticed that Lithuanian émigrés and their media were hostile to the ideas of feminism; they ignored it and even saw it as “an American strangeness” that was not relevant to the Lithuanians.³⁴⁴ Hence, it is not surprising that female voices and armed resistance were seen as incompatible issues by the male narrators of this history.

Moreover, most of those male writers who contributed to the historical narrative of the anti-Soviet resistance in Lithuania were influenced by traditional historiography, in which the woman was seen as a domestic figure rather than as a participant in politics or as an important historical agent. As a result, as one might predict, historians’ knowledge of possible female involvement in the Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis remains unknown. In the Lithuanian historiography, women remained consigned to

³³⁶ LEISEROWITZ/RÖGER, p. 15.

³³⁷ LEISEROWITZ, *In the Lithuanian Woods*, p. 216.

³³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³³⁹ BALKELIS, p. 123.

³⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

³⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 67.

³⁴³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁴ DAUGIRDAITĖ, p. 114.

non-political roles. Female historical figures were seen neither as heroes, nor as perpetrators, and remained passive observers of historical events.

Thus, after independence, the heroic male narrative of the uprising became an integral part of the collective memory in Lithuania. It served as a symbol of the courageous anti-Soviet resistance. The Jewish perspective on the uprising as the prelude to the Holocaust was forgotten. However, the media provided not only an arena for fostering the memories about the uprising but also a place where those memories were later re-shaped and counter-memories emerged. It was debates among politicians, historians, and philosophers in the Lithuanian print media which challenged the established heroic narrative of the June uprising and have even influenced the lawmaking process. The law which would honor the June uprising and turn it into a national celebration was not implemented. Furthermore, the media has also shaped the moral debates about the uprising, while fostering a discussion about the reburial of the uprising's "heroes." However, while print media may have functioned as a monitoring institution against the glorification of the uprising in the historical consciousness, other forms of media acted differently.

4.2.2 Politics of Apology: Holocaust Memory, Media Antagonism, and Lithuanian Foreign Policy

Locating Holocaust Apology in Lithuania in the "Era of Apologies"

The post-Cold War era is often designated as "the age of apology and forgiveness."³⁴⁵ Apologies have been issued for colonial and postcolonial repressions, including for the crimes committed during the Holocaust. The apology phenomenon is "most remarkable" in the fact that "powerful actors and institutions are apologizing to the relatively powerless" or, in the case of the Holocaust, to communities which have nearly vanished from the societal landscape of the respective countries.³⁴⁶ According to Mark Gibney and Rhoda Howard-Hassmann, in some cases these apologies have even become a sort of social movement, invoked by "social movements for liberation, indigenous demands for apology, and the politics of multiculturalism," which highlight personal suffering and feeling.³⁴⁷ These developments evoke a "new politics of recognition of 'others,' of minorities."³⁴⁸ Apologies are used by states and other social institutions in this manner to express "empathy to those they have harmed."³⁴⁹ Repentance is claimed "to reconstitute the moral framework that governs the communities and direct those towards an alternative future built on equality, mutual dignity and respect."³⁵⁰

Since the Second World War, (West) Germany has generally been seen as providing "the template for modern movements of remorse" in relation to the Holocaust.³⁵¹ As

³⁴⁵ WILSON/BLEIKER, p. 42.

³⁴⁶ HOWARD-HASSMANN/GIBNEY, p. 2.

³⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁵⁰ WILSON/BLEIKER, p. 42.

³⁵¹ CELERMAJER, p. 16.

early as 1952, the West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer spoke to the Bundestag about the crimes that had been committed in the name of the German people, although, at this point, “he did not place the German people in the position of being the active and responsible subject of those crimes.”³⁵² Twenty years later, while visiting the Warsaw ghetto in 1970, Chancellor Willy Brandt fell to his knees before the Memorial for the Jewish Uprising. Mass media outlets around the globe covered this *Kniefall*, with which Brandt can be seen to have “lowered himself, and made himself and his country lower than the Jewish people.”³⁵³ According to the sociologist Danielle Celermajer, Brandt’s gesture was “not only a turning point in the transformation of the German-Polish relations after the war, but a catalyst in reshaping Eastern European politics more generally.”³⁵⁴

Some scholars have pointed to “the rapid proliferation of political apologies” since 1995.³⁵⁵ In November 1994, the Austrian president Thomas Klestil apologized for his country’s role during the Holocaust in a speech before the *Knesset*, the Israeli parliament. In July 1995, French president Jacques Chirac apologized for France’s guilt in the fate of Jews during the war; however, at the same time he “redeemed the contemporary nation.”³⁵⁶ He stated that “France, the homeland of the Enlightenment and of the rights of man, a land of welcome and asylum, on that day committed the irreparable.”³⁵⁷ As Celermajer observes, Chirac’s apology was not really addressed to the victim but rather to “the national identity of the apologizing nation.”³⁵⁸ In May 2001, Polish bishops apologized for the role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust, especially for the massacre at Jedwabne. A month later, the Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski delivered a state apology for the murder of Jews at Jedwabne. More than fifty years after the events, apologies were also issued in Croatia (1997), Switzerland (1999), Finland (2000), and the Vatican (1998); even the Argentinean president Fernando de la Rúa apologized on behalf of his country in June 2000 for harboring Nazi criminals who had sought refuge from the war crime tribunals there.

A final such apology speech which deserves mention here is that delivered by the Lithuanian president Algirdas Brazauskas at the *Knesset* in Jerusalem on March 1995. Lithuania, together with Poland, was one of the first post-Soviet countries to apologize for the atrocities committed against Jews during the Second World War. This apology came during an important phase in the development of the Lithuanian state, namely during the years when negotiations were started with the European Union and NATO regarding Lithuania’s petition for membership in those bodies. It was also the year marked by rehabilitation processes of alleged war criminals. Jewish communities around the world were paying close attention to these controversial rehabilitations,

³⁵² Ibidem.

³⁵³ WILSON/BLEIKER, p. 53.

³⁵⁴ CELERMAJER, pp. 17-18.

³⁵⁵ HOWARD-HASSMANN/GIBNEY, p. 2.

³⁵⁶ CELERMAJER, p. 21.

³⁵⁷ MARLISE SIMONS: Chirac Affirms France’s Guilt in Fate of Jews, in: The New York Times from 1995-07-17, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/17/world/chirac-affirms-france-s-guilt-in-fate-of-jews.html> (2019-01-26).

³⁵⁸ CELERMAJER, p. 21.

which meant that the political atmosphere in which the apology had to be delivered was very tense. Before Brazauskas's visit to Israel, the President of the World Jewish Congress, Elan Steinberg, had predicted that, given these negative developments in Lithuania, especially those related to rehabilitation of Nazi criminals, the Lithuanian president state visit to Israel would be a "diplomatic catastrophe."³⁵⁹

The Performance of Brazauskas's Apology and its Media Reception: The "Turning Point" in Holocaust Remembrance in Lithuania

Brazauskas's apologetic speech in Israel was both a historical and a political apology. A historical apology refers to an expression of remorse for "injustices that occurred in the remote past," i.e., apologies made in situations in which "either the perpetrators or the victims, or both, are no longer alive."³⁶⁰ In the case of the Holocaust in Lithuania, most, namely ninety-five percent, of the victims had perished and many perpetrators had already died, as well. It was also a political apology, meaning that it was delivered by a political entity, namely, a national president, who apologized on behalf of the state. In his apology speech to the Knesset, Brazauskas addressed most of those issues:

How could it come to be that in full view of their fellow citizens, and even with the direct participation of so many of them in the crimes, hundreds of thousands of Lithuanian Jews perished or were exiled, imprisoned, robbed, and humiliated during the course of World War Two? I, of course, can never agree that any nation could be inculpated with collective guilt. The Jewish people, more than any other, appreciate the blamelessness of such accusations. Nevertheless, there exists a moral imperative for the nation as well as a personal obligation for the individual to comprehend that which occurred. In the final analysis, conscience and shame do exist. And we, in building a new, civil, and democratic Lithuania which extends her hand to the nations of the world, raise this question among ourselves. [...] I ask you for forgiveness for those Lithuanians who ruthlessly killed, shot, deported, and robbed Jews.³⁶¹

Thus, Brazauskas, who might well have referenced the Holocaust apologies proclaimed by German and Austrian presidents before drafting his own text, apologized in the name of the nation for those Lithuanians who were responsible for the massacre of Jews in Lithuania. Brazauskas's apology proved quite controversial within the Lithuanian media. The journalists of the two largest national newspapers, *Lietuvos Rytas* and *Respublika*, described the visit as a diplomatic mistake. However, some journalists from *Lietuvos Rytas* suggested that Brazauskas's actions were ahead of their time.³⁶² A leading journalist from *Lietuvos Rytas*, Rimvydas Valatka, claimed that this apology was more for Lithuanians' sake than for the Jews.³⁶³ Nevertheless, Valatka criticized the

³⁵⁹ N.N.: Brazausko vizitas į Izraelį – diplomatinė katastrofa [Brazauskas' Visit to Israel – Diplomatic Catastrophe], in: *Lietuvos Rytas* from 1995-02-11, pp. 1-2.

³⁶⁰ WILSON/BLEIKER, p. 46.

³⁶¹ BRAZAUSKAS.

³⁶² RIMVYDAS VALATKA: Atsiprašymas, kuris sukretė 'žmogų iš gatvės' [Apology, which Shocked 'People from the Street'], in: *Lietuvos Rytas* from 1995-03-13, p. 4.

³⁶³ *Ibidem*.

president for not informing Lithuanian society about his planned apology, which, Valatka claimed, had been totally unexpected for “an ordinary Lithuanian from the street.” However, Valatka’s colleague Stoma stated that “the passion of the Lithuanian leaders for remorse causes nothing besides damage.”³⁶⁴

Respublika was even more critical: its journalists claimed in their headlines that the apology had improved Lithuania’s image in Israel but had worsened Lithuanians’ image of Jews.³⁶⁵ In the section “Society,” *Respublika* printed a series of articles questioning the “national apology.” This section included an article by the famous Lithuanian writer and signatory of the 1990 Act of Reestablishment of the State of Lithuania, Vidmantė Jasiukaitytė, who asked “Was It All of Our Fault?” She claimed that this apology had been motivated by economic and political pressure, calling it as a “misunderstanding” of Lithuanian foreign policy.³⁶⁶ She even proclaimed that Brazauskas had “falsified the historical face of Lithuania” with his apology, because no one had apologized for the deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia.³⁶⁷ According to Jasiukaitytė, the entire nation was completely innocent.³⁶⁸

The hostile reaction of the Lithuanian media was largely based on two arguments. First, they discussed the consequences that might follow the state’s official expression of remorse. Apologies for past crimes by a state leader could expose the government to demands for reparations from the Lithuanian Jews. In his speech, Brazauskas had stated that Jews “can reclaim property in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Lithuania, and on the basis of international law and good will.”³⁶⁹ Second, critics questioned the legitimacy of Brazauskas, a former communist, apologizing in the name of the nation. According to Lithuanian journalists, such an apology reinforced the image of Lithuanians as war criminals.³⁷⁰

Furthermore, they reminded readers that Brazauskas, the former head of the Lithuanian Communist Party, had not yet apologized Lithuanian nation for the crimes committed in the name of the communist regime. In fact, just nine days after Brazauskas returned from Israel, on 11 March 1995, the anniversary of Lithuania’s restored independence, Česlovas Juršėnas, the head of the Lithuanian parliament and a member of the reformed communist party (i.e., the Democratic Labor Party of Lithuania),³⁷¹ apologized for the communist crimes. He proclaimed that he felt a moral responsibility to apologize in the name of those communist party members who had carried out crimes against the Lithuanian nation.³⁷² Juršėnas claimed that only after having apologized

³⁶⁴ SAULIUS STOMA: Atgaila iš reikalo niekada nebūna nuoširdi [Remorse Out of Necessity is Never Sincere], in: Lietuvos Rytas from 1995-03-06, p. 4.

³⁶⁵ FERDINANDAS KAUZONAS, AUDRIUS BAČIULIS: Prezidento vizito pėdsakais [Following the Traces of the Presidential Visit], in: Respublika from 1995-03-06, p. 4.

³⁶⁶ JASIUKAITYTĖ, p. 18.

³⁶⁷ Ibidem.

³⁶⁸ Ibidem.

³⁶⁹ BRAZAUSKAS.

³⁷⁰ JASIUKAITYTĖ, p. 18.

³⁷¹ In 2001, the Democratic Labor Party of Lithuania merged with the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania. After the reunification, Algirdas Brazauskas became the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania.

³⁷² JURŠĖNAS.

can one achieve peace.³⁷³ Hence, ironically, Brazauskas's apology for the crimes of Lithuanians against Jews was the catalyst which evoked Juršėnas's apology in the name of the former communist party, of which he had been a member, for the crimes of the Soviet regime.

The content of an apology transcends the literal words expressed to include the manner and location in which it is delivered.³⁷⁴ Some scholars compare contemporary political apologies with ancient religious practices—only today high priests are replaced “with the heads of states; temples, with parliaments; religious procedures, with equally well-rehearsed rituals dictated by media-entertainment networks.”³⁷⁵ Apologies should thus be seen as a public performance “through which the memory—or myth—of trauma is being shaped and reshaped.”³⁷⁶ It is therefore important to consider the visual and performative dimension of an apology. In their discussion of Brandt's apology in Warsaw, the political scientists Erin Wilson and Roland Bleiker, note that “nowhere is the power of performance more evident and influential than in its visual dimension.”³⁷⁷

Brazauskas's apology in the name of the Lithuanian state likewise resembles a performance. An incident that happened one day before the historic speech is remembered more than the apologetic speech: As the Lithuanian president and his delegation were leaving the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem, they were confronted with a picket line of nearly seventy Holocaust survivors, most of them Lithuanian Jews, who were protesting against the rehabilitation of Lithuanian Nazi murderers. One member of the group, an elderly man wearing a yellow star on his jacket had lost his family in the Ponary forest; this Holocaust survivor, Yaakov Brosh, loudly expressed his dissatisfaction with Lithuanian politics concerning the Holocaust. Confronted with this man whose entire family had been killed, President Brazauskas, as he later wrote in his memoirs and stated in interviews, was shocked and overwhelmed. He simply did not know what to say and how to react.³⁷⁸ He approached Brosh—according to his later accounts, spontaneously³⁷⁹—and embraced and kissed this elderly man. Some years later, Lithuanian journalists called this act “the best spontaneous act in modern Lithuanian diplomacy” and foreign policy.³⁸⁰

Dozens of photographers recorded Brazauskas's embrace of this Lithuanian Holocaust survivor, and the first photographs of this encounter were published the next morning, before Brazauskas spoke to the Knesset, in both Israeli and global media outlets. This speechless act of apologizing to a single man diminished the tensions which had existed at the beginning of the visit and became a visual illustration for his speech. Later, Brazauskas and Brosh became friends and met each other during their visits to Israel or Lithuania. The image of Brazauskas praying next to the Wailing Wall

³⁷³ Ibidem.

³⁷⁴ WILSON/BLEIKER, p. 52.

³⁷⁵ Ibidem.

³⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 53.

³⁷⁷ Ibidem.

³⁷⁸ MILIŪTĖ.

³⁷⁹ There were discussions in the media concerning whether this had been a spontaneous or a planned act. It is known that Brazauskas thoroughly studied similar French and Austrian Holocaust apologies before penning his own.

³⁸⁰ MILIŪTĖ.

in Jerusalem, known as a site of Jewish prayer and pilgrimage, also circulated in Lithuanian media. The photograph of Brazauskas praying and touching the stones of the wall became a visual representation of the apology in Lithuania. The picture resurfaced in Lithuanian media for many years. In 1998, for example, the Lithuanian magazine *Veidas* republished it on the cover with the headline “Lithuanians and Jews: Six Ages of Living Together.”³⁸¹ This photograph symbolized not only the act of apology itself but also served as a reminder of the positive historical relations between Lithuanians and Jews. Hence, in the case of Brazauskas, these images have proven to be a more important element of his apology than the speech he delivered. This embrace should be seen as a reflection of the physical encounter with those to whom the apology is offered. In the meantime, touching the Wailing Wall evoked memories of the common history between non-Jewish Lithuanians and Lithuanian Jews. As scholars noticed “neither can an apology be accepted nor forgiveness be given without actually seeing the Other.”³⁸² In other words, speech acts “necessarily require a physical encounter to be authentic.”³⁸³

Apology as Foreign Policymaking: “New Identity” and Western Integration

Despite the powerful images of Brazauskas’s trip to Israel, his apology did not have popular support in Lithuania in 1995. The truth is that this apology cannot be viewed as having been motivated solely by remorse for crimes committed during the Holocaust, but was also a product of the sociopolitical context in which it was delivered. The apology was ultimately directed towards the international community. The atrocities of the Holocaust were deplored in the context of the European Union and NATO expansion. According to the German writer and publicist Ralph Giordano, the only reason the question of the Holocaust was discussed publicly in Lithuania for the first time in 1995 is that Lithuania aspired to join these Western organizations.³⁸⁴ This move towards the EU and NATO required a critical evaluation of Lithuanian history during the Second World War, meaning not only the investigation of Stalinist crimes but also the evaluation of Lithuanian collaboration with Nazi Germany, which had resulted in the vanishing of nearly the entire population of Lithuanian Jews.

The international studies scholar Maria Mälksoo has observed that during the EU and NATO accession processes, the Baltic states and Poland had to display very specific kind of “memory work”; they had to take part in the creation of the collective European memory.³⁸⁵ Western European countries set certain “rules of remembrance to the ‘new Europeans.’”³⁸⁶ In the countries of the European Union to the west, the memorialization of the Second World War was tied tightly to the memorialization of the Holocaust. The historian Tony Judt observes: “by the end of the twentieth century the centrality of the Holocaust in Western European identity and memory seemed secure.”³⁸⁷ Thus, post-So-

³⁸¹ GELEŽEVIČIUS, *Nauji laikai*, pp. 24-29.

³⁸² WILSON/BLEIKER, p. 51.

³⁸³ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁴ GIORDANO, p. 2.

³⁸⁵ MÄLKSOO, *The Memory Politics*, p. 656.

³⁸⁶ *Ibidem*. See more on the memory work in the European Union in section 4.2.3.

³⁸⁷ JUDT, *From the House of the Dead*.

viet states entering the Western organizations had to deal with their other past during the Second World War, as well.

As a result, demonstrating remorse for their role in Holocaust atrocities became one of the priorities of Lithuanian foreign policy. The political scientist Douglas Becker uses constructivist international relations theory to stress the importance of identity and image in shaping decisions of national foreign policy and claims that historical trauma influences foreign policy formation.³⁸⁸ According to him, trauma can affect foreign policy in two very different ways, namely, “states that have experienced trauma can use this experience to cast a more aggressive foreign policy or a more pacifistic one.”³⁸⁹ This logic of the relationship between international relations and historical trauma could be also observed in the case of Lithuania. Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania required shaping pacifistic and apologetic political agendas.

In April 1994, one year before his visit to Israel, Brazauskas delivered an official speech to the Council of Europe, in which he responded to allegations about the Holocaust and the rehabilitation of war criminals. He not only condemned the massacre of Jews in Lithuania, but also expressed regret that there had indeed been Lithuanians who took part in the extermination of Jews. He promised that these criminals would be punished. Thus, the first location in which Lithuania issues such an apology was a European institution, not Israel, and the first addressees were not the Jews but the bureaucrats of the Council of Europe and the leaders of different European states. Brazauskas used Holocaust trauma as an opportunity for positive international interaction and to show that Lithuania was dealing with its past. According to scholars, “the act of apology or repentance is, thusly, seen as a form of renewal that leads to a new identity, a new life, and ultimately a new future for parties that shared a traumatic past.”³⁹⁰ Both Brazauskas’s apologies, to the Council of Europe and the Knesset, were to serve as a sign of Lithuania stepping westward.

4.2.3 The Paradoxes of Europeanization: Lithuanian and European Holocaust Memories

After the Soviet Union collapsed, the narrative of national identity drew on other symbols like “the West,” which was associated with Europe, democracy, and morality.³⁹¹ “The East” in this narrative was linked to communism and the Soviet state.³⁹² Hence, in the course of European integration and its “return to Europe,” Lithuania had to reconsider and redefine its national historical memory in relation to “the West.” One example of this was public apologies for the crimes of the Holocaust. Paradoxically, however, instead of profoundly reconsidering Western memories of the Second World War, Lithuanian politicians have chosen to use the Holocaust analogy in order to condemn communist regimes.

³⁸⁸ BECKER, p. 58.

³⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁰ WILSON/BLEIKER, p. 51.

³⁹¹ KLUMBYTĖ, p. 54.

³⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 52.

Europeanization of Memories: Holocaust as a Foundational Memory of Europe?

European integration, which started after the Second World War, was an attempt to pacify nationalisms which had invoked extreme mass killings and dehumanization in many European countries. The Nazi regime and its extermination of Jews had not only cost Europe millions of victims, but had also destroyed the moral face of many European states. The European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the EU, sought to eliminate any possibility of wars among European nations by regulating heavy industries. The creation of the European Union might therefore be seen as an act of memory work, whose aim was to not repeat the past. However, this memory work was largely West-centric and excluded the Eastern European countries, which were at that time occupied and still forcibly included in the Soviet Union.

On the one hand, the integration of Europe initiated the process of memorialization during which European countries started to create a culture of anti-Nazism. The Nuremberg Trials, for instance, prosecuted Nazi war criminals. On the other hand, however, the Cold War was an era characterized by amnesia in Western Europe. The “mnemonical consensus” of the Western countries symbolized a controversial politics of memory of the Second World War.³⁹³ According to Henning Grunwald, “the Cold War did act as a catalyst for suppressing some and emphasizing other aspects of the wartime experience.”³⁹⁴ In Judt’s essay “The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe,” he argues that the Cold War froze national memories in order to maintain a political status quo.³⁹⁵ During this period in the European Union, the memory of the Holocaust did not play a central role because “Europe wanted to forget the victims of the war and move on.”³⁹⁶ European politicians focused on economic issues, armaments, and foreign relations with the Soviet Union.³⁹⁷

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Europe had to redefine itself, and this is the moment at which the memory of the Holocaust became a central focus.³⁹⁸ The historian Dan Diner describes the Holocaust as a “common unifying memory in the events of the Second World War.”³⁹⁹ According to him, “such a commonly shared European memory” of the Holocaust “is also being transformed into a veritable foundational, a seminal event—quite comparable to a certain extent to the Reformation or the French Revolution [...]”.⁴⁰⁰ The liberation of the concentration camps and the experience of the Holocaust formed a central part of the Western European culture of remembrance. Aleida Assmann, in her essay “Europe: A Community of Memory,” outlines how the Holocaust became “a common point of reference” for many Europeans.⁴⁰¹ Assmann

³⁹³ MÄLKSOO, *The Memory Politics*, p. 654.

³⁹⁴ GRUNWALD, p. 262.

³⁹⁵ JUDT, *The Past is Another Country*, p. 160.

³⁹⁶ WÄHRENS.

³⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁸ *Ibidem*. See more in: CHRISTIAN KARNER/BRAM MERTENS (eds.): *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, New York 2013.

³⁹⁹ DINER, p. 36.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰¹ ASSMANN, *Europe*, p. 13.

claims that all European nations, albeit differently, experienced the Holocaust.⁴⁰² Nevertheless, she adds that “in Europe, the historical site of the German genocide of the Jews, Holocaust memory has a different quality and resonance [...]. In Europe this memory is anything but abstract and removed, but rather deeply engraved in local and national history.”⁴⁰³ There is no other historical event to which the institutions of the European Union have devoted so much attention.⁴⁰⁴ From 1989 to 2009, in the European parliament there were issued eight resolutions and two declarations dealing with the Holocaust, regulating its remembrance days, construction of memorials and payment of restitutions.⁴⁰⁵

Among the most important reasons for the revival of Holocaust memory in European Union politics were the war in Bosnia (1992–1995) and the Kosovo war (1998–1999).⁴⁰⁶ The images of camps and death corps in Bosnia circulated within the international media and served as a “symbolic connection to Auschwitz.”⁴⁰⁷ This pictorial representation of the war was straightaway associated with the images of Nazi concentration camps and Serbs were equated with Nazis.⁴⁰⁸ In this case, the Holocaust imagery “became a symbol for an ethically driven politics in the global arena,”⁴⁰⁹ which could be used to encourage military intervention. The Kosovo war, which was, according to Levy and Sznajder, was “a seminal moment in the process of universalizing the Holocaust.”⁴¹⁰ The war also rekindled Holocaust memories and the slogan “Never again Auschwitz” became a rallying cry in international politics as pressure built in favor of military intervention. Holocaust memories thus became “catalysts in shaping new political and cultural attitudes” in Europe and around the world.⁴¹¹ These wars not only evoked the memory of the exterminations of Jews during the Holocaust but also “the memory of the Holocaust became present” in a way that suggested “the Holocaust might not be that far away.”⁴¹² The Holocaust was not only integrated into the national histories of Western European countries, especially Germany, but it went beyond these national histories and was regarded as “a European event” with no clear center.⁴¹³

This change in Holocaust memorialization became institutionalized in 2000 through the declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. Attended by heads of state, prime ministers, and ministers from over forty countries, this intergovernmental conference was led by the honorary chairman Elie Wiesel, former Auschwitz detainee and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Also in attendance was the French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, whose film *Shoah* is one of the most important documentary films ever made about the Holocaust. The conference participants discussed how Europe

⁴⁰² Ibidem, p. 14.

⁴⁰³ Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁴ KARLSSON, p. 40.

⁴⁰⁵ WĒHRENS, p. 13.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 14.

⁴⁰⁷ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*, p. 157.

⁴⁰⁸ WĒHRENS, p. 14.

⁴⁰⁹ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *The Holocaust*, p. 161.

⁴¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 165.

⁴¹¹ Ibidem.

⁴¹² WĒHRENS, p. 15.

⁴¹³ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *Memory Unbound*, p. 97.

could define itself “as a community of values” and create “a legitimating model for future military as well as non-military forms of intervention.”⁴¹⁴ The Stockholm International Forum declared that the Holocaust should be an example of universal memory:

The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. After half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people. The terrible suffering of the many millions of other victims of the Nazis has left an indelible scar across Europe as well.⁴¹⁵

This declaration, according to Levy and Sznajder, reveals that Holocaust memorialization in Europe “provides the foundations for a new cosmopolitan memory, a memory transcending ethnic and national boundaries.”⁴¹⁶ Thus, the memorialization of the Holocaust, its inclusion in European school curricula, and the fostering of European memory culture were all seen as ways to prevent future genocide.⁴¹⁷ This declaration officially embedded the Holocaust in European memory.

Locating Lithuanian Memories in the Context of Europeanization: Soviet Gulag versus Holocaust

This focus on the trans-European nature of Holocaust memory should not belie the differences between Western and Eastern European countries. As discussed above, Western Europe increasingly focused on Holocaust memorialization that transcended national borders.⁴¹⁸ The Western narrative of the Second World War focused on the Allied forces’ victory over Nazism; the end of the war was accordingly depicted as a celebratory moment among European nations. The British historian Norman Davies has called this narrative an “Allied scheme of history”: “The Slovaks, Croats, and Baltic nations [...] who were thought to have rejected the friends of the West or to have collaborated with the enemy, deserved no such compliments.”⁴¹⁹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-communist states were preoccupied with memorialization of crimes under the Stalinist regime; the Holocaust was not the central element of the memory landscape in Eastern Europe. This difference of memories became especially evident when the European Union expanded in 2004 to include the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.⁴²⁰ This expansion has also brought new regimes of memory,⁴²¹ which challenged

⁴¹⁴ IDEM, *The Holocaust*, p. 184.

⁴¹⁵ DECLARATION OF THE STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE HOLOCAUST.

⁴¹⁶ LEVY/SZNAIDER, *Memory Unbound*, p. 88.

⁴¹⁷ IDEM, *The Holocaust*, p. 186.

⁴¹⁸ WÆHRENS, p. 6.

⁴¹⁹ DAVIES, p. 41.

⁴²⁰ Malta and Cyprus also entered the EU in 2004.

⁴²¹ The historian Konrad H. Jarausch writes about three memory regimes: (1) Western memory or “an Allied scheme of history,” especially prevalent in the United Kingdom; (2) Central European memory prevailing in Germany and Austria; (3) Eastern European memory in the former Soviet bloc countries. JARAUSCH, pp. 310-311.

the memory work within the European Union; the challenges to the integration of these new states were not only of a political and economical nature, but also in regards to history and memory.⁴²² One of the most debated issues was “the relationship between a Western Holocaust memory and an Eastern Gulag remembrance.”⁴²³ This divergence showed that within the memory landscape in Europe there was a “dividing line between East and West” which largely coincided with the Iron Curtain.⁴²⁴ Dovilė Budrytė, in her discussion of how the same imagery was often perceived differently, has described this duality of memories very well:

In Western and Central Europe, the image of the cattle wagon is immediately associated with the memory of the deportation and destruction of the European Jews by Nazi Germany. In the Baltic States, the image of a cattle wagon is a symbol of suffering during the Stalinist times and deportation to the gulag.⁴²⁵

These new members of the European Union, including Lithuania, urged for the emergence of a new European culture of remembrance. This form of commemoration had to evaluate the crimes of the Stalinist regime and equate them with the horror of the Holocaust. Maria Mälksoo had studied the post-Cold War politics of memory in Poland and the Baltic states, and she claims that citizens of the post-communist, post-Cold War world now also proclaim their “right to memory.”⁴²⁶ She defines Eastern Europeans as “European subalterns⁴²⁷” who, after the period of decolonization, started to voice their “minority memories.” These memories are important not only for identity formation and the historical narrative of many post-communist states, but could also be associated with their security politics.⁴²⁸ The historical memory of the Soviet aggression in Lithuania was a central motivating factor in the desire to join these Western alliances. Lithuania has chosen a “flight strategy”⁴²⁹ and sought to escape from the control of Russia. Thus, this new European movement of memory, according to Mälksoo, represents a claim to “an equal subjectivity.”⁴³⁰ The French historian Alain Besançon has even claimed that European memory suffers from “a sort of ‘amnesia’ regarding communist crimes,” in contrast to the “‘hypermnnesia’ respecting those of Nazism.”⁴³¹

While their contributions to the debate are valuable, these scholars have appraised memory solely within a broad European context, ignoring the memory work within different Eastern European countries, where the ambiguity of the memorialization is

⁴²² WĒHRENS, p. 16.

⁴²³ TROEBST, p. 60.

⁴²⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁵ BUDRYTĖ, *Taming Nationalism*, p. 187.

⁴²⁶ MÄLKSOO, *The Memory Politics*, p. 657.

⁴²⁷ “Subaltern” is a concept used in postcolonial studies. It refers to a group of people who are left outside the hegemonic power structure of a colony; see GAYATRI C. SPIVAK: *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in: CARY NELSON – LAWRENCE GROSSBERG (eds.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago 1988, pp. 271-313.

⁴²⁸ MÄLKSOO, *The Memory Politics*, p. 653.

⁴²⁹ BECKER, p. 71.

⁴³⁰ MÄLKSOO, *The Memory Politics*, p. 659.

⁴³¹ Cited from MORGAN, p. 263.

evident. On the one hand, Eastern European countries, including Lithuania, claim to be voicing their subaltern memories in the European context, however, on the other hand, in the Lithuanian context, these Stalinist memories deprived and marginalized the memories of the Holocaust. Hence, Lithuania and other Eastern European countries used the centrality of the Holocaust in the European Union's memory politics to articulate their own memories of the Second World War and not to critically reconsider their own colonization of different memories.

One of the first attempts to publicly revive and discuss the tragedy of the Holocaust in Lithuania was the creation of The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania. This commission, created in 1998 by a decree of the Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus, continues its work today.⁴³² The commission's mandate was to evaluate the crimes of these two regimes and "to fill in the existing gaps in the modern history of Lithuania."⁴³³ This commission promoted political education about the Holocaust for the first time since Lithuanian independence, and it published the first historical books providing a critical discussion of the Nazi era. International Jewish organizations, however, criticized the commission because they felt that this "simultaneous evaluation of both, the Nazi and Soviet crimes played down the significance of the Holocaust."⁴³⁴ They blamed Lithuania for using the commission to improve its image abroad.⁴³⁵ The Yiddish scholar and Lithuanian Jew Dovid Katz argues that the commission initially published exemplary scholarship but then became too political.⁴³⁶ According to him, the commission "in partnership with the commissions of the other two Baltic states [...] generates declarations, resolutions and new laws in the European Union that would in fact delete the notion of the Holocaust and have it replaced by various formulations of Two Equal Genocides."⁴³⁷ He suggests that the Lithuanian government is trying to "impose the 'new paradigm' on the EU,"⁴³⁸ in other words, trying "to persuade the EU to accept a revisionist Equal Genocides model of the twentieth century history in which the Holocaust, in a macabre semantic hat trick, disappears and then re-emerges as one of the two equal genocides."⁴³⁹

In January 2008, the informal group "Common Europe – Common History" was created in Tallinn. It was initiated by six deputies of the European Union, one from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary with the aim of preparing a common position on the memorialization of the communist past in the European Union and to evaluate this history. The members of this group claimed that the Second World War and communism are "completely unintelligible" in Western Eu-

⁴³² Their most recent meeting, the ninth, was held in October 2013, where members of the commission expressed the needs for additional financial support.

⁴³³ INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE CRIMES OF THE NAZI AND SOVIET OCCUPATION REGIMES IN LITHUANIA.

⁴³⁴ TOLEIKIS.

⁴³⁵ Ibidem.

⁴³⁶ KATZ, p. 263.

⁴³⁷ Ibidem.

⁴³⁸ Ibidem, p. 266.

⁴³⁹ Ibidem, p. 262.

rope.⁴⁴⁰ In June 2008, the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism was proclaimed, demanding that “many crimes committed in the name of Communism should be assessed as crimes against humanity serving as a warning for future generations, in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal.”⁴⁴¹ Among the signatories of this declaration were two Lithuanian politicians: Vytautas Landsbergis, a member of the European parliament and former head of Lithuania, and Emanuelis Zingeris,⁴⁴² a member of the Lithuanian parliament.

In July 2009, the OSCE⁴⁴³ Parliamentary Assembly issued the Vilnius Declaration, which condemned totalitarianism and stated that, “in the twentieth century[,] European countries experienced two major totalitarian regimes, the Nazi and Stalinist, which brought genocide.”⁴⁴⁴ The preparatory work for this declaration had begun four years earlier, in June 2005, when Landsbergis, a member of the EU parliament, and a Hungarian member of the EU parliament, urged a ban of Soviet and Nazi symbols in a letter sent to Franco Frattini, the European Commissioner of Justice and Internal Affairs. This proposal garnered much media attention, especially in Italy, where one of its few supporters was Alessandra Mussolini, a granddaughter of the former Italian Fascist dictator. The Russian media attacked the proposal, and members of the Russian State Duma called it “an assault on established historical memory.”⁴⁴⁵ These declarations were also harshly criticized for equating Nazi and Soviet crimes.⁴⁴⁶ Timothy Snyder rightly suggested that “the current Lithuanian government thus emphasizes Soviet crimes, sometimes to the point of neglecting obvious opportunities to acknowledge the scale of the Holocaust in Lithuania and the role of Lithuanians in the mass shootings on Lithuanian territory.”⁴⁴⁷ According to Snyder, the “indubitable Western ignorance of Soviet crimes is no excuse for neglecting the historical record of the tragedy of the Lithuanian Jews.”⁴⁴⁸

In December 2010, the European Commission rejected the idea of criminalizing the denial of communist crimes, claiming that the necessary legal conditions for adopting such a law were lacking. Some scholars contended that this rejection was related to economic relations of some of the EU states—e.g., Germany, France and Italy—with Russia.⁴⁴⁹ According to Mälksoo, the Eastern European countries’ push to adopt such legislation concerning the communist crimes was “more about seeking recognition of Eastern European actors’ equal standing in the European community—their right to be a recognized part of ‘European memory’—and less about the practical potency of the criminalizing measure as such.”⁴⁵⁰ On this point, however Mälksoo’s argument is some-

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴¹ PRAGUE DECLARATION ON EUROPEAN CONSCIENCE AND COMMUNISM.

⁴⁴² Emanuelis Zingeris, a Lithuanian Jew, is an active member of the Lithuanian Jewish community and Lithuanian Member of Parliament; his mother survived the Holocaust.

⁴⁴³ OSCE refers to the Organization of Security and Co-Operation in Europe.

⁴⁴⁴ VILNIUS DECLARATION OF THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY AND RESOLUTIONS, p. 48.

⁴⁴⁵ Cited from MÄLKSOO, *Criminalizing Communism*, p. 94.

⁴⁴⁶ DEFENDING HISTORY, Prague Declaration.

⁴⁴⁷ SNYDER, *Neglecting*.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴⁹ GRAJAUSKAS, p. 108.

⁴⁵⁰ MÄLKSOO, *Criminalizing Communism*, p. 89.

what problematic: On the one hand, it is true that this desire for recognition might be an important catalyst for urging a ban on communist symbols. On the other hand, however, the stance towards communist legacies in the national politics of Lithuania and other Eastern European countries reveals that this issue has not been addressed solely in the sphere of foreign political power relations and recognition within the European Union, but also within the sphere of national politics and national memory discourses. Despite the fact that the EU rejected criminalizing the denial of communist crimes, the Lithuanian penal code was changed in 2010 to outlaw communist symbols.

Moreover, the concept of genocide was applied to this era of Lithuanian history long before Lithuania was admitted to the EU. In the years following the war's end, Lithuanian exiles⁴⁵¹ had used this concept to depict atrocities committed in Lithuania under Stalin's regime. This discourse blamed Jews for the mass killings and deportations of civilians, and, therefore, they were blamed for the genocide committed in Lithuania during the first Soviet occupation. Consequently, "in an effort to modify the charges that Lithuanians participated in the mass killings of Jews in 1941 and after," some Lithuanians, especially those in exile, started to speak of "two genocides."⁴⁵² The "second genocide"—i.e., the Holocaust—was portrayed as an act of revenge against Jews who had supposedly taken part in the "first Soviet genocide" against non-Jewish Lithuanians.⁴⁵³ Donskis notes that this theory of "two genocides," which creates "a symmetry in the suffering among both peoples," is simply another term for the theory of "collective guilt of the Jews."⁴⁵⁴

In 1992, Lithuanian politicians officially confirmed a definition of genocide that included the crimes of the Stalinist regime. Article 71 of the Lithuanian penal code defines genocide as "actions committed with intent to physically destroy, in whole or in part, residents belonging to a national, ethnical, racial, religious, *social* or *political* group [...]."⁴⁵⁵ According to the legal scholar Justinas Žilinskas, Lithuania is the only country which includes this explicitly broad definition of genocide in the penal code itself,⁴⁵⁶ and this broad definition is a reaction to Soviet crimes against Lithuanian citizens. This new definition of genocide deviates from the UNCG⁴⁵⁷ by adding the categories of social and political group.

The classification of Stalinist crimes as a form of genocide has sparked debate among Lithuanian and international scholars. Lithuanian scholars such as Donskis and Venclova reject the idea that the crimes perpetrated by the Soviet regime should be considered genocide. Venclova argues:

⁴⁵¹ DONSKIS, Dviejų genocidų.

⁴⁵² IDEM, Another Word for Uncertainty, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁵³ Ibidem, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵⁵ Emphasis added. ŽILINSKAS. See also, JUSTINAS ŽILINSKAS: Karo nusikaltimų ir genocido reglamentavimo Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamuosiuose įstatymuose raida [The Development of Regulations of the War Crimes and Genocide in the Penal Code of Lithuania], in: Genocidas ir Rezistencija 12 (2002), 2, pp. 153-160.

⁴⁵⁶ The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and, less explicitly, Latvia all banned communism's symbols to varying degrees. See ŽILINSKAS.

⁴⁵⁷ UNCG is an abbreviation for the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Lithuanians were repressed, were shot, not because they were Lithuanians, but because they were educated, patriotically-minded, more prosperous than others, or members of the resistance. This sort of genocide might more accurately be called stratocide—the destruction of a social stratum. For me, therefore, the attitude that were two genocides, on a par with each other, is unacceptable as a matter of principle—even though I feel pain on account of the destruction, stratocide, and ethnocide of Lithuanians.⁴⁵⁸

The Lithuanian political scientist Rokas Grajauskas suggests that Holocaust scholars fear the concept of “‘double genocide,’ which would effectively mean that the Nazi genocide [against Jews] equals the Stalinist one.”⁴⁵⁹ While these scholars claim that the term is “counter-productive,”⁴⁶⁰ the use of this concept can be seen to mark the emergence of the narrative of “parallel memories.” In other words, the Lithuanian politics of memory now tends to group victims in different categories and generally considers the victims of the Soviet regime to be “ethnic” Lithuanians. This isolates Soviet memory from the memory of traumas experienced by other ethnic groups.

It is often forgotten, that, for instance, Lithuanian Jews were shipped off to Soviet gulags along with their non-Jewish neighbors. In the memoirs of the non-Jewish Lithuanian deportee Dalia Grinkevičiūtė entitled *A Stolen Youth, a Stolen Homeland*, she relates how travelled to Siberia: “There were some Jews there, a brother and a sister. I cannot recall their surname, I remember only the name Dora. They had a mill in Šiauliai.”⁴⁶¹ Grinkevičiūtė also writes about the wooden barracks for the Jews in the Siberian steppe and remembers how a forty-year-old Jewish women named Gamzienė dies there.⁴⁶² Esther Hautzig, a Jew from Vilna, recalls similar experiences in her memoir *The Endless Steppe*, in which she recounts how her family was arrested and their property confiscated, before they were shipped in a cattle car to Siberia. As the owners of a jewelry store in Vilna, they were accused under the Soviet regime of being “capitalists.” Hautzig remembers the journey in a cattle wagon: “Four small square holes high up in the corners of the car and the slivers of space between the filthy slatted walls were all that provided light and air. However, to be fair, cattle on their way to the slaughterhouse did not need a well-appointed car.”⁴⁶³

Having endured this repressive regime, the post-communist states are eager to take advantage of the opportunities the European Union provides for speaking their historical “truth.” In addition, it is now possible for them to create a pan-European memory of the Stalinist terror and reshape European historical memory which, according to them, focuses “too much” on the Holocaust remembrance. On the one hand, this memory situation in the European Union raises the danger of competition for the status of victimhood; the Danish historian Anne Wæhrens observes that “the fight for recognition and the competition between victim groups” dominate the construction of shared Eu-

⁴⁵⁸ VENCLOVA, *Genocide*, pp. 332-333.

⁴⁵⁹ GRAJAUSKAS, p. 111.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶¹ GRINKEVIČIŪTĖ, p. 31. Grinkevičiūtė’s memoirs were published in Lithuania for the first time after her death in 1988.

⁴⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁴⁶³ HAUTZIG, p. 22.

ropean memory.⁴⁶⁴ However, on the other hand, the emergence of this debate over two (competing) European pasts actually signifies an ongoing process of Europeanization of memories, and, according to scholars, such polemical debate over the past is a precursor to the emergence of a “shared memory.”⁴⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the case of Lithuania reveals that the exchange of memories within Western and Eastern European states has not yet occurred. The commemoration of the Holocaust is seen as a foundational event in the historical memory of Western Europe, but it has not found its place in Eastern European memory. Although Eastern European countries, seeking integration, proclaimed their return to Western Europe, they are ultimately unwilling to admit their perpetratorhood during the Holocaust or to incorporate the Holocaust into their national histories. However, they are more than willing to apply “the Holocaust template” to the condemnation of communist regimes.⁴⁶⁶ The historians Saulius Sužiedėlis and Šarūnas Liekis note that, “although perceptions of the Holocaust have changed considerably since the 1990s, the establishment of the Holocaust as a central memory has not yet happened.”⁴⁶⁷ According to them:

The fact that foreign perspectives and imagery of World War II do not reflect the experience of most Lithuanians encourages a tendency to see the Holocaust as a Western obsession, making it difficult to appreciate the gravity of the Shoah and its centrality to the nation’s history.⁴⁶⁸

Mälksoo declares that “the Holocaust analogy has become a sword for some and a shield for others in the contention over the reconstruction of new moral order.”⁴⁶⁹ Lithuania, as well as other Eastern European countries in the EU, has chosen the defensive position of subalterns and, having formally apologized for the Holocaust, now wants the EU to exert pressure on Russia to apologize for past atrocities, as well.

⁴⁶⁴ WÆHRENS, p. 19.

⁴⁶⁵ ASSMANN, Europe, p. 19.

⁴⁶⁶ MÄLKSOO, Criminalizing Communism, p. 88.

⁴⁶⁷ SUŽIEDĖLIS/LIEKIS, p. 319.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 326.

⁴⁶⁹ MÄLKSOO, Criminalizing Communism, p. 88.

5 Iconographic Narratives: Imagery of the Holocaust in Lithuania

5.1 Homecoming Narratives in Documentary Films: The (Im)possibility of Diasporic Return

5.1.1 Landscape Memories: Returning to Ponary Forest in the Documentary Film *Out of the Forest*

Still, still, let us be still.
Graves grow here.
Planted by the enemy,
they blossom to the sky.
All the roads lead to Ponary,
and none returns.¹

Forests have long been regarded a mystical places, “as having genetic as well as symbolic connections to memory, custom, national character, and ageless forms of popular wisdom.”² However, forests are also associated with a lost unity.³ The epigraph above stems from one of the most famous ghetto songs “Still, Still,” written in the Vilna ghetto in the spring of 1943 by the poet and partisan fighter Shmerke Kaczerginski. The lyrics describe the emotional connotations of the Ponary forest, a veritable Jewish graveyard from which no one returns. In this song, the forest becomes a place of death, and the Jewish victims become part of the forest’s landscape. It is, therefore, not surprising that this landscape and Holocaust memory are inseparable. In Lithuania, where most of the Jews were killed in forests, this wooded landscape becomes “an archive of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and other memories.”⁴

Claude Lanzmann dedicated a passage in his film *Shoah* to the forests of forgetting, where among other survivors, the Lithuanian Jews Motke Zaidl and Itzhal Dugin compare the Ben Shemen forest with the Ponary forest outside Vilna, where most of that city’s Jews were executed. They note that the Israeli forest resembles Ponary: “the forest, the ditches. It’s as if the bodies have been burned here. Except there were no stones

¹ Shmerke Kaczerginski’s poem “Still, Still” was written in 1943. Translated from the Yiddish by Hillel Schwartz and David G. Roskies, Cited from TEICHMAN/LEDER, pp. 229-230.

² HARRISON, p. 165.

³ Ibidem, p. 169.

⁴ KAPLAN, Landscapes, p. 198.

in Ponary.”⁵ Hence, the sight of a simple forest in Israel evokes an image of another forest, namely the Ponary forest, in the minds of survivors. The two images fuse together through psychological associations. In this case, the Israeli forest evokes memories of another place and context. Thus, the landscape, in this case, the forest landscape, “is not indifferent” as “it embodies the recollective experience” conveyed through the memory of the Ponary forest.⁶

The paintings of the Lithuanian Jew Samuel Bak similarly evoke Holocaust memories through landscape. Every forest in Bak’s paintings are related to the Ponary forest of his homeland, where his father and grandparents were executed. Bak entitled a collection of his paintings *Landscapes of Jewish Experience*; which Lawrence L. Langer has studied, concluding that Bak’s paintings portray a “double meaning of ‘landscape,’ both the physical terrain of ghettoization and the psychological terrain of the endless attempt to come to terms with and represent pictorially the trauma of Nazi genocide.”⁷ Therefore, it becomes clear, as the American literary scholar Robert Pogue Harrison states, that “forests have the psychological effect of evoking memories of the past; indeed, that they become figures for memory itself. They are enveloped, as it were, in the aura of lost origins.”⁸

The forest is identified as a key site of return for the Lithuanian Jews and as a transmitter of the Holocaust memory. The word “homecoming” implies that “by reentering one’s native country a person is necessarily returning to something familiar.”⁹ However, here, I will show that the the Lithuanian Jewish survivors able to “return” have no such sense of familiarity. The historian Anna Cichopek-Gajraj notes that “there was nothing familiar in the physical and social landscape of postwar Eastern Europe.”¹⁰ Therefore, then—as now—“the return entailed numerous small and large disillusionments among which the most traumatic was the absence of a home.”¹¹

Ponary Forest: An Idyllic Landscape Transformed into a Mass Grave

Before the Second World War, Ponary was known as an idyllic village.¹² Tourists visited throughout the year to enjoy its natural beauty and recreational opportunities; in the warmer parts of the year, it was a perfect place for a diversity of outdoor activities, and in winter it turned into skiing resort. In 1945, the Polish writer and publicist Józef Mackiewicz wrote an essay which included reflection on his pre-war memories of Ponary as an area filled with joy and happiness: “Those who loved Vilna’s surroundings as their own homeland also loved Ponary without any exceptions.”¹³ The landscape around Ponary started to change during the war: In the course of the first Soviet occu-

⁵ Cited from SHOAH.

⁶ HARRISON, p. 191.

⁷ Cited from KAPLAN, *Landscapes*, p. 4. See, LAWRENCE L. LANGER: Samuel Bak and the Search for an Aesthetics of Atrocity, Conference on Aesthetics after the Holocaust, UCLA, 7 February 2010.

⁸ HARRISON, p. 156.

⁹ HAMMOND, p. 230.

¹⁰ CICHOSPEK-GAJRAJ, p. 30.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² KOZICZ.

¹³ MACKIEWICZ, p. 166. This essay was written in 1945.

pation (from June 1940 to June 1941), Soviet officials dug large pits for storing airplane fuel in the forest. The village itself was located next to an airbase, which was under construction at the time of the Soviet occupation. The pits were large, ranging from “twelve to thirty-two meters in diameter and five to eight meters deep.”¹⁴ These pits were connected by ditches, into which pipes were to be laid, but the project was never finished.¹⁵ In June 1941, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union and, during the Nazi occupation, these pits were used as mass graves, in which around one hundred thousand people were buried, among them between fifty and seventy thousand Jews.¹⁶ The other victims included Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, some anti-German or communist Lithuanians, and Romanians.

Mackiewicz, who had lived in Wilno¹⁷ since 1907,¹⁸ witnessed the execution of Jews next to the Ponary railway station in 1943, a scene he described as “a human slaughterhouse.”¹⁹ In 1945, from his exile in Rome, he wrote an essay sharing his memories of Ponary village and its forest and how the idyllic village with its beautiful forest had become a place of massacre:

All that was, everything collapsed. The joys of summer, the wonderful charm of the surrounding area, the blue-grey horizon, the skiers, the racing and shocking crimes in peaceful times have all been locked in memory and can be viewed only through the glass pane, like that through which a beggar looks at jewels. Ponary became the personification of the war and of the unheard-of terror. At the end, the sound of these six letters ending with “Ypsilon”²⁰ started to alarm people. Its dark and unwanted fame seeped slowly from 1941, as leaking viscous human blood, always more and onward from country to country, but until now has not yet embraced the whole world.²¹

Those pits became the last destination of the Lithuanian Jewry. Many victims were brought there from Vilna by train or truck; some had to march. Then they were forced to climb down into the pits, where they were shot in head. The bodies were covered with sand, and then other victims were sent to their deaths directly on top of them. Kazimierz Sakowicz, who observed the shootings in the forest on Monday, 5 April 1943, from his attic, described the killing procedure in his diary:

The first group in front of the first pit is ordered to undress. Weeping, groaning, pleading, falling to the feet of the Lithuanians and Germans, who kick them and shoot the most impudent. But after they have been beaten, they undress about ten meters from the pit. Those who have poor clothing do not undress. They are driven to the pits and Lithuanians began to

¹⁴ MARGOLIS, Foreword, p. IX.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. X.

¹⁶ BUBNYS, Holocaust in Lithuania 1941–1944, p. 562. The exact number is uncertain.

¹⁷ Mackiewicz used this term.

¹⁸ Wilno/Vilnius was the subject of an ongoing dispute between Poland and Lithuania; both countries claimed it for their own from 1918 on, with Poland generally having the upper hand up until the Second World War.

¹⁹ KOZICZ.

²⁰ The German word for the letter Y.

²¹ MACKIEWICZ, p. 166.

shoot from the side. [...] On the edge of the pits, 7-8 men and women are positioned. From the back a revolver is placed practically at their heads, and a Lithuanian shoots. One after the other falls, cut down into the pit.²²

Like Mackiewicz and Sakowicz, Helena Pasierbska also wrote about the Ponary forest and its mass graves. Pasierbska was a Polish writer, born in Wilno, who was imprisoned in Lukiszki prison as a secret Polish agent during the war.²³ She heard about the mass shootings in the Ponary forest, and, after the war, she documented the crime by collecting original documents and testimonies. She called Ponary forest the “Golgotha of Vilnius.”²⁴ Today, as is evident in the Israeli film *Out of the Forest*, Ponary forest and its landscape have changed. The pits are not that deep anymore; they are filled with the ashes of dead bodies, and the trees are young.²⁵ The older trees in Ponary forest not only witnessed these executions but became part of the crime when the perpetrators used them to burn the bodies of the Lithuanian Jewry. Thus, these trees might be seen as victims, who were cut and burned like those executed in the forest.

Out of the Forest: The Forest as a Place of Return

The Ponary forest landscape dominates the Israeli documentary film *Out of the Forest*, one of the best cinematic examples of a narrative of returning to the site of mass killings. The forest as a place of return is not an accidental choice in the cinematic representation of the Holocaust. As was already mentioned, most of the Lithuanian Jews were not killed in the concentration camps, but rather were exterminated near their homes in the neighboring forests. The executions in Ponary took place from July 1941 until August 1944. Today, a memorial to the Holocaust victims and a small museum commemorate this grim chapter of Ponary’s history. In the film *Out of the Forest*, Limor Pinhasov and Yaron Kaftori visually revisit memories of the Holocaust in the Ponary forest. Their film has never been shown on Lithuanian television, but is it part of the permanent exhibition of the museum here, and it is shown regularly at the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum in Lithuania and during commemorative events elsewhere. Shortly after its release in 2004, the film was also shown at the Berlin International Film Festival, where it was compared with Lanzmann’s film *Shoah*.²⁶

This film is based on Sakowicz’s *Ponary Diary*. Sakowicz, a Polish journalist, lived in Ponary during the massacres and observed the daily executions of Jews from the attic in his house. He kept a careful record of them in his diary, an eyewitness account of mass murder that he hid in lemonade bottles buried in his garden. After the war, his neighbors dug up some of the bottles and gave them to the State Jewish Museum. The marginalization of Holocaust memorialization during the Soviet era, however, meant that these documents were not published and indeed nearly forgotten. It was only after Lithuanian independence that Rachel Margolis, a former partisan and assistant at the

²² SAKOWICZ, pp. 71-72.

²³ Liaison officer of the Armia Krajowa.

²⁴ Cited from KOZICZ.

²⁵ NOAR FAMILY.

²⁶ BERT REBHANDL: Mordtagebuch, in: Berliner Zeitung from 2004-02-11.

State Jewish Museum, rediscovered and published them. A report in an Israeli newspaper about this discovery and the diary's publication inspired the Israeli filmmakers to make a film about the Ponary massacre.²⁷

This film, similar to Lanzmann's *Shoah*, does not focus on archival footage or factual Holocaust information. Lanzmann rejected archival images since he wanted the Holocaust to be told rather than shown.²⁸ The camerawork in *Out of the Forest* is likewise simplistic, leading the audience along with the victims and showing the locations and pits of the Ponary forest. The camera allows the viewer to observe the site of mass killings and creates a space for the viewer's own contemplation. There is also an absence of images of dead bodies; the central focus of the film is on Holocaust survivors, witnesses, bystanders, and the environment of the Holocaust site today. The film also reveals how the memories vary among different nationalities in Lithuania, namely how Lithuanians, Poles, and Jews perceived the events in the Ponary forest differently. Lithuanian Jews remember the Ponary forest as a place of horror, where Nazi Germans and Lithuanian collaborators carried out mass murders. Poles and Lithuanians who lived in the neighborhood and witnessed the crimes claim to have been unable to stop the killings. Moreover, Poles note that the Ponary forest was also the final destination for some Poles. They still speak about the need for an apology from the Lithuanian state for the destruction of the Polish intelligentsia by the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union in the Ponary forest: "If late President Brazauskas officially apologized to the Jews in Israel for the Holocaust, why wouldn't Dalia Grybauskaitė²⁹ do the same for the Poles?"³⁰ Thus, the film also portrays this competition of victimhood.

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* [The Land of Israel] likewise pointed out that *Out of the Forest*'s "cinematographic style could be compared to the work of Claude Lanzmann."³¹ In a way, the film can also be seen as a cinematic continuation of *Shoah*: Motke Zaidl, who, in Lanzmann's film, compared the Ben Shemen forest in Israel to the forest he remembered from Lithuania, returns to the Ponary forest in the film *Out of the Forest* and narrates his memory as he walks through it:

I remember the trees. We would cut them at ground level. That was the initial work. We would only cut this kind of tree, in huge quantities. What for? We didn't understand what for. But as we progressed, and when we were told to dig a hole of forty centimeters deep and six meters long, we started to understand something, but it wasn't clear yet. When we got to do the actual work, we understood what it was.³²

The interview in the forest setting evokes vivid memories for Zaidl. He remembers the trees that surrounded him at the Ponary forest, trees that he associates with forced labor during the Holocaust, with being forced by SS soldiers to cut the trees and prepare

²⁷ JAN BRACHMANN: Der Dokumentarfilm 'Stimmen aus dem Wald' widmet sich dem Massenmord an Juden in Litauen. Wem helfen Blut und Boden weiter?, in: Berliner Zeitung from 2005-01-20.

²⁸ WOOD, p. 35.

²⁹ Lithuanian president from 2004 until 2019.

³⁰ KOZICZ.

³¹ ISRAELI FILMS.

³² Cited from *Out of the Forest*.

a space for pits where Jews could be exterminated. The pits in Ponary forest, treeless spaces where nobody could hide and where they were destined to die, are the most traumatic sight for all the Holocaust survivors in this film. These pits evoke strong emotions. Similarly, the Lithuanian Jew William Good, who survived the Holocaust, remembers the agony of death of people in those pits. Good evaded death only by accident, stumbling at the exact moment that the shot rang out. He lay in the pit, covered with dead bodies. In the film, he becomes emotional when he returns to the pit to testify to his experiences, and he starts crying. The empty pit and the forest with its missing trees serve for him as a symbol of the loss of his relatives.

Ponary forest is a place that harbors different memories, including the memory of the landscape itself. The forest, in this film, becomes a witness to the Holocaust. Brett Ashley Kaplan has suggested that, “as the generation of survivors shrinks, the cultural weight of maintaining memory shifts not only to subsequent generations but also in some sense to the landscape itself.”³³ In *Out of the Forest*, the Holocaust survivor Tamar Dreifuss also reflects on the landscape of the Ponary forest, where her family was massacred: “Those trees, if they could only talk, they would have a story to tell. But they are mute. They can’t speak.”³⁴

Nevertheless, as is shown in the film, the trees are not only mute, but the landscape where traumatic events happened seems to be unstable as a witness. The changes in landscape memory are reflected in the film. Two Lithuanian Jews, Dina Beitler and Motke Zaidl, cannot find pieces of their memory in the forest. The landscape has transformed and the material signs of their memories have been demolished:

Motke Zaidl: Everything was demolished. Everything. Not that I care that it was demolished, but I was certain there would be an opening, even if a blocked one, so I could show you the tunnel.³⁵

Dina Beitler: So where is... There is... It is probably not here. There must be ... another one... like that ... or am I confused? Because I know I was standing here when they were killing and I was looking at my brother. So it is not here, I am probably wrong. I don't know.... Where is the other pit? Where did I see my brother? The trees ... so I could not see the other side, or maybe I could. If someone stood near the pit, as we did.... We did stand here. And they were killing us and we would fall. As this ... it was also full. It was not like this, this was all full.³⁶

Zaidl cannot find the tunnel that he and his friends had secretly dug with hands and spoons while preparing the pits in the forest under the supervision of SS officers. This tunnel became their secret gateway to survival, but the visible traces of it have disappeared in the Ponary forest. One of the most important elements of his memory has been deleted from the landscape. Similarly, Beitler is lost in the landscape memory. The forest landscape has changed, and she is confused because she cannot find the exact place

³³ KAPLAN, *Landscapes*, p. 1.

³⁴ Cited from *Out of the Forest*

³⁵ Cited from *ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*. The ellipses in this quote are to capture the sense of trailing off into contemplative silence rather than omissions.

and the pit where her family was executed. The altered landscape evokes confusion in her mind, which causes an emotional reaction expressed in tears, as she cannot even find the exact site where her family was shot. According to Kaplan, “on the one hand, visible traces of the past remain; on the other hand, an inevitable covering up of these traces by the movement of the landscape as nature either reclaims it or human desires reshape and repurpose it occurs.”³⁷ In such a case, “the tension manifests clearly between the instability of the landscape and the natural tendency to reclaim and grow over versus the weight of memories of spaces configured very differently.”³⁸

Thus, as shown in the film, the landscape proves unstable as a Holocaust witness; physical and material traces of trauma have been obliterated. The deep pits where the Jews were killed are today reconfigured and one can observe how the landscape changes the site of mass murder during different seasons of the year. In the film, we see how Zaidl walks through the pit in autumn; instead of a deep trench filled with dead bodies, there is growing grass and layered stones. The scene of the mass murder has changed and the pits have become much more shallow because of the ashes they were filled with. We can read about this transformation in correspondence between the Yiddish poet Avrom Sutzkever and the Soviet Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg. Sutzkever writes: “I’ve dug out cultural treasures and visited Ponary. I found no one there. Only – ashes. They had dug up [the corpses of] Vilna Jews and burned them. The human ash is sticky and grey. I poured some of it into a pouch (it could be my child or my mother) and I keep it near me.”³⁹ Hence, it seems that, after many years the landscape had managed to hide the site of the mass killings.

This transformation of the landscape—its instability as a witness—is also very well illustrated in the aesthetics of *Out of the Forest*. The scenery of the forest does not resemble the place filled with the horror of the survivors’ memories. The film’s protagonists walk around the beautiful and tranquil forest. During their interviews, we hear no music, only the sounds of nature and its inhabitants. As Kaplan points out, “survivors often remark on the incongruity between the calm and indeed often beautiful scenes they find when they return to places wherein they have been debased and incarcerated.”⁴⁰ Symbolically, at the end of the film, we observe a man removing refuse from around the Holocaust monuments. His figure reflects the disjuncture that occurs in the minds of survivors when they arrive at Ponary; the place filled with dead bodies and blood has been transformed into a neat and orderly organized environment. However, Kaplan, in her book *Unwanted Beauty*, claims that “the unwanted beauty in these works is precisely what provokes us to engage with them to deepen the search for Holocaust understanding.”⁴¹

Moreover, the filmmakers further highlight the incongruity between the calm and beautiful forest and the place of horror by filming the location in different seasons. The film’s directors return to the Ponary forest in winter, when the Ponary forest looks like a beautiful, silent, innocent forest. The surface of the pits is covered with snow, which

³⁷ KAPLAN, *Landscapes*, p. 2.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³⁹ Cited from ROSKIES, p. 248.

⁴⁰ KAPLAN, *Landscapes*, p. 4.

⁴¹ IDEM, *Unwanted Beauty*, p. 20.

hides the trenches almost completely. In Western literature, snow is often associated with death.⁴² It reflects not only the coldness of nature but also the inner condition and suffering of human beings. Moreover, “snow reveals its cruel and oppressive nature as it covers the plants’ ability to gain energy and nourishment from the sun.”⁴³ In the documentary film, the cinematic metaphor of snow mirrors the mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews, who were hidden under the sand and deprived of the ability to continue with their lives. In literature, it is also argued that “humans frequently blame snow for the loss of freedom and inhibition in their movement.”⁴⁴ Thus, in this documentary, the images of the Ponary forest blanketed in snow can be seen as a reminder of the death of the Jewish people, even though the landscape has hidden the history of their extermination.

According to the literary scholar David Roskies, the snow-covered forest represents peacefulness; in his analysis of the metaphor of snow in Sutzkever’s poetry, he writes “snow could do wonders: it could illuminate his private memory and release the well-springs of new life.”⁴⁵ This aesthetic controversy between a beautiful, peaceful landscape and the traumatic memories discussed in the film thus reveals the power of cinematic images to “connect the past and the present, signaling not only what was but what is, condensing and collapsing time.”⁴⁶

The aesthetics of the film also metaphorically reveal the inconsistency in the Lithuanian culture of remembrance in its dealing with the Holocaust. Ponary forest and its trees are not only unstable witnesses but also serve as a metaphor for the culprit. The literary scholar Ernst Van Alphen analyzes the effects of the Holocaust on contemporary art in his book *Caught by History*; he presents the works of Dutch painter Herman Dirk van Dodeweerd, known as Armando. Armando lived in Amersfoort, next to a Nazi “transition camp,” and observed Jews being sent to the concentration camps every day. In his art, Armando also chose the forest as a metaphor for speaking about the Holocaust. He declared that the “landscape is culpable”; he considered the “tree as a metaphor for the culprit.”⁴⁷ As Van Alphen writes: “trees continue to grow regardless of surrounding events, just as the perpetrator, untouched by the destruction he commits, the death he deals, continues with the violence and with his life.”⁴⁸ From this perspective, even the trees growing in the Ponary forest at the scene of violence could be perceived as guilty. Van Alphen claims that the refusal of the trees to testify determines their guilt, and “trees are guilty not only because of their inability or unwillingness to testify, but also because they cover over the traces left by violence.”⁴⁹ Likewise, the trees of the Ponary forest confront Lithuanian Jews who return home. Nature—in this case, the Ponary trees—“overgrows the place of action”⁵⁰ and, like human beings,

⁴² ROSKIES, p. 236.

⁴³ HEATH.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ ROSKIES, p. 246.

⁴⁶ JACOBOWITZ, p. 9.

⁴⁷ VAN ALPHEN, *Caught by History*, p. 128.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

fosters the forgetting of the crime through their indifference. According to Van Alphen: “The guilt of the trees resides in the invisibility of the violence and the evil that took place at their feet, an invisibility they ‘caused.’”⁵¹ Those in the film who claim that no Jews died at the hands of non-Jewish Lithuanians in the forest, try, like those trees, to make the mass murder invisible.

Out of the Forest is built around these scenes of Lithuanian Jews returning to the site of the mass executions and their reactions to the present landscape of the Ponary forest. In contrast to many other documentary films related with the Holocaust in Lithuania, there are neither pictures of the site during the Holocaust, nor archival footage or images of corpses. In this film, Lithuanian Jews have to confront the absence of identifiable markers of the tragedy. The aesthetics of this film resembles modern Holocaust photographs that depict Holocaust sites from today’s perspective. Such photographs, like this film, “raise urgent questions about the task of showing the *nothing* that nonetheless triggers a response: about the difficulties of representing trauma and about the poetics of witnessing.”⁵² It also raises the question of the (im)possibility of physically returning to the past and one’s homeland after the Holocaust. According to the literary scholar Ulrich Baer, if the site has lost the evidence of the events, it should still be stored in visual memory; “for the nothing to be ‘translated’ into sight, it must be shown as nothing, rather than as the absence of something we could know.”⁵³ Thus, the film *Out of the Forest* reveals how the silent and changed forest landscape might evoke memories in the minds of Holocaust survivors and how these memories can help retell the events that happened. In this manner, the forest becomes the catalyst for remembering; each tree has its own memory and symbolically stands for the culprits who perpetrated the atrocities here.

5.1.2 A Documentary of Nostalgic Return to Vilna: Mira Jedwabnik van Doren and *The World Was Ours*

Vilna Diaspora and Filmmaking: First-Person Documentary Films and Speaking in the First Person Plural

In the pre-war period, Vilna was considered the *Jerusalem de Lita*, the center of Eastern European Jewry and its cultural life. Home to many different Jewish organizations, from the Jewish labor movement *Bund*⁵⁴ to different literary, artistic, athletic, and political associations, Vilna was known for its Jewish quarter, the Great Synagogue, the Strashun library, and Talmudic scholars. The community—which “boasted one of the most historically dynamic and vibrant of the east European Jewish communities”⁵⁵—enjoyed “a glowing reputation [...] among Jews not only in the local area, but also

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 132.

⁵² Italics in original. BAER, p. 70.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 75.

⁵⁴ Bundism was a secular Jewish socialist movement established in 1897 in Vilnius (then the Russian Empire).

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

in major Polish cities, and as far away as Paris and New York.”⁵⁶ The Second World War, however, destroyed all this Jewish life and its cultural heritage, annihilating not only the Vilna’s Jewish population but also its cultural institutions. Vilna, the erstwhile center of the Eastern European Jewry, was left in ruins. Physically returning to Vilna became impossible; the Jewish population had been erased and the Jewish Vilna had disappeared. Many survivors were afraid to return and discover only the ghosts from their past. Sutzkever, for example, writes about his return to Vilna: “Whomever I ask about, hardly anyone remains.”⁵⁷ One of the survivors interviewed in *The World Was Ours*, the Lithuanian Jew Rita Kogan, says “I came to Vilna in 1945, after the war, and I came to a cemetery.”⁵⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that many survivors who cannot bear to physically return to this place have chosen, like Marianne Hirsch writes, a “less direct means of access to this lost world, means that inscribe its unbridgeable distance.”⁵⁹ In other words, they have chosen to return visually.

The film *The World Was Ours*—directed by Mira Jedwabnik van Doren, a Lithuanian Jew living in New York—is an example of this visual return. Her visual memories are mostly determined by the past and by the loss of homeland. Jedwabnik van Doren was born in Polish Wilno. She arrived in New York before the Holocaust, having set sail with her parents, father David Jedwabnik, a noted doctor, and mother Lydia Baruchson Jedwabnik, an artist, to the USA to visit the New York World’s Fair; her family was then unable to return to Lithuania. Jedwabnik van Doren remembers: “War broke out when we were on the high seas. In the early morning, I looked out of the porthole window and saw a ship, an English war ship.”⁶⁰ This ship escorted them to the United States. New York at that time was one of the most sought after destinations for the Vilna Jews—“with its three Yiddish dailies, a host of Jewish journalists and writers, as well as the many relatives and acquaintances who had made their home there.”⁶¹ Her father was one of the Lithuanian Jews who helped found the Friends of Vilna/United Vilna organization in New York, which aimed “to help those survivors to become once again equal and worthy members of human society.”⁶² With her film, Jedwabnik van Doren tries to bridge the gap between the past and the present; according to Hirsch, it is exactly this chronological distance of two worlds that the “postwar child longs to bridge.”⁶³ In this film, we encounter the world before the war, “where the Holocaust had not yet happened” and the other world “after Auschwitz.”⁶⁴

Jedwabnik van Doren became an artist, pioneering the technique of vitreous enamel on steel. In 1989, she founded a non-profit organization in New York called the Vilna Project, which aims to collect and preserve information about pre-war Jewish life in Vilna.⁶⁵ Her Vilna memories are mostly related to pre-war life, and her film, filled with

⁵⁶ GILBERT, *Music in the Holocaust*, p. 55.

⁵⁷ Cited from ROSKIES, p. 227.

⁵⁸ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

⁵⁹ HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 268.

⁶⁰ MCCALLUM.

⁶¹ ABRAMOWICZ, *My Father’s Life*, p. 29.

⁶² ABRAMOWICZ, *Profiles of a Lost World*, p. 177.

⁶³ HIRSCH, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 218.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ JEDWABNIK VAN DOREN.

pre-war Vilna photographs, is devoted to the memory of her parents David and Lydia Jedwabnik, “who dedicated much of their life and work to the welfare and culture of Vilna.”⁶⁶ Hamid Naficy, a scholar of cultural studies of diaspora, exile, and postcolonial cinema, observes that “many exilically accented films are intensely place-bound, and their narratives are driven by a desire either to recapture the homeland or to return to it.”⁶⁷ The homeland becomes not only “too powerfully real” but also “sacred.”⁶⁸ This “holiness” of the homeland is also reflected in the film *The World Was Ours*.

The film opens with the following introductory remarks: “It is so important for the world to know how we lived. That is why talking about the good times makes the bad times even more impossible to accept.”⁶⁹ Roskies, a cultural historian of eastern European Jewry, whose family left Vilna in 1940, notes that looking back in order to make sense of the present is part of Jewish commemorative tradition: “To make sense of the immediate event in terms of ancient texts, to seize upon the symbols of past holiness to highlight the present sacrilege was, on the other hand, the very essence of tradition.”⁷⁰ The Jewish community thus always tried to define itself within the historical continuum; “the response to catastrophe was one of the ways a community defined its own place on the continuum.”⁷¹ Therefore, the analysis of this film will reveal how memories of the periods before and after the Holocaust are interconnected. It will be also shown how the nostalgic pre-war visual memories could function as a source of mourning and as tool for rebuilding the life which was demolished after the war.

The film *The World Was Ours* can be described as a first-person film. According to the film scholar and filmmaker Alisa Lebow, first-person films do not solely designate “a cinema of me,” i.e., they are not necessarily “self-absorbed, myopic, [or] ego-driven.” Instead, these films are often “about a neighborhood, a community, a phenomenon or event.”⁷² The concept of “first-person film” refers more to “a mode of address: these films ‘speak’ from the articulated point of view of the filmmaker,” which can be done “in the first person singular or in the first person plural.”⁷³ In *The World Was Ours*, Jedwabnik van Doren expresses her subjective view about Vilna; the film reflects how she sees the city and remembers it. However, her memories are expressed not only in her own voice, but also through the voices of other Lithuanian Jews, who shared the same or similar experiences; most of them come from the same social milieu.⁷⁴ First-person films usually “imply a dialogue between subjects” and “speaking with others”; this is a central aspect of Jedwabnik van Doren’s documentary.⁷⁵ She presents herself not only

⁶⁶ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

⁶⁷ NAFICY, p. 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

⁷⁰ ROSKIES, p. 54.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 48

⁷² LEBOW, p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ It is important to note that the majority of the Lithuanian Jews who speak in this film, unlike Mira Jedwabnik van Doren, personally experienced the Holocaust atrocities in Lithuania.

⁷⁵ LEBOW, p. 3.

through the memories of others, but also through Yiddish culture, language, and images, thus portraying her “own subjectivity in relation to [...] her larger collectivities.”⁷⁶

The film incorporates personal photographs of Mira Jedwabnik van Doren and her family, which depict her in pre-war Vilna with her closest relatives. With her white dress and smiling face, Mira stands out in one of those photos; there is no sign of hardship or loss. In an interview about this documentary, she said: “This little girl (van Doren) left at the age of 10 and she had the nerve to recreate the city, a community on her memory.”⁷⁷ This picture depicts her in her safe childhood and shows an intimate moment from her family life. According to Hirsch, “the family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals.”⁷⁸ Hence, this image transports the viewer back to this past, temporarily bridging the separation in time; it allows her to return to Vilna and recreate the community of her memory.⁷⁹

The use of the first-person-plural narrative voice is also a common tradition in the Yiddish culture when speaking about the community. In her analysis of Yiddish ghetto songs from Vilna, Shirli Gilbert argues that the use of the first person plural narrative expresses “the idea that their experiences were shared” and “clearly provided people with some sense of comfort, and served to alleviate their sense of individual aloneness.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, the use of the first-person-plural narrative, according to Gilbert, served “as a kind of chronicle of the events, which would bear witness to what the group had suffered.”⁸¹ The plurality of voices of the Vilna Jews creates a nostalgic memory about their families’ past and the previous life of their community. The following section analyzes how the audiovisual return to the lost homeland imbues the film with the aesthetics of nostalgia.

Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Audiovisual Return to the Lost Homeland

The very title of the film, *The World Was Ours*, implies that the Jews’ displacement is marked by sadness and nostalgia. The Greek word “nostalgia” consists of *nostos* (homecoming) and *algos* (pain or sorrow); one of its meanings describes it as the pain associated with the loss of home or nation and is closely related to the displacement of people.⁸² The literary scholar Heidi Schlipphacke, in her book discussing the development of nostalgia after Nazism, claims that “nostalgia insists on the primacy of the past over the present and of a perceived stability over change: home, nation, family are privileged over the foreign and non-familial.”⁸³ She claims that “‘nostalgia of exile’ of diasporic groups is the deterritorialized nostalgia for an imagined homeland.”⁸⁴ In the

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 7.

⁷⁷ MCCALLUM.

⁷⁸ HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 7.

⁷⁹ IDEM, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 38.

⁸⁰ GILBERT, *Music in the Holocaust*, p. 67.

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² SCHLIPPHACKE, p. 16.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 15.

⁸⁴ SCHLIPPHACKE, p. 14.

case of the Vilna Jews in this documentary film, their homeland, Jewish Vilna, is today only an imagined homeland, namely a homeland within the mind: “It is vanished. There is no more, no more of the Jewish life in Vilna, as if the earth has opened and everything fell in.”⁸⁵ The film characters experience the feeling of having lost it forever as a physical place; what they long for now is a spiritual homeland which is present solely in their minds and their memories:

The old Vilna, my Vilna, the Vilna of my parents, my people did not exist, it was eradicated, it was destroyed, it was annihilated. I lost something which would never be replaced, and then I said, What did I gain? Is it possible that despite of this tremendous loss, I gained something? That was very difficult for me to define, but I felt that I have my people, whether they know it or not, I have my culture, I have a certain set of concepts about life and they are with me.⁸⁶ I do think that Vilna will remain anchored in Jewish history; through much of the second millennium, Vilna was the center of the Jewish world, this is not going to be forgotten. Jews in America, Israel, in South Africa, all over the world will continue to look to Vilna as a place that gave them a sense of themselves. It is now a Vilna of the mind, of the memory, of our own history.⁸⁷

Hence, nostalgia is not only associated with the longing to return home, but also with the longing with regard to lost time.⁸⁸ In 1798, Immanuel Kant noted—in Hutcheon’s and Valdés’s words—that people “did not return to a *place*, but to a *time*, a time of youth.”⁸⁹ However, time is, in contrast to space, irreversible and “nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact.”⁹⁰ In the twentieth century, nostalgia became more a physical than a psychological condition,⁹¹ described by scholars as “an incurable condition of the spirit or psyche.”⁹²

In the film, Jedwabnik van Doren does not return to today’s Lithuania; we see almost no images of modern Vilna, we hear no voices of the Lithuanian Jews who live there or non-Jewish Lithuanians who witnessed the atrocities of the Holocaust. Hirsch observes that “embodied journeys of return, corporeal encounters with place, do have the capacity to create sparks of connection that activate remembrance and thus reactivate the trauma of loss.”⁹³ Therefore, “return journeys *can* have the *effect* of such a reconnection of severed parts, and, if this indeed happens, they can release latent, repressed, or dissociated memories—memories that, metaphorically speaking, remained behind, concealed within the object.”⁹⁴ In this manner, return evokes the fear that violence will be repeated.⁹⁵ Hirsch notices that, in terms of Nadine Fresco who speaks of “absent

⁸⁵ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

⁸⁶ Cited from *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ Cited according to *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ HUTCHEON/VALDÉS.

⁸⁹ Translation of Kant is taken from HUTCHEON/VALDÉS, p.19.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² *Ibidem*.

⁹³ HIRSCH, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 212.

⁹⁴ Italics in original. *Ibidem*, p. 212.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 218.

memory”: “the postwar generation’s diasporic life is a *diaspora des cendres*—the place of origin has gone up in ashes. There is no return.”⁹⁶ Such impossibility of return is also reflected in *The World Was Ours*, as Vilna is remembered in past tenses, as a place of the past and as a “ruined city of the mind.”⁹⁷

Lithuanian Jews idealize the interwar Vilna, describing it in the film as a center of Yiddish culture, an island of a different culture. In the film, the painter Samuel Bak nostalgically remembers that “it was such a privilege—it was such an extraordinary thing to be from Vilna—that in your family everybody was telling you, you are the aristocracy of the Jewish people, you are from Vilna.”⁹⁸ Another Lithuanian Jew remembers that “Vilna was a city of ideas, of dreams, it was a city of deep profound meditation. Vilna lived with history, old families, old tradition, old memories, and at the same time it was a city with a tremendous desire to strive for something new, for something unusual, for something behind the mountains.”⁹⁹ The poet Czesław Miłosz once called Wilno “Atlantis,” writing that it was no longer his country because, as the Dutch writer and historian Ian Buruma in his article writes, “the Jews are gone, and so, by and large, are the Poles. All that is left are scattered memories, in the minds of old women and men, and books.”¹⁰⁰

The impossibility of returning to Jewish Vilna is not only the focus of this film but also seems to be a common memory shared among Vilna Jews. The narrative of impossible return is also present in contemporary Lithuanian literature, for instance, in a short story “The Return of Samuel Vilneris”, which was written by Kristina Sabaliauskaitė, one of the most renowned contemporary non-Jewish Lithuanian writers. The protagonist is a Lithuanian Jew Samuel Vilner who emigrated to New York after the Holocaust and has never returned. When he becomes ill, however, he decides to return to Lithuania. His friend, another Lithuanian Jew from New York, Mishka Kaplan, remembering his return to Vilna twenty years ago, tries to persuade him not to go to Vilnius: “Sometimes everything seems exactly the same but in fact it’s a completely different city. Nothing’s left of the old one. Hardly any Jews are left and even if you meet one—it’s not one of our Jews. [...] Don’t go there, Vilner, because you won’t have any memories left! All that you’ll have is nightmares until your dying day!”¹⁰¹ Sabaliauskaitė’s novel—like *The World Was Ours*—describes the relationship between Lithuanian Jews and Vilna, which, despite its presence on postwar maps of Lithuania, has become a city of memories for the Lithuanian Jews.

Hence, nostalgia engages with the history of the Holocaust in many different ways. Svetlana Boym, in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, called nostalgia “a historical emotion”¹⁰² which is about “the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialization of the immaterial.”¹⁰³ It seems that Jedwabnik van Doren is caught by this “historical emo-

⁹⁶ IDEM, *Family Frames*, p. 243. See, FRESKO.

⁹⁷ ROSKIES, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ BURUMA.

¹⁰¹ SABALIAUSKAITĖ, pp. 79-80.

¹⁰² BOYM, p. xv.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, p. xvii

tion” of nostalgia. Nevertheless, the aim of this film is not only to transmit the nostalgic narrative of the Jewish past. Rather it also engages with “restorative nostalgia,” which, according to Boym, “stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home.”¹⁰⁴ With its nostalgic audiovisuality—i.e., its pre-war photography and Yiddish language and music—the film *The World Was Ours*, tries to recreate the Vilna Jewish community. As Jedwabnik van Doren herself said: “Vilna is gone forever, but at least for a moment I brought it back to life.”¹⁰⁵

Contextualizing the Vilna Diaspora and Its Images: Photographs as a Tool against the Erasure of Visual Memory

The destructive power of the Holocaust obliterated nearly all the images of Jewish life before the war. One can speak not only about the loss of the homeland, but also about the disappearance of its visual traces. The few photographs that survived, became an important remembrance of pre-war life, documenting their loss and providing a medium of sorts for returning home, at least in the imagination. Fresco has noted that “the destruction was such that not an image was left from the Jewish life before the war that was not in some way encumbered, tainted, marked by death.”¹⁰⁶ These images functioned as signals of absence and loss, but, at the same time, they allowed survivors to “rebuild, reconnect, bring back to life.”¹⁰⁷ Photographs also became “the medium of a narrative shared across generations,”¹⁰⁸ providing the “illusion of continuity over time and space”¹⁰⁹ for survivors and their children. The Jewish studies scholar Laura Levitt (b. 1960) claims that pictures “are clearly important. Not only do they offer us a sense of our links to a time before we [...] were born, but they also validate those earlier moments in ways that we cannot yet do with our own images.”¹¹⁰

In order to analyze and understand why so many pre-war images were used in the film *The World Was Ours*, it is important to first present the meaning of visual memory in the context of the community of former Vilna Jews in New York, where the film director and most of the film interviewees live. The media scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff claims that “the diasporic visual image is necessarily intertextual, in that the spectator needs to bring extratextual information to bear on what is seen within the frame in order to make full sense of it.”¹¹¹ The cultural studies scholar Anna Lipphardt has visited many members of the Vilna diaspora in New York for her research, and she has noticed that some of their homes are overloaded with photographs, for instance in one couples’ home she found dozens of photographs: “These images have an enormous emotional power for the two and serve as the ‘connection,’ which they explain their relationship with Vilna to me. They function as a constantly visible [mental] map of their memory,

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, p. xvi.

¹⁰⁵ MCCALLUM.

¹⁰⁶ FRESCO, p. 209. Translation from HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁷ HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁸ IDEM, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 210.

¹⁰⁹ IDEM, *Family Frames*, p. XI.

¹¹⁰ LEVITT, pp. 39- 40.

¹¹¹ MIRZOEFF, p. 7.

as a visual frame of their daily life in New York.”¹¹² Jedwabnik van Doren’s home in Manhattan is also an example of a visual Vilna environment. It is filled with faded pictures of her family, photographs of Vilna, and even a blade of grass from Ponary forest, which she brought to New York in 1991.¹¹³ Survivors use these visual memories of Vilna in an attempt to repair their memories and reincarnate Vilna.

Images were also used as a weapon against the destruction of Jewish life. In 1974, after more than twenty years of work, Leyzer Ran published a three-volume photo album of Vilna *Jerusalem of Lithuania, Illustrated and Documented*, which included pictures not only of Jewish Vilna before the war but also images taken in the ghettos, in the Ponary forest, and after the “liberation” of the city. According to Ran, a Lithuanian Jew from New York, this photo album was a reaction to the Soviet regime’s attempt to erase the visual memory of Jewish Vilna. Ran wrote that “‘liberators’ have definitely resolved to continue the liquidation of organized Jewish life of surviving Vilna Jews,”¹¹⁴ and that this had served as the catalyst for his photo album initiative, for which he had collected images of Vilna from private family albums, YIVO collections, and archives worldwide.¹¹⁵ According to Lipphardt, Ran’s work could be considered a counter publication.¹¹⁶ Many Vilna Jews living in the diaspora contributed to the photo album. Ran’s aim was to “preserve the Jewish physiognomy of the destroyed city that was being rebuilt and deJudaized.”¹¹⁷ The book contained both texts and photographs in its presentation of the Jewish world before and after the Holocaust. According to Hirsch,

The memorial books are acts of witness and sites of memory. Because they evoke and try to re-create the life that was and not only its destruction, they are acts of public mourning, forms of a collective Kaddish. But they are also sites where subsequent generations can find a lost origin.¹¹⁸

Thus, the photo album aimed to revive Jewish Vilna and re-inscribe it in the collective memory for coming generations through visual memory. The editors of Ran’s publication wrote that “total destruction cannot and must not be perpetuated with selection but with ingathering and reconstruction.”¹¹⁹ The same ideas are also inscribed in Jedwabnik van Doren’s film, which uses photographs as tools to reconstruct the past.

Community and Family Photographs: The Intersection of Private and Public Memories

Many families fill their living spaces with pre-war Vilna photographs, but some of them go even further, becoming obsessive collectors of Vilna images. Jedwabnik van Doren

¹¹² LIPPHARDT, p. 458.

¹¹³ Ibidem, p. 226.

¹¹⁴ RAN, p. 34.

¹¹⁵ KLIMAS.

¹¹⁶ LIPPHARDT, p. 387.

¹¹⁷ RAN, p. 34.

¹¹⁸ HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, pp. 246 -247.

¹¹⁹ VILNO ALBUM COMMITTEE, pp. 35-36.

incorporates a variety of photographs into her film, mostly depictions of communities and families; there are, however, hardly any images of corpses. During the ten years of work on this film, she collected around two thousand portraits of children, families, artists, and various communities.¹²⁰ Most of these images are personal, i.e., taken from private family photo albums. Jedwabnik van Doren sought to create a monument to the city of Vilna and its people, and to bring both back to life, at least temporarily in collective visual memory.¹²¹ As Hirsch writes, “more than oral or written narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world.”¹²² Moreover, according to Susan Sontag “photographs actively promote nostalgia,”¹²³ and they “turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalized pathos of looking at time past.”¹²⁴

Many Holocaust survivors have no photographs from their life before the war, but *The World Was Ours* attempts to make up for this loss; as Hirsch points out, photographs “enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past, but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic ‘take.’”¹²⁵ There are two types of photographs which repeatedly appear in the documentary, namely, community and family photographs. On the one hand, they “authenticate the past’s existence,” but, on the other hand, “they also signal its insurmountable distance and de-realization.”¹²⁶ These images of a “before” reflect “the deep loss of safety in the world.”¹²⁷ Hirsch, in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, claims that family and community pictures play a significant role in the work of postmemory:

The family and community pictures, particularly, provide a part of a record and a narrative about the Jewish world lost in the Holocaust and thus place the images of destruction into a needed contextual framework. More than that: they re-create something of what has been destroyed, even as they elicit and facilitate the viewer’s mourning of the destruction. The conventionality of the family photo provides a space of identification for any viewer participating in the conventions of familial representation; thus the photos can bridge the gap between viewers who are personally connected to the event and those who are not.¹²⁸

Community pictures depict typical Jewish life in Vilna before the war—the diversity of the Jews’ lifestyles and activities over a period of more than twenty years. They reflect a vitality that presents a very strong contrast to their later destruction and death. In these pictures, young children play in childcare centers and elderly women and men engage in a variety of pastimes, including music, theatrical performances, and activities

¹²⁰ McCALLUM.

¹²¹ Ibidem.

¹²² HIRSCH, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 36.

¹²³ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 15.

¹²⁴ Ibidem, p. 71.

¹²⁵ HIRSCH, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 36.

¹²⁶ Ibidem, p. 38.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, p. 39.

¹²⁸ IDEM, *Family Frames*, p. 251.

in different clubs, leisure associations, and communal organizations. The film conveys the vivacity of the Jewish community in Vilna, where almost two hundred different registered societies and clubs served a population of about sixty thousand Jews.¹²⁹ The actor Rita Karin, who is interviewed in the film, recalls: “I don’t remember as a teenager not being affiliated with some kind of club or movement. There was no such thing as free time, hanging around. What do you mean hanging around? We never hung around. There was always some kind of get-togethers.”¹³⁰ All of the film’s community images radiate the pride of belonging to the Vilna Jewish community. Bak speaks in the film about the enormous privilege of belonging to this community: “If you were from Vilna, you had to be very proud. People were very alive. There was an incredible vitality.”¹³¹ The film also devotes special attention to medical staff, as the director’s father, David Jedwabnik, was a noted doctor in Vilna. His image appears in the film, as the director of the TOZ¹³² sanatorium.

However, it is also important to observe that the majority of the community photographs included in the film showcase the educated segments of the Jewish population and their lifestyle. Jedwabnik van Doren and her family belonged to the Vilna intelligentsia, and most of those she interviewed in the film led a different life than the poorer Jewish population, who lived in different parts of the city. Gregory Massell, for example, who became a political scientist, discusses these differences in the film:

I remember that quarter vividly because I passed it every day of my life until probably age 14. Coming from where we lived, the streets were very wide with comfortable homes, with alleys of chestnut trees. The moment you entered the Jewish quarter, not a single tree, not a single bit of green and the streets instead of being wide and sunny turned into crooked narrow winding little places which from time to time, after every block, were interrupted by shops. You have here a profusion of smells, colors, motion, crowds.¹³³

The actor David Rogow also remarks on the disparity between the intelligentsia and the poor Jews. In speaking about the Jewish quarter, he remembers: “You saw a lot of poor people there, badly dressed, children in rags. Of course, I felt very bad for them because I saw the difference how I lived and how they lived.”¹³⁴ Thus, the community pictures included in *The World Was Ours* actually reveal the community which surrounded Jedwabnik van Doren—her family and her friends in Vilna and later in New York. Lipphardt also noted that the filmmaker’s familial and social perspective significantly shaped the film.¹³⁵ Most of the interviewed people belonged to her social milieu: they were engaged in the same social activities in New York—for example,

¹²⁹ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*.

¹³² TOZ was the Society for the Protection of Health of the Jews.

¹³³ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁵ LIPPHARDT, p. 226.

in the organization United Vilna—or belonged to the circle of her closest friends and acquaintances.¹³⁶

The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., includes similar photographs of the pre-war Jewish life in the Lithuanian *shtetl* Ejszyzski. Hirsch describes the emotional response she had to seeing these images there:¹³⁷

My first reaction, similar to that of many others, was to marvel at how rich and varied a life was destroyed. The pictures gain by their diversity and their multiplicity: after looking at them for a while, it becomes less important to see individual images than to take in a sense of the whole, and of its relations to one's own family albums.¹³⁸

Hirsch notes that such photographs evoke a sense of identification among survivors, who, looking at these images, can remember their own life and fill the “visual holes” in their family albums. However, these pictures also help people who did not experience the Holocaust to identify emotionally with the Jewish community in Vilna. The normality and vitality of community life in these pictures suggests that the people who died during the Holocaust were similar to those who gaze at these images today. These ordinary photographs of individuals thus manage to personalize the memory of the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, the purpose of using pre-war imagery in this film is also to show the horror of the Holocaust. In Hirsch's words, “pictures of horror and also ordinary snapshots and portraits, family pictures connected to the Holocaust by their context and not by their content.”¹³⁹ She adds:

These two photographs are complementary: it is precisely the displacement of the bodies depicted in the pictures of horror from their domestic settings, along with their disfigurement, that brings home the enormity of Holocaust destruction. And it is precisely the utter conventionality of the domestic family picture that makes it impossible for us to comprehend how the person in the picture was, or could have been, annihilated. In both cases, the viewer fills in what the picture leaves out: the horror of looking is not necessarily *in* the image but in the story the viewer provides to fill in what has been omitted.¹⁴⁰

The French philosopher Roland Barthes claims: “in photography I can never deny *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past.”¹⁴¹ The pre-war pictures in this film serve a double function, or in words of the French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, they contain a “double regime,”

¹³⁶ Ibidem, p. 226.

¹³⁷ Eišiškės is a town in Lithuania located near the border with Belarus. A large part of its Jewish community was killed by the Nazi troops and the Lithuanian auxiliary police. Read more about this town in YAFFA ELIACH: *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*, Boston 1999.

¹³⁸ HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 252.

¹³⁹ Ibidem, p. 20.

¹⁴⁰ Italics in original. Ibidem, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴¹ Italics in original. BARTHES, p. 76.

a certain dual mode.¹⁴² While they reveal the existence of certain times—i.e., they affirm that *the thing has been there*, photographs “also signal its insurmountable distance and unreality.”¹⁴³ In the film’s contemporary time, taken out of their context of life before the war, they become evidence of destruction and death. Therefore, “the pre-war photo from the family album—from the seemingly protected intimate and embodied space of the family and its repertoires—cannot be insulated from the collective, anonymous images in the killing fields.”¹⁴⁴

In addition to community images, *The World Was Ours* includes family photographs that serve as “agents of postmemory”¹⁴⁵ and “testify to the full range of Holocaust photography.”¹⁴⁶ According to Hirsch, family photographs “depend on such a narrative act of adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into telling details connecting lives and stories across continents and generations.”¹⁴⁷ Like community pictures, family photography also creates a sense of identification, erasing time and space to “transcend these distances, figured spatially by the bridge that separates us from the pictures, and to foster an affiliative look that binds the photographs to one another and us to them.”¹⁴⁸

The film relates the story of the librarian Dina Abramowicz and her relatives both in narrative and visual form; this family story resembles the filmmaker Jedwabnik van Doren’s own family history in some ways. Dina Abramowicz was the daughter of a teacher from Vilna, Hirsz Abramowicz, who travelled to Canada and the USA in late 1939 for a planned two-month vacation to visit his relatives.¹⁴⁹ However, after the war started in Europe, Hirsz Abramowicz turned from a tourist into a refugee and soon found work as a proofreader.¹⁵⁰

In the picture of Hirsz Abramowicz included in the documentary, we see him as a member of the Vilna intelligentsia, who never planned to leave the town which he described as “the most Yiddish city in the world,” even though his brother had encouraged him to join him overseas.¹⁵¹ His longing and nostalgia for Vilna—“the city of the most intimate Jewishness in the world,”¹⁵² as he called it—never disappeared. In 1943, he contributed to the first volume of the periodical *Der litvisher yid*, which was published in New York.¹⁵³ He also collected images of the lost Vilna, which he published from 1949 to 1953 in a Paris Yiddish daily under the title *Images of a Lost World*. However, the image of the Abramowicz family portrays not only the Jewish intelligentsia of Vilna and a happy family life but also foreshadows the coming horror in the family’s life: Anna Abramowicz, Dina’s mother, was murdered in the extermination camp in

¹⁴² DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 33.

¹⁴³ Italics in original. HIRSCH, *Surviving Images*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴⁴ IDEM, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 220.

¹⁴⁵ IDEM, *Family Frames*, p. 249.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. XII.

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 254.

¹⁴⁹ ABRAMOWICZ, *My Father’s Life*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 29.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 31.

¹⁵² Ibidem.

¹⁵³ Ibidem, p. 29.

Majdanek; Dina writes that her “mother perished anonymously, like most of the other victims of the Holocaust.”¹⁵⁴ Dina and her sister Tamara survived. Dina worked in the Vilna ghetto library. When the Vilna ghetto was liquidated, she escaped from a deportation train and became a partisan.¹⁵⁵ In 1946, she came to New York, where she worked again as a librarian, this time in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. In the film, her interview is set in the YIVO library, where she worked until her death in April 2000.¹⁵⁶

The Abramowicz family’s photographs displayed in this film symbolically represent the photographs of many families of Vilna Jews. These photographs portray the world of Vilna as it was before the war, but they are all the more poignant because those photographed are oblivious to the death and loss that the future holds. Barthes notes, “whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”¹⁵⁷ Sontag refers to a moment of “posthumous irony” in reference to Roman Vishniac’s pictures of daily life.¹⁵⁸ She writes that “one’s reactions to the photographs Roman Vishniac took in 1938 of daily life in the ghettos of Poland is overwhelmingly affected by the knowledge of how soon all these people were to perish. [...] Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people.”¹⁵⁹ Hirsch expands on this point: “We also know [...] that they will *all* die (have all died), that their world will be (has been) destroyed and that the future’s (our) only access to it will be (is) through those pictures and through the stories they have left behind.”¹⁶⁰

The relation between death and life is also reflected through the film montage that blurs the family images with the face of Dina Abramowicz (fig. 2). The camera slowly scans the photography of her family; Dina becomes superimposed onto her family picture, which slowly disappears like a ghost on her face. Hirsch claims that “photogra-



Fig. 2:
Screenshot from the film *The World Was Ours*, USA 2006, Direction: Mira Jedwabnik van Doren

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 30.

¹⁵⁵ BAKER.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁷ BARTHES, p. 96.

¹⁵⁸ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 70.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁰ Italics in original. HIRSCH, *Family Frames*, p. 20.

phy's relation to loss and death is not to mediate the process of individual and collective memory but to bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability."¹⁶¹ Thus, the montage of pre-war photographs not only brings back the past but also highlights people's disappearance and loss. The visual studies scholar Laura Marks analyzes intercultural cinema and speaks about "haptic visuality," which also describes the role of the photographic images in this film:

Haptic visuality implies a fundamental mourning of the absent object or the absent body, where optical visuality attempts to resuscitate it and make it whole. At the same time it acknowledges that it cannot know the other, haptic visuality attempts to bring it close, in a look that is so intensely involved with the presence of the other that it cannot take the step back to discern difference, say, to distinguish figure and ground.¹⁶²

Thus, according to Laura Levitt, viewers enter "into intimacy of loss" through visual memories: "Instead of replacing or pretending to revive what has been lost, they allow us to come closer, to sense the presence of another to whom we no longer have any physical access."¹⁶³ These photographs not only illustrate the Abramowicz's personal family story but also, as Jo Spence and Patricia Holland noted "family photography can operate at this junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious" because, as they argue "Our memory is never fully 'ours,' nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past."¹⁶⁴ These family and community pictures demonstrate how private and public history intersect, and reveal the power of family "to negotiate and mediate some of the traumatic shifts that have shaped postmodern mentalities."¹⁶⁵ They also recreate a feeling of pre-war community life in Vilna, functioning as memory aids and enabling the visual return to a lost home.

Language and Music: Creating an Audiovisual Balance with Images

Hamid Naficy, who analyzes exilic cinema, has coined the term "accented" to describe films that "emphasize visual fetishes of homeland and the past" but also "stress the oral, the vocal, the musical—that is, accents, intonations, voices, music, and songs, which also demarcate individual and collective identities."¹⁶⁶ According to him, "stressing musical and oral accents redirects our attention from the hegemony of visual and of modernity toward the acousticity of exile and the commingling of premodernity and postmodernity in the films."¹⁶⁷ In the film *The World Was Ours*, the viewer not only

¹⁶¹ Ibidem.

¹⁶² MARKS, p. 191.

¹⁶³ LEVITT, p. 49.

¹⁶⁴ SPENCE/HOLLAND, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 13.

¹⁶⁶ NAFICY, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 25.

sees the homeland and its past, but hears the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora in the spoken word and music.

One of these audio elements which remind viewers of Vilna is the Yiddish language. The movie's dialogue is predominantly in English, however, even though most of the survivors could speak fluent Yiddish. The English language was chosen in part because the film's intended audience was primarily in the United States, where it was shown on television and in schools and universities. While those interviewed speak almost no Yiddish in the film, they do reflect on the importance of the language for the Lithuanian Jewish community: "In the Vilna community, Yiddish was a language of the people, it united the poor, the middle class, the traders, the intelligentsia, and the professionals. Yiddish was a language of the Jews in Vilna, and they were extraordinary proud of it."¹⁶⁸

Another film interviewee claims that Yiddish "was a revolutionary: instead of living in the past, you are now saying I can reshape my life here and now, in the present, and my language is not just something that I happened to use, but my language will become the tool that I will use to change who I am."¹⁶⁹ It was the language of schools, theaters, newspapers, and literature. Vilna became the center for Yiddish writers and poets.¹⁷⁰ After the Holocaust, Yiddish became the language of the traumatic past. It could be argued that, in some cases, the choice of language in this film might itself convey meaning as a sign of trauma. Survivors have often testified in second and third languages. As these films show, Holocaust survivors, especially those now located in the USA and Israel, choose a neutral language for their remembrance, not the language in which they thought, suffered, and survived, namely Yiddish. The literary scholar Shoshana Felman, who analyzed these movements between languages in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, claimed that witnessing in a foreign, and new, language allows an alienation from past events.¹⁷¹ In *The World Was Ours*, music also serves as a catalyst for memory, and a signal of moving between languages, as the English-speakers include Yiddish words in their stories when they sing or discuss Yiddish songs.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Yiddish music, ranging from partisan songs to lullabies, dominates the musical landscape of the film. After the Holocaust, "songs were seen to play a valuable role, both as historical sources that would enable future researchers to reconstruct what had happened, and as artefacts that could perhaps preserve the voices, and thereby the memory, of the victims."¹⁷² In the words of Shirli Gilbert, "music opens a unique window onto the internal world of those communities, offering insight into how they understood, interpreted, and responded to their experiences at the time."¹⁷³ Thus, music also plays an important part in *The World Was Ours*, triggering the auditory senses of Vilna Jews and bringing them back to Lithuania. Music serves "as a medium through which narratives of understanding and response to the

¹⁶⁸ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁰ In the interwar years, many famous Hebrew writers lived in Kovno.

¹⁷¹ FELMAN, pp. 212-213.

¹⁷² WORLD ORT, Music.

¹⁷³ GILBERT, Music in the Holocaust, p. VII.

events are constructed” because communities used “music to process and make sense of what was happening to them.”¹⁷⁴

In these songs, we hear the voices of the Lithuanian Jews who lived and created in pre-war Vilna. The segments of the film that include songs are mostly those which feature photographs; they make the pictures speak in this manner. One of the central songs in the film is the popular song mentioned in other parts of this work “Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg” [Never say that you are walking the final road], which the resistance fighter Hirsh Glik wrote in the Vilna ghetto in 1943. This song became an anthem of resistance for all Eastern European Jews. During the Holocaust, music both replaced and complemented religious and political activism to become one of the most important weapons against the Nazi regime. In her book about music during the Holocaust, Gilbert claims that spiritual resistance was the only option for fighting the perpetrators, as armed resistance was usually unsuccessful.¹⁷⁵ Fitting with the first person plural of the film, “Zog nit keynmol” reflects on collective rather than individual survival; the “we” of the song refers to “the Jewish people, who had wandered among foreign lands, ‘from green palm-hand to distant land of snow,’ arriving each time only with ‘pain’ and ‘sorrow’ to shed their blood anew.”¹⁷⁶ The Lithuanian Jewish community in the USA also identified with this song, as it encompasses the “larger context of Jewish suffering and existence” and reminds them of their lost past.¹⁷⁷

In addition to famous Vilna resistance songs in Yiddish, the film also incorporates other types of songs including excerpts from Yiddish lullabies that were popular in pre-war Vilna. Esther Hautzig, for instance, remembers the past and Vilna through the sense of hearing, namely, through lullabies:

The music I associate with Vilna is my mother’s lullabies. I almost liked being sick because when I was sick, my mother would put a big pillow on her lap and put me on a pillow and hug me with the pillow and sing to me, and I hear it now.¹⁷⁸

Hautzig lost many of her relatives during the Holocaust; she herself survived because she and her family were arrested—accused of being “capitalists”—and deported to Siberia during the first Soviet occupation.¹⁷⁹ In the film, when she speaks about her mother’s lullabies, she does not sing herself, but her body language indicates how her mother used to hug her, put her on a pillow, and sing to her. For Hautzig, these songs symbolize Vilna. Thus, music, in this film as “an important means of connection: to the past, to the outside world, and within communities.”¹⁸⁰ It helps not only to reconstruct “a narrative of experience” but also serves as part of “living memories,” something that survived the horror and was passed from generation to generation.¹⁸¹ Yiddish songs and

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 16.

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 73.

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 72.

¹⁷⁸ Cited from *The World Was Ours*.

¹⁷⁹ Read more in: HAUTZIG.

¹⁸⁰ GILBERT, *Music in the Holocaust*, 199.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 17.

language unify the film's protagonists, "affirming a feeling of togetherness in suffering, and restoring a sense of dignity and moral victory to those who did not survive," and, in this manner, bringing them home.¹⁸²

5.2 Photographic Narrations: Victims' and Perpetrators' Perspectives on the Holocaust in Lithuania

5.2.1 Clandestine Images of the Kovno Ghetto and the Visual Perspective of a Victim

"My camera will be my revenge"—these are the words of George Kadish¹⁸³ who took clandestine pictures in the streets and homes of the Kovno ghetto. His photos depict Jews moving into the ghetto; the everyday life of families, children, and elderly people; the daily work of the labor brigades; deportations; and, finally, the ghetto's destruction. Born in 1910 in Raseiniai, Lithuania, Kadish joined the right-wing Zionist movement *Betar* while studying engineering at the university in Kovno. Before the Second World War, he taught mathematics, science, and electronics at a Jewish high school.¹⁸⁴ According to his former inmate from the ghetto, Sol Littman, Kadish was "a genius in the design and construction of photographic equipment, he had built a number of secret miniature cameras for the Lithuanian police before the war."¹⁸⁵ As an amateur photographer, Kadish began documenting the Kovno ghetto with his *Leica* camera and also built himself a miniature camera with which he could surreptitiously take pictures through the buttonhole of his coat. Georges Didi-Huberman, who analyzed clandestine photographs from Auschwitz, considers these to be "images in spite of all," namely, "in spite of the hell [...], in spite of the risks."¹⁸⁶

Taking pictures in the Kovno ghetto was forbidden. Had the Nazis found out about Kadish's photography, he would have been immediately shot or hung. Abe Malnik, a survivor from the Kovno ghetto who was thirteen when he moved there, knew Kadish. He remembers, "you were in the lion's den, the lion's mouth. [...] To me, he was a hero. He actually put his life on the line every day."¹⁸⁷ As an educated engineer in the Kovno ghetto, Kadish was responsible for the maintenance of x-ray equipment at the German military hospital. Kadish used the chemicals for the x-ray machines to develop his negatives, which he smuggled out in crutches.¹⁸⁸ In the ghetto, he led "a dual life, sometimes living in the ghetto, sometimes staying with Christian friends."¹⁸⁹ Littman remembers:

¹⁸² Ibidem, p. 197.

¹⁸³ George Kadish (1910–1997) is also known by other names: Zvi Hirsh Kadushin and George Kaddish. In this research, I will use the transcription of his name offered by the YIVO—George Kadish.

¹⁸⁴ KLEIN, p. 55.

¹⁸⁵ LITTMAN, p. 102.

¹⁸⁶ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ YOUNG MILLER.

¹⁸⁸ KLEIN, p. 55.

¹⁸⁹ LITTMAN, p. 103.

Kadish had blond hair and blue eyes that made it easy for him to pass as a Gentile, and had a number of close friends among enlightened students who were willing to hide him, supply him with film, develop his pictures, and provide him with spare radio parts.¹⁹⁰

His friend Yehuda Zupovitz, the deputy chief of the Kovno ghetto Jewish police, helped Kadish hide the photos. Zupovitz was arrested in March 1944 but refused to betray Kadish during the ensuing interrogations in which the authorities asked about the photographs found at his place. After the destruction of the ghetto, Kadish returned and retrieved the photos from where they had been hidden in buried milk cans. Kadish was “the only member of his family to escape death.”¹⁹¹ After the war, Kadish went to DP camps in Germany. While he was residing in the Landsberg DP camp and St. Ottilien hospital,¹⁹² he put together exhibitions, took pictures, and even made short documentary films.¹⁹³ In Germany, he worked for the American Joint Distribution Committee “as a photographer and correspondent covering the work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.”¹⁹⁴ Later he emigrated to the USA, working in New York as an engineer and inventor. He manufactured television studio equipment.¹⁹⁵ He spent his last years in Hollywood, Florida, where died in 1997 from Alzheimer’s disease.¹⁹⁶ After emigrating to the USA, Kadish divided most of his pictures among museums in the USA and Israel, but he kept some of his negatives, and these pictures have never been exhibited.

One of Kadish’s first pictures—taken in June 1941—documented the death of his neighbor and his neighbor’s son. Kadish entered the neighbor’s house and found him lying in blood on the floor, next to his murdered son. The picture does not include any dead bodies, only Yiddish words. The dying man had written the Yiddish word *nekoma* (revenge) with his son’s blood. Confronted with this death scene, Kadish was compelled to run home and get his camera.¹⁹⁷ The American Holocaust historian Michael Berenbaum claims that “Kadish felt that he had been summoned. ‘I don’t have a gun,’ he said. ‘The murderers are gone. My camera will be my revenge.’”¹⁹⁸ In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag writes that a camera is “a predatory weapon [...]. It’s as simple as turning the ignition key or pulling trigger.”¹⁹⁹ Kadish likewise saw that his camera might become the most effective weapon against the Nazi regime, especially after the war, when their crimes would be investigated. His daughter Georgia Geary said, “he knew that maybe one day these pictures would have a chance to be seen.”²⁰⁰ His audience was thus not only those who might survive the ghetto, but also the non-Jewish

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 102.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem, p. 178.

¹⁹² Lithuanian Jews in the DP camps are discussed in section 3.2.

¹⁹³ For instance, a short documentary film named “The Persecuted.” He also filmed the scenes of daily life in the DP camps.

¹⁹⁴ LITTMAN, p. 178.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁶ YOUNG MILLER.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁸ BERENBAUM, p. 92.

¹⁹⁹ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 14.

²⁰⁰ YOUNG MILLER.

population. Hence, for Kadish, in the words of French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, image was an act and not a thing.²⁰¹ Abe Resnick had been one of Kadish's students in Kovno, and, with other Jews from Kovno, he was eventually forced to move into the ghetto. After the war, Resnick emigrated to the United States and became a city commissioner in Miami Beach, Florida. He remembers, "Kadish was very strong. He felt that this was his mission."²⁰²

Taking images became Kadish's form of revolt in a world that "Nazis wanted to obfuscate, to leave wordless and imageless."²⁰³ According to Didi-Huberman, "to maintain the image in spite of all" can be compared with the decision "to exercise one's observation, to take notes in secret, or to attempt to memorize as many things as possible."²⁰⁴ It is also the intent "to maintain in the end *the image of oneself*: in other words 'to safeguard one's self' in the psychic and social meaning of the term."²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, images can also be regarded as a way of getting rid of traumatic memories, as Kafka once said, "we photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes."²⁰⁶ In his photographs, Kadish recorded moments of resistance, manifested in the daily routine of ghetto life among those trying to live "normally despite intolerable conditions."²⁰⁷ One of his pictures even depicts a group of Jewish children sledding in the Kovno ghetto.

Kadish's photographs are not only significant in and of themselves as documentary evidence of the Kovno ghetto, but they are also essential as a medium through which survivors' memories are mediated. The analysis of the Holocaust survivor Raya Kruk's memoirs and her reflections on Kadish's pictures show how images serve not only as evidence of the past but also offer a space for personal projection and stimulate memory.

Inscribing Memories of the Kovno Ghetto: Praying Kaddish through Images

Holocaust photographs can be divided into three broad categories based on who took them:²⁰⁸ perpetrators, victims, and liberators and those who accompanied them (mostly Western journalists).²⁰⁹ The historian Raul Hilberg observes, "Jews are the most frequent figures in Holocaust photographs [...] [,] they contributed the smallest portion of the photographic record. Eventually their cameras were confiscated, and relatively few photographers in the Jewish community worked clandestinely to record the fate of Jewry on film."²¹⁰ Mendel Grossman and Henryk Rozencwajg-Ross were two such clandestine photographers in the Lodz ghetto. Members of the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz who burned the corpses of Jews in crematoria also took clandestine pho-

²⁰¹ Cited from DIDY-HUBERMAN, p. 50.

²⁰² YOUNG MILLER.

²⁰³ DIDY-HUBERMAN, p. 20.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem, p. 43.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem.

²⁰⁶ Cited from BARTHES, p. 53.

²⁰⁷ GONG, p. 95.

²⁰⁸ Discussed above, see section 2.1.

²⁰⁹ WOLLASTON, p. 440.

²¹⁰ HILBERG, Sources, p. 16.

tos.²¹¹ Didi-Huberman writes, “one summer day in 1944, the members of the Sonderkommando felt the perilous need to snatch some photographs from their infernal work that would bear witness to the specific horror and extent of the massacre.”²¹² In the Kovno ghetto, George Kadish took clandestine pictures; unlike the perpetrators’ images, Kadish’s photographs embody a victim’s gaze. The Nazi imagery, on the other hand, “objectifies, humiliates and violates those photographed”; its aim is “staging [and] then recording state-sanctioned murder as spectacle, entertainment even.”²¹³

One of the most difficult tasks is to “read” these pictures. The French psychoanalyst Elisabeth Pagnoux, who wrote about “ethics of the gaze,” argued that Holocaust images—in particular, photos from Auschwitz—should be left unread; “horror generates silence: it does not say it, it imposes it. There is nothing to be done, we can say nothing [...] Auschwitz was silence.”²¹⁴ According to her, reading pictures “usurps the status of the witness” and then “the source is lost, speech is denied.”²¹⁵ Nevertheless, Didi-Huberman claims that “a fragile reading *in spite of all*” is better than “no reading *at all*,” even though “reading would make something ‘speak’ in an ‘improper’ if not odious manner, something that was meant to remain in its—supposed—original muteness.”²¹⁶

Didi-Huberman suggests “reading” images using an “interpretative montage,” namely, by examining “intersecting memories” in light of retrospective and contemporary testimonies and topographical knowledge gathered in archives.²¹⁷ Barbie Zelizer, whose research focuses on liberation images, also claims that pictures act “as ‘remnants of light captured from another time.’”²¹⁸ In other words, photographs tell “us not only about what the world looks like, but also something of what it means.”²¹⁹ Zelizer argues that “the compelling weight of the photograph, then, is determined by a linkage between its material and discursive dimensions, and the power created by that linkage draws us to a photo’s many meanings, both now and then.”²²⁰ My analysis of Kadish’s photographs draws on this interpretative montage method; understanding how the memories of former prisoners from the Kovno ghetto and the context in which the images emerged are interconnected sheds light on the inner feelings expressed in the faces and street scenes that Kadish captured on film.

The Streets of the Kovno Ghetto: A Jewish Wanderer with a Camera

The soldiers who liberated the camps brought with them reporters and photographers tasked with bearing witness to the Nazi atrocities, a task which, in Zelizer’s words, “imposed a moral obligation [...] that went beyond the professional mores surrounding

²¹¹ The Sonderkommando in Auschwitz was comprised mostly of Jewish inmates who were forced to work in the gas chambers.

²¹² DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 6.

²¹³ WOLLASTON, p. 441.

²¹⁴ PAGNOUX, 93.

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

²¹⁶ Italics in original. DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 89.

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁸ ZELIZER, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 8.

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²²⁰ *Ibidem*.

journalism and photography.”²²¹ Each of those images “depicted a moment of oppression,” and many photographs were “captioned by one-word phrases such as ‘Starvation’ or ‘Hanging!’”²²² They served a “dual function as carrier of truth-value and as symbol, helping the public come to grips with the meaning of events at the same time they saw them.”²²³ The postwar reports and photographs, however, could not depict the people who had already been murdered. They were unable to turn back time with their cameras and record the lost faces, actions, feelings; these were images that they could never capture. Clandestine photographers such as Kadish, on the other hand, bore witness by recording everyday ghetto life and its systematic destruction. He had been able to photograph not only dead, burned corpses of the dead but also the inner thoughts and suffering of the living.

In the ghetto Kadish personified the figure of the wandering Jew, who, according to a Christian legend, was cursed to walk the earth forever because he had taunted Jesus on his way to the Crucifixion and refused to help carry Jesus’s cross. The wandering Jew later became a personification of the Jewish diaspora scattered throughout the world. The antisemitic sentiment inherent in this legend, and reflected in Christian imagery, justified the annihilation of Jews in the eyes of many Lithuanian Catholics, for they regarded the Jews as betrayers, be it betrayers of a nation or of Jesus. Kadish, like the other Jews of Kovno, had been arrested and imprisoned in the ghetto. As he rambled through the streets documenting the world around him with his camera, his life metaphorically paralleled that of the wandering Jew.

The desolate ghetto streets function in his photographs as a backdrop for the struggle of Jews in their wartime surroundings; Kadish photographed unlawful gatherings, underground activities, and illegal markets. He portrayed labor brigades and gatherings that the Nazis organized, some of which ended in the murder of Jews. For him, the streets were a location where Jews encountered each other and where they also collided with Nazi Germans and Lithuanian collaborators. The streets of the ghetto symbolized a transitory space, a space through which people pass without being able to establish homes.²²⁴ Kadish’s street images depict the feeling of being separated from home very well. The ghetto was a place to which people had been forced to move; they had left their homes behind. Solly Ganor, a Holocaust survivor from the Kovno ghetto, remembers the day he left his house to move into the ghetto: “I remember going to my room to take a last look at all I was leaving, and slipping my beloved copy of *The Mysterious Island* into my knapsack.”²²⁵

Kadish’s first images of the ghetto were of people moving there. The forced relocation started on 19 July 1941, when German and Lithuanian authorities ordered that the surviving Jews of Kovno, around twenty-nine thousand people, were to move into the ghetto by 15 August.²²⁶ The use of motor vehicles for their relocation was prohibited; wagons and horses were their only form of transport. A list of permitted items limited

²²¹ IDEM, *From the Image of Record*, p. 102.

²²² *Ibidem*, p. 103.

²²³ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

²²⁴ Read more about street as metaphor in: CUEVAS, p. 61.

²²⁵ GANOR, p. 53.

²²⁶ KLEIN, p. 45.



Fig. 3: George Kadish. [A woman pushes a cart piled with household belongings through the streets of the Kovno ghetto]. Photograph. 1941. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin.

what Jews were allowed to take with them into the ghetto. Around eight thousand Jews had been killed in Kovno before the ghetto was established; the mass executions took place in the Seventh Fort of Kovno, where many of the perpetrators were soldiers in the Lithuanian National Work Security Battalion.²²⁷ The ghetto was created in a very poor area of Kovno, the suburb Vilijampolė, which the Jews called Slobodka. It was filled with wooden houses, where multiple families had to share single apartments. Kadish's photographs depict such houses. Ganor remembers the flat in which his family lived: "It had a bedroom and a living room. There was no kitchen, no bathroom or toilet, no running water. In the corner of the living room stood a small wood-burning stove for cooking. The water had to be brought from an artesian well down the block, and the toilet was an outhouse, used by all the neighbors."²²⁸

One of the pictures Kadish took in 1941 depicts a woman, her husband, and two children pushing a cart with their belongings through the streets of the Kovno ghetto. This image (fig. 3) has been often used to illustrate the process of moving into the ghet-

²²⁷ BUBNYS, *Kauno getas*, p. 40.

²²⁸ GANOR, p. 95.

to between July and August 1941.²²⁹ Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the details of the photograph contradict this assumption: there are no leaves on the trees, and the people are dressed warmly. The photo must have been taken in winter or late autumn rather than in the summer. It might be that the family was moving from one house to another within the ghetto or was forced to move into the ghetto sometime later in 1941.

This picture—like many of Kadish’s images—is remarkable in the sense that it documents what must have been a traumatic moment—life in the ghetto was a devastating experience for many Jews—even as it portrays a moment of harmonious cooperation and dynamic movement. According to Judith Butler’s analysis of photos of Abu Ghraib, “even the most transparent of documentary images is framed, and framed for a purpose, carrying that purpose within its frame and implementing it through the frame.”²³⁰ Kadish’s photograph is also framed: The shadow at the bottom right suggests that the picture was taken openly; he was looking through the viewfinder of the camera, not snapping a clandestine image through the buttonhole of his coat. Kadish apparently had time to prepare and frame the shot before capturing this image because the composition of the image maintains equilibrium, with the people in the foreground and the house in the background at the center. Kadish’s image contains a visual sense of balance, which creates a feeling of harmonious aesthetics. This framing suggests that Kadish had time to consider how to shoot the picture. As Gertrude Käsebier, one of the most influential American photographers of the early twentieth century, claimed, “the value of composition cannot be overestimated: upon it depends the harmony and the sentiment.”²³¹ Had Kadish photographed the scene from an angle to include the individuals’ faces, the harmony could have been disrupted. Kadish maintains the calmness of the image by not showing their faces, only their backs. Kadish probably staged this picture in such a manner, so as to avoid humiliating the subjects, who already were distraught by their changed life conditions. Having moved into the ghetto himself, he could empathize with other victims. The image of this family moving through the streets of the ghetto symbolically resembles a funeral procession; metaphorically this family is going to its own death. The carriage looks like a coffin and the darkly dressed family members resemble mourners.

The picture is taken on a day when the sky was clear: the direct natural light provides strong contrast. Kadish’s shadow in the picture serves as his symbolic signature and as a sign of him bearing witness. There are more pictures in which we see his shadow on the pavement or next to the people he photographed. As a clandestine chronicler of the ghetto, Kadish was always in the shadow of ghetto life. He highlighted the life of other individuals, attempting to document the moments in which the Nazis tried to annihilate the community, including the destruction of the Kovno ghetto itself in July 1944. Ironically, there are only a few pictures of Kadish himself in the ghetto. The sil-

²²⁹ See, for instance, how this picture is presented in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: USHMM, *A Woman Pushes a Cart*.

²³⁰ BUTLER, *Frames of War*, p. 70.

²³¹ Cited from ZAKIA/PAGE, p. 92.

houette in his photographs therefore also serve as documentation of his own activities and his own presence in the ghetto.

Most of Kadish's images were taken during the period of the "normalization" in the Kovno ghetto—i.e., November 1941–September 1943—which came after a period of different killing "actions." Many Jews were executed before the "normalization" period; for instance, on 18 August 1941, only three days after had moved into the ghetto, around 550 well-educated professionals and intellectuals were murdered.²³² Later in the autumn, on 4 October 1941, the "small ghetto" was liquidated: around 1,800 Jews were shot, others burned alive in a hospital set ablaze by the German SS guards. From 28 October to 29 October, the "Grand Action" took place, during which Jews were gathered at Demokratų Square in the ghetto, and some ten thousand were selected to be shot.²³³ After these events, the period of "normalization" began which lasted until the Nazis converted the ghetto into a concentration camp in October 1943. It endured as a camp until mid-June 1944, when many of the remaining inhabitants were deported.²³⁴

Another image is a picture of a labor brigade, taken over a window sill sometime during the above-mentioned years of "stabilization"—i.e., sometime between 1941 and 1943. Forced labor was part of the Nazi German economy; Jews between the ages of fourteen and sixty years old were forced to work in factories on production lines or to maintain German equipment.²³⁵ There were also many small workshops in the ghetto where men, women, and children worked, making everything from clothing to toys. Others were sent to the Aleksotas airport, in another part of the city, where they worked in the fields to construct a new military base. This photo most probably depicts one of these brigades gathered by the gate of the ghetto.²³⁶ Kadish himself was sent to work in the German military hospital taking care of their equipment; because he was a highly professional technician, he was not assigned to the labor brigades. Raya Kruk, a Holocaust survivor from the Kovno ghetto, writes in her memoirs that Kadish enjoyed the very rare privilege of having received a pass with which he was allowed go to the city alone.²³⁷ Therefore, it is not surprising that he could take pictures of other Jews from the Kovno ghetto going to work in their brigades, an event which usually happened early in the morning. Kadish remembers that he used to wake up early in the morning in order to take photographs in the ghetto.²³⁸

The picture contains a frame within a frame: the focal point of the inner frame created by the symmetrically opened windows, is the labor brigade leaving the ghetto. The central focus of the image, namely, the groups of Jews forced to perform slave labor outside the ghetto is also described in the ghetto writings of Tamara Lazerson (Lazersonaitė), who writes, "that is how the days, weeks, and months go by. It is always the

²³² KLEIN, p. 45.

²³³ BUBNYS, Kauno getas, p. 18.

²³⁴ The Vilna ghetto had already been liquidated in September 1943. Thus, many inhabitants of the Kovno ghetto feared the same fate.

²³⁵ Fifty percent of the pay went to the German administration, and other half to the Judenrat. In the Kovno ghetto, the Ältestenrat paid some compensation to Jews for their work.

²³⁶ LEISEROWITZ, Litauen, p. 216.

²³⁷ KRUK, Lautlose, p. 221.

²³⁸ USHMM, Oral History Interview.

same. Thus, every day you go to the brigade, count the hours until noon, then lunch, a few more hours [...] finally the hour (God bless it!) when we go [...].”²³⁹ Chaim Yellin, who was also in the underground resistance, and later became a partisan, wrote the following between 1941 and 1942:

At every day’s dawn, the broad neck of Meysim Street by the gate is filled with people. The arriving Jews tremble with the cold and the damp. They wait; the sorting should begin soon [...]. The guards arrive to conduct brigades into the city to their workplaces. There is tension at the gate. The Germans search for their “own” Jews. They want their regulars, especially the regular women [...]. Sometimes a guard grabs up his gun, shoots into the air to frighten people, or sometimes fires into the crowd.²⁴⁰

As this suggests, “normalization” did not mean a return to “normal” life; the danger of being shot was always there. Kadish understood this danger; he was especially cautious when taking pictures which might involve Germans. In the image of the labor brigade gathering at the ghetto gate, Nazi guards are also visible. This picture depicts the border zone of the ghetto, and symbolically represents two spaces: the ghetto and the expanse beyond the fences. However, the Lithuanian Jews, even after leaving the ghetto, were not free; they worked as slaves in the town and its surroundings. Outside the inner frame, especially on the left side, a “black zone” of the picture reveals how the photographer was hiding while taking the picture. Didi-Huberman defines this black shadow as a “mass of black”²⁴¹ in his analysis of clandestine pictures of Auschwitz. He writes about a picture taken in Auschwitz’s Crematorium V sometime between 1943 and 1944, which shows Nazis burning the corpses of the dead:

The *mass of black* that surrounds the sight of the cadavers and the pits, this mass where nothing *is visible* gives in reality a *visual mark* that is just as valuable as all the rest of the exposed surface. [...] That mass of black gives us the situation itself, the space of possibility, the condition of existence of the photographs themselves. To erase a “zone of shadow” (the visual mass) for the sake of some lucid “information” (the visible testimonial) is, moreover, to act as though Alex were able to take photographs safely out in the open. It is almost to insult the danger that he faced and to insult his cunning as *resistant*.²⁴²

Though the scene in Kadish’s picture is not as dramatic as in the pictures of the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz, “the mass of black” in Kadish’s images is still a valuable visual signal of resistance. The “black zone” marks the danger to Kadish while taking this image. After the war, Kadish also photographed the burned corpses of Lithuanian Jews lying all over the ghetto, which the Nazis had burned and razed. These images, however, which are arguably the most terrifying that he made, were no longer clandestine pictures and had no black visual mass. He walked freely with his camera

²³⁹ Ghetto writings of Chaim Yellin, 1941-2 cited from KLEIN, p. 127

²⁴⁰ Diary of Tamara Lazerson, January 23, 1944 cited from KLEIN, p. 127.

²⁴¹ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 35.

²⁴² Italics in original. Ibidem, pp. 35-36.



Fig. 4: George Kadish. [Two women collect potatoes on an agricultural plot in the Kovno ghetto]. Photograph. 1941-1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin

through that field of death. Nevertheless, in the earlier picture of the labor brigade, the “mass of black” shows the need to hide; at the same time, Kadish managed to make a sharp image, suggesting that it must have been shot from a safe place where he had often taken photographs and he had enough time to check the camera settings. Most probably, the picture was taken from his room. We know from the memoirs of Raya Kruk, who lived together with Kadish in the ghetto, that his apartment was in Stulginskis Street next to the barbed-wire fence.²⁴³ The sharpness of the picture might mean that his fear of taking clandestine pictures had already disappeared; he was both physically and mentally calm enough to capture this sharp image.

The street scenes Kadish photographed also depicted people and their daily routines. Some of these pictures seem to be made less clandestinely; he seems to have had time to adjust his viewfinder and balance the composition. The picture portraying women digging potatoes (fig. 4) in the Kovno ghetto is one of the street images made more openly; it is also very sharp. It is unknown when the image was taken, but it was most probably during the “stabilization” period in the ghetto. It portrays an elderly woman and a younger one—they could be mother and daughter—digging potatoes in the fields. The picture seems to be made in a very idealistic manner; the scene resembles an ordinary day of digging potatoes in any Lithuanian village. The residents of the ghetto, however, lacked food and most of them were starving. Their allotted food rations provided only one-third the necessary calories for survival.²⁴⁴ The procurement

²⁴³ KRUK, *Lautlose*, p. 83.

²⁴⁴ USHMM, *Two Women Collect Potatoes*.

of additional food was strictly forbidden and subject to punishment, but illegal markets and smuggling nevertheless existed in the ghetto. As this picture shows, the Kovno ghetto had large open spaces, where the Jewish Council established communal vegetable gardens.²⁴⁵ The Jewish Council received the harvest and distributed the food equally among ghetto residents.²⁴⁶

The women are posing for Kadish, whom they seem to recognize. The elderly woman is even evidently smiling, though it is not clear why: It could be an expression of delight at recognizing Kadish. It could be because she and the members of her family are still alive in the ghetto and have evaded the mass killings and actions. Or perhaps the smile simply denotes the strength of a woman who manages, despite all the horror she has experienced, to see the bright side of life in her everyday duties and is glad to be alive. This photograph also echoes an entry from Avraham Tory's diary made on 4 May 1943:

A Jewish farmer led his plow, harnessed to two horses, over a large, wide field on Demokratu Square. Girls wearing green, red, and blue skirts were preparing narrow garden plots on the adjacent field, planting in the soil the seeds they were taking out of paper bags. It was a true spring spectacle, like the ones we used to see in a village before the war, or in a painting. The sun fills the world with warmth and brightness. It also sends its light and warmth to us in the Ghetto. This pretty picture is sharply circumscribed, however, by the barbed-wire fence surrounding us. No painter in his artistic imagination could conjure up the combination of a fairy tale—an open landscape—and a barbed-wire fence.²⁴⁷

It seems that Kadish was also reluctant to photograph the women digging potatoes in a field with the humiliation that accompanied their everyday life in the ghetto. No barbed-wire fence and no Stars of David are visible in the photo, which appears simply to portray two ordinary Jewish women working in a potato field. Another representation of a potato field, a drawing by ghetto painter Esther Lurie, provides an illuminating contrast to Kadish's image.²⁴⁸ Lurie's drawing, entitled "Raiding a Potato Field," was made in 1941 (fig. 5) and portrays the starving inhabitants of the Kovno ghetto digging potatoes for their food.²⁴⁹ Lurie was known in the ghetto for her pen-and-ink drawings and even received a temporary work release from the Council in order to document ghetto life for its "secret archives."²⁵⁰ It was exactly this drawing that aroused the *Ältestenrat's* interest in her works.²⁵¹ Lurie remembers:

²⁴⁵ Ibidem.

²⁴⁶ Ibidem.

²⁴⁷ TORY, p. 318.

²⁴⁸ CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE STUDIES.

²⁴⁹ USHMM, Esther Lurie.

²⁵⁰ KLEIN, p. 168.

²⁵¹ Ibidem.



Fig. 5: Esther Lurie. [Raiding a potato field, Kovno ghetto]. Drawing. 1941 (depiction) and 1957 (creation). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Esther Lurie

In the village part of the ghetto there were potato fields. After the gates were closed[,] crowds of hungry people began raiding the fields to remove the potatoes, though they were not yet ripe. The Germans used to shoot at them, but they would return at the earliest opportunity.²⁵²

Lurie's drawing reveals another perspective on the potato field and shows how many people fought against starvation in the ghetto. Kadish's picture, on the other hand, does not show other people in the field or their moods, but only the calmness these two women radiate. Kadish's pictures of people in the ghetto fields do not depict them as starving or devastated. Is it therefore appropriate to speak about the limits of representation that his images contain? Didi-Huberman claims that visual testimony should not be considered absolute because "the archive always demands to be constructed, but is always the 'witness' of something."²⁵³ Hence, an image is not proof or evidence of something, but rather "a simple 'reflection' of the event,"²⁵⁴ in this case, a reflection on ghetto inhabitants—captured through Kadish's camera lens—intended to portray people trying to lead a "normal" life and ostensibly still hoping that one day their horror will end. Kadish did not want to photograph people scrambling for food or

²⁵² USHMM, Esther Lurie.

²⁵³ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 99. He refers here to: ARLETTE FARGE: *Le goût de l'archive*, Paris 1989, p. 9 and p.77.

²⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

being killed in the potato field, as an image taken by the Nazis might have depicted in order to humiliate the victims. Kadish wanted to show that these people, in spite of all the difficulty, were capable of surviving in a human manner.

Portraits of Ghetto Inhabitants: "Silent Screams"²⁵⁵ in the Kovno Ghetto

Kadish's portraits are among his most artistically fascinating photographs. Kadish took portraits of families, children, the elderly, workers, and many other ghetto inhabitants. Like the photographs discussed above, these portraits stand in stark aesthetic contrast to the context in which the subjects found themselves. They radiate tranquility, beauty, and, in some cases, even contain expressions of happiness. Susan Sontag, in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, writes that "certain photographs—emblems of suffering [...]—can be used like *memento mori*, as objects of contemplation to deepen one's sense of reality."²⁵⁶ Kadish's portraits are like *memento mori*; they confront viewers with the faces of individuals and invite contemplation of inner thoughts. Raya Kruk, mentioned above, uses Kadish's images in her memoirs and also observes this aesthetic contradiction: "But these pictures seem to contradict the real life of the ghetto; through equilibrium in composition and the shades of black and white, they radiate a certain feeling of calm. In the pictures, also cannot see the life-threatening conditions in which the photographer had to take them."²⁵⁷

Kadish's ghetto portraits are artistically astonishing and diverse. He photographed, for example, an unknown elderly woman wearing a Star of David in her room (fig. 6); the exact date of the picture remains unknown. Other subjects were more well known, like the internationally known lawyer Simon Bieliatzkin, whom Kadish likewise photographed in his room (fig. 7). Before the war, Bieliatzkin had worked as a civil law attorney at the university in Kovno; in the ghetto, he served as chairman of the Jewish court.²⁵⁸ This picture was taken in 1943, when Bieliatzkin was suffering from severe depression and was being treated in a clandestine psychiatric ward in the ghetto.²⁵⁹ Kadish also photographed the deputy police chief Yehuda Zupovitz with his wife Dita in March 1944 (fig. 8). Zupovitz was one of the people who encouraged Kadish to take pictures and, as already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, helped Kadish hide his collection. Zupovitz was also active member of the underground resistance in the ghetto.

All of these portraits were taken in the inhabitants' apartments or private rooms in the ghetto. The focal points of these photographs are the people, who are seated in these intimate spaces. The objects in the background are less important and serve as a secondary point of interest, providing a setting for these informal portraits. The images are static. Roland Barthes writes that, "when we define the Photograph [*sic*] as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like

²⁵⁵ A reference to the title of Kruk's memoirs: *Lautlose Schreie: Berichte aus dunklen Zeiten*.

²⁵⁶ Emphasis added. SONTAG, *Regarding*, p. 119.

²⁵⁷ KRUK, *Lautlose*, pp. 12-13.

²⁵⁸ USHMM, *Portrait of Professor Simon Bieliatzkin*.

²⁵⁹ TORY, p. 478.



Fig. 6: George Kadish. [An elderly woman wearing a Jewish badge sits on a bed in her room in the Kovno ghetto]. Photograph. 1941-1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin

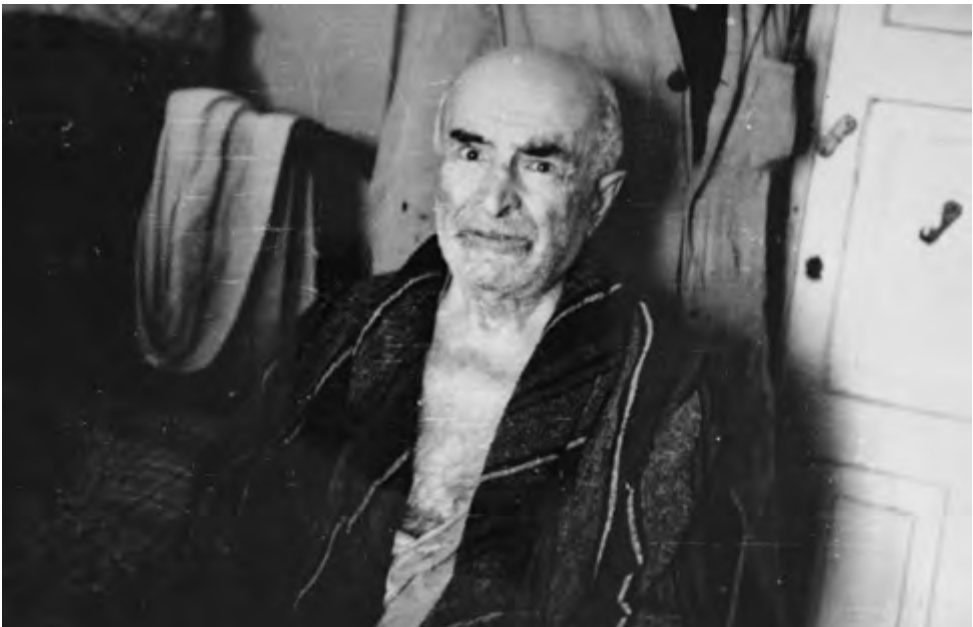


Fig. 7: George Kadish. [Portrait of Professor Simon Bieliatzkin in his room in the Kovno ghetto]. Photograph. 1943. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin

butterflies.”²⁶⁰ Thus, the people in these images are like butterflies caught in a moment and frozen forever. Kadish’s portraits seem to be surrounded by complete silence, or as Barthes says, they produce music and “speak in silence.” This is critical: according to Barthes, “absolute subjectivity is achieved only in a state, an effort, of silence.”²⁶¹

Kadish’s portraits are reminiscent of professional photography, despite the fact that he was only an amateur photographer. Kadish started to take pictures before the war; he had most probably been exposed to the artistic photography and exhibitions in interwar Kovno, which at that time was often called “the little Paris” of Lithuania.²⁶² Kovno was also famous in interwar Lithuania for its photographic studios, some of which were owned by Lithuanian Jews; their photographic work focused mostly on portraiture, which was in generally typical for that period.²⁶³ Kadish’s images embody an artistic style similar to that of the famous nineteenth-century French photographer Felix Nadar, a pioneer of portraiture which revealed the inner world of the photographic subject. Nadar rejected “any artifice, such as the use of accessories, painted backdrops, or re-touching.”²⁶⁴ Nadar also had a “direct approach to his sitters” which “shows his concern to grasp their inner life.”²⁶⁵ This is especially visible in Nadar’s portrait of his mother or wife.²⁶⁶

Kadish’s portraits are also focused on the intensity of the subject’s gaze. According to Barthes, Nadar “produced a supererogatory photograph which contained more than what the technical being of photography can reasonably offer”—in other words, his portraits revealed the identities of those photographed.²⁶⁷ The woman in Nadar’s picture looks directly into the eyes of the photographer. The elderly woman in Kadish’s image, on the other hand, seems to not have the strength to make eye contact and is consumed in her own thoughts. Kadish’s images have a photographic look to which Barthes refers as a paradox: “How can one have an *intelligent air* without thinking about anything intelligent [...]. It is because the look, eliding the vision, seems held back by something interior.”²⁶⁸

We cannot know what pain hides in the eyes of a single woman, but Bieliatzkin’s look can be interpreted with help from the memoirs of his friend Avraham Tory. Bieliatzkin’s eyes are what Barthes would call the “punctum” of the photograph, something that attracts the attention and “has a power of expansion”²⁶⁹ and “is a kind of subtle *beyond*—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see.”²⁷⁰ On 10 February 1943, the same year that this photograph was made, Tory wrote the following in his diary:

²⁶⁰ Italics in original. BARTHES, p. 57.

²⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 55.

²⁶² KRUK, Lautlose, p. 37.

²⁶³ KAMINSKAS, p. 52.

²⁶⁴ BOCARD.

²⁶⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶⁶ It is unknown, whether he photographed his wife or his mother.

²⁶⁷ BARTHES, p. 70.

²⁶⁸ Italics in original. Ibidem, p. 113.

²⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 45.

²⁷⁰ Italics in original. Ibidem, p. 59.

Now Professor Bieliatzkin is sitting at my desk in the [Jewish] Council office. He has lost his composure, and for good reason, I look at him with sorrow and pity. He, my tutor for four years in the past – how much he has changed, how he has grown old. Professor Bieliatzkin, the genius, the unique person who for many years had defended people in trouble, who always had a kind word in exchanges with anyone, however humble, who always found an ingenious solution in a complex situation in court—now he sits in front of me, seized by panic, confused, drained of courage.²⁷¹

In the ghetto, Bieliatzkin lived alone; one of his sons was among the first five hundred Jews killed in the ghetto.²⁷² Tory visited him in the hospital and his description of Bieliatzkin's physical and emotional state correlates well to the emotion evident in his face in Kadish's portrait. Kadish's own emotions while taking this picture might well have paralleled those expressed in Tory's report of his visit with Bieliatzkin. Tory described the clandestine psychiatric hospital in his diary on 25 September 1943:

A half-naked old man, his hair all white, was lying on an iron bed next to a wall. Unshaven, his face and forehead furrowed with wrinkles, his protruding eyes looking on with concentration. [...] I closed my eyes in order to contain the overpowering emotions churning in my breast. [...] He seemed to be about to cry. [...] His face assumed a stern expression and the look in his eyes grew even more penetrating. [...] Professor Bieliatzkin: "Let them finish me off." [...] He begged me to persuade the doctors to put an end to his life. Professor Bieliatzkin: "I suffer because I understand everything. I know the nature of my illness. I beg you: put an end to my sufferings."²⁷³

Kadish captured this sense of inner suffering, expressed through the eyes which Tory described as protruding and penetrating, very well. Despite his obvious anguish, Kadish tried to depict him as masculine; according to photography scholars, "in a portrait of a man, it is often a strong light to emphasize manliness."²⁷⁴ Compare here the strongness of the light in the picture of Bieliatzkin with the lighter image of the unknown woman. The eyes in the both pictures are pensive, disclosing the subjects' inner sufferings. The subjects, especially the elderly and those living alone, seem emotionally exhausted. However, looking through Kadish's pictures, it seems that he preferred to depict people in such domestic settings, not scenes in which they were actively being killed or tortured; he wanted to portray them as dignified human beings. Kadish aimed not to show the physical and therefore obvious pain, but rather the daily inner struggle of life in the ghetto. In her memoirs Raya Kruk writes that Kadish's photographs revealed the inner state of being of the ghetto inhabitants, who had been humiliated and deprived of their human rights.²⁷⁵ She notes that only a few of his pictures show direct violence, but that these pictures contain "associations with inhumanity."²⁷⁶ Barthes

²⁷¹ TORY, p. 206.

²⁷² Ibidem, p. 478.

²⁷³ Ibidem, pp. 479-480.

²⁷⁴ ZAKIA/PAGE, p. 177.

²⁷⁵ KRUK, Lautlose, p. 222.

²⁷⁶ Ibidem.



Fig. 8: George Kadish. [Deputy Police Chief Yehuda Zupovitz poses with his wife, Dita, in their apartment in the Kovno ghetto two weeks before his arrest]. Photograph. March 1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Yehudit Katz Sperling

wrote that “ultimately, photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks.”²⁷⁷

The deputy police chief Zupovitz and his wife posed for Kadish in their apartment and appear to feel comfortable in front of his camera lens. Zupovitz’s wife Dita has a relaxed body position; she has pulled her legs up onto the sofa (fig. 8). The photograph is taken from an intimate distance. The nature of this picture suggests that it was taken spontaneously during a visit to their home, where he came not as a photographer, but also as a family friend. It might be that Kadish already anticipated Zupovitz’s fate; the picture was taken after the ghetto had been turned into a concentration camp and two weeks before Zupovitz was killed. It could be also that Kadish wanted to include the faces of his friend and his friend’s wife in his photographic collection, so that, in the case of their deaths, they might live on through his image.

As Barthes would say, pictures testify that something has existed and verify its existence: “every photograph is a certificate of presence.”²⁷⁸ Kadish’s pictures aim to document the existence of people who suffered and were later annihilated; his camera freezes their memory and feelings at this crucial moment in time. In most of the portraits, he does not ask the Jews to remove the Star of David for the photograph. On the

²⁷⁷ Italics in original. BARTHES, p. 38.

²⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 87.

contrary, he emphasizes it, and, in this manner, shows that their destiny is marked by the cruelty of the war. It is his revolt against the annihilation of memories and against the Nazi regime. Didi-Huberman reflects on this destruction:

There is a perfect coherence between Goebbels's discourse, analyzed in 1942 by Hannah Arendt according to its central motif, "No one will say Kaddish"—in other words, we will murder you without remains and without memory—and the systematic destruction of the archives of the destruction by the SS itself at the end of the war. Indeed the forgetting of the extermination is part of the extermination. The Nazis no doubt believed they were making the Jews invisible, and making their very destruction invisible.²⁷⁹

It might be claimed that, with his photographs Kadish wanted to say a Kaddish, the hymn of praise to God and the ritual of mourning. The Nazis' aimed to annihilate all Jews, so that no Kaddish would be heard again. Kadish revolted not only through his images but also by changing his own identity. In contrast to many Jews who changed their names after the Holocaust to get rid of the memories of their past, Kadish changed his last name from Kadushin to Kadish to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. The author Catherine Gong, who wrote a book on George Kadish, once asked him directly why he changed his name:

I carefully dialed George Kaddish's [*sic*] number in Hollywood, Florida. George's phone numbers loomed large on my notebook. "Hello?" an older voice chirped. "Sir, are you Mr. George Kaddish or Mr. Zvi Hirsh Kadushin?" "Yes, I am," he replied protectively and authoritatively. Nervously and enthusiastically, I said, "Mr. Kaddish you are alive!" Probably expecting to hear a telemarketer's pitch, he replied cantankerously, "Of course I am alive. I answered the phone! Who is this?" I apologized and tried to sound calm. [...] Now was my chance and I carefully asked him about his name change from Zvi Hirsch Kadushin to George Kaddish. George's reply was immediate and bold, "I did it for the six million!"²⁸⁰

His friends called him "meshugga" [crazy] for changing his last name.²⁸¹ However, he not only changed his last name but also his first name, from Zvi Hirsch to George, which was easier to pronounce in his new homeland in the USA. This name is carried on by his daughter Georgia. Thus his change of names, according to Gong, was a "way of linking his identity with not only loss and annihilation but with hope and regeneration" in his new place of living.²⁸²

The images Kadish took in the streets and homes of ghetto inhabitants represent "the tears of photography,"²⁸³ as they have power to affect deeply. Nevertheless, in order to comprehend these pictures, it is important to see them not only as evidences of the atrocities these people suffered but also as reflections of events which can be deconstructed through historical knowledge and intersecting memories. The art historian

²⁷⁹ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 22.

²⁸⁰ GONG, p. 22.

²⁸¹ Ibidem.

²⁸² Ibidem, p. 25.

²⁸³ WOLF, p. 83.

Herta Wolf writes that “discursive explanations specifying this singular moment must be added in order that pictures showing the suffering of others [...] not only have an emotional impact but also become intelligible.”²⁸⁴ The emotional impact of Kadish’s images makes them an important source of postmemory, as the analysis of their reception will show.

Images, Survivors and Postmemory: “To Remember, One Must Imagine”

In his work on the four clandestine photos of Auschwitz, Didi-Huberman responded forcefully to the French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann suggestion that such images should be dismissed as “images with imagination.”²⁸⁵ Lanzmann rejected the use of archival images in his film *Shoah*. He aimed “to oppose the absolute silence of horror with absolute speech.”²⁸⁶ The French author Gérard Wajcman wrote about *Shoah* that the filmmaker had succeeded in “showing in a film something that no image can show, [since] it shows that there is some Nothingness to be seen, [and that] what this shows is that there is no image.”²⁸⁷ Didi-Huberman quotes Lanzmann, who writes:

I have always said that archival images are images without imagination. They petrify thought and kill any power of evocation. It is much more worthwhile to do what I did, an immense work of development, of creation of the memory of the event. My film is a “monument” that is a part of what it monumentalizes. [...] To prefer the cinematic archive to the speech of the witness, as though the former could do more than the latter, is to surreptitiously reiterate the disqualification of human speech in its destination to the truth.²⁸⁸

According to Didi-Huberman, anyone who, and here he speaks mostly about Lanzmann, persists in the “bankrupt notion of an archival image defined as an ‘image without imagination’ [...] [is] mistaken on the nature of the archive in general [...] as well as the nature of testimony in general.”²⁸⁹ Therefore, Didi-Huberman claims, image is “neither *nothing* nor *all*”²⁹⁰ but, in order to remember, one has to imagine.²⁹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, a close friend of Lanzmann, also writes that “it would be absurd to say that an image can harm or hinder thought, or else one would have to infer that thought harms itself, loses itself in meanderings and detours. [...] Thought takes an imaged form

²⁸⁴ Ibidem.

²⁸⁵ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 92. Lanzmann used this term in his interview: CLAUDE LANZMANN, La question n’est pas celle du document, mais celle de la vérité (interview with Michel Guerrin), in: *Le Monde* from 2001-01-29.

²⁸⁶ PAGNOUX, pp. 95-96.

²⁸⁷ WAJCMAN, pp. 125-126.

²⁸⁸ Cited from ibidem, p. 93. The original quotation is from CLAUDE LANZMANN: Le monument contre l’archive? (interview with Daniel Bougnoux, Régis Debray, Claude Mollard, et al.), in: *Les cahiers de médiologie* 11 (2001), p. 274.

²⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 111.

²⁹⁰ Italics in original. Ibidem.

²⁹¹ Ibidem.

when it seeks to be intuitive, when it seeks to found its affirmations on the sight of an object.”²⁹²

The American writer Toni Morrison ascribed images a similarly important role in the process of remembering. In Ernst Van Alphen’s words, in her novel *Beloved* (1987), Morrison writes about “rememories” that pictures can evoke.²⁹³ Van Alphen suggests that Morrison “insists on the founding, grounding function of specifically visual images in the ‘re-remembering,’ the healing activity of memory that present-day culture, facing the disappearance of the eyewitness, is struggling to articulate and implement.”²⁹⁴ Hirsch likewise sees photographs as triggers of memory. According to her, images are part of postmemory. She depicts the relationship between postmemory and images as “so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right,” especially for the children of the Holocaust survivors.²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Hirsch does not deny the fact that both the memories of children of Holocaust survivors and the memories of survivors themselves are mediated.²⁹⁶ The mediating potential of images for the survivors is also evident in Raya Kruk’s memories and George Kadish’s pictures.

Kruk was born to German-speaking Jews in Latvia. In the interwar period, she and her family moved to Kovno, where Kruk began to engage with art and attended art school. In 1941, she was confined with her mother in the Kovno ghetto. For four months, until the liberation of the ghetto by the Red Army on August 1, 1944, she was hiding outside the ghetto in the cellar of the non-Jewish Lithuanian family. After the war, Kruk stayed in Lithuania, where she completed a doctorate in art history. She was soon disappointed with the Soviet ideological regime, and was allowed to leave Lithuania with her family. She subsequently lived and worked as an art historian in Israel and Great Britain before moving to Berlin in 1989. She avoided speaking about her time in the ghetto until 1999, when she published her memoirs. In the introduction to her book, she explains why it took more than fifty years for her to break the silence:

When one breaks the silence and starts bringing to the surface memories which have been shrouded in darkness for a long time, old wounds are re-opened. Zvi Kadushin’s pictures, taken with a clandestine camera, reinforce the urge in me not only to describe them, but also to understand what lurks behind them. They also revive memories which have been long forgotten or thought to have been lost forever; they trigger my anxieties.²⁹⁷

According to her account, George Kadish’s images were the catalyst for her thinking about the past, and she started to remember and to write her memories down. She needed to understand what was behind those photographs. Van Alphen also speaks about the necessity of this “link between seeing and comprehension” in the testimonies of Holocaust survivors.²⁹⁸ According to him, “these eyewitnesses’ testimonies of

²⁹² SARTRE, p. 229 and p. 235. The translation taken from DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 112.

²⁹³ VAN ALPHEN, p. 97. See, TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*, New York 1987.

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 97- 98.

²⁹⁵ HIRSCH, *Projected Memory*, p. 8.

²⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁹⁷ KRUK, *Lautlose*, p. 12

²⁹⁸ VAN ALPHEN, *Caught by Images*, pp. 98-99.

visual imprints concern events that cannot be processed in the same manner as those recounted in the eyewitness account in a police report.²⁹⁹ He claims that, in these memoirs, the visual level functions as “a mode of access to or penetration into what happened—instead of being the raw material to be processed into understanding. Even after all this time, that first step has still not been made. Yet the image is there; it refuses to budge.”³⁰⁰ These words reflect both on the mental images that exist solely in survivors’ minds, and material pictures which they see in exhibitions, books, or media. In this way, Kadish’s images offered Kruk access to her memories, which for many years were buried through her silence and the guilt of having survived. Kruk writes, “looking at these photographs, I try in my memory to reconstruct the essence, even though sometimes the chronological order of events becomes blurred; permanent evidence however, helps everything to become more precise.”³⁰¹

Kruk is not the only Holocaust survivor from Lithuania who has used Kadish’s images in their memoirs. The Holocaust survivor Solly Ganor also refers to Kadish’s images in account. There is even a picture of Ganor that Kadish took in the ghetto; it became the cover photo for the German translation of Ganor’s memoirs. Museums in Munich and New York have prepared several exhibitions which presented the childhood of ghetto children, including Ganor, through Kadish’s photography. An exhibition in the YIVO in New York City was entitled “Light One Candle: A Survivor’s Tale—From Lithuania to Jerusalem.” Ganor collected and commented on the pictures, claiming that this exhibition focused on images of children was a way for him to fulfill a promise to his friends to show the world what happened.³⁰² Thus, Ganor used images as evidence, while Kruk uses images as references for her memories; Kadish’s images are accompanied by her feelings, which evoke the remembering.

Kruk apparently deeply identified with these photographs at an emotional level, even though she and her relatives, unlike Ganor, are not depicted in any of them (at least not in the pictures that are in public archives). Understanding this emotional response might suggest how images influence memory work, but will also explain why Kruk has chosen a photo which does not show her for the cover of her memoirs (fig. 9). In contrast to the book covers of many accounts by Holocaust survivors, the cover of Kruk’s account features a girl from the Kovno ghetto with a milk can rather than a photo of herself.

Kruk’s memoirs are written as secretively as the pictures captured by Kadish were taken. Almost all the names of individuals have been changed, something uncommon among the memoirs of survivors from the Kovno ghetto. Most such accounts depict not only the names, but years, days, hours, and even minutes of the events which occurred. Kruk’s memoirs includes very few dates; it is even unclear when she herself was born. The book is also written non-chronologically; a chapter might begin with Kruk walking in the streets of New York or Tel Aviv, and then suddenly, her memories shift to a different time and space, into the Kovno ghetto. However, there is at least one

²⁹⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 99.

³⁰¹ KRUK, *Lautlose*, p. 14.

³⁰² GÜMBEL.

person whose name she did not hide, since she knew that if she described him and his activities in the ghetto, everyone would know who that individual was: that person is Zvi Hirsch Kadushin.³⁰³ In the introduction and at the end of the book, she refers to him with his full name. In other chapters, she calls him Grischa, a diminutive for Hirsh. She writes “I have now a beloved, Grischa, a close person, who takes care of me and my mother.”³⁰⁴ Although she includes him in several chapters, she does not title any of these chapter with his name, as is the case for many other chapters (“Kazys,” “Tanja,” “Anna,” “Benjamin,” etc.).

Furthermore, based only on the introduction and the last chapter, it would not be apparent that these people (Kruk and Kadish) knew each other very closely in the ghetto. In the last chapter, “With the Hidden Camera,” which comes after the epilogue, she describes how Kadish had to hide in the ghetto to take pictures and how he hid his pictures in milk cans. However, she describes him from a distance, as though she was not part of it, even though the body text of the memoirs suggests the opposite. She and her mother moved into his apartment in the ghetto, after staying in a small apartment shared with other families. She found Kadish’s apartment to be very “luxurious.”³⁰⁵ Kruk helped him hide his pictures and assisted him in his secret photo laboratory, which he had constructed in the cellar of his apartment under the kitchen, and where he used to work silently in the evenings.³⁰⁶ She also used to wake up with him in the middle of the night, as he was scared that his photos might be found by the ghetto administration.³⁰⁷ She hid with him during the Children’s Action in March 1944, when they were also hunting for Kadish because somebody had betrayed him.³⁰⁸ Finally, while they were hiding in the home of non-Jewish sympathizers in the city, just before the liquidation of the ghetto, he even made her a gramophone, with which she could listen to the voices of Amelita Galli-Curti, Enrico Caruso, and Feodor Chaliapin from such operas as *La Traviata* or *Faust*.³⁰⁹ Nevertheless, in those opening and closing sections of the memoirs she writes as though she had not been part of it; she distances herself from Kadish.³¹⁰

³⁰³ She calls Kadish “Kadushin” in her memoirs.

³⁰⁴ KRUK, *Lautlose*, p. 61.

³⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

³⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

³⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

³⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

³¹⁰ There are several reasons she might wish to remain as secretive as possible about Kadish. First, her memoirs reveal that she was married to a man named Mischa before the war. Mischa served in the Soviet army during the war as part of a documentary film studio team. Kruk remembers her feelings after Mischa came back: “Thus I could not tell him a lot about my experiences, as he had experienced so much, during the hard days of the war. But I was happy about it, as I did not have to respond to uncomfortable questions.” *Ibidem*, p. 134. Second, Kruk was much younger than Kadish and had different experiences after the war. In the end of the memoirs, while speaking of Kadish’s exile, Kruk indirectly alluded to reasons why they did not stay together, unlike most couples who had survived the Holocaust, as these typically stayed together after the war: “As he was already considerably older, he experienced ‘the Russian year’ differently than I did, and as soon as he could, he escaped to the West.” *Ibidem*, p. 222. After the war, Kruk and her mother stayed in Lithuania. She married and had a daughter. Later, she was allowed to leave the Soviet Union and went to Israel, then to Great Britain and Germany, where she worked as an art historian. Nevertheless, she never wrote articles on Kadish’s photographs.

Kruk perceives all of Kadish's images not as "ordinary" Holocaust pictures of atrocities, but rather as photographs which represent moments of her own past. Most probably, she took part in the staging of some of these clandestine photographs, for instance, the ones which were taken at their apartment or while visiting friends. It is also possible that they discussed the representation of subjects in front of the camera in such gruesome conditions in the ghetto. She writes in her memoirs: "He wanted to transmit in all details the unimaginable, undignified, with all its triviality, and ignored the constant death threat floating around him."³¹¹

On 21 November 1997, just after Kadish's death, an exhibition titled *Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto* opened at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where it ran for two years, until the end of October 1999. The exhibition was filled with Kadish's pictures, which were commented on by the memoirs of other survivors. Most probably it was these two factors— his death and the exhibition filled with his images—that triggered Kruk to write; her memoirs appeared two years after his death. Kruk regularly visited a friend who was also a survivor from the Kovno ghetto in the United States, and she might well have visited the exhibition on the Kovno ghetto in Washington, D.C. Most of the pictures from the exhibition are included in her memoirs. Although she did not write much about him, she managed to uncover his visual world.

The cover picture of her memoirs (figs. 9 and 10) does not depict her, but a girl named Helen Verblunsky, who was secretly delivering milk to one of her mother's customers. Verblunsky was born in Kovno; during the war, she lost her father and little brother. She resided in a DP camp in Austria, where she met her husband; they emigrated together to Canada.³¹² It was no accident that Kruk, having looked at dozens of Kadish's pictures, chose this one to represent her memoirs. Kruk herself was about that age in the ghetto. Like Verblunsky, she also lost her brother in the ghetto. For these reasons, she may have seen herself in that girl. It is also interesting to observe that this image is one of the several images which hung at Kadish's home in the USA³¹³. This reveals that for both Kruk and Kadish, this image was important. The photo was taken from close range and seems to be staged: the girl is posing and is located in the center of the photographic frame. Moreover, Kruk's decision to take this photograph could be based on the symbolism of the milk can in the girl's hand, as Kadish hid his negatives in milk cans.

The choice to position this image as a visual representation of her memoirs reveals that Kruk is keeping in close visual touch with her past and prefers to communicate in images. In the epilogue, she writes: "The real home is the creative process: ideas and images emerge despite time and place. They evoke pain and delight at once, happiness and doubt, when they are shaped."³¹⁴ Thus, for her, Kadish's images are home, a place where her memories have found shelter. In order to remember her past, Kruk first had to access it through images, to imagine herself in the place where those people were photographed. This imagination led her to an understanding of what had happened to

³¹¹ Ibidem, p. 221.

³¹² USHMM, Portrait of a Young Girl.

³¹³ See his home interior in USHMM, Oral History Interview.

³¹⁴ KRUK, Lautlose, p. 219.



Fig. 9: [Book cover]. RAYA KRUK: *Lautlose Schreie: Berichte aus dunklen Zeiten*. Frankfurt 1999



Fig. 10: George Kadish. [Portrait of a young girl holding a milk can in the Kovno ghetto]. Photograph. 1941-1943. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin

her. The cover photograph of her book also reveals how the same image might have two meanings—the literal one, revealing the fact, showing a certain girl from a ghetto with her own history, but, at the same time, a symbolic meaning in which the image reflects or inspires the imagination. It might be that this image symbolized another person for Kadish, namely, Kruk, the girl who helped him hide his negatives in milk cans. There can be no certainty on this point, of course, but, as Didi-Huberman writes: “To know, one must therefore imagine for oneself.”³¹⁵

Kadish’s photographs are among the most frequently mediated visual memories about the Holocaust among the survivors of the Holocaust in Lithuania, especially in memoirs of the survivors from the Kovno ghetto. Some of Kadish’s images have also been circulated in Soviet publications about the Holocaust in Lithuania, but they were not attributed to him. Today, in Lithuania, these images rarely circulate in the Lithuanian print media, but they are often used in museums and scholarly publications. Nevertheless, Lithuanian Holocaust scholarship fails even today to credit Kadish for

³¹⁵ DIDI-HUBERMAN, p. 119.

these images, treating them as anonymous photographs. In 2014, the historian Arūnas Bubnys published a book about the Kovno ghetto³¹⁶ filled with Kadish's photographs (including the cover of the book), but he nevertheless does not mention Kadish at all. The photographs are presented anonymously, with a note that they come from the Lithuanian Central State Archives. Neither does Bubnys discuss how and under which conditions these pictures were taken. Kadish, both as a photographer and as a victim, seems to have been deleted from the memory landscape in Lithuania, only his photographs remain as signs of his activity during the Holocaust. The photographs, which revive the memories and serve as a source of remembering the past, have thus become better known than the photographer himself, who fought against the perpetrators with a camera.

5.2.2 Perpetrator's Iconography: Massacre of the Lithuanian Jews in the Lietūkis Garage

Massacre in the Lietūkis Garage: The Beginning of the Holocaust in Lithuania

The perpetrators' images from the mass murder of Jews in the Lietūkis garage belong to the most important iconographic representations of the Holocaust in Lithuania (figs. 11, 12, and 13). Their reception has changed over time and in different national and international contexts, but a fundamental element of understanding this evolution is awareness of the historical events behind these images; The extermination of Jews in the Lietūkis garage on 27 June 1941 was a part of the Kovno pogrom that took place from 25 June to 29 June 1941, during the first days of the Nazi occupation of Lithuania. During the killings in the Lietūkis garage, around fifty Jews were publicly executed. They were tortured with a hose used for washing cars; water was pumped into their gullets until their entrails burst, and they were beaten to death with iron bars. This bloodshed took place in front of the cemeteries in Kovno, where, several days before, non-Jewish Lithuanian fighters of the anti-Soviet resistance, who had fought in the June uprising against the Soviet regime, had been buried.³¹⁷ The atrocities committed at the Lietūkis garage are remembered in almost all the memoirs of Lithuanian Jews from Kovno. It was one of the first encounters with antisemitic violence in the city, and it remained deeply etched in their memories. It can also be depicted as one of the strongest visual imprints marking the beginning of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The memoirs of the Kovno ghetto survivor William W. Mishell include testimony from the Jewish doctor Max Solc, who was Mishell's brother-in-law:

You know the Lietūkis garage across from our clinic. I just saw a massacre of Jews which is beyond description. A group of Jews were brought in from the street and forced to clean the garage floor of horse manure with their bare hands. These Jews were treated very harshly. A whole group of civilians stood outside the garage and were observing the spectacle. When the men completed their work, they were led to the water hoses and, apparently, instructed to wash up.

³¹⁶ BUBNYS, *Kauno getas*.

³¹⁷ See section 4.2.1.



Fig. 11: [Murder of Jews at Lietūkis garage]. Photograph. June 1941. BBArch, B 162 Bild-04145, o.Ang. / unidentified photographer



Fig. 12: [Murder of Jews at Lietūkis garage]. Photograph. June 1941. BArch, B 162 Bild-04128, o.Ang. / unidentified photographer



Fig. 13:
[“Blond man” during the killings in the Liet-
ūkis garage]. Photograph. June 1941. BArch,
B 162 Bild-04126, o.Ang. / unidentified pho-
tographer

Suddenly, a group of partisans decided to have some fun and a massacre began. With spades, sticks, rifle butts, crowbars, and other tools from the garage they started assaulting the Jews. There must have been at least fifty or more Jews, all of them severely wounded, lying on the pavement crying and moaning. The partisans then grabbed many Jews by their hair and dragged them across the lot to the amusement of the bystanders. When the Jews collapsed, they turned the hoses on them and revived them. Once revived, they again beat them until they died. Then, later, another group of Jews was brought in to wash up the pavement and to remove the bodies.³¹⁸

Similarly, another Kovno Jew, Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson writes: “Descriptions of that pogrom make it clear there was one Hell that Dante failed to enumerate in *The Inferno*, and only because that particular one had not been conceived of when he was writing.”³¹⁹ This slaughter was committed in daylight, in the center of the city, with hundreds of local witnesses, including women and children and Jewish and non-Jewish residents. The historian Saulius Sužiedėlis claims that in these killings “the Germans encouraged, watched and lurked in the background; nonetheless, the killers were mostly ethnic Lith-

³¹⁸ MISHELL, p. 25.

³¹⁹ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 36.

uanians.”³²⁰ The Lithuanian provisional government, which was formed after the June uprising, was based in Kaunas; it did not denounce these macabre killings. They did, however, try to disassociate themselves from this pogrom. After the murders in the Lietūkis garage, Lithuanian Minister Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis “reported on the extremely cruel torture of the Jews in the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas,” but he did not denounce them, claiming only that *public* executions of Jews should be avoided: “Despite all the measures which must be taken against the Jews for their Communist activity and harm done to the German Army, partisans and individuals should avoid public executions of Jews.”³²¹ As Sužiedėlis rightly observes, “this is hardly a ringing condemnation of anti-Jewish violence.”³²²

Photographers and the “Double Act of Shooting”: (Re-)Constructing a Photographic Frame

The images of the execution of the Lithuanian Jews in the Lietūkis garage were taken by the German officers from the 16th Army, who during the massacre was commanded by Ernst Busch, a German field marshal.³²³ These photographs depict the process of killing the Jews (figs. 11 and 12). Majority of the images are usually attributed to Wilhelm Gunsilius, who was a photographer by profession, served in the air force where he dealt with air reconnaissance photography.³²⁴ He took number of photographs depicting the mass murder of Jews, he remembers that in the Lietūkis garage: “[...] I had a special permit from the Sixteenth army high command in which I was stipulated that I could photograph anyone and everywhere.”³²⁵ Nevertheless, it is presumed that there were also amateur photographers capturing the massacre, for instance, Karl Röder. In the summer 1941, he, as a lance corporal, was attached to company Bakery No. 562, which was part of the 16th Army. Röder remembers: “Being an amateur photographer, I took two photos of this unusual event while standing on top of my car.”³²⁶

Most of the photographs of these atrocities emerged from “the most organized of documenters—the Nazis themselves.”³²⁷ This Nazi imagery recorded the atrocities and the prisoners in the camps, deportations of the Jews to the East, and the Nazi troops themselves. The Nazi regime was already employing photography as a form of persecution in the streets of Germany in the 1930s, where posters stated: “Jewish Business. Whoever Buys Here Will Be Photographed.”³²⁸ During the war, visual images recorded

³²⁰ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *The Burden of 1941*.

³²¹ Italics in original. *Ibidem*.

³²² *Ibidem*.

³²³ In the Digital Picture Archives of the German Federal Archives, these photographs are without the exact authorship. Photographer Gunsilius is presented as the witness of the event. It is known that he made the majority of the photographs in the Lietūkis garage. Karl Röder also testifies taking several images during the massacre.

³²⁴ FAITELSON, p. 24. Testimony of Gunsilius was given on 11 November, 1958 in the Central Bureau of the Department of Justice of the Federal Republic of German.

³²⁵ Cited in *ibidem*, p. 26.

³²⁶ Cited in *ibidem*, p. 22. His words are taken from the interrogation protocol on 8 July, 1959 in Düsseldorf.

³²⁷ ZELIZER, *Remembering to Forget*, p. 44.

³²⁸ *Ibidem*.

the mass killings of Jews and the perpetrators of these crimes. The German author and film historian Gerhard Schoenberner notes that “most monstrous of all, it is the murderers themselves who photographed their handiwork” and victims “going to certain death [...] they saw the enemy’s camera turned on them.”³²⁹ Zelizer reminds that while these photographs were usually high quality images in technical terms, they “provided primarily staged information about the atrocities.”³³⁰ The aim of these images most probably was to show that the first mass atrocities were exclusively executed not by the Germans but by the local population. Stahlecker, commander of the SS security forces and SD for the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, writes in his report: “Both in Kovno and in Riga evidence was taken on film and by photographs to establish, as far as possible, that the first spontaneous executions of Jews and Communists were carried out by Lithuanians and Latvians.”³³¹

Furthermore, photographing executions became so widespread that in some cases even high-ranking Nazi officials had to ban private photography in order to control their policy of creating visual evidence of the murders.³³² Röder remembers: “The film ran out at this point and I took it out intending to put a fresh film. At this moment, an official of the Wehrmacht, an officer, presumably an army paymaster, informed me that it was forbidden to photograph such events.”³³³ Lithuanian Jews who survived the Holocaust observe that Germans very often tried to conceal their active participation in the mass killings. In the 1950s during the Ulm process,³³⁴ in connection with the investigation into the killings in the Lietūkis garage, the German photographers Gunsilius and Röder, who are never seen in the frame of any of these images, testified in the Federal German Republic on how these images were made. They were interrogated by the Department of Justice.³³⁵ The photographers presented themselves and their fellow Germans as completely innocent and accidental participants in the execution:

I was confronted by the following scene: in the left corner of the yard there was a group of men aged between thirty and fifty. There must have been forty to fifty of them. They were herded together and kept under guard by some civilians. The civilians were armed with rifles and wore armbands, as can be seen in the pictures I took. A young man—he must have been a Lithuanian—with rolled-up sleeves was armed with an iron crowbar.³³⁶ (Testimony of Wilhelm Gunsilius)

³²⁹ SCHOENBERNER, pp. XII-XIII.

³³⁰ ZELIZER, *Remembering to forget*, p. 45.

³³¹ STAHLCKER.

³³² STRUK, p. 113.

³³³ Cited in FAITELSON, p. 22. His words are taken from the interrogation protocol on 8 July, 1959 in Düsseldorf.

³³⁴ The Ulm Einsatzkommando trial started in 1958. It was the first major trial of Nazi crimes under West German law. Ten suspects, former members of the Einsatzkommando Tilsit, were accused of atrocities committed between June and September 1941 in Lithuania. All of them were convicted and sentenced to prison terms of varied length. See also the documentary film: *Der Ulmer Prozess: SS-Einsatzgruppen vor Gericht*, Germany 2006, Direction: Eduard Erne.

³³⁵ Cited from FAITELSON, p. 20.

³³⁶ Cited from KLEE/DRESSEN, p. 31.

I left the scene after around ten minutes. A group of Wehrmacht soldiers passing through came over to the fence eager to see what was going on. They did not, however, take part in the murders themselves. None of us could believe our eyes. I didn't see any SS or SD men there. I can identify the exact spot where I parked from the pictures taken by Gunsilius. The puddles in between the corpses strewn on the ground are blood; the rest of the yard was flooded with water.³³⁷ (Testimony of Karl Röder)

Thus, the photographers not only denied the culpability of the *Einsatzgruppen* but also presented themselves as innocent observers of the event. However, Susan Sontag, in her work *On Photography*, writes that “a photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights—to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on.”³³⁸ The German historian Wolfram Wette—who wrote a book about the Holocaust in Lithuania and Karl Jäger, the SS officer and *Einsatzkommando* leader—claims that the Nazi Germans intentionally refrained from active participation in the massacre in Lietūkis garage.³³⁹ According to Wette, even though the Wehrmacht contributed to the organization of the massacre, they acted as spectators (*Zuschauer*) and those who looked away (*Wegschauer*).³⁴⁰ They aimed thereby to present the killings as an episode of ethnic cleansing initiated solely by non-Jewish Lithuanians.³⁴¹ At the same time, non-Jewish Lithuanian collaborators wearing white armbands, known as *baltaraiščiai* (Lithuanian *Selbstschutz*), were not forced by the Germans to kill anyone; while they were consciously collaborating with Nazis, the escalation that resulted in the massacre was voluntarily. In her memoirs, Ginaitė-Rubinson remembers that the pogrom in Kovno “was organized in accordance with Stahlecker’s³⁴² orders but the massacre was orchestrated and implemented by Algirdas Klimaitis, the leader of one of the local partisan groups.”³⁴³ She writes that “not all Lithuanian partisans were the killers, but almost all the Jews killed were murdered by the ‘White Armbanders.’”³⁴⁴

The German painter and author Helene Holzman, who lost her Jewish husband and daughter during the Holocaust in Kovno, in writing about a mass murder of Jews in the Lithuanian province, similarly notes that the Germans always took care that only Lithuanian executors would be appear in the visual record of these atrocities. Later, they used these images to falsely claim that the massacre was initiated by Lithuanians who had been inspired by anger against the Jewish “exploiters.”³⁴⁵ Viktor Kutorga, a doctor

³³⁷ SMART/LISCIOOTTO.

³³⁸ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 11.

³³⁹ WETTE, p. 77.

³⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

³⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁴² Franz Walter Stahlecker (1900–1942) was a commander of Sicherheitspolizei for the Reichskommissariat Ostland from 1941 to 1942. He commanded one of the most murderous groups, known as Einsatzgruppe A. He was killed in a confrontation with the Soviet partisans.

³⁴³ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 35.

³⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁵ KAISER/HOLZMAN, p. 78

from Kovno, also wrote about the photographers in Lietūkis garage in his diary, which was published in *The Unknown Black Book*:

The scenes of the executions of Jews were filmed with great care. They made an effort to avoid including in the film a single German among the leaders and accomplices in these killings. In this way, the Germans painstakingly prepared falsified records for future historians which would show the Lithuanian people responsible for all the vile actions committed in Lithuania upon the arrival of the Germans.³⁴⁶

Hence, as Sontag writes: “Often something looks, or is felt to look, ‘better’ in a photograph. Indeed, it is one of the functions of photography to improve the normal appearance of things.”³⁴⁷ In the case of the Lietūkis garage, as the pictures suggest, the Nazi Germans are present only in the background, as passive observers of the killings; their active participation is denied, and they are portrayed as the “better” ones. Local Lithuanians are photographed in the foreground, actively annihilating Jews in the most gruesome ways. According to Sontag, “uglifying, showing something at its worst, is a more modern function: didactic that invites an active response. For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock.”³⁴⁸ Thus, it might be claimed that the aim of the Nazi propagandist imagery was to photograph the “others”—in this case, non-Jewish Lithuanians—publicly murdering Jews, in order to bleach out their own guilt. These shocking images were used for propaganda and to advertise that it was indeed the non-Jewish Lithuanians who had executed the Jews, while the members of the *Einsatzgruppen* played the role of the innocent bystander. However, the historian Bubnys notices that there is controversy over who is responsible for this massacre, until today this murder case has not been solved.³⁴⁹ Franz Walter Stahlecker in his report of October 15 to Heinrich Himmler writes:

In the course of the first pogrom during the night of June 25/26, the Lithuanian partisans eliminated more than 1,500 Jews, set fire to several synagogues or destroyed them by other means, and burned down an area consisting of about sixty houses inhabited by Jews. During the nights that followed, 2,300 Jews were eliminated in the same way. In other parts of Lithuania similar Aktionen followed the example set in Kovno, but on a smaller scale, and including some Communists who had been left behind. These self-cleansing Aktionen ran smoothly because the Wehrmacht authorities who had been informed showed understanding for this procedure.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁶ KUTORGA, p. 280. His testimony was delivered in 1944.

³⁴⁷ SONTAG, Regarding, p. 81.

³⁴⁸ Ibidem.

³⁴⁹ BUBNYS, Lietuvių saugumo policija.

³⁵⁰ STAHLECKER.

Bubnys claims that the only researched fact is that the Lithuanian prisoners liberated from the confinement in Kovno can be identified as the main executioners of this massacre.³⁵¹ Nevertheless, the contribution of the Germans remains unclear.³⁵²

*Lithuanian Jewish Victims through the Lens of the Camera: "They Are Shot Before They Are Shot"*³⁵³

Sontag writes that "to take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability."³⁵⁴ Similarly, Barthes relates death to photography: "the photograph [...] represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter."³⁵⁵ Barthes therefore calls a photographer an "agent of death."³⁵⁶ In the case of the Lietūkis garage, the images made by the German army photographers are examples of death, which reveal not only the execution seen within the frame but also raise questions about the role of the cameraman in the act of killing. These photographers are not solely passive observers of the massacre in the garage, but rather "agents of death," who, with their cameras, take possession of Jewish victims and their death. The Lithuanian Jewish victims in these pictures are "robbed of any interior life and self-directed means of expression."³⁵⁷ Sontag claims that "to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and therefore, like power."³⁵⁸

These Jewish victims are nameless and faceless, shown without feelings and emotions, depicted solely as a pile of corpses. Most of them, in the course of history, will remain anonymous victims, while the photographer(s) will be "endowed by the historians with motives, feelings, and a rationale for his actions."³⁵⁹ Günsilius, the photographer of the Lietūkis massacre, referred in his testimony to the Jewish victims solely as corpses, and not as human beings or Jews: "After the war, I discovered in my archives a number of photos I took of the corpses and am prepared to lend them, as documentary material, provided they are returned to me afterwards."³⁶⁰ It seemed that, even after the war, Günsilius thought about the Jews solely as something inhuman.

Sigitas Parulskis, a non-Jewish Lithuanian writer has written a novel about the Holocaust in Lithuania entitled *Darkness and Company*.³⁶¹ Inspired by the massacre at the Lietūkis garage, Parulskis chose to make a photographer the protagonist of the book. The central character is taught that photographs are not solely visual images but that

³⁵¹ BUBNYS, Lietuvių saugumo policija.

³⁵² Ibidem.

³⁵³ Referring to Hirsch's text, see in: HIRSCH, *Generation of Postmemory*, pp. 136-137.

³⁵⁴ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 15.

³⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 14.

³⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 92.

³⁵⁷ PRAGER, p. 25.

³⁵⁸ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 4.

³⁵⁹ BAER, p. 136.

³⁶⁰ Cited from FAITELSON, p. 26.

³⁶¹ PARULSKIS. The original, entitled *Tamsa ir partneriai*, was published in 2012.

“a photograph is a frozen idea.”³⁶² Thus, in this vein, it seems that Gunsilius continues to conceive of Jews as dead objects, and his wish to regain the photographic images signals his sadistic thoughts. The need to possess these photographs depicting people in pools of blood also reveals his voyeuristic gaze. Butler ascertains that “there is not only a certain pleasure involved in the scenes of torture [...] but also a pleasure, or perhaps a compulsion, involved in the act of taking the photographs itself.”³⁶³

Lithuanian Jews are considered not only as enemies but also as “less than human”; Butler describes such visualization as an act in which “the humanity [...] has escaped the visual control of the photograph.”³⁶⁴ Nazi photographers could take such pictures because they presumed Jews to be “the barbaric subhumanity” that has to be fought in the name of civilization.³⁶⁵ However, Hirsch, in her analysis of Holocaust photography observes, it is impossible to humanize such images:

The lethal power of the gaze that acts through the machine gun and the gas chamber, that reduces humans to “pieces” and ashes, creates a visual field in which the look can no longer be returned, multiplied, or displaced. All is touched by the death that is the precondition of the image. When looking and photographing have become coextensive with mechanized mass death, and the subject looking at the camera is also the victim looking at the executioner, those of us left to look at the picture are deeply touched by that death.³⁶⁶ [...] No retrospective irony can redeem or humanize the images produced in the context of Nazi genocide. These images can signify nothing less than the lethal intent that caused them and that they helped to carry out.³⁶⁷

The German photographers are thus in a sort of safety zone, acting alongside the executioners, supporting the persecutors in their torture of the Jews.³⁶⁸ The photographers become masters of the situation because the camera transforms them “into something active, a voyeur.”³⁶⁹ Furthermore, by taking pictures, these photographers are even encouraging the action.³⁷⁰ Sontag observes that taking a picture means “to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged.”³⁷¹ These photographers are arguably complicit in the massacre. The viewer of these images (figs. 11 and 12) is positioned in a place identical to that of the executioners, because the photographer, unlike the bystanders, has the right to move around the site of the mass killing along with the perpetrators. The shutter of the camera can be compared with the trigger of a weapon, which, according to Sontag can “at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate [...] from a distance, and with some detachment.”³⁷² Likewise, Barthes notices that

³⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 101.

³⁶³ BUTLER, *Frames of War*, p. 86.

³⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

³⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁶ HIRSCH, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 138.

³⁶⁷ IDEM, *Nazi Photographs in Post-Holocaust Art*, p. 25.

³⁶⁸ BUTLER, *Frames of War*, p. 84.

³⁶⁹ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 10.

³⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

³⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

³⁷² SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 13.

“the photographer’s organ is not his eye [...] but his finger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens.”³⁷³ Therefore, to photograph people, especially when they are vulnerable, might also mean “to violate them.”³⁷⁴ In a way, then, the Lithuanian Jews executed in the Lietūkis garage experienced double violence, once via the weapons with which they were killed and once via the camera lens, which humiliated them at this moment of their death. Hirsch would claim that the victims in the Lietūkis garage “are shot before they are shot”³⁷⁵ because the act of looking is connected to the act of killing.³⁷⁶

“Zooming In” on the Background of the Image: Bystanders and Passive Femininity

In the town, terrible scenes could be observed: In the Bahnhofstraße [street to the train station], the partisans had conducted a full-blown slaughter of some [...] Jews in a automobile garage, in which the Jews—completely unarmed—were all massacred. A big crowd of people gathered to watch the bloodcurdling spectacle and shout encouragement at the blind fury of the murderers. There were also voices which expressed disgust of this bestiality. “A disgrace for Lithuania!” the brave ones dared to say, but they were silenced straightaway.³⁷⁷

Helene Holzman happened to observe the events at the Lietūkis garage on her way home and recorded these impressions of the massacre in her diary. She was surprised by the reaction of the bystanders and onlookers. The Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel expressed a similar sense of surprise at how spectators could witness such atrocities and remain unmoved. In his book *The Town beyond the Wall*, he describes the return of book’s main character Michael, a Jew in his thirties, to his hometown in Hungary from which he was deported by the Germans.³⁷⁸ Wiesel explains the readers that the main reason for Michael’s return was to understand the behavior of people from his village: “This, this was the thing I had wanted to understand ever since the war. Nothing else. How a human being can remain indifferent. The executioners I understood; also the victims [...]”³⁷⁹

The photographs of the Lietūkis garage massacre (figs. 11 and 12) show a crowd of bystanders witnessing these atrocities in the middle of the day. The photographs are mute; these spectators look like silent, passive observers. Holzman’s account, however, suggests that they are not passively standing and observing but even actively encouraging the executioners. The crowd of bystanders is very heterogeneous; it includes men and women as well as children, who stand in the crowd as the “ordinary” people. Lithuanian Jews are among the witnesses of the crime, but they are beyond the frame of this image. Other memoirs and testimonies indicate that most of the Lithuanian Jews who observed the atrocities were a safe distance from the site of the mass killing, hiding behind the fences surrounding the area.

³⁷³ BARTHES, p. 15.

³⁷⁴ SONTAG, *On Photography*, p. 14.

³⁷⁵ HIRSCH, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 136.

³⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 136- 137.

³⁷⁷ Helene Holzman cited from KAISER/HOLZMAN, pp. 24-25.

³⁷⁸ WIESEL, *The Town*.

³⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

This complexity of the crowd reflects the difficulty of defining the concept of “bystander” in the Lithuanian context. The historian Victoria J. Barnett, who wrote the book *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust*, argues that “the term ‘bystander’ does not apply to leading Nazis or guards in concentration camps, but to ‘ordinary’ citizens.”³⁸⁰ Moreover, bystanders are usually seen not as perpetrators but as individuals who “retain the option of remaining on the sidelines.”³⁸¹ Nevertheless, some bystanders benefited materially from the persecution of Jews, as was the case in Kovno. When the Lithuanian Jews were forced to move into the Kovno ghetto, their former neighbors not only received many of their belongings but, in some cases, also their apartments. Therefore, as Barnett notes: “In a pre-genocidal or genocidal situation, these kinds of benefits make the lines between bystander and perpetrator, between passivity and active involvement, a very blurred one indeed.”³⁸² Thus, the bystanders in the photographs of the Lietūkis garage may have initially been passive observers, but they also became perpetrators. Barnett rightly defines “bystanders” not as a group of people but in terms of a process “that shapes the behavior of those involved, occurs over a period of time, and is determined by numerous factors and dynamics.”³⁸³ I would argue that bystanders can be defined as “situational” human beings whose level of complicity changes depending on the context of the situation. In the images of the Lietūkis garage, they are portrayed as the onlookers, and look like passersby, who perhaps saw Jews as “the evil other” or, in case of Lithuania, as “communists,” those “others” who had supposedly betrayed the Lithuanian nation. However, by taking possession³⁸⁴ of the Jews’ apartments and profiting materially from their deaths, these bystanders also turned into perpetrators.

The active killers in these photographs are male; women are in the position of the passive bystander. In the case of the Holocaust in Lithuania, female perpetrators are absent from both the visual record and historical narratives. These pictures are emblematic examples representing female passivity and male perpetratorhood. According to the historian Claus-Christian Szejnmann, the question of female perpetrators “is a largely neglected topic” in Holocaust historiography, which has “played an important part in the collective strategy of denying any guilt.”³⁸⁵ According to Szejnmann, “the picture of ‘unnatural femininity’ and dehumanized creatures with unbridled sexuality allowed society to construct a counter-model of it as normal and innocent.”³⁸⁶ Women who did not actively participate in tormenting the prisoners, however, still bore in many cases responsibility for the crimes, for instance as the wives of SS officers or Lithuanian collaborators, or as personnel in the Nazi German administration.³⁸⁷ Szejnmann writes that these women usually “were not passive tools in the apparatus of repression but

³⁸⁰ BARNETT, *Bystanders*, p. XV.

³⁸¹ IDEM, *Reflections*, p. 37.

³⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 38.

³⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

³⁸⁴ Jews had to exchange their apartments, typically located in the center of the city, for the apartments of non-Jewish Lithuanians in the neighborhood of Slobodka, which was already one of the poorest areas of the town.

³⁸⁵ SZEJNMANN, p. 29.

³⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁷ See more in: LOWER.

used their freedom to pursue personal initiatives.³⁸⁸ In her diary, Holzman describes how the women working in the civil administration used to buy fur coats and hats produced in the Kovno ghetto and promenade along Laisvės Avenue³⁸⁹ in Kovno wearing them.³⁹⁰ These women, Holzman says, never showed “the slightest bit of female compassion.”³⁹¹ They even used ghetto prisoners as slaves in their homes; these ghetto residents would come to massage them and do their nails or hair. When they were finished, the women sent them back to the ghetto without a qualm for their suffering there.³⁹² Thus, even though these images depict women as part of the crowd, having nothing to do with the direct annihilation itself, some Lithuanian women were guilty of actively abusing Jews, if not by pulling the trigger, then by humiliating them and even taking advantage of the opportunity to employ them as slaves.

The Mass Murder in the Lietūkis Garage as Soviet Iconography: Photography as an Instrument of Soviet Ideology

In Soviet Lithuania, the killings in the Lietūkis garage served as a paradigmatic example of the compliance of “the Lithuanian nationalists.” The case of the Lietūkis garage was included in the war crime trials the Soviet regime conducted in Kaunas and Vilnius in 1962. Starting in September 1962, in the Palace of Trade Unions, next to the Lietūkis garage, alleged war criminals were charged for the death of Jews, including the bloodshed in the Lietūkis garage.³⁹³ According to witnesses, the hall where the trial took place was filled to capacity, and the atmosphere was very emotional.³⁹⁴ The Lithuanian Film Studio filmed the process, and the Soviet State Security Committee sent a documentary film team from Moscow.³⁹⁵ The Soviet Lithuanian newspaper *Kauno tiesa* (The Truth of Kaunas) printed special reports on the trial.³⁹⁶ The case of the Lietūkis garage massacre, however, played only a minor role in the trial; it was mentioned only a few times. Even though death sentences were handed down and executed for crimes against Jews that had taken place in other parts of Kovno and Vilna, no organizers of the mass killings in the Lietūkis garage were ever punished.³⁹⁷

After the trials, the images of the Lietūkis garage started to appear regularly in both the Soviet media and official publications. This mass slaughter was also presented in the form of testimonies in the book *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944* [Mass Murders in Lithuania 1941–1944], which was published in 1965.³⁹⁸ In these several testimo-

³⁸⁸ SZEJNMANN, p. 22.

³⁸⁹ The central commercial street of the city during this period.

³⁹⁰ KAISER/HOLZMAN, p. 100.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

³⁹² *Ibidem*.

³⁹³ DARGIS, p. 3.

³⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁵ *Ibidem*. In 1963, a short documentary film debuted called “Kodėl akmenys netyli?” [Why Are the Stones Not Silent?]. Directed by the famous Lithuanian documentary filmmaker Leonas Tautrimas, this film presented the activities of “Lithuanian nationalists” based on this trial.

³⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁷ Some of the organizers already lived abroad.

³⁹⁸ ERSLAVAITĖ, *Masinės žudynės 1 dalis*, pp. 231-232.

nies, collected between 1959³⁹⁹ and 1961,⁴⁰⁰ witnesses recall how civil citizens, namely a group of Jews, were tortured by Germans and White Armbanders. The volume does not give many details about the people testifying, however, and it remains unclear why these two observers of the mass killings have been chosen in particular. Interestingly, Jewish ethnicity is not erased, and Jews are not hidden under broader category of the Soviet citizens, but are acknowledged as the main victims of this massacre. Moreover, the Nazi Germans and Lithuanian auxiliaries are represented as actively participating in the mass murder by beating Jews until they died. The massacre in the Lietūkis garage is also depicted in the memoirs of Mejeris Elinas-Eglinis, a former prisoner of the Kovno ghetto. In his memoirs, published in 1966, Elinas-Eglinis comments on the pictures of the Lietūkis garage massacre; according to him, these images show “bandits”—namely, “Lithuanian nationalists”—torturing Jews and reveal “Hitler’s soldiers” taking pictures of this slaughter.⁴⁰¹

As these examples show, the Soviet regime used the mass murder in the Lietūkis garage as an example both of the brutality of the crimes committed by Nazi Germans and Lithuanian partisans—“bandits” and “nationalists”—and of Lithuanians collaboration with Nazi Germany. Moreover, during the Cold War, the publication of these images often coincided with anti-Soviet campaigns of Lithuanians living in exile.⁴⁰² In 1985, pictures of the Lietūkis garage appeared, for example, not only in the Soviet Lithuanian media but also in the leftist media outlets in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany after a ship flying the flags of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia passed near the territorial waters of the Soviet Union in an action known as the “Baltic Peace and Freedom Cruise.”

Iconographic Debates about the Lietūkis Garage after 1990: Soviet Falsification or Archival Image?

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, diverse accounts of the murders at the Lietūkis garage proliferated and different interpretations of the event emerged. In newly independent Lithuania, the massacre of Jews in a garage in Kovno again became a central issue in media debates over the memory of the Second World War. In 1989, Aleksandras Bendinskas, a former chief of staff of the Lithuanian Activist Front, published an article about the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas newspaper *Gimtasys Kraštas* [Homeland Region].⁴⁰³ Bendinskas was responsible for the security of industrial and transport facilities when the massacre occurred. He claims that he did not participate in this mass murder “but that he had ‘accurate information.’”⁴⁰⁴ According to him, the ‘immediate executors’ were “the [Soviet] security agents” who “stayed behind to destroy the classified documents; then the Independence was declared and the unrest began, and they

³⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 231 (testimony of Julius Vainalavičius).

⁴⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 232 (testimony of Leonardas Survila).

⁴⁰¹ ELINAS-EGLINIS, p. 17.

⁴⁰² DARGIS, p. 3.

⁴⁰³ BENDINSKAS, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibidem.

(the security agents) were planning to take the cars from „Lietūkis“ garage and run away.⁴⁰⁵ He explains in his oral history interview, recorded in 1998:

[...] when the security agents could not take the cars, they started commotion, and some group of five that was just passing by saw and arrested them without asking if they were Jewish or Lithuanian; that when on the 24th the (*Lithuanian nationalist*) security agents came out of the prisons and later out of the basements, and heard about the Jewish and Russian security agents in “Lietūkis” garage, they went there and started arresting anyone who looked suspicious. [...] The tragedy started when the (*Lithuanian nationalist*) security agents came out and recognized one or two interrogators kept at the “Lietūkis” garage; and that’s when the execution started. [...] He admits that the execution happened, that people were killed, but claims that the whole event has been exaggerated.⁴⁰⁶

Bendinskas claims that “the majority of those killed were investigators of the security organs and heads of the ‘special departments’ of enterprises and institutions” who “were killed as officials rather than as representatives of a certain nationality.”⁴⁰⁷ This interpretation of the events immediately sparked debates in the Lithuanian media. The exiled Lithuanian historian Vincas Trumpa sent a letter from Santa Monica, California, supporting Bendinskas’s account and confirming the suggestion that these killings had been nothing more than the revenge of former Lithuanian prisoners, who had been captured by Soviet officials and liberated by Nazi Germans.⁴⁰⁸ They had killed “Jewish Bolsheviks” at the Lietūkis garage out of revenge.⁴⁰⁹ Other voices challenged these accounts of the executions: Haimas Finkelstein, a Lithuanian Jew from Kovno, wrote a letter to the editor of *Gimtasis Kraštas*, in which he accused Bendinskas of defaming Lithuanian Jews as communists and claimed that Bendinskas was attempting to frame the bloody actions of the Lithuanian Activist Front as an expression of patriotism.⁴¹⁰

In 1994, the public prosecutor in Kaunas received an official request from the General Lithuanian State Prosecutor to investigate the case of the Lietūkis garage massacre. A Lithuanian Member of Parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, had asked that the facts surrounding the extermination of Jews in Kovno should be clarified. The Lithuanian media subsequently published requests for witnesses of the slaughter in the Lietūkis garage to come forward. One of the first to do so was the journalist Henrikas Žemelis, the former editor of the Lithuanian exile newspaper *Akiračiai*, who was living in the USA. In 1941, he was an active member of the anti-Soviet resistance in Kaunas. According to Žemelis, there were no White Armbanders among those who tortured Jews.⁴¹¹ Žemelis claimed that he had been invited to a reception after the execution where he coincidentally met an officer from the Lithuanian military who had admitted to killing

⁴⁰⁵ Italics in original. Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁶ Italics in original. Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁷ Cited from YČIKAS, p. 202.

⁴⁰⁸ Cited from DARGIS, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁰ Cited from YČIKAS, p. 203.

⁴¹¹ Cited from DARGIS, p. 3

Jews at the Lietūkis garage as revenge for torture he had suffered in the Soviet prison.⁴¹² After prosecutors collected testimony from all the witnesses, only one perpetrator was named; this person, however, had been killed in a car accident many years before.⁴¹³ As a result, the case was closed despite numerous testimonies, because it was no longer possible to identify the perpetrators.

Despite the fact that the criminal case was closed without any results, the media debates continued: In 2009, the Lithuanian historian and member of the Lithuanian parliament Arvydas Anušauskas publicly responded in the Lithuanian newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas* to the publication of an “accusatory” article in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* according to which Lithuanians had celebrated the executions in the Lietūkis garage with music—and even the Lithuanian national anthem. It suggested that the extermination of Jews had become a sort of national event.⁴¹⁴ Anušauskas, who did not deny that some Lithuanians had participated in the murders at the Lietūkis garage, nevertheless blamed *Der Spiegel* for being “unprofessional” and “using old and inaccurate information,” especially in its depiction of the executions in Kaunas as a national celebration.⁴¹⁵

The images of the executions in the Lietūkis garage have long been an important part of the discussions among historians and journalists. There are no testimonies with which to incriminate possible perpetrators; the only material left are the images made by these German army photographers. In 2007, in the Lithuanian magazine *Ekstra* [Extra] which was distributed weekly with the newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas*, the journalist Rimantas Varnauskas claimed that “iconographic heritage” of the Lietūkis garage is nothing but a forgery.⁴¹⁶ He quoted statements from one of the leaders of the Lithuanian Association of Photographers, Stanislovas Žvirgždas, according to which the Soviet regime had regularly falsified documentary photos. Žvirgždas assumed that these famous images had also been “creatively edited.”⁴¹⁷ First, the head of “a blond man,” supposedly a “local Lithuanian” is actually a picture of Joachim Hamann, an officer of the *Einsatzkommando 3*, a killing unit of *Einsatzgruppe A* (fig. 13). Second, to maximize the number of victims, two different pictures with corpses had been edited into one photo (figs. 11 and 12). Third, he claimed that people with white armbands and the German officer on the right side had also been added to this picture by the Soviets afterwards.⁴¹⁸ Thus, Žvirgždas concludes that these pictures are Soviet falsifications, which reveal very “primitive montage.”⁴¹⁹ The Soviet regime had altered these photos, he alleged, in an attempt to compromise the “Lithuanian nation” and its attempts for independence.⁴²⁰

These debates reveal that the photographs of the mass murder in the Lietūkis garage have become an important tool for memory construction in Lithuania. These images have been interpreted in a number of ways in attempts to change collective memories

⁴¹² Ibidem.

⁴¹³ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁴ BÖNISCH ET AL, pp. 82-92.

⁴¹⁵ ANUŠAUSKAS, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹⁶ VARNAUSKAS.

⁴¹⁷ Cited from Ibidem.

⁴¹⁸ All three opinions are cited from Ibidem.

⁴¹⁹ Ibidem.

⁴²⁰ Ibidem.

of the Holocaust. Such interpretation of the Lietūkis garage photographs is influenced by the Soviet legacy of “photographic terror,” when many “documents were staged and images contradicting the ‘truth’ were hidden, destroyed or edited.”⁴²¹ According to the Lithuanian cultural historian Agnė Narušytė, “during the Soviet period, the memory of the photographic image was unstable and untrustworthy.”⁴²² This legacy of images as unreliable witnesses opens the possibility of doubts in connection with the images of the Lietūkis garage, which the Soviet regime admittedly instrumentalized. Nevertheless, the assumption that these images are forgeries is highly improbable. Memoirs and testimonies of the Lithuanian Jews verify the facts and prove that the massacre in the Lietūkis garage did take place, and in a manner which corresponds to these photographs. Žvirgždas’s claims that the White Armbanders were only later inserted into these images also contradict numerous accounts of Lithuanian Jews who confirm the partisans’ participation.⁴²³

Furthermore, the nationality of the famous “blond man” from the photograph remains unknown to this day (fig. 13). Žvirgždas and Anušauskas argue that this man is German, but the exhibition at the Wannsee Conference Museum in Potsdam claims that this man is a Lithuanian nationalist. Thus, it seems that the nationality of the blond man depends on the context in which the photograph is shown; no one wants to acknowledge him as part of their nation. Judith Butler, in her analysis of the photographs of Abu Ghraib prison, claims that photography has “an enormous power to construct national identity itself.”⁴²⁴ In this case, these photographs are used for the construction of national history. The scene of the image of the Lietūkis garage changes through time. In Butler’s words, “the scene becomes not just the spatial location and social scenario in the prison itself, but the entire social sphere in which the photograph is shown, seen, censored, publicized, discussed, and debated.”⁴²⁵ Such different interpretations of one event and its iconographic representation reveal that Holocaust documentary photography and the debate surrounding it can become the very “litmus test” of a nation uncovering its trauma and memory.

The impact of these pictures extends beyond Lithuanian. They have also circulated in other countries; they appear often in German media, for example. In 1958, in connection with the Ulm process in the Federal Republic of Germany, pictures of the massacre were printed in *Vorwärts*, the official newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, alongside the testimonies of the photographers and a lengthy story about Germans’ “collective shame.”⁴²⁶ This was one of the first incidences of these photographs in the international media. In 1960, this article was reprinted in Soviet Lithuania.⁴²⁷ Significantly, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* edited these images before reproducing them in 1984 and 2009. In 1984, *Der Spiegel* printed these photographs to illustrate an article titled “Die Mörder werden noch gebraucht” [The Murderers are Still

⁴²¹ NARUŠYTĖ, p. 137.

⁴²² Ibidem.

⁴²³ Cited from VARNAUSKAS.

⁴²⁴ BUTLER, *Frames of War*, p. 72.

⁴²⁵ Ibidem, p. 80.

⁴²⁶ The English version of the article in *Vorwärts* is republished and cited from FAITELSON, pp. 20-21.

⁴²⁷ Ibidem.

Needed].⁴²⁸ The Lithuanian Jew Leonid Olschwang, who lived in the USA, claimed in this publication that Lithuanian perpetrators who had taken part in the extermination of Jews in Kovno were living free lives in exile in the USA.⁴²⁹ Olschwang's article speaks solely about Lithuanian perpetrators, while the Germans responsible for the death of Jews in the Lietūkis garage remain unmentioned. The photographs reprinted in this article were images without the Nazi Germans in the foreground.

The images of Lietūkis garage without the Nazi Germans were also reprinted in 2009, when *Der Spiegel* published an article about foreign collaborators.⁴³⁰ The focus of this article lay on the perpetratorhood of local citizens of different countries, including Lithuania, while the German responsibility for atrocities remains in the shadow.⁴³¹ The content of the article is also reflected in the photograph of the Lietūkis garage, which is printed next to the text. The Nazi Germans are again not in the frame of the photograph. One possible explanation for such editorial decisions could be historical Nazi sympathies on the part of *Der Spiegel*. The German media historian Lutz Hachmeister claims that *Der Spiegel* employed former SS officers like Horst Mahnke and Georg Wolff as journalists after the war.⁴³² Wolff, who during the war was the section head (*Referatsleiter*) of the Security Service (*Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*) in Oslo, served as the head of *Der Spiegel*'s history bureau from 1966 to 1978.⁴³³

Thus, as Butler writes, images "change their meaning depending on the context in which they are shown and the purpose for which they are invoked."⁴³⁴ In Lithuanian contexts, the photograph with the Nazi German is perceived as a sign of the participation of Germans in the mass killings, and the SS officer has been never removed from the frame of the photograph. In the German media, especially in the magazine *Der Spiegel*, the SS officer is not in the frame of the photograph. The German media has thus arguably tried to gloss over the guilt of its own nation.

The Nazi images of the mass atrocity in the Lietūkis garage provide a valuable illustration of how images shape the Holocaust memory in Lithuania and Germany. The testimony of numerous Lithuanian Jewish survivors confirms the authenticity of the events depicted in these photographs, which have nevertheless often been dismissed in Lithuania as Soviet forgeries. These photographs depict Lithuanian participation in the mass murder of Jews in Kovno, surrounded by bystanders, who actively or passively encouraged their actions. They also serve as a symbol of male perpetratorhood during the Holocaust, as women are depicted as passive observers. However, as was discussed above, women also took part in the humiliation of the Lithuanian Jews, by stealing belongings from deported or murdered Jews and using Jewish prisoners as slave labor.

⁴²⁸ OLSCHWANG, pp. 123-126.

⁴²⁹ *Ibidem*. It was actually the Lithuanian-American exile community, who refused to publish Olschwang's article in their newspapers. He was accused of being a betrayer and communist for serving in the Red Army. Thus, in this case *Der Spiegel* served as an alternative arena of speaking for Olschwang.

⁴³⁰ BÖNISCH ET AL., pp. 82-92.

⁴³¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴³² HACHMEISTER, Ein deutsches Nachrichtenmagazin, pp. 87-120.

⁴³³ IDEM, Heideggers Testament, p. 145. In this publication he dedicates one section of his book to Georg Wolff, the title of this chapter is "Georg Wolff. Vom SD-Offizier zum „Geisteswissenschaftler“ des Spiegel."

⁴³⁴ BUTLER, Frames of War, p. 80.

The reception of these images in German media reveals that these photographs also trigger memories of the Holocaust there, where Lithuanians are portrayed as the main executors of the crime. Even after so many years, some German media at least still avoids full acceptance of their guilt.

5.3 Gendered Narratives: Visualization of Children and Women

5.3.1 (Un)Speakable Images: Afterlife of Holocaust Children Photographs

Was it from some hunger
or from greater love –
but your mother is a witness to this:
I wanted to swallow you, my child,
when I felt your tiny body losing its heat
in my fingers
as though I were pressing
a warm glass of tea,
feeling its passage to cold.⁴³⁵

The “cannibalistic image”⁴³⁶ of this poem, “To my child”—written on 18 January 1943 in the Vilna ghetto—conveys the pain of the Lithuanian Jew Avrom Sutzkever, whose wife had given birth to their first child despite the official prohibition. The child was killed in the maternity ward of the ghetto. This pain described in the poem was felt by many Jewish victims who lost their infants. During the Holocaust, approximately one and a half million Jewish children and teenagers were murdered.⁴³⁷ In Lithuania, thousands of Jewish children were exterminated, many together with their parents during the executions in the summer and autumn of 1941; others were imprisoned in the ghettos.⁴³⁸

Therefore, it is not surprising that the child victim became a central figure in Holocaust iconography after the war; Hirsch called them “icons of untimely death, icons of mourning.”⁴³⁹ According to her, “encountering the child victim, we also, by implication, encounter the atrocities he has seen.”⁴⁴⁰ Tobias Ebbrecht also observed that the child victim is one of the most recurrent motifs in Holocaust films, where they have

⁴³⁵ Cited from LANGER, *Using and Abusing*, pp. 79-80.

⁴³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁴³⁷ AYER, p. 6. See also, GEORGE EISEN: *Children and Play in the Holocaust*, Amherst 1990; HOLLIDAY; SUE VICE: *Children Writing the Holocaust*, New York 2004; SHARON KANGISSER COHEN: *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel: Social Dynamics and Postwar Experiences*, Eastbourne 2005; STEPHANIE FITZGERALD – HAROLD MARCUSE (eds.): *Children of the Holocaust*, Oakland 2011; PATRICIA HEBERER: *Children During the Holocaust*, Maryland 2011; ELAINE SAPHIER FOX – PHYLLIS LASSNER (eds.): *Out of Chaos: Hidden Children Remember the Holocaust*, Chicago 2013.

⁴³⁸ BUBNYS, *To the Memory of Lithuanian Jewish Children*.

⁴³⁹ HIRSCH, *Projected Memory*, p. 12.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

a symbolic meaning and are often related with the motif of hope.⁴⁴¹ Hirsch, in her scholarly work, addresses the question of why so many archival images of children are used in texts documenting and memorializing the Holocaust.⁴⁴² She suggests two possible explanations: First, images of children are usually anonymous or depersonalized, therefore, “they invite a very specific kind of spectatorial look, a particular form of investment; thus they can help us to understand the particular kind of subject taking shape in the act of postmemory.”⁴⁴³ Second, viewers can easily identify with children, who provide a “virtually universal availability for projection.”⁴⁴⁴ Ziva Amishai-Maisel suggests an additional explanation: the narrative of the child victim does not have to be interpreted intellectually; it provokes “a spontaneous emotional response”⁴⁴⁵ and creates empathy for the victims while evoking “our anger against a central crime of the Holocaust.”⁴⁴⁶

Children during the Holocaust in Lithuania: Children in Process of Remembering

The historian Arūnas Bubnys points to the annihilation of Jews in the Lithuanian province of Rokiškis, which took place from 15 to 16 August 1941 as the first mass killing of Lithuanian Jewish children.⁴⁴⁷ According to Karl Jäger’s report, issued on 1 December 1941, 3,200 Jewish men, women and children were executed in this small Lithuanian town, in only two days.⁴⁴⁸ Later, large numbers of children were killed during the Great Actions: for instance, in the Kovno ghetto during the Great Action from 28 to 29 October, 4,273 children were exterminated in the Ninth Fort.⁴⁴⁹ Many of the remaining Lithuanian Jewish children were annihilated in 1943 and 1944 during Children’s Actions or the liquidation of the ghettos. During the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in September 1943, all the children and “nonessential” women and men were rounded up and brought to the Ponary forest.⁴⁵⁰ On 24 September 1943, Kazimierz Sakowicz wrote in his diary: “When the second bus arrived, many Jewish children and several men climbed out. The children undressed, and the Lithuanians used sticks to calm those who were crying.”⁴⁵¹ One of the most tragic annihilations of Jewish children occurred from 27 to 28 March 1944 in the Kovno ghetto, when between one thousand and 2,500 children were shot during the Children’s Action.⁴⁵² The Kovno ghetto survivor William Mishell described this action in his memoirs:

⁴⁴¹ EBBRECHT, p. 286.

⁴⁴² HIRSCH, *Projected Memory*, p. 10.

⁴⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁴⁴⁵ AMISHAI-MAISEL, p. 140.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

⁴⁴⁷ BUBNYS, *The Killings of Jewish Children*.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁰ SAKOWICZ, p. 118.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

⁴⁵² Helene Holzman mentions 2,500 children, see in: KAISER/HOLZMAN, p. 252. Other publications suggest that there were 1,300 child victims; see KLEIN, p. 248. Bubnys speaks of nine hundred to one thousand children: BUBNYS, *To the Memory of Lithuanian Jewish Children*.

The murderers went from house to house, beating everybody and turning everything upside down. Mothers clinging to their children were mercilessly beaten. Where beatings did not work, huge German shepherds trained in violence were incited against the helpless mothers, tearing them apart with the bastards looking on and laughing. When the ferocious dogs could not pry the children loose from the mother, the child was shot and the mother kicked into the gutter. “You, bitch, can still work for us,” was the statement that followed. In some cases the mothers tried to climb into the trucks. When beating did not stop them, they were shot. The children were thrown into the trucks like footballs and when an older child resisted, his head was bashed in with the butt of a rifle. Babies were grabbed by their legs and their heads were smashed against the sides of the trucks.⁴⁵³

Only few Jewish children survived the harsh conditions of the ghettos, having miraculously remained undetected in hiding places or having been adopted and baptized by Lithuanian Christians. Today, we can read their stories in diaries and memoirs. There are the original diaries written while they were living in ghettos or in hiding. According to the Holocaust researcher Bilha Shilo, “keeping a diary stemmed from many factors: the desire to leave testimony; a type of internal conversation between the writer and himself which served as a remedy for the soul; a way to deal with dangers and loneliness.”⁴⁵⁴ The Holocaust children’s literature scholar Laurel Holliday claims that “the very act of writing in their diaries was a form of resistance for most of these children.”⁴⁵⁵ Most of the original diaries of Holocaust children from Lithuania were published in the 1960s, for example, the diary of Maša Rolnikaitė, a former 14-year-old prisoner of the Vilna ghetto, was published in 1963. Her diary *I Must Tell* was originally written in Yiddish and then translated into Lithuanian. Several years later, in 1965, it was translated into Russian and published in the Soviet Union. The diary was translated into eighteen foreign languages, and Rolnikaitė was hailed as the Anne Frank of the Soviet Union. However, her diary, which recounts her childhood experience during the Holocaust, represents one of the most visible examples of the ideologization of a child’s narrative. This diary was instrumentalized by the Soviet regime for ideological goals.⁴⁵⁶ Rolnikaitė’s diary was censored to whitewash antisemitism in the Soviet Union. Soviet historians observe that this book launched the anti-Zionist campaign in the Soviet Union, because it blamed Zionist leaders for collaborating with Nazis during the Holocaust.⁴⁵⁷ In the West, this diary was received very controversially. In 1980, the Canadian historian Erich Goldhagen described this book as inauthentic and “un-Jewish,” alleging that it followed “the political prescriptions of the party.”⁴⁵⁸ This was also understood by Rolnikaitė, who in the documentary film *I Must Tell* speaks of her feelings about this paradoxical situation that: “on the one hand, it was good, that it is published, that people are interested [...] but from the other side, I am a pitiable paper,

⁴⁵³ MISHELL, p. 208.

⁴⁵⁴ SHILO.

⁴⁵⁵ HOLLIDAY, p. XVII.

⁴⁵⁶ See more on this issue in section 4.1.1.

⁴⁵⁷ LÖWE, p. 48.

⁴⁵⁸ GOLDHAGEN, pp. 502-503.

by which the antisemitism is being hidden. So it was difficult. But the will to publicate was stronger.”⁴⁵⁹

In 1968, in Israel, the diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski was published, who was born in Vilna in 1927 and was a boy of almost fourteen years when the ghetto was created. His diary is an exception because Rudashevski was executed but still left a legacy, this diary written—sometimes in pencil and sometimes in pen—in a small notebook. There are few cases in which we can hear the voices and testimonies of murdered children or read their original, untouched diaries written during the Holocaust in Lithuania. Rudashevski recorded all aspects of ghetto daily life in his diary, from cultural activities to interactions with friends and intellectuals in the ghetto. His last entry was on 7 April 1943: “Our mood is a little better. A happy song can be heard in the club.⁴⁶⁰ We are, however, prepared for everything, because Monday⁴⁶¹ proved that we must not trust nor believe anything. We may be fated for the worst.”⁴⁶² In October 1943 the Gestapo found Rudashevski in his hiding place and sent him for extermination in the Ponary forest. Rudashevski’s diary reveals that “he understood that he was a part of a significant historical process and could influence fate.”⁴⁶³ His cousin Sarah Voloshin, who managed to escape on the way to the Ponary forest, discovered his diary when she came back to her hiding place.

In Israel, in 1975, one of Tamara Lazerson’s (also known as Lazersonaitė) diaries was printed in Hebrew; Lazerson was thirteen years old when she started documenting the life in the Kovno ghetto in her notebook. Her father, a psychiatrist, convinced her of the necessity of writing a diary about the events that she was witnessing.⁴⁶⁴ She started her ghetto diary in September 1941, when she was twelve years old and wrote until her escape from the ghetto in April 1944.⁴⁶⁵ However, only the second of her two notebooks, which she had hidden beneath her window, survived.⁴⁶⁶ During the Holocaust, she lost both of her parents; they were deported to concentration camps in Germany in July 1944. Lazerson published her diary in Hebrew in 1975, several years after moving to Haifa, Israel, with her family. Her diary ends with the thought: “I must fortify myself with strength and patience and pave a new road for myself to the future.”⁴⁶⁷

Most of these diaries remain unknown in Lithuania even today, however, unlike Anne Frank’s diary, which is included in the educational program of Lithuanian schools. Lazerson’s diary was not translated into Lithuanian until 1997; Rudashevski’s diary was published in Lithuania only in 2018.⁴⁶⁸ Holliday, who included excerpts from the diaries of Rolnikaitė, Rudashevski, and Lazerson in her book *Children in the Holocaust and World War II and Their Secret Diaries*, observes that “it is astonishing that,

⁴⁵⁹ Cited from the documentary film *I Must Tell*.

⁴⁶⁰ Rudashevski was involved in the clubs for literature, poetry and history.

⁴⁶¹ In his diary entry, on 5 April 1943, Rudashevski writes that on Monday five thousand Jews were transported to Ponary and shot to death.

⁴⁶² This excerpt from Rudashevski’s diary can be found in ZAPRUDER, p. 225

⁴⁶³ SHILO.

⁴⁶⁴ HOLLIDAY, p. 127. See also, LAZERSONAITĖ.

⁴⁶⁵ KLEIN, p. 195.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁶⁷ Cited from HOLLIDAY, p. 135.

⁴⁶⁸ See, ICCHOKAS RUDAŠEVSKIS: Vilniaus geto dienoraštis [The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto], Vilnius 2018.

even though most of them are as powerful and well-written as Anne Frank's diary, they have remained obscure while hers has been thought of as *the* child diary of the Holocaust.⁴⁶⁹ Frank's diary mostly focused on her hiding, without giving any details about the concentration camps or mass executions of the Jews, and maybe for that reason it remains the most-read child diary worldwide. Frank had already become an icon of the Holocaust in the USA in the 1950s. The film scholar Judith E. Doneson, who analyzed the Americanization of Frank's diary, claims that it was an important contribution to the universalization of the Holocaust.⁴⁷⁰ The Broadway play (1955) and Hollywood film (1959)⁴⁷¹ about Anne Frank adapted and adjusted images of the Holocaust, and even downplayed the Jewishness of Anne Frank. In fact, the *Diary* allowed "a broad consensus of the population to identify with the event—this, inevitably, at the cost of its Jewish particularity."⁴⁷² Langer observes: "the sequel to her *Diary*, in which she would have recorded her reaction to her 'death life' after Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, remains one of the much-missed unwritten books of Holocaust literature."⁴⁷³

Many others who survived the Holocaust in Lithuania as children wrote their memoirs much later, like the famous painter Samuel Bak and Solly Ganor, a survivor from the Kovno ghetto, who was forced to destroy his original diary in a concentration camp. These Holocaust children started to recall their childhood through writing memoirs almost fifty years later. The lives of most of the Holocaust children was marked by the discontinuity of their prewar lives as well as "the absence of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins [that] always reminded them that their lives were not like that of others."⁴⁷⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that many other Holocaust children have not spoken about their childhood experiences for many years. Most of them not only avoided writing memoirs but also returning to Lithuania. Bak, who was eight years old when the Germans entered Vilna, survived the Holocaust, together with his mother, by hiding in the Benedictine convent in Vilna. Bak writes about his return to Vilna in May 2001: "A journey that had been deeply desired but apprehensively deferred became suddenly a reality. Only a few months before, such a visit had seemed unimaginable—a return to the city of my birth after 56 years of absence and so much loss."⁴⁷⁵ Bak's memoir was published later that same year. Carla Lessing, who founded the *Hidden Child Foundation* that aims to collect the memories of children who were hidden during the Holocaust, notes:

The survivors who were children during the Holocaust are now in their mid-fifties and sixties and are facing retirement. The anticipated loss or the actual loss of their work community is for child survivors a repetition of the traumatic childhood separations from their communities. For the child survivors, work gave them a place, separate from family and personal

⁴⁶⁹ Italics in original. HOLLIDAY, p. XIV.

⁴⁷⁰ DONESON, *The Holocaust*, p. 61.

⁴⁷¹ The play was created by a team of husband and wife, Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich. The film *The Diary of Anne Frank*, based on the Broadway play, was directed by George Stevens.

⁴⁷² DONESON, *The Holocaust*, p. 61.

⁴⁷³ LANGER, *Using and Abusing*, p. XII.

⁴⁷⁴ LESSING, p. 268.

⁴⁷⁵ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 498.

history, where they felt they belonged and with which they identified. With retirement that feeling of belonging ends.⁴⁷⁶

Writing a memoir hence became not only a way “to order their lives” but also a way to express their trauma and the loss of their loved ones. According to Maria Rosenbloom, who wrote about the lessons of the Holocaust for mental health practice: “The acts of remembering and committing the memories to paper facilitate the mourning process, which is never complete.”⁴⁷⁷ Bak writes: “And in me it was also a story about a trauma that had been silenced for too many years. Now, its emergence could be seen as a sign of resilience.”⁴⁷⁸ Bak’s memoirs, which only appeared in 2001 in the USA, where he lives today, are filled with the perspective of his “inner child”: “My childhood paradise was not simply lost, as any Eden must be, but rather destroyed by eager human cruelty and mediated violence, and my art is centered on the memory and meaning of that destruction.”⁴⁷⁹ For many years Bak expressed this pain through painting: “I decided to let my paintings tell me what to do, to let my story (or was it their story?) come without forcing.”⁴⁸⁰ However, after more than fifty years he decided to paint in words and not in colors, as the title of his memoirs *Painted in Words: A Memoir* suggests.

The silence also dominated the life of another child survivor from the Kovno ghetto, Solly Ganor, who until 1992 had never spoken a word about his childhood in Lithuania. Ganor remembers how he destroyed his diary in Stutthof: “That night, when they allowed us to go to the latrine, I slipped my precious diary out from under my shirt and dropped it into a stinking hole full of excrement.”⁴⁸¹ He was only thirteen when he had to move into the Kovno ghetto. After the war, he felt like an old grey man: “Now we were old, old men at sixteen years of age.”⁴⁸² Ganor left the DP camp in Germany in 1948 and emigrated to Israel, where he changed his identity. The original Zali Genkind became Solly Ganor, a name that he found in the Israeli phone book: “It was short, it started with *G*, and there weren’t many Ganors in the book.”⁴⁸³ In April 1992, he was invited to participate in a ceremony honoring war veterans in the USA, where he met Clarence Matsumara, an American of Japanese descent who had been among the troops who liberated the concentration camp in Dachau, and, whom Ganor credited with bringing him back to life.⁴⁸⁴ The German theater director and actress Sabine Zaplin, who edited the German version of Ganor’s memoirs, notes that this was the moment which brought Ganor to “sit down to his writing table and start telling.”⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁷⁶ LESSING, p. 269.

⁴⁷⁷ Cited from *ibidem*, p. 271. Originally from MARIA ROSENBLUM: *Lessons of the Holocaust for Mental Health Practice*, in: R. L. BRAHAM (ed.): *The psychological perspectives of the Holocaust and of its aftermath*, New York 1988, pp. 145-159.

⁴⁷⁸ BAK, *Painted in Words*, pp. 478-479.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 297.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 478.

⁴⁸¹ GANOR, p. 262.

⁴⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 316.

⁴⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. xix.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. xix-xxi.

⁴⁸⁵ ZAPLIN, p. 12.

After 1990, there was a flurry of memories of Lithuanian Holocaust children being made public; most of the Lithuanian Jews who survived the Holocaust and are still living were children at the time. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the children's perspective and narrative has become central to Holocaust remembrance in Lithuania. This mediation of images of children on book covers or exhibitions not only opens new perspectives of remembrance, however, but also raises the danger of abusing their childhood memories of the Holocaust.

*Images of Holocaust Children in Lithuania: Using and Abusing Children Iconography*⁴⁸⁶

In February 1944, two young brothers, Avraham and Emanuel Rosenthal, five- and two-years-old at the time, were photographed by George Kadish in the Kovno ghetto at their family's request (fig. 14). One month later the brothers, with their father Elhanan and grandmother Dina Wainer, were taken to the Majdanek camp and executed there. Kadish, who secretly documented the life of the Kovno ghetto during the Holocaust,⁴⁸⁷ also photographed many Jewish children. He was able to take clandestine pictures through the buttonhole of his coat or over a window sill with his homemade cameras



Fig. 14: George Kadish. [Portrait of two young boys wearing Jewish badges in the Kovno ghetto taken shortly before their round-up in the March 1944 "Children's Action"]. Photograph. 1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Shraga Wainer.

⁴⁸⁶ The title refers to LANGER, *Using and Abusing*.

⁴⁸⁷ See section 5.2.1.



Fig. 15:
[Book cover]. ARŪNAS BUBNYS: Holocaust in Lithuania between 1941-1944. Vilnius 2008

He took pictures of children selling food in their baskets, carrying a milk can, playing in the snow on sleds, or hiding Jewish books. Today, many of Kadish's images of children—especially, the image of the two Rosenthal brothers—are regularly published around the world, shown in Holocaust exhibitions, and included in dozens of books. After the Holocaust, this picture was displayed in the Landsberg DP camp, where Kadish had brought his photographs for the exhibition, and the boys' uncle, Shraga Wainer, also a survivor from the Kovno ghetto, saw it and recognized his nephews.⁴⁸⁸ Even though these children were murdered, their picture survived, and they have come to symbolically represent all Lithuanian Jews who perished during the Holocaust.

In 2008, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre in Lithuania published one of its first publications about the Holocaust in Lithuania, a book entitled *Holocaust in Lithuania Between 1941 and 1944* by the historian Arūnas Bubnys. The cover bears the image of a boy (fig. 15), the older Rosenthal brother, which had been cropped from Kadish's original portrait of these two brothers. The image of the boy presents a child, who might resemble a brother, son, or grandson of any of the book's readers, and invites

⁴⁸⁸ YAD VASHEM MUSEUM, KOVNO.

emphatic identification. Boaz Cohen, who has analyzed the representation of children's experiences of the Holocaust, claims that there is no better way of "underscoring the evilness of the Nazis than by showing their most innocent victims. The children could not be blamed for exploiting non-Jews or for being politically disloyal."⁴⁸⁹

The image of the brothers has become decontextualized: it is no longer a portrait of two brothers picture but it could be a picture of any child. In the shadow of his photograph, we might see many Lithuanian Jews. Nevertheless, the child's image stands out from the shadow and becomes the central one. The author of the book leaves the image nameless, there is no historic specificity, no indication of when and where the picture was taken, nor of whom it portrays. The child is anonymized. Hirsch notices that "images of children readily lend themselves to universalization."⁴⁹⁰ According to her, in order to achieve a "nonappropriative encounter with images of children, they need to preserve some of their visual layers and their historical specificity."⁴⁹¹ Therefore, it is also important to observe that "photographic images, especially when cropped and decontextualized, elicit an *affiliative* as well as *protective* spectatorial look marked by these investments: a look that promotes forgetting, even denial."⁴⁹² Thus, images of children possesses significant narrative power in the context of Holocaust iconography:

[...] the figure of the persecuted child turns the Holocaust into a moving and accessible story with religious and mythic associations. Transcending history even as it affirms the most dreadful historical reality, it appeals to our own memories of childhood, our identities as parents, sisters, brothers: it speaks to us in existential and moral terms, and only secondarily in historical or political ones. This is the source of the Holocaust's power as *narrative* – for novelists, playwrights, filmmakers, and, of course, politicians. But it is also the source of its potential exploitation.⁴⁹³

Therefore, it could be also argued that the child figure was chosen as a way to soften the historical events described in Bubnys's book, which depicts the horrifying extermination of almost all Lithuanian Jews. The boy in the image was photographed by one of the victims and not by the perpetrators; it is taken not during the atrocity itself, but documents their "normal" life in the ghetto. It transmits a sense of calm: at the moment when it was taken, the subject was surrounded by his relatives. The only sign which foreshadows his tragic fate is the Star of David on his sweater. Thus, the medialization of this innocent child's image turns this child's image into a symbol of all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania and the child victim becomes a symbolic figure of reconciliation and forgiveness in the context of the Holocaust remembrance in Lithuania.

The children's images have also become a medium for historical exhibitions in Lithuania. On 23 September 2009, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the State Jewish Museum and the Lithuanian Day of Remembrance of Jewish Victims of Genocide,

⁴⁸⁹ COHEN, *Representing the Experiences of Children*, p. 94.

⁴⁹⁰ HIRSCH, *Nazi Photographs in Post-Holocaust Art*, p. 29.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹² Italics in original. *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹³ Italics in original. ANDERSON, p. 145.

a new permanent exhibition entitled “Rescued Lithuanian Jewish Child Tells about Shoah” was inaugurated. The exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Lithuanian Jewish children and their rescuers.⁴⁹⁴ It includes thousands of pictures of Lithuanian Jewish children and their families, not only of those who survived, but also of children whose fates and names remain unknown. According to the curators of the exhibition, they gathered “about 1,000 pages of text, 6,000 pictures, 60 hours of video footage and 5 hours of audio recordings” in the course of preparing the exhibition and, in the end, “more than half of this information was handpicked and displayed for the visitors.”⁴⁹⁵

The aim of this exhibition is “to tell the society of Lithuania—and especially the young generation—about the Holocaust not from textbooks but from the stories told by living people.”⁴⁹⁶ The museum has tried to create an exhibition which would present a living history of the Holocaust based on historical images and visual narrative. Its concept resembles the permanent exhibition dedicated to children at the USHMM in Washington, D.C., “Remember the Children: Daniel’s Story,” which is likewise based on children and their families’ stories, and includes historical imagery, family albums, and pictorial diaries.⁴⁹⁷ Mark M. Anderson, who for many years has worked for the Florida Holocaust Museum, in his article on the child victim as witness to the Holocaust, contemplates on the focus on children in the exhibition of the USHMM: “Unlike traditional museums that present a collection of artifacts, the Holocaust Museum was deliberately organized around a ‘story’ or ‘plot’ that requires the visitors to identify with the victims emotionally.”⁴⁹⁸

In the case of Lithuania, the exhibition in Vilnius also tries to effect an emotional response in the non-Jewish Lithuanian audience by providing stories about Jewish children and their fate. Most of the pictures depict happy, smiling children in pre-war Lithuania, who resemble the sons and daughters or brothers and sisters of the visitors. The exhibition clearly intends to normalize their lives with this visual representation. There are few images of children in the ghettos and no pictures of dead children. Hirsch observes that the absence of dead children’s pictures is a global tendency of Holocaust iconography until this day, because images of dead children “wound us deeply,” and they stand “for all that cannot be—and perhaps should not be—worked through.”⁴⁹⁹

One of the most emotional part of the exhibition is a weakly illuminated corner, comprised solely of children’s images. As the museum’s description of the exhibition says, the eyes of the visitors have to “meet the glances of children,” and then a rising wave of light floods the pictures of children and they disappear. The wave symbolizes the destruction of their normal life and marks the end of their childhood. The emotional effect is heightened with music, as the visitors hear the lullaby “Shtiler, Shtiler,” which is sung to this day and whose melody was written by an eleven-year-old prisoner of the

⁴⁹⁴ SELČINSKAJA, Permanent Exhibition.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁹⁷ USHMM, Remember the Children.

⁴⁹⁸ ANDERSON.

⁴⁹⁹ HIRSCH, Projected Memory, pp. 20-21.

Vilna ghetto, who later became the famous pianist Alexander Tamir (born Alexander Wolkovsky).⁵⁰⁰

The aim of this emotionalization is to influence the visitors and engage in their Holocaust education, as the museum states the exhibition “will also serve as a centre of education,” and exhibition invites schoolchildren and their classes to visit the exhibition.⁵⁰¹ The choice of child narrative as an educational tool is not accidental. Hirsch argues that “our culture has a great deal invested in the children’s innocence and vulnerability.”⁵⁰² In other words, they cannot be blamed for collaboration or betrayal, as happened to Lithuanian Jewish partisans, who were even investigated for crimes against the humanity committed during the war, reversing the narrative and turning them into perpetrators.⁵⁰³ The children’s narrative embodies innocence and vulnerability and thus allows the audience to approach it from a different perspective. Many Holocaust children are anonymous and “less individualized, less marked by the particularities of identity,”⁵⁰⁴ therefore, they are ideal figures for this type of Holocaust education.

The exhibit begins with panels providing additional historical material on the Holocaust in Lithuania: the historical background of the various ghettos, mass executions, and efforts to rescue children. In this case, the child victim and its visualized life story not only supplement the historical information, but the child also serves as a figure of verification of historical truth. Thus, the child is used as an authentic witness to the Holocaust. It is interesting to observe that the authenticity of children narratives was highlighted already in the work of the first historical commissions established in DP camps. Boaz Cohen writes: “While adults had a reputation to uphold commitments to the dead or to fellow survivors, children were accepted as authentic witnesses unencumbered by agendas or social connections.”⁵⁰⁵ Cohen also observes, however, that this expectation was idealistic, because “children also had reasons of their own to speak or to remain silent about specific experiences they went through.”⁵⁰⁶ This assumed authenticity was not only a prevalent notion in the immediate postwar period, but it remains a frequent assumption today. The exhibition in Vilnius itself reflects this expectation; according to the curators, the display “contains authentic memoirs of Holocaust witnesses,” again highlighting the authenticity of the child witness.⁵⁰⁷

Nevertheless, Anderson sees a danger in this “thrill of the real”: widely received “true” or “living” stories often “offer a simplified narrative of good and evil that does not necessarily lead to a greater historical knowledge, critical awareness, or political commitment.”⁵⁰⁸ This simplification of good and evil is evident in the exhibition in Lithuania, which romanticizes and idealizes the rescuers of Jewish children. In *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, Lawrence L. Langer observes that “the temptation to ro-

⁵⁰⁰ SELČINSKAJA, Permanent Exhibition.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰² HIRSCH, Projected Memory, p. 13.

⁵⁰³ On this issue, see section 5.3.2.

⁵⁰⁴ HIRSCH, Projected Memory, p. 13.

⁵⁰⁵ COHEN, Representing the Experiences of Children, p. 94.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁸ ANDERSON, p. 160.

manticize the experience of hiding or passing and to idealize the rescuers is very strong, especially among those who are reluctant to face the boredom and the terror, to say nothing of the shattered identity that afflicted the youthful victims. It is a view bearing little resemblance to the truth.”⁵⁰⁹ The exhibition presents a positive relationship between Lithuanian Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors, for it focuses solely on the heroic actions of rescuers. Moreover, the exhibit is dominated by optimistic stories in which the children were rescued. Nevertheless, the children “who met murderous gentiles usually did not live to tell about it.”⁵¹⁰ William Mishell observes in his memoirs that the relationships between Jews and their rescuers were sometimes complicated and should not be presented as entirely positive:

[...] after the Children’s Action numerous Jews had left their children with Lithuanian families to save them from destruction. These families got used to the children and in many cases grew to love them as their own. Many Lithuanians gave those children a warm and loving home and, in some instances, even had them baptized. The children, particularly the smaller ones, got used to their new parents already started to call them Mommy and Daddy. These cases presented heartbreaking decisions for all involved. The Lithuanian families very reluctantly parted with the children, who often refused to go with the unfamiliar “aunt” who came and took them away. In some cases, the Lithuanian families refused to hand over the children to relatives, unless the parents themselves came and claimed them. But most parents had been destroyed in the crematoria and in the concentration camps and the relatives had a difficult time pressing the issue.⁵¹¹

The exhibition omits such ambivalent stories, favoring instead the sort of romanticization of rescuers that is popular in films focusing on children during the Holocaust. According to Annette Insdorf, the idealization of rescuers is one of the most prominent topics in films dealing with Jews as children. Such a representation usually expresses the weakness and helplessness of the Jewish victim and allows viewers to identify with its heroes.⁵¹² Judith E. Doneson’s analysis of the French film *Black Thursday* (1974), in which a young student named Paul tries to save Jews from being shipped to concentration camps, reveals how a Gentile character is often depicted as the one who has to rescue helpless and weak Jews.⁵¹³ Similarly this exhibition focuses mostly on heroic stories of the relationships between Jews and their neighbors, and tends to dwell on this “goodness” to humanize the non-Jewish Lithuanians, which in turn partly diminishes any sense of Lithuanians as perpetrators.

By placing children’s narratives at the center of the exhibition, the curators are furthermore continuing a preexisting tendency within Eastern European Jewish culture. Cohen has noted the importance of the cultural role of children in Eastern Europe; according to him, “interest in children and in children’s experience was characteristic of

⁵⁰⁹ LANGER, *Using and Abusing*, p. 70.

⁵¹⁰ COHEN, *Representing the Experiences of Children*, p. 92.

⁵¹¹ MISHELL, p. 361.

⁵¹² INSDORF, p. 77.

⁵¹³ DONESON, *The Jew*.

Jewish culture in Eastern European [countries] before the war.”⁵¹⁴ Child narrator figures were central to the Yiddish literary works of such writers as Sholem Aleichem⁵¹⁵ and Yitskhok Leybush Peretz.⁵¹⁶ In Soviet Lithuania, as well, children’s narratives were a popular way to relate Holocaust experiences. Icchokas Meras, whose story is included in the children’s exhibition in the State Jewish Museum, became one of the most popular writers in Soviet Lithuania. Many of his novels focused on child narrative and his own experiences during the Holocaust. Meras himself was only seven years old on 28 July 1941 when he was taken to a pit to be shot in Kelmė, a town in northwestern Lithuania.⁵¹⁷ However, due to chance, he was not murdered, but later hidden and adopted by a Lithuanian peasant family. In his literary works, the child figure came to symbolize a universal Jewish fate. The centrality of the child figure thus represents a continuity in Lithuanian Jewish culture, in which the child figure is used “to lay out society’s failings and maladies.”⁵¹⁸

The historian and Holocaust child survivor Nechama Tec notes that even though postwar recollections of children are crucial, still “a combination of factors—children’s lack of perspective at the time of persecution, the impact of trauma, and later transformations in memory—may blur our comprehension of the concrete circumstances and causal connections of events that are remembered.”⁵¹⁹ The use of children’s images might lead, furthermore, to the abuse of Holocaust representation in general. Historical imagery containing child victims tends to emotionalize the viewers; visual normalization of the child victim offers the opportunity of identifying emotionally with their lives. This emotionalization opens new possibilities for Holocaust education which asserts the innocence and authenticity of a child’s narrative. The images of children might also function as figures which soften the narrative and obscure complicity. They might also—as is the case in the exhibition in Vilnius—simplify the narrative by shifting the focus to heroic gentiles who rescued the children, while evil gentiles who abused and even executed children go unmentioned because the children who experienced violence at their hands did not survive to tell their story.

Transfer of Images: Photography of Warsaw Boy in the Art of Samuel Bak

In Lithuania, images of children in the Holocaust not only circulate in books and exhibitions, but they are also integrated in the artwork of Holocaust survivors. “My crumpled and anguished young self, traveling on the German truck [to HKP camp], cannot yet know that in many of my future paintings this [Warsaw] boy will hold a prominent position.”⁵²⁰ Bak remembers here his days in the Vilna ghetto and speaks about the

⁵¹⁴ COHEN, *Representing the Experiences of Children*, p. 93.

⁵¹⁵ Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinovitz) (1859–1916) was one of the founders of Yiddish literature, born in Pereyaslav (Ukraine).

⁵¹⁶ Yitskhok Leybush Peretz (1852–1915) was a Yiddish and Hebrew poet born in a Polish city of Zamość, which was under Russian imperial rule at the time.

⁵¹⁷ SUŽIEDĖLIS, *Icchokas Meras*.

⁵¹⁸ COHEN, *Representing the Experiences of Children*, p. 93.

⁵¹⁹ TEC, *Introduction*, XXIV.

⁵²⁰ BAK, *Painted in Words*, P: 33.



Fig. 16: The Stroop Report. [Jews captured by SS and SD troops during the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising are forced to leave their shelter and march to the Umschlagplatz for deportation]. Photograph. 1943. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park

image of the Warsaw ghetto boy (fig. 16), which, in the postwar years, became an important narrative figure in his art. The “Warsaw boy,” whose image is one of the most iconic Holocaust photographs—or as Hirsch called him, “the poster child of the Holocaust”⁵²¹—serves, in Bak’s case, as an example of how one’s memory might be projected onto an image of a child.

The Warsaw boy image, though taken by a perpetrator, has played a crucial role in global Holocaust memorialization, including in Lithuania. It was taken by Jürgen Stroop, the SS commandant during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. The young boy is presented wearing a cap, coat, and short pants, his arms uplifted. Those uplifted arms, according to Bak, symbolize the Jewish Crucifixion and, at the same time, they raise the question of Christian complicity in the annihilation of Jews.⁵²² In the background, other Jews raise their hands, and, on the right side, a German guard points his gun at the boy. This image was featured in Alain Resnais’s 1956 film *Night and Fog* and, in 1966, in Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona*. In 1990, a documentary film told the story

⁵²¹ HIRSCH, *Nazi Photographs in Post-Holocaust Art*, p. 19.

⁵²² BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 299.

of the Holocaust survivor Tsvi Nussbaum, who claimed to be the boy in the picture.⁵²³ The image also inspired the Polish writer Jarosław Rymkiewicz, who projected his own Holocaust experience onto the Warsaw boy in his book *The Final Station: Umschlagplatz*.⁵²⁴ The Warsaw boy image has thus been very often highlighted as an iconic visual representation of the Holocaust. According to Oren Stier: “It is this afterlife that is encompassed by the concept of the icon.”⁵²⁵ In other words, these iconic images bear “their roles as mediators of and motivators for memory.”⁵²⁶

Starting in the mid-1990s this photo became the central figure in the pictorial language of Bak’s paintings. Bak was born in 1933 in Vilna, which was part of Poland at that time. His talent for painting was discovered already while he lived in the Vilna ghetto, and it is there that his first exhibition was organized when he was just nine years old. In 1948, in a Hebrew children’s newspaper, Bak related his Holocaust memories in pictures for other children. Most of Bak’s works involving children were done not for children, however, “but for himself, and they represent his own feelings and fears as a child.”⁵²⁷ According to Bak, he was reluctant for many years to integrate this famous Holocaust photograph into his art because of its popularity and overexposure.⁵²⁸ Nevertheless, he discovered a personal bond between the boy and himself. Bak was the same age as the boy when he was living in the Vilna ghetto; he wore the same outgrown clothes with the Star of David and experienced a similar fate. The iconic photo of the Warsaw boy could have been a portrait of himself in those times, and Bak therefore included it in his pictorial world.⁵²⁹ In his memoirs, Bak writes:

I have painted many canvases about the well-known image of the Warsaw ghetto boy, the child with arms uplifted as if they were nailed to a cross. For a long time I considered it to be a kind of self-portrait. It might have been a slightly presumptuous idea. We do not know if the authentic boy survived or not, while I did. True, in my ghetto in Vilna I was his age and I looked—as did thousands of other children—exactly like him. Same cap, same outgrown coat, same short pants. He was my alter ego, my counterpart.⁵³⁰

With his paintings, Bak sought to rescue “the boy from his photographic confinement, transporting him and his viewers to various other sites and points in time, disassembling and reassembling him in dozens of makeshift monuments.”⁵³¹ Bak writes: “I painted impossible memorials—monuments that could never exist, tombstones of sorts, humble ‘reliquaries,’ unassuming cutouts, and perishable bricolages that called up the ghostlike presence of the Warsaw boy. Such were the only tangible markings of memory that I could produce.”⁵³² Hirsch defined such decontextualization of the War-

⁵²³ Tsvi Nussbaum. A boy from Warsaw.

⁵²⁴ RYMKIEWICZ.

⁵²⁵ STIER, p. 29.

⁵²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁵²⁷ AMISHAI-MAISEL, p. 144.

⁵²⁸ BAK, *Icon of Loss*, p. 16.

⁵²⁹ NOLAN FEWELL/PHILIPS, p. 5. See Bak’s painting “With a Blue Thread.”

⁵³⁰ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 306.

⁵³¹ NOLAN FEWELL/PHILIPS, pp. 5-6.

⁵³² Cited from *ibidem*, p. 6.

saw boy as strategical “cropping,”⁵³³ for the boy in Bak’s works has been cropped out of the original picture and into completely different contexts, situations, and memory spaces, where he escapes the perpetrator’s gaze. Hirsch writes that “Bak’s narrative becomes a mythic narrative of Jewish experience rather than the particular narrative of the Warsaw ghetto, or even the Shoah.”⁵³⁴ Though she is right that this narrative is not about a particular place, Bak’s works are very much about the Shoah as it happened in the Vilna ghetto; Bak has recontextualized and transported the picture into Lithuanian Holocaust memory.

In incorporating the figure of this boy into his art, Bak reflected, in his own words, “on the countless millions of children that perish in man’s senseless conflicts, wars, and genocides—past and present.”⁵³⁵ The Warsaw boy in Bak’s art aimed to safeguard the memory of Holocaust children. The boy became more than just his own image to him, he became a new friend.⁵³⁶ In the Vilna ghetto, Bak lost his childhood friend Samek Epstein in a brutal episode when “the Lithuanian police dragged a crying Samek to the courtyard, shot him, and left him lying in a pool of blood.”⁵³⁷ Samek reappears in several paintings next to the Warsaw boy, but, sometimes, the Warsaw boy also becomes Samek. Bak claimed that, “Whenever at present I look at these paintings, I see Samek. And when he has eyes, which in many of my paintings he does not have, Samek looks back at me. We mirror each other.”⁵³⁸ Bak comforts himself with his ability to honor his friend’s memory, writing further: “[...] his future wasn’t totally obliterated, since by living in me he is still being remembered and he helps me to remember all of Them.”⁵³⁹ The boy in the Warsaw ghetto became for him the symbol of an incomplete past, “the boy’s very iteration in Bak’s works witnesses to the elusiveness of memory, the incomplete and uncontained past, the excess and the silence at its core.”⁵⁴⁰ Thus, the image of the Warsaw boy serves as a catalyst of Bak’s memory, which brings him back to his childhood:

The other day I was working on a painting that is based on the image of the most famous of all Holocaust photographs, the *Warsaw Ghetto Boy*. It is to me the Jewish Crucifixion. With his arms lifted in an attitude of resigned and bewildered surrender and his spent gaze focused on the viewer, he has never stopped questioning me. So I paint him again and again as if the process of letting him materialize on my canvases were going to supply the two of us with an answer to this silent query. That day his slender legs that were stretching out from under his short pants and his feeble knees must have been trembling in the horrendous circumstance in which the snapshot was taken. They triggered in me a chain of associations and uncontrollable reflections that projected me far, far off.⁵⁴¹

⁵³³ HIRSCH, *Nazi Photographs in Post-Holocaust Art*, p. 27.

⁵³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁵³⁵ BAK, *Preface*.

⁵³⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵³⁷ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 301.

⁵³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 306.

⁵³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁰ NOLAN FEWELL/PHILIPS, p. 6.

⁵⁴¹ BAK, *Painted in Words*, p. 299.

Bak writes that today the famous image of the Warsaw ghetto boy “is as iconic as the *Mona Lisa* of Da Vinci” and that it “screams louder than Munch’s *Scream*.”⁵⁴² It serves for him, despite its popularity and, in some cases, trivialization, as a source of inspiration, which never stops questioning him. This iconic photo inspired more than one hundred of Bak’s paintings. The Warsaw ghetto boy lives again through his art, and, as Bak writes, “perhaps I should reassure you that he is well and alive and that he has recently moved to my studio, where he functions as my live model.”⁵⁴³

Images of children taken during the Holocaust have become an important visual element of public Holocaust memory in Lithuania. However, such photographs serve as a measure which tries “to rebuild a world so massively destroyed without, however, denying the destruction or its wounds.”⁵⁴⁴ They thus can be seen to represent a paradox: they are simultaneously both speakable and unspeakable images. In Lithuania the use of the object of an innocent child, on the one hand, offers the viewer emotional access to these atrocities and represents every victim who perished during the Holocaust. Such images allow for personal projection, as in Bak’s case, when a public image provides the opportunity to confront personal memories. Some of the children’s images—e.g., the Warsaw ghetto boy or the Rosenthal brothers from the Kovno ghetto—have been so often reproduced, generalized, and decontextualized that they also appear in different media. On the other hand, these images often leave the victims anonymous and encourage a disregard or a forgetting of their particular fates. As this section has shown using the example of the boy’s image on the cover of a book dealing with the Holocaust in Lithuania, a child’s portrait might even lead to the erasure of the perpetrators and soften the atrocities committed by Nazi Germans and their Lithuanian auxiliaries.

5.3.2 Iconography of the Jewish Resistance: Engendering Masculine Partisan Narratives in Lithuania

In the postwar years, the narrative of female Jewish resistance was overshadowed by male stories of heroism. Even though women took an active part in the Jewish resistance, their activities were described “as private acts, rather than as national heroism.”⁵⁴⁵ In the words of the sociologist Lenore Weitzman, “their roles were more often defined as auxiliary than as central.”⁵⁴⁶ This was true of both literature and films; the film scholar Lawrence Baron has observed that in recent decades only a few movies have focused on female activists of the Jewish resistance during the Holocaust.⁵⁴⁷ Baron has analyzed such films as *Hanna’s War* (1988), directed by the Israeli filmmaker Golan Menachem, and *A Woman at War*, directed by the British writer and director Edward Bennet (1991). *Hanna’s War* retells the story of a Hungarian Jew living in British Palestine who manages to rescue Hungarian Jews from deportation by parachuting into occupied Yugoslavia. *A Woman at War* traces the activities of Helene Moszkiewicz, who fought against

⁵⁴² BAK, *Icon of Loss*, p. 14.

⁵⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁴ HIRSCH, *Projected Memory*, p. 22.

⁵⁴⁵ WEITZMAN, p. 218.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁷ BARON, *Women as Resistance Fighters*, p. 90.

the deportation of Jews from Belgium. These films, according to Baron, “idealize a ‘New Jewish Woman,’ who is not a passive victim but a fighter.”⁵⁴⁸ This woman joins a “New Jewish Man” “who possessed the courage and physical strength to pioneer a Jewish state in Palestine and defend it against hostile Arabs.”⁵⁴⁹ Such an image is the result of the victories of Israeli armed forces in 1948, 1956, and 1967, which fostered the heroic portrayal of Jewish male characters.⁵⁵⁰ However, as Baron notices, most of the representations of Jewish female partisans show solely how “gender can be exploited in feature films.”⁵⁵¹ Both films mentioned above involve “fictional romantic incidents,”⁵⁵² which, Baron argues, undermine “the [film’s] credibility as an accurate representation” of these women as fighting against the Nazi regime.⁵⁵³

For a long time female Jewish partisans were entirely absent from the narrative of the Jewish resistance in Lithuania. Their stories went untold. In the Soviet era, Jewish male partisans, although usually without mention of their ethnic identities, were the main narrators of heroism during the Holocaust.⁵⁵⁴ In 1986, the documentary film *Partisans of Vilna* appeared. Directed by the American film director Josh Waletzky, this film depicts the story of Zionist partisans from Vilna under Abba Kovner’s leadership.⁵⁵⁵ The film is entirely centered, however, around the narrative of the Zionist partisans of Vilna and, furthermore, the leading figures are former male combatants. It was only after the Soviet Union collapsed that the voices of female Lithuanian Jewish partisans began emerging. These women broke the silence by publishing memoirs in which they presented themselves as active fighters during the Jewish resistance, but, at the same time, they also became objects of an ambivalent media campaign. Why did these female partisans remain silent for so long? What kind of narratives did these women present when they did break their silence, and how were their life stories received in Lithuanian media after 1990?

Visual Staging of Jewish Female Partisans in Soviet Times: From Active to Passive Femininity

Soviet recollection of the Second World War in the media, especially in the year 1944, focused on the glorification of the female combatant, including female partisans. This celebration of heroic femininity was expressed in the form of photographs of females in many leading Soviet newspapers—i.e., *Pravda* [Truth], *Krasnaya Zvezda* [Red Star], and illustrated magazine *Ogoniok* [Spark]. Jewish female partisans became the prototype of the new heroic Soviet woman, alongside other Soviet female heroes of the Second World War, such as the *frontovichki* (front fighter), nurses, pilots, snipers, or

⁵⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 89.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibidem, pp. 89-90.

⁵⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 95.

⁵⁵² Ibidem, p. 91.

⁵⁵³ Ibidem, p. 95.

⁵⁵⁴ See section 4.1.1.

⁵⁵⁵ Partisans of Vilna.

members of rifle brigades.⁵⁵⁶ Such exaltation of female fighters as heroes could be related to the Stalinist reconfiguration of the Soviet Union to the Soviet “Motherland,” where a cult of heroines “reimagined the Soviet woman as an emancipated representative of ‘progress’ and modernization.”⁵⁵⁷ According to the historians Roger Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, who studied the Soviet women on the frontline in the Second World War, these women were part of “Stalin’s ‘superwoman’ environment.”⁵⁵⁸

These female partisans not only appeared on magazine covers, but they also played a role in the first Soviet feature films on the Holocaust. In his book on the first films about the Holocaust—namely Soviet films which appeared between 1938 and 1946, Jeremy Hicks devotes one chapter to the cinematic imagination of occupation and representation of partisans and spectral Jews in Soviet films. One of the most renowned examples of female partisan iconography is Fridrikh Ermler’s film *She Defends the Motherland*, which was released in May 1943. The central character, a married mother, rural villager, and tractor driver becomes a partisan leader after Nazis kill her husband and son.⁵⁵⁹ The newspaper *Pravda* reviewed this film positively, noting that “such women as the heroine of the film, Praskov’ia Luk’ianova, have often been the subject of reports from the front, their faces turned to us from posters, enjoining us to vengeance, but for the first time the film *She Defends the Motherland* brings us right up close with their life and fate, face to face with the heroine herself.”⁵⁶⁰ In 1944, another film with a female partisan protagonist appeared, the film *The Rainbow*, directed by Mark Donskoy. The protagonist of *The Rainbow* is the pregnant partisan Olena Kostiuik. This film was based on the novel by Wanda Wasilewska, which was in turn inspired by a newspaper article about the female heroine Aleksandra Dreiman, a partisan from the village of Uvarovka, Ukraine.⁵⁶¹ The journalistic stories and photo essays which will be discussed in this chapter were thus not coincidental.

The historians Maren Röger and Ruth Leiserowitz observe that “up until the breakdown of the Eastern bloc, the men and women who had been important agents in wartime [...] were politically instrumentalized after 1945 or excluded from public commemoration, depending on the political aspirations of the communist leaders.”⁵⁶² On the one hand, Jewish female partisans did not disappear from the visual remembrance of the war and were present in pictures in many Soviet publications in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years. Leiserowitz notes that in Soviet Lithuania “even the group portraits of veterans which were taken during the whole post-war period always show women and men” (fig. 17).⁵⁶³ On the other hand, the memory of the war in Soviet Lithuania was shaped mostly by the male partisan narrative,⁵⁶⁴ which of course was

⁵⁵⁶ MARKWICK/CHARON CARDONA, pp. 1-6.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁵⁵⁹ HICKS, p. 96.

⁵⁶⁰ Cited from *ibidem*, p. 98.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

⁵⁶² LEISEROWITZ/RÖGER, p. 13.

⁵⁶³ LEISEROWITZ, *In the Lithuanian Woods*, p. 215.

⁵⁶⁴ POVILAS ŠTARAS: *Drąsios širdys* [Courageous Hearts], Vilnius 1958; KURGANOVAS; ŠTARAS; ELINAS-EGLINIS; ELINAS-EGLINIS/GELPERNAS; MEJERIS ELINAS-EGLINIS: *Kraujas ir ginklai* [Blood and Guns], Vilnius 1970.



Fig. 17: [Former fighters – comsomolists of the Kovno ghetto]. Photograph. MEJERIS ELINAS-EGLINIS, –DIMITRIJUS GELPERNAS: Kauno getas ir jo kovotojai [The Kaunas Ghetto and its Fighters], Vilnius 1969, courtesy to the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

not devoid of Soviet ideology. In this narrative, female heroism was overshadowed by male valor.

In 1944, during the liberation, Soviet magazines celebrated female heroism. Photos of Lithuanian Jewish partisans started to appear in the pages of the magazines which showed female partisans with weapons and presented them as active Soviet fighters during the war. Most of these photographs stem from the liberation period of Soviet Holocaust photography. One of the most iconic female photos of the Jewish resistance in Lithuania was the photo of Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson taken on 11 July 1944 by the Soviet photojournalist Yakov Riumkin⁵⁶⁵ in Vilna on the eve of Lithuania's liberation (fig. 18). This picture was already taken when the Red Army reached Vilna, and some of the partisans had to support its fight against Nazi Germany. Ginaitė-Rubinson fought in the partisan battalion of the Kovno ghetto, which was led by Chaim Yellin and called itself "Death to the Occupiers." Her duties included smuggling guns and escorting partisan groups into the forest.⁵⁶⁶ Ginaitė-Rubinson writes in her memoirs about other women in

⁵⁶⁵ His name is also written as Jacob Riumkin, here, the name Yakov Riumkin will be used.

⁵⁶⁶ Ginaitė, like many other female partisans, married a partisan, Misha Rubinsonas, who headed the youth fraction of the Anti-Fascist Organization.

her partisan detachment, and notices that despite the fact that some Jewish partisans did not want to take women on dangerous missions, the women in her detachment “were not discouraged from carrying arms and they did participate in military endeavors.”⁵⁶⁷

Ginaitė-Rubinson remembers that the iconic picture was taken in the morning, when they had to launch the attack (fig. 18). The commander did not allow Ginaitė-Rubinson to participate in the attack, saying “you are not partisan anymore [...] you are on the front lines now and here there are military rules.”⁵⁶⁸ Thus, ironically despite her active participation in the partisan armed resistance, at the moment when the photograph was taken, her duty was to safeguard and not to participate directly in the attack. This could be explained by the fact that much of the public glorification of female fighters was a façade which served Soviet ideology. Historian Nechama Tec⁵⁶⁹ concludes that the Soviet government always publicly praised “women’s contributions to guerilla warfare, claiming that women partisans symbolized supreme dedication to the patriotic struggle for the country,” but were not always assigned such duties during the war.⁵⁷⁰ Moreover, female involvement in partisan warfare played into Soviet politics of gender equality and celebration of femininity. Ginaitė-Rubinson remembers that life in the Rūdninkai forest was regulated by the traditions and rules of the Soviet Union, one of whose traditions was the celebration of International Women’s Day at the beginning of March 1944.⁵⁷¹ She recollects that on this day, she was asked to prepare a speech in the Rūdninkai forest⁵⁷²: “First, I was to thank the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its leaders for having freed women of their ‘double yoke.’⁵⁷³ Although it was not very clear to me exactly what this equality and freedom from ‘the double yoke’ consisted of, I did not bother to argue. I [...] and then proceeded to write about the women of our detachment, about their responsibilities and their bravery.”⁵⁷⁴

Female heroism was also celebrated in two other important Soviet newspapers, *Pra-vda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*. In the summer of 1944, these two newspapers published a photo essay on the Lithuanian Jewish partisans by the famous Soviet Jewish journalist Ilya Ehrenburg.⁵⁷⁵ He wrote that the Jewish partisans of Lithuania had organized to fight the occupiers from the first days of German occupation, and that the Germans had been

⁵⁶⁷ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 175.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 184.

⁵⁶⁹ Tec is also the author of the book *Defiance* about the Bielski partisans, see NECHAMA TEC: *Defiance*, Oxford 2008.

⁵⁷⁰ TEC, *Women*, p. 225.

⁵⁷¹ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 174.

⁵⁷² Ibidem.

⁵⁷³ Mao Tse-Tung stated that: “Under capitalism, the female half of the human race suffers under a double yoke [...] They are, firstly, in an inferior position because the law denies them equality with men, and secondly, and this is most important, they are ‘in domestic slavery,’ they are ‘domestic slaves,’ crushed by the most petty, most menial, most arduous, and most stultifying work of the kitchen, and by isolated domestic, family economy in general.” Cited from MAO WRITINGS.

⁵⁷⁴ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 174.

⁵⁷⁵ Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967) was a writer, journalist, and cultural figure. He was a reporter in the First World War, Spanish Civil War, and the Second World War. Ehrenburg also published novels; the most famous is entitled *The Thaw* (1954). He, together with Wassili Grossman, edited *The Black Book*, which contains testimonies of Holocaust survivors from the Soviet Union.



Fig. 18: Yakov Riumkin. [Portrait of a female partisan, Sara Ginaité-Rubinson, at the liberation of Vilna]. Photograph. July 1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Sara Ginaite



Fig. 19: Ilya Ehrenburg. [Abba Kovner (center) poses with Ruska Korczak (left) and Vitka Kempner (right) on a street in Vilna day of the city's liberation]. Photograph. 1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Vitka Kempner Kovner

so scared of the partisans that they had built fortifications to resist the fighters.⁵⁷⁶ Of course, the article exaggerated the strength of the Jewish partisans, especially in terms of armed resistance, which did not yet exist in the first days of the Nazi occupation. However, it is significant that in 1944 the Soviet media was still publicly identifying the partisans as Jews and not as anonymous victims or *sovetskii narod* [Soviet people].

The photos Ehrenburg included in his article show partisan youth. The article included the photo of the female partisan Rachel Rudnitzky. Rudnitzky⁵⁷⁷ fought with the partisans in the Rūdninkai forest. She was also the sister of Yitzhak Arad (formerly Rudnitzky), who was also a partisan, and later the director of the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.⁵⁷⁸ According to Ehrenburg's commentary, fig. 19 depicts a Jewish partisan unit—which called itself *Nakam* [The Avengers]—with their commanding officer,

⁵⁷⁶ BART.

⁵⁷⁷ HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS.

⁵⁷⁸ Arad was a director of Yad Vashem from 1972 until 1993.

Abba Kovner, during the liberation of Vilna. In this photo, female partisans are again shown with weapons. In the picture one can see the renowned female partisans Rozka Korczak and Vitka Kempner, who fought under Kovner's command (fig. 19). Kempner, who later married Kovner, is famous for the execution of the FPO's first act of sabotage: she smuggled a bomb out of the ghetto and blew up a Nazi train line. Female partisans comprised an important part of the *Nakam* detachment. Kovner even refused the Soviet officers' wish to build a family camp to house the Jewish women in his unit, claiming that there was no real distinction between men and women.⁵⁷⁹ After the war, when many Jewish partisans, along with other Soviet soldiers, were proclaimed as Heroes of the Great Patriotic War and received Soviet medals for valor, Kovner protested by tearing up the recommendation for his own medal because Kempner was not nominated for the award.⁵⁸⁰

The fact that these pictures were taken on the streets of Vilna reveals that the Soviet regime recognized the partisans as legitimate and acknowledged their involvement. The partisans were recognized as the bringers of victory against Nazi Germany. The pictures were most probably staged. Kovner's biographer, the Israeli Holocaust scholar Dina Porat, describes how the partisans met Ehrenburg, already a famous Jewish-Russian author and reporter for the *Red Star* and *Pravda*, in the streets of Vilna, where Ehrenburg was accompanied by a special unit of press photographers.⁵⁸¹

Most, if not all, of the partisan photographs available today were not taken in the forest—for who then had a camera?—but rather during Ehrenburg's emotional meeting with them on the streets of liberated Vilna. He was profoundly surprised to meet a Jewish partisan unit and their commander, who had been acting openly as a Jew and a Zionist under Soviet command.⁵⁸²

Photo essays were one of the main instruments the Soviet media used to cover the war, aiming to affect readers emotionally with the visual images.⁵⁸³ Shneer claims that “photographers, then, played an integral role in this process of both making meaning and proving to the world what the Nazis had done in the Soviet Union,” and it was “the photographers ‘eyewitness testimony’ that drove the population on.”⁵⁸⁴ The famous photograph of Ginaitë-Rubinson was taken by the Soviet Jewish photojournalist Yakov Riumkin, who was a famous war photographer at that time. Riumkin had been photographing since the 1930s.⁵⁸⁵ During the Second World War, he published a number of photo essays, including one in 1944 after the liberation of the concentration camp Majdanek.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁷⁹ COHEN, *The Avengers*, pp. 110-111.

⁵⁸⁰ PORAT, p. 179.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

⁵⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 172.

⁵⁸³ SHNEER, p. 128.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 156. Majdanek was a concentration camp in the outskirts of Lublin, Poland. The prisoners there were mostly Jews, Russian soldiers, and Poles. It was the first major concentration camp to be liberated by the Allied Forces and was widely covered in international media.

The picture of Ginaitė-Rubinson (fig. 18) appeared on the cover of the magazine *Ogoniok*, which had a large readership in the Soviet Union. *Ogoniok* was founded by Jewish cultural figures, including Riumkin, who was one of the magazine's primary photojournalists.⁵⁸⁷ *Ogoniok* was compared to *Life* magazine and defined itself as a "mass journal" targeted at a general audience.⁵⁸⁸ In his book on Soviet Jewish photography, Shneer observes that *Ogoniok* "projected the Soviet Revolution in all its political and aesthetic glory, and it was a hit."⁵⁸⁹ Ginaitė-Rubinson very clearly reveals the occasion when the picture was taken:

"Strap the gun across your chest," he said, smiling. Not amused, I remembered the pain I had experienced when I had been denied an automatic weapon.

"It's strange," I said, refusing to move the rifle, "that you can't tell the difference between an automatic weapon and a rifle. No one straps a rifle across their chest."

At that, he changed tactics. Very politely, he asked if I would do it for the sake of the photograph. With that, he won me over and I took the rifle from my shoulder and strapped it across my chest, both of us laughing out loud.

"Don't laugh," he said. "Just smile." [...] Not long afterwards, the photo he took of me appeared in the pages of the Moscow journal, *Ogoniok*.⁵⁹⁰

Hence this picture, like many others depicting partisans in Lithuania from that time, was staged. Ginaitė-Rubinson was not only aware of the camera, but she even cooperated with the photographer by agreeing to pose with the rifle across her chest. It might therefore be argued that Soviet photojournalists not only passively reported on the war and created propaganda, but that they were at liberty "to shape individual images based on the photographer's particular desires."⁵⁹¹ Shneer claims that: "Soviet Jewish photographers were not passively telling other people's stories, but were active creators of the world they photographed."⁵⁹²

During the Stalin era, Jewish female partisans thus became icons of female heroism. Woman was "glorified for her capacity to work like a man," "her willingness to sacrifice for others."⁵⁹³ According to the sociologist Lynne Attwood, who has written several works on gender in the Soviet Union, "the emphasis was not on women's right to be treated fairly and judged as individual workers but on their heroic service to the nation" by making "no less a contribution to society than men."⁵⁹⁴ Moreover, the pictures of Jewish female partisans highlighted their femininity. Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson, Rachel Sakir, Rozka Korczak, and Vitka Kempner all are photographed with neatly done hair

⁵⁸⁷ Ibidem, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 27.

⁵⁹⁰ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, pp. 184-185.

⁵⁹¹ SHNEER, p. 90.

⁵⁹² Ibidem, p. 236. For instance, Ehrenburg published pictures in the magazine *Pravda*, along with a description of his experience of the pogrom, which occurred in his childhood, in czarist Russia. Thus, Ehrenburg had "his coming-out as a Jewish victim of anti-Jewish violence on the pages of the central Soviet press with the outbreak of the war." Ibidem, p. 187.

⁵⁹³ ATTWOOD, p. 13.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibidem, p. 14.

and smiling faces. They do not resemble fighters from the forest so much as magazine cover models. One could even suggest a category of “sexy memory”⁵⁹⁵ in the iconography of the Jewish female partisans. According to Attwood, it was no accident that the articles and stories about the partisans at the end of the war focused on young partisan women, who were depicted as “loyal daughters of Stalin” symbolizing the Soviet state and its people.⁵⁹⁶ Attwood argues that the partisans’ youth and beauty signified “the youth of the new country which the Nazis were attempting to destroy.”⁵⁹⁷

Despite the prevalence of such images in the late 1940s, these photographs were not visible in Soviet Lithuania in later years after Stalin’s death. For political and ideological reasons, Zionists disappeared from the Soviet narrative of the Holocaust. Pictures of Ginaitė-Rubinon, as well as other partisans, later reappeared in Soviet books, but without weapons. A book published by the Kovno ghetto fighters Mejeris Elinas-Eglinis and Dimitrijus Gelpernas in 1969 once again included photographs taken by Riumkin in July 1944 (fig. 18). Nevertheless, for the publication a very pacified representation of female partisans was chosen.⁵⁹⁸ This passive femininity is also portrayed in the pictures of Ginaitė-Rubinon and other partisans as veterans (fig. 17). Furthermore, this veterans’ picture, which appeared in several publications in the 1960s and 1970s,⁵⁹⁹ presented them not as Jewish partisans, but rather as komosolists—i.e., as Soviet fighters—and thereby erased their Jewish identity. This could be read as evidence of a concerted effort after the Second World War to demilitarize both male and female Jewish partisans by showing them without weapons. In Soviet iconography, Jewish partisans became Soviet heroes who adhered to Soviet ideology. Many of the former partisans, especially the male ones, went on to become Soviet functionaries, obtaining important, publicly visible positions within the communist party.

Such changed representation of the female partisans—portraying them unarmed—also coincided with the changed role of women in Soviet society under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Women no longer had a public duty to go to war and fight the enemy; their role shifted to the maternal realm, and their duty now was to combine work and family life.⁶⁰⁰ There were only a few iconographic exceptions, such as female pilots, women in parachuting or sports aviation, and female cosmonauts, most famously the pictures of Valentina Tereshkova, who was the first woman in outer space. These images circulated during the Cold War to back up claims of gender equality in the Soviet Union.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁵ Comments from a personal conversation with Professor Ruth Leiserowitz.

⁵⁹⁶ ATTWOOD, p. 139.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹⁸ ELINAS-EGLINIS/GELPERNAS.

⁵⁹⁹ Additional pictures in ŠTARAS.

⁶⁰⁰ See also, HILLE KAROLINE HEROLD: *Brauchen Frauen Helden? Russische Frauen zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, Bremen 2001; MELANIE ILIČ – SUSAN E. REID – LYNNE ATTWOOD (eds.): *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, Hampshire 2004.

⁶⁰¹ BRIDGER, p. 230.

Female Narratives of Jewish Partisans and the Formation of Holocaust Memory after Independence: Engendering Masculine Narratives of Soviet Heroism

Although female partisans were turned into the visual figures of the “victorious” war, they were not given the opportunity to speak for themselves during the Soviet era. Ginaitė-Rubinson, who was honored by the Soviet authorities as a war hero, did not publish any kind of memoir in Soviet times. Female partisans were silent despite the fact that the diary of another Lithuanian female Holocaust survivor, Maša Rolnikaitė’s *I Must Tell*, became quite popular in the Soviet Union.⁶⁰² The fourteen-year-old Rolnikaitė had survived several concentration camps.⁶⁰³ The female partisans did not speak even when male Jewish partisans wrote books about their resistance in Soviet Lithuania.⁶⁰⁴ This silence was particular to the Soviet context, for, within the early post-war years, pivotal female resistance figures—for instance, Zionist partisans like Rozka Korczak—did publish “resistance-oriented” memoirs in Palestine and Israel, but not in the Soviet Union.⁶⁰⁵

The absence of a female narrative of resistance in Soviet Lithuania defies an easy answer. During Soviet times, Holocaust memory was generally marginalized in Lithuania. Female partisans therefore had to confront two obstacles: the public representation of femininity and their Jewishness. On the one hand, Soviet ideology may have excluded the female war martyrdom narrative as incompatible with the gender ideals of the post-Stalinist era, as mentioned previously. On the other hand, perhaps the dominance of public male partisan narrative left insufficient space for women to voice their own stories. Or, maybe, female partisans simply did not want to speak about their experiences, or spoke about what they had experienced in private settings; many of them not only had relatives who had survived the Holocaust but most of the female partisans also married former Jewish partisans alongside whom they had fought in the woods. Scholars, who research female Jewish partisans and their underground activities, claim that partisan women were excluded from the “institutional structure of recognition and remembrance that emerged after the war,” as instances of female engagement in partisan warfare were considered private acts and not, as in the case of male partisans, examples of national heroism.⁶⁰⁶

Testimonial accounts and documentary films featuring female Jewish partisans only started to appear in Lithuania after the country gained independence in 1990. So far, a number of female partisans in Lithuania have published memoirs and public interviews, but the memoirs of Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson and Rachel Margolis have contributed the most to the engendering of Holocaust narratives of resistance in Lithuania. Another Jewish partisan, Fania Brantsovskaya, has not written her own memoirs, but she has testified about her life as a female partisan in several biographical articles and documentary films.

⁶⁰² In the late 1960s, her memoirs were published in the Soviet Union, both in Russian and Lithuanian, albeit with a certain degree of censorship; the word “Jew,” for instance, was not mentioned.

⁶⁰³ For more on Rolnikaitė, see above, section 4.1.1 and 5.3.1.

⁶⁰⁴ Read more about the books of Jewish partisans in Soviet Lithuania in section 4.1.1.

⁶⁰⁵ TYDOR BAUMEL, pp. 107-108.

⁶⁰⁶ Cited from WEITZMAN, p. 218.

What life choices led these female partisans in Soviet Lithuania to hide their past trauma from the public eye? After the war, Brantsovskaya decided to stay with her husband in Lithuania, claiming: “We’ve never considered emigration. We didn’t consider it during the mass emigration in the late 1970s.”⁶⁰⁷ She started to work as a secretary in one of the ministries, but it took time for her war wounds to heal: “I used to take my rifle to work putting it in the corner. The minister joked: ‘One day you will shoot me!’ We didn’t care for any material riches. They didn’t seem to matter in comparison to victory and freedom. However, we had to get used to peaceful life.”⁶⁰⁸ Brantsovskaya remembers how, in summer 1954, she celebrated Victory Day in Moscow with her husband: “Mikhail and I were in the Lithuanian delegation standing on the Red Square at the Victory Parade. These were unforgettable moments.”⁶⁰⁹ In 1945, she finished a degree at the technical school of statistics and afterwards worked at the Central Statistical Office of Soviet Lithuania, devoting all her time to her work and family.⁶¹⁰ After several years, her memories of partisan activities were relegated to the past and have not entered into her public life for many years.

Ginaitė-Rubinson moved to Vilnius after the war because she could not live in Kaunas anymore, where she had lost many of her relatives.⁶¹¹ She graduated from Vilnius University with a degree in political economy. During the Soviet era, she never spoke publicly about her experiences fighting in the resistance. Similarly, Rachel Margolis earned a doctorate in biology and worked as a teacher. Neither Margolis nor Ginaitė-Rubinson nor Brantsovskaya commented publicly on the Holocaust, even though the Soviet regime, at least officially, was favorable towards them. In her memoirs, Margolis claims that she was not discriminated against in Soviet Lithuania: “Nothing prevented me neither from getting the education I wanted nor from getting the job I wanted.”⁶¹² Furthermore, Margolis claims that she “thrived under the Soviet regime, as Party leaders honored her service as a partisan and advocated for her, forcing the Lithuanian university to accept her at the point she left off in 1941.”⁶¹³ She explained her long silence thus: “I mastered Lithuanian, ran our meager household, and tried not to think about the past—the wound in my heart had not healed.”⁶¹⁴ It might be some indication of that wound to her heart that she and her husband had decided (at that point) not to have children: “Why bring new people into the world? What if their fate was as terrible as ours?”⁶¹⁵

Interestingly, all three of these female partisans started to speak out publicly about their memories only after the fall of the Soviet Union. Their decision to speak was influenced not only by factors such as political changes or emigration, as in the case of Ginaitė-Rubinson, who moved to Canada, and Margolis, who emigrated to Israel

⁶⁰⁷ LITINSKAYA.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹¹ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 210

⁶¹² MARGOLIS, *A Partisan from Vilna*, p. 511.

⁶¹³ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 498.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibidem*. Margolis did eventually give birth to a daughter when she was forty years old.

in 1994; their voicing of the past also coincided with changes in their familial life, particularly with the death of their husbands and their children reaching adulthood. All three married former partisans whom they had met in the woods during as resistance fighters. The death of their husbands was a catastrophe for all of them, as is illustrated by the example of Margolis, who experienced this transition from private to public life after the loss of her husband in 1986. She wrote that “I had lost my husband and my friend and remained alone all the rest of my life. I retired and drew a pension. I left my work at the university and devoted all my efforts to the restoration of the Jewish Museum in Vilna.”⁶¹⁶ Moreover, this moment of loss also encouraged her to revive her memories, for “now I was living alone and was sorting out my memories. I began to write down the history of my childhood, trying to lose myself in the past.”⁶¹⁷ These life changes shifted their focus from private family life to public life. Ginaitė-Rubinson and Margolis wrote their memoirs, and Brantsovskaya became active in educational Holocaust programs, speaking in meetings at schools and at commemorative days, as well as leading groups of tourists, including Holocaust survivors, through the streets of Jewish Vilna and to the Ponary forest, where the corpses of many Lithuanian Jews remain. In 1990, Brantsovskaya was even invited to the Knesset to speak as a veteran of the Second World War during the celebration of Victory Day (9 May).⁶¹⁸

When these three women started to speak about their experiences during the war, they not only broke the silence of the Jewish partisans in Lithuania, but they also confronted the masculinized narrative of heroism during the resistance. Their life stories confirmed that women had participated actively in the armed resistance and contributed to resistance in other ways, as well. Ginaitė-Rubinson dedicated a chapter of her memoirs to the female partisans of her detachment, in which 15 percent of all partisans were women. She revealed that women were active in the armed resistance; they had not only washed their men’s clothes, but also carried weapons and “fought bravely against the enemy and never complained.”⁶¹⁹ However, she also revealed that gender-based discrimination also prevailed in the forest:

Of course, there were the centuries old male-female divisions in responsibilities and duties. The women were regarded as weak, frail, and unfit to play a part in difficult and dangerous missions. Their participation in combat was often not appreciated. Even the Jewish partisans were not eager to take women along on dangerous missions far from our base. They felt that girls would only make a difficult situation worse, that they might require shielding during a retreat or a battle, that they might be a burden.⁶²⁰

It is thus no surprise that the historical accounts of the resistance written by men after the war did not feature women in important roles and generally portrayed their involvement as brief and sporadic. The female experience of subordination in the resistance was thus reproduced in the postwar narrative. Margolis deconstructed this nar-

⁶¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 499.

⁶¹⁷ Ibidem.

⁶¹⁸ LITINSKAYA.

⁶¹⁹ GINAITĖ-RUBINSON, p. 177.

⁶²⁰ Ibidem, p. 175.

rative tendency in her memoirs by giving a detailed account of her partisan activity. Her account includes not only examples of antisemitism but also sexism, which was widespread among the Soviet partisans.⁶²¹ Margolis is the best example of an “invisible” female partisan, who took part in such activities as seizing food.⁶²² She could not take part in active warfare because she had contracted a severe case of typhus in the forest. In her book, however, she revealed the partisan girls did not passively accept the duties they were assigned but also confronted the sexism that pervaded the circles of Soviet partisans:

And we girls, including many from the ghetto battle organization, who dreamed of fighting against the Nazis, were going to bake bread? This was impossible, a mean trick! [...] “[...] We did not come into the forest for cover,” I asserted, “or to hide behind the backs of the fighting partisans. We are members of the FPO, warriors of the ghetto. Do you know what sacrifices we made to acquire weapons and smuggle them into the ghetto, how we collected them part by part and test fired them in basements, and how we trained young people in the ghetto environment to carry out military actions? And now you want to dump us into a family camp. It won’t work. We will not agree to it. We will pick up our weapons and create our own detachment.”⁶²³

In this manner, Margolis tried to negate the devaluation of the women’s organizational activities in the forests. Scholars have noted that “even though women were often given the most dangerous missions of transporting weapons and guns [...], what they were doing was defined as helping those who blew up the trains.”⁶²⁴ In other words, women’s roles were defined as auxiliary even when they were essential and arguably more dangerous than those of their male counterparts in the resistance. Brantsovskaya says in the film *Surviving Ostland*: “I was hungry for revenge.”⁶²⁵ Brantsovskaya lost her entire family in the Holocaust: her father and sister perished in concentration camps, and Nazis intentionally drowned her mother at sea on a barge.⁶²⁶ In other accounts, she recalls how she became a member of a partisan group: “I was given a rifle and then an automatic gun. I dragged it with me and took part in military missions.”⁶²⁷ Brantsovskaya notes that the partisans treated her like a sister.⁶²⁸ She remembers how in the beginning she even lacked shoes: “I had no good boots, but was wearing shabby high-heeled sandals. [...] Borovskaya, the commissar of the unit, gave me the boots of her son who had perished.”⁶²⁹ She also remembers how female partisans tried to stay feminine: “We made blouses from parachutes.”⁶³⁰ She was trained to install mines and shoot: “We blasted trains and placed explosives in the enemy’s equipment. We shot

⁶²¹ MARGOLIS, *A Partisan from Vilna*, p. 43.

⁶²² *Ibidem*.

⁶²³ *Ibidem*, p. 384.

⁶²⁴ Cited from WEITZMAN, p. 218.

⁶²⁵ Cited from *Surviving Ostland*.

⁶²⁶ LITINSKAYA.

⁶²⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶²⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶²⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶³⁰ *Ibidem*.

and killed them. Yes, I did, I killed them and did so with ease. I knew that my dear ones were dead and I took my revenge for them and thousands [of] others with each and every shot.”⁶³¹ After the death of her husband in 1985 and her retirement in 1990, Brantsovskaya became an important figure in the Lithuanian Jewish community. She became involved in numerous public activities, for instance meeting schoolchildren, guiding Lithuanian Jews to the Ponary forest, and speaking on memorial days: “I live a fulfilled life, since I’m involved in the Jewish life in Lithuania.”⁶³² She is also one of the most often interviewed Holocaust survivors in films made in Lithuania and abroad.

Despite having acquired even international attention with their accounts, the memories of these women as mediated through their memoirs and appearances in documentary films have not always been widely received in Lithuanian national media. For some years Ginaitė-Rubinson and Margolis simply went unnoticed by the broader public, except within the Lithuanian Jewish community itself. Marjorie Margolis, Rachel Margolis’s cousin, has claimed that, in Lithuania, Jewish history is “so unpopular that memoirs of Jewish survivors are being culled for ‘evidence’ of Jewish partisan involvement in ‘war crimes.’”⁶³³ While the Lithuanian media has played a very important role in the popularization of these female partisan memories, but often in a negative manner. One of the first attacks on the Lithuanian Jewish partisans started after Margolis’s memoirs first appeared in Lithuania in 2006. Her cousin, in an afterword to the English version of the memoirs, remembers how these accusations started:

Little did I realize that only four days earlier, two plain clothed police officers were knocking on Rachel’s door in Vilnius to interrogate her about the “war crimes” revealed in her memoir. [...] A sentence in her Russian memoir intrigued the Prosecutor General’s office, a sentence based on which his office launched an investigation into the war crimes of 86 year old fellow partisan, Fania Brantsovskaya. Fortunately, Rachel is in Israel, but Fania still lives right there in Vilnius. [...] Rachel was advised by her attorney not to return to Vilnius. For the first time in her life, Rachel has lost her strong sense of purpose.⁶³⁴

Lithuanian Jewish partisans were questioned for their actions in the case of the Kaniūkai massacre.⁶³⁵ However, this legal investigation was soon closed, as there was no evidence, except for the single sentence in Margolis’s memoirs; Margolis later acknowledged that this one sentence was based on rumors, because, due to her illness, she had not participated in the killings in Kaniūkai. This sentence was deleted from the English edition of her memoirs in 2010. These allegations against Brantsovskaya became inscribed in the public memory and have persistently followed her in the Lithuanian media. For instance, Brantsovskaya appeared in the Lithuanian documentary

⁶³¹ Ibidem.

⁶³² Ibidem.

⁶³³ MARGOLIS, *A Partisan from Vilna*, p. 513.

⁶³⁴ Ibidem.

⁶³⁵ The Koniuchy (Kaniūkai) massacre (then Poland, now Lithuania) was carried out on 29 January 1944 against civilians by Soviet partisans; supposedly, some of those partisans were Jewish. However, the case has not been completely investigated to this day.

film *Amžininkai*,⁶³⁶ where she spoke about her experience during the Holocaust. Several days after LRT showed this film⁶³⁷ in January 2008, these allegations resurfaced when Brantsovskaya was attacked in the press by the Lithuanian historian Irena Tumavičiūtė. In the Lithuanian newspaper *Lietuvos Aidas* [Echo of Lithuania], known for its strong nationalistic perspective on historical events in Lithuania, Tumavičiūtė wrote: “Perhaps the most shocking part in this film was an interview in Russian with Brantsovskaya. Exactly sixty-four years ago, on the night from 29 to 30 January, Soviet terrorists murdered all the inhabitants of Kaniūkai village and burned down the village.”⁶³⁸ Similarly, in May 2009, the head of the Baltic News Service, Artūras Račas, wrote that Brantsovskaya “needed to be tried, and that only the court could decide whether they [i.e., the partisans] were guilty or not. Because not just Israel and Jews, but also Lithuania and Lithuanians have a right to demand justice [...] for crimes, notwithstanding the nationality of the perpetrators.”⁶³⁹

However, in 2004, a few years before this investigation, these Jewish female partisans had actually been honored as heroes in Lithuania and received medals for heroism.⁶⁴⁰ After the allegations surfaced, the international press mostly defended these partisans. One of the most important articles was written by the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, Gordon Brown, who supported the Lithuanian Jewish partisans and criticized the Lithuanian national press for their hostile articles: “But the question remains why this extraordinary woman [Margolis] is being subject to a campaign of state-sponsored harassment for her involvement in—and reportage of—a campaign of resistance to those who had invaded her country and set about systematically murdering its Jewish population.”⁶⁴¹ Margolis, Brantsovskaya, and other Jewish partisans thus became controversial figures within Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania. The British filmmaker Shivaun Woolfson, who interviewed Brantsovskaya for her documentary film *Surviving History*, notes this contradiction: “[Brantsovskaya] is, on the one hand, the subject of a highly public vilification in the Lithuanian press for her alleged participation in an attack, carried out by Jewish and Soviet partisans, [...] and, on the other, internationally recognized as a heroic representative of Jewish Vilna.”⁶⁴²

The legacy of the Lithuanian Jewish partisans was portrayed positively in the 2013 documentary *Fanios Vilnius* [Fania’s Vilnius], directed by the renowned Lithuanian journalist Edita Mildažytė.⁶⁴³ In the film, Brantsovskaya walks through the streets of

⁶³⁶ Amžininkai.

⁶³⁷ The film *Surviving Ostland* was not screened on any Lithuanian TV and attracted no media attention, although today it is shown at the permanent Holocaust exhibition in the State Jewish Museum in Vilnius.

⁶³⁸ IRENA TUMAVIČIŪTĖ: Berniukas iš Varšuvos geto ir lietuviškas ‘Požiūris’ [A Boy from the Warsaw Ghetto and Lithuanian ‘Attitude’], in: *Lietuvos Aidas* from 2008-01-29. *Lietuvos Rytas* and *Respublika* focused mostly on the case of Yitzhak Arad, and did not comment on this film. See also JULIUS GIRDVAINIS: Ekspertas kruvinomis rankomis [The Bloody-Handed Expert], in: *Respublika* from 2006-04-22; IDEM: Prokurorų akiratyje – Izraelio armijos generolas [In the Spotlight of the Prosecutors – the General of the Israeli Army], in: *Respublika* from 2006-06-17.

⁶³⁹ RAČAS.

⁶⁴⁰ MARGOLIS, A Partisan from Vilna, p. 504.

⁶⁴¹ BROWN.

⁶⁴² WOOLFSON, p. 95.

⁶⁴³ *Fanios Vilnius*.



Fig. 20
Screenshot from Fania's Vilnius, Lithuania
2013, Direction: Edita Mildažytė

Vilna, the Rūdninkai forest—where she used to fight as a partisan, and other memorial sites (fig. 20). She remembers her life as a partisan: “Life was not easy. We were starving. We ate at mixture of grain flour and hot water. [...] We slept on thin planks covered by spruce branches so it would feel softer.”⁶⁴⁴ This film is designed as a tour with Brantsovskaya as the guide, similar to the hundreds of tours which she has already led in Lithuania. She plays the role of a storyteller and retells not only her own past but also the history of Jewish Vilna during the Holocaust. Woolfson claims that: “through stepping again and again across the storied landscapes[,] [...] through remembering, in the active sense of the word, those she [Brantsovskaya] has lost, rather than leaving them silent, alone, she recovers and re-inscribes a sense of self.”⁶⁴⁵

Telling stories and going to the sites of her traumatic past or participating in film-making is Brantsovskaya's way of dealing with the past. It is, she claims, “a sacred duty to those who died in Ponar who cannot get up and tell others what took place there.”⁶⁴⁶ Woolfson even calls her “a carrier, organizer, linker and articulator of stories.”⁶⁴⁷ Similarly, in this documentary film she serves as a conveyer of memories of a lost world. Moreover, in this film Brantsovskaya speaks in Yiddish with Lithuanian subtitles. In the film, she explains why the Yiddish language is so important to her: “When I get a chance to speak in Ponary, I speak in Yiddish, because this is what the people lying there spoke.”⁶⁴⁸ Thus, in this film, Brantsovskaya visits her landscapes of memory, speaking the same language as the majority of the Lithuanian Jews who were killed during the Holocaust. This film was broadcast on LRT on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto and screened in the Lithuanian parliament during the Fourth Litvak Congress. The fact that Brantsovskaya was chosen as the protagonist of a documentary film produced by a journalist from Lithuanian national television might be a sign that perceptions towards the Lithuanian Jewish partisans are changing yet again.

Thus, the mediation of memories of the Jewish female partisans in Lithuania reveals that, in the first postwar years, these partisans were celebrated by the Soviet regime as heroes of the Second World War. Widespread images depicted them with weapons and celebrated their femininity and youth. However, in the post-Stalinist period, their visual

⁶⁴⁴ Cited from *ibidem*.

⁶⁴⁵ WOOLFSON, p. 95.

⁶⁴⁶ Cited from *ibidem*.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴⁸ Cited from *Fanios Vilnius*.

representation changed, they were demilitarized and their memories shifted from the public domain to the realms of their private lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that they remained silent and that the male narrative of heroic resistance during the Soviet years predominated. They had to overcome the hurdles of being women and ethnic Jews. After Lithuanian independence in 1990, these Jewish partisans started to tell their stories in memoirs and documentary films. Most of them felt an increased need to speak after the death of their husbands, with whom they had fought in the forests. This personal loss was a rupture, both in their present lives and their past memories. However, as it has been shown, their narratives of active participation in the Lithuanian Jewish resistance were met with contradictory reactions, some of the partisans were even formally alleged to have committed war crimes. After Lithuanian independence, they were also seen as betrayers of their nation and collaborators with the Soviet regime. As Leiserowitz observes “the group pictures of the veterans and their appearances at anniversary events were components of a collective memory in the LiSSR⁶⁴⁹ and were looked on by the Lithuanians as an expression of the Soviet culture of occupation.”⁶⁵⁰ Despite the fact that most of the partisans acknowledged “the hypocrisy of the Soviet power”⁶⁵¹ or were disillusioned with the communist party,⁶⁵² they were still blamed for their collaboration. The partisans were not forgiven, unlike the former Lithuanian communists, the leader of whom, Algirdas Brazauskas, was even elected president of newly independent Lithuania. Nevertheless, as the example of the documentary film *Fanios Vilnius* shows, their persistence in speaking and remembering have altered the prevailing negative perceptions. Today, they are increasingly sharing the stories and memories which were lacking during the Soviet era, when they were only visible—and mute—in photographs.

5.3.3 Remembering the Vilna Ghetto Singer Liuba Levitska in the Film *Ghetto*: The Possibilities and Limits of Cinematic Visualization of Female Experience during the Holocaust⁶⁵³

The first (and only) cinematic film to treat the subject of the Lithuanian Holocaust is the 2006 film *Ghetto*, directed by Lithuanian filmmaker Audrius Juzėnas.⁶⁵⁴ At the time of

⁶⁴⁹ Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic.

⁶⁵⁰ LEISEROWITZ, *In the Lithuanian Woods*, p. 217.

⁶⁵¹ WOOLFSON, p. 113.

⁶⁵² MARGOLIS, *A Partisan from Vilna*, p. 511.

⁶⁵³ A large part of this chapter has already been published. In this work, only limited changes have been made. See GINTARĖ MALINAUSKAITĖ: *From Private to Public Memories: Vilna Ghetto Female Prisoners and their Resistance in Documentary and Narrative Films*, in: ANDREA PETÖ, LOUISE HECHT, KAROLINA KRASUSKA (eds.): *Women and the Holocaust: New Perspectives and Challenges*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 206-232; GINTARĖ MALINAUSKAITĖ: *Filmische Darstellung sexueller Gewalt im litauische-deutschen Shoah Film Ghetto*, in: JACOB GUGGENHEIMER ET AL. (eds.): “When we were gender...”: *Geschlechter erinnern und vergessen*, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 291-304; GINTARĖ MALINAUSKAITĖ: *Film as Erinnerungsraum des Holocaust in Litauen: Jüdische Frauen zwischen Erinnern und Vergessen*, in: ELISABETH CHEAURÉ, SYLVIA PALETSCHEK, NINA REUSCH (eds.): *Geschlecht und Geschichte in populären Medien*, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 269-282.

⁶⁵⁴ This film was created in cooperation with German filmmakers, who also supported its production financially.

its release, *Ghetto*, with a budget of one and a half million euros, was the most expensive Lithuanian feature film ever produced. Before the premiere, it was presented as a ground-breaking film on Lithuanian history and compared to such renowned cinematic works as *Utterly Alone* (2004) about Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance and *The Forest of the Gods* (2005), based on Balys Sruoga's novel recounting his arrest and survival during the war outside Lithuania, i.e., in the Stutthof Nazi concentration camp.⁶⁵⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that this film was highly anticipated by film critics, as this artistic work aimed to show the Second World War from a new perspective and make Lithuanians rethink their own history.⁶⁵⁶ The film's premiere, however, and its presentation of life in the Vilna ghetto sparked public debate and protests, not only from film critics and scholars, but also from survivors of the ghetto themselves.

The film *Ghetto* is based on Joshua Sobol's award-winning play of the same name.⁶⁵⁷ Sobol, a renowned Israeli playwright, adapted the script for the screen himself. The play revolves around Jacob Gens, the chief of the ghetto and police in Vilna,⁶⁵⁸ while the central figure in the film is a female opera singer from the ghetto named Hayyah, whose narration recounts violent events that occurred in the Vilna ghetto between 1942 and 1943, when around fifteen thousand Jews lived in the ghetto and were later executed.⁶⁵⁹ In the film *Ghetto*, the ghetto is run by Gestapo commander Bruno Kittel, who meets the Jewish singer Hayyah. In the film, Kittel, fascinated by Hayyah's singing, decides to open a theater.

In the description of *Ghetto*, director Juzėnas claims that the film is based on authentic documents and represents a real story of events as they happened in the Vilna ghetto. Juzėnas's claims to authenticity, however, have not gone unchallenged. Markas Petuchauskas, a theatrologist and former prisoner of the Vilnius ghetto, saw most of the performances and concerts at the ghetto theater between 1942 and 1943; in his opinion, "it is hard to understand how, after so many years, it is possible to create a film by striking through new facts and memoirs published earlier, castrating real history and at the same time leaving real names of people in the film."⁶⁶⁰ He was disturbed by the fact that in film Gens and Kittel are presented as the founders and leaders of the ghetto theatre:

The film has unambiguously emphasised that the founder of the theatre was the ghetto police commander J. Gens, that Gens and Gestapo commander [Kittel], in fact, led the theatre. After the premiere, I participated in a meeting with Joshua Sobol. I asked the playwright how to understand that a collaborator founds and leads the theatre in the film (whatever complex and tragic figure Gens was) and a Nazi. The playwright claimed that Gens founded the theatre and he referred to H. Kruk, the theatre's chronicler. I answered that the scriptwriter inter-

⁶⁵⁵ VALIULIS.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁵⁷ The play *Ghetto* premiered in 1984 at the Haifa Municipal Theater in Israel and at the Freie Volksbühne in Berlin.

⁶⁵⁸ Gens was named the chief of the ghetto police in September 1941. In July 1942, he was appointed the chief of the ghetto administration, when the Judenrat was dissolved by the Germans. An official designation of his duties was *Gettoversteher und Polizeichef in Wilno*, see TRUNK, p. 12.

⁶⁵⁹ Statistical data is taken from BUBNYS, Vilniaus žydų žudynės, p. 49.

⁶⁶⁰ Interview with Petuchauskas from VASINAUSKAITĖ.

preted H. Kruk too dogmatically, because the latter was against the founding of the theatre together with a group of intellectuals, but only at the beginning. Already after the first public appearances, Kruk turned into a supporter of the theatre [...]. When only the pseudo-creator of the theatre is emphasised, the uniqueness of the latter escapes the film. In this case, the theatre could be included in the list of ‘cultural’ actions organised by Nazis in concentration camps and ghettos [...] in order to entertain themselves, to mock at their victims, to trample on their human dignity, film it and use for propaganda.⁶⁶¹

In 1989, when the play *Ghetto* was shown in New York, the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel also criticized its portrayal of inmates in the Vilna ghetto, calling the play “false and nasty” and even describing it as “‘Hilul hashem’—blasphemy or profanation.”⁶⁶² Both the play and the film draw heavily on details taken from the biography of another ghetto singer, Liuba Levitska, in developing the character of Hayyah, the main character in the film, but Khayele Rozental was an actual ghetto singer, too, so that, as the scholar Rasa Vasinauskaitė observes, the figure “is rather a combined image embodying two different personalities.”⁶⁶³ Given these deviations from the actual events, the film critic Živilė Pipinytė suggested that the film is simply “lost in history.”⁶⁶⁴

One significant difference between the play and the film is that the film includes a subplot of sexual attraction between Hayyah and Kittel, even though in reality these two people never met. The singer Liuba Levitska, upon whom the character of Hayyah is based, had already been executed in Ponary when Kittel arrived as commander of the Vilna ghetto. Vaidas Jauniškis, a Lithuanian cinema and theater critic, reacted very critically to *Ghetto*’s representation of the events in Vilnius, alleging that the film *Ghetto* had had the potential to become “a medicine to heal our historical memory and national consciousness” but had been turned into a love story.⁶⁶⁵ Jauniškis blamed this transformation on the fact that the director had had to cooperate with German and Dutch producers, who had their own expectations for the production; Juzėnas had necessarily made certain sacrifices and compromises.⁶⁶⁶ Such changes for the sake of an artistic interpretation raise the question of where the borders between cinematic invention, historic authenticity, and private memories should lie. There is already a paradox at the very heart of the relationship between authenticity and film.⁶⁶⁷ As the Holocaust film scholar Aaron Kerner observes:

Authenticity is a red herring. Narratives, whether we are speaking of conventional fictional film or documentary, are always already a construct. Historical events can only be *re-presented*; there is no transparent window through which we might render the past. This not to say that “realistic” representations cannot, or should not, be made, but rather that authentic-

⁶⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶⁶² WIESEL, *Art and the Holocaust*.

⁶⁶³ VASINAUSKAITĖ.

⁶⁶⁴ PIPINYTĖ, p. 66.

⁶⁶⁵ JAUNIŠKIS.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibidem. See also, FORUM CINEMAS.

⁶⁶⁷ LANGE, p. 5

ity, whatever that might be, or look like, should not be the criterion on which we predicate our assessments.⁶⁶⁸

The Hungarian author and Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész could not understand why Spielberg claimed *Schindler's List* to be authentic: "It is obvious that the American Spielberg, who incidentally wasn't born until after the war, has and can have no idea of the authentic reality of a Nazi concentration camp. Why, then, does he struggle so hard to make his representation of a world he does not know seem authentic in every detail?"⁶⁶⁹ Like Spielberg, Juzėnas maintained the pretense that his film is authentic, denying the fact that authenticity is merely an illusion. Annette Insdorf during an interview in the documentary *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust* notes that, "we assume that there is a certain verisimilitude, a certain authenticity, but there is always some degree of manipulation, some degree of distortion" involved in motion pictures.⁶⁷⁰ For the purposes of the present study, however, the question of *Ghetto's* authenticity is only part of examining the implications this portrayal of memories had for Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania.

It is also necessary to examine how private memories of the life in the Vilna ghetto and Liuba Levitska—who was mentioned almost in every published memoir about the Vilna ghetto—were visualized so many years later, and what this representation suggests about the cinema's role in the formation of historical memory. The American film scholar Robert Rosenstone states that film provides "an integrative image" and "history in film becomes what it most centrally is: a process of changing social relationships where political and social questions—indeed, all aspects of the past, including the language used are interwoven."⁶⁷¹ According to this argumentation, historical films represent real history or a new method of history.⁶⁷² Thus, what kind of history is being written by the only Lithuanian Holocaust cinematic film? What legacy does the film create for the famous Vilna ghetto singer Liuba Levitska?

Levitska became a famous opera singer in Lithuania during the interwar period. She was one of the Vilna ghetto's most notable personalities. She held concerts for the ghetto's residents, and nearly all the Vilna ghetto diaries and memoirs mention her as a result. Her friend, the librarian Ona Šimaitė,⁶⁷³ called her the "nightingale of the ghetto" and was devastated when she found out about Levitska's death. Šimaitė later published an article in Hebrew about Levitska's life called "Liuba Levitska—Nightingale of the Ghetto" in a women's worker magazine.⁶⁷⁴ Levitska was caught by the chief of the ghetto smuggling peas to her mother; she was initially imprisoned for a month in Lukiškės, and then, in June 1943, she was executed in Ponary. Her story has

⁶⁶⁸ Italics in original. KERNER, p. 15.

⁶⁶⁹ Italics in original. KERTÉSZ, pp. 269-270.

⁶⁷⁰ *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust*.

⁶⁷¹ ROSENSTONE, p. 57.

⁶⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷³ Ona Šimaitė was a Lithuanian librarian. She used to smuggle food into the ghetto and rescue Jews. In 1944, she was arrested by the Gestapo and deported first to Dachau and later to a concentration camp in the south of France. She died in Paris in 1970.

⁶⁷⁴ See, ŠUKYS, Ona Šimaitė, p. 26.

been recounted many times; the details can be also recognized in the novel *Stalemate*, written by the Lithuanian Jewish writer Icchokas Meras, which was published in 1968 and republished in 1998 and 2005. The literary scholar Julija Šukys has collected five different accounts about Levitska; each differs slightly.⁶⁷⁵ The details of the food she was smuggling into the ghetto is usually the main difference: for instance, the historian Yitzhak Arad writes that she was carrying two pounds of grits; the ghetto diarist Herman Kruk says beans; Yitskhok Rudashevski writes in his diary of peas; Maša Rolnikaitė focuses on the amount of peas; and Shoshana Kalisch mentions only a small bag of food.⁶⁷⁶ According to Šukys, such varied accounts of her life show her importance in the life of the Vilna ghetto. She observes that:

The interest in these accounts lies not in pinning down exactly what Levitska was carrying on the day of her arrest; rather in the multiplicity that her story has taken on. The telling of Liuba Levitska's arrest has become a collective endeavor, but the collective story-telling does not result in a single, unified monument to her. Rather, the story explodes into a multiplicity of contradictory accounts. The slight variation in each telling of the story is the stone that each carrier brings to the cairn. It is the differences, the moments of memory lapses and shifts that make the story of Liuba Levitska's death a text of minor literature, and not a myth recited by heart.⁶⁷⁷

The film *Ghetto* could likewise be considered a retelling of her story; it opens with a scene in which the protagonist Hayyah is caught with a bag of peas by ghetto commander Kittel. In the film, however, Hayyah is not executed; instead, she not only remains in the ghetto but also engages in a sexual relationship with Kittel, continues performing in the Vilna ghetto theater, and even escapes to the forests as a Jewish partisan. Her figure becomes a mixture of both armed and spiritual resistance. This presentation of Levitska's life could be understood as a way of showing her immortality and changing her destiny by turning her into an active ghetto fighter. The intimate relationship with the Gestapo commander Kittel is also invented. Hence, in the film, Hayyah becomes a very complex character: on the one hand, she is presented as a ghetto victim and hero of spiritual, and later armed, resistance, while, on the other hand, she is portrayed as a collaborator with the Nazis due to her intimate relationship with Kittel. The film's director advertised this relationship on the poster for *Ghetto* as "passion in the shadow of death." However, as the film critic Laima Kreivytė writes, "not even for a moment can one conceive of any possibility of such passion."⁶⁷⁸ Throughout the entire film, Kittel's fascination with Hayyah is obvious: he is attracted to her both as a woman and as an artist. Kittel himself is a musician and plays saxophone. He does not condemn her to death for the bag of peas she is caught carrying in the ghetto; on the contrary, he turns her into the star of the ghetto theater. Yet the only exchange in the film in Hayyah talks about her relationship with Kittel is not exactly passionate:

⁶⁷⁵ IDEM, *Algiers – Vilnius – Algiers*, p. 92.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibidem, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁷⁸ KREIVYTĖ.



Fig. 21: Public Nudity: Hayyah's body is publicly exposed to Kittel, screenshot from the film *Ghetto*, Lithuania–Germany 2006, Direction: Audrius Juzėnas



Fig. 22: Rape scene in the film *Ghetto*, screenshot from the film *Ghetto*, Lithuania–Germany 2006, Direction: Audrius Juzėnas

Kittel: You are a great performer. Maybe one day we will dance and sing together.
 Hayyah: I can't wait for that day to come.
 Kittel: Neither can I.
 Hayyah: I will see you after the war.⁶⁷⁹

In all the other scenes, her “passion” is voiced through the demonstration of her body. One of the central scenes in the film is the so-called voyeuristic “party” scene, which occurs after Kittel and Gens,⁶⁸⁰ the head of the ghetto police, negotiate over delaying the destruction of Vilna ghetto. This voyeuristic scene takes place in a theater and shows an orgy of completely drunk Wehrmacht soldiers surrounded by Jewish women who are forced to submit to the Germans' sexual desires. Gens uses this atmosphere—and Hayyah—to save the Vilna ghetto from liquidation. He suggests that Kittel kill six hundred elderly ghetto prisoners, instead of two thousand Jews. In this situation of desperation, Gens saves the life of ghetto Jews by using Hayyah and her body. During this scene, Gens removes Hayyah's clothes and has her bare her breasts in front of Kittel (fig. 21). Hayyah has to please Kittel sexually.

This scene also includes the rape and humiliation of other Jewish women (fig. 22), in particular through public nudity. In this scene, however, Hayyah and other Jewish women from the ghetto are wearing fashionable dresses; they are forced to satisfy the Nazi officers' sexual desires. The scene is illustrative of the sexual violence prevalent in the ghetto. Based on the the main character Hayyah's on-screen appearances, the slogan about “passion in the shadow of the death” seems like a very misleading description of their relationship. In a scene where Hayyah dances with Kittel, her eyes are full of fear when he touches and kisses her. However, in the case of these two main protagonists, the scene ends without a direct portrayal of rape, and leaves the viewer with ambiguity. In this scene, there is no verbal mention of sexual violence. The narrator, Hayyah looking back after many years, does not voice this traumatic experience, and neither

⁶⁷⁹ Vilniaus getas.

⁶⁸⁰ Gens sought to save the ghetto from destruction by showing how productive the Jews could be. In September 1943, he was executed by the Gestapo.

Gens nor Kittel comments on it. And while Hayyah is being sexually harassed, Gens and Kittel are discussing the destiny of the Vilna ghetto; the female body is an object of negotiations.

Coercing women in such ways, for example, by removing a woman's clothing, "exposing her person to the gaze of men with whom she had no familial or sexual relationship, was a crude and effective act of sexual violation."⁶⁸¹ As the human rights scholar and lawyer Ni Aolain, who has analyzed sex-based violence in the context of the Holocaust, claims, "nudity in a public context was an abnormal and grotesque experience for these women, and the perpetrators understood that it would be experienced as such by them."⁶⁸² These acts were public, in the case of this film, during the "party" scene. This expression of public gendered violence was a way "to demonstrate humiliation of the loser and the advantage of the victor."⁶⁸³ Moreover, the target was not only the woman herself but also the community surrounding her: parents, partners, children, and others. The goal was to demoralize all of them. In the film *Ghetto*, Hayyah's sexual contact with the Gestapo commander occurs with her tacit consent as her body becomes a tool for the chief of the Jewish ghetto police to save the lives of Jews.

Cinematic treatment of the Holocaust has a long tradition of thematizing sexuality. The literary scholar Rebecca Scherr claims that fictional Holocaust narratives, including screenplays, "treat sexual relationships and eroticism as dominant features of the main character's experience of the Holocaust" and force viewers to navigate between sex and violence.⁶⁸⁴ In such cases, the female body becomes "the site of eroticism and the site of memory."⁶⁸⁵ The sexualization of Holocaust memory already played an important role at the beginning of the postwar period.⁶⁸⁶ Marcus Stiglegger, the author of *Sadiconazista. Faschismus und Sexualität in Film*,⁶⁸⁷ has written about a wave of pornographic representations of fascism and National Socialism in the 1960s and 1980s.⁶⁸⁸ This sexualized Nazi imagery was widespread, not only in German and Italian porno Holocaust films, but even in Israel, where the pornographic magazine *Stalags*,⁶⁸⁹ included pornographic imagery of prisoners in concentration camps and sadomasochism by SS guards. These images mostly focused on the male gaze and their voyeuristic and sadistic tendencies, whereas women were depicted as passive, silent victims.⁶⁹⁰ Similarly, the literary scholar Laura Frost claims that, "fascism was, from its earliest appearance, imagined—in propagandistic, psychoanalytic, historical, and literary discourses—as a political regime with a particularly sexual dynamic."⁶⁹¹ Frost notes that representations of sexualized fascism began to emerge in literary works by non-fascist British and

⁶⁸¹ NI AOLAIN, p. 63.

⁶⁸² Ibidem.

⁶⁸³ Ibidem, p. 78.

⁶⁸⁴ SCHERR, p. 279.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁸⁶ DIETRICH/HANITZSCH, p. 222.

⁶⁸⁷ STIGLEGGER, *Sadiconazista*.

⁶⁸⁸ IDEM, *Die Sexualisierung*.

⁶⁸⁹ *Stalags* became popular in Israel in the 1950s. After Eichmann's trial, it was banned by the Israeli government. See also, *Stalags. Holocaust and Pornography in Israel*, Israel 2008, Direction: Ari Libsker.

⁶⁹⁰ DIETRICH/HANITZSCH, pp. 48-65.

⁶⁹¹ FROST, p. 121

French writers in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁶⁹² These representations “anticipate the tropes that turn up forty years later in works such as *The Night Porter*.”⁶⁹³

In the Lithuanian context, the film *Ghetto* was the first work to intertwine the topics of the Holocaust and sexuality. The first literary work to portray the Holocaust from a pornographic perspective was the 2013 novel *Tamsa ir partneriai*—now published in English under the title *Darkness and Company*—by the renowned non-Jewish Lithuanian author Sigitas Parulskis.⁶⁹⁴ The novel recounts the mass murder of the Jews in Lithuania from the perspective of a young photographer named Vincentas, who unexpectedly witnesses this extermination. Vincentas is forced to photograph the killings of the Jews in order to save the life of his beloved Jewish girlfriend Judita. In one of the most pornographic scenes, Judita is raped by a sadistic SS officer in front of the table on which the severed head of the Jewish Rabin is laid. When Vincent is forced to photograph this sexual violence, he suddenly resolves to strangle the SS officer. Judita subsequently orders him to masturbate in front of the officer’s corpse.⁶⁹⁵ According to Leonidas Donskis, this book is “reminiscent of the aesthetics of shocking beauty deeply permeated with ugliness, inherent in such masterpieces of cinematography as Liliana Cavani’s masterpiece *The Night Porter* and Lina Wertmüller’s *Seven Beauties*.”⁶⁹⁶ The Lithuanian literary scholar and Yiddish poetry translator Mindaugas Kvietkauskas asks if the imagery of the novel, by turning the bodies of Holocaust victims into voyeuristic objects, might not be considered to repeat the violence which had already been inflicted upon them during the Holocaust.⁶⁹⁷ He expresses doubts that this strategy of Holocaust representation in Lithuania—which started with the film *Ghetto*—is the correct way to foster Lithuanian historical consciousness and tolerance.⁶⁹⁸

Indeed, scholars claim that such sexualized imagery has several functions in the shaping of historical consciousness. Silke Wenk argues that the pornographization and feminization of National Socialism is aimed to appease and universalize the history of the Holocaust⁶⁹⁹ and, in some cases, even remove the guilt from its perpetrators.⁷⁰⁰ The American historian Dagmar Herzog has also noticed how sexuality can take on a silencing function; in numerous works, she has traced “how moral debate in postwar Germany was directed away from discussion of complicity in mass murder and toward a narrowed conception of morality as solely concerned with sex.”⁷⁰¹

From this perspective, the pornographic metaphor at the center of the film *Ghetto* is a continuation of the cinematic representation of the Holocaust worldwide. As has been shown above, in the 1960s and 1970s, a market developed for the pornographic representation of fascism and Nazism within Holocaust memorialization.⁷⁰² It was this peri-

⁶⁹² Ibidem, p. 3.

⁶⁹³ Ibidem.

⁶⁹⁴ PARULSKIS.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 233-241.

⁶⁹⁶ DONSKIS, How Memory Prevails.

⁶⁹⁷ KVIETKAUSKAS.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹⁹ WENK, Rhetoriken der Pornografisierung, p. 270.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 280.

⁷⁰¹ HERZOG, p. 148.

⁷⁰² See also, STIGLEGGGER, pp. 183-188.

od that saw the release of films like Liliana Cavani's 1974 film *The Night Porter*; Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 film *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom*; Luchino Visconti's 1969 film *The Damned*; and Bernardo Bertolucci's 1970 film *The Conformist*. Most of these films' content skates "on the border of power relations and sex."⁷⁰³ Kerner uses the term "Naziploitation" for films "combining elements of horror and pornography [...] and thus mixing sexual stimuli (pleasurable feelings, sexual arousal) with violence and gore (feelings of displeasure, repulsion, or disgust)."⁷⁰⁴ Susan Sontag responded to this iconographic trend in her 1975 essay "Fascinating Fascism," asking: "Why has Nazi Germany, which was a sexually repressive society, become erotic?"⁷⁰⁵ She observed:

In pornographic literature, films, and gadgetry throughout the world, especially in the United States, England, France, Japan, Scandinavia, Holland, and Germany, the SS has become a referent of sexual adventurism. Much of the imagery of far-out sex has been placed under the sign of Nazism.⁷⁰⁶

According to Sontag, the iconographic tradition of staging nudity, sexuality, and violence in Holocaust cinema can be traced to the imagery of Nazism itself.⁷⁰⁷ Hitler, similar to Nietzsche and Wagner, "regarded leadership as sexual mastery of the 'feminine' masses, as rape."⁷⁰⁸ Nevertheless, it should be noted that Juzėnas has never stressed the sexual violence inherent in *Ghetto* in promoting the film, which was voted the best Lithuanian cinematic film in 2006. However, the film critic Živilė Pipinytė remarked on this visualization of sexual violence and criticized Juzėnas for (ab)using the episodes of rape just to make the film more dramatic.⁷⁰⁹ She argued that instead of relying on the inner feelings of the characters, Juzėnas had dramatized the film with violent rape and execution scenes.⁷¹⁰ Lithuanian Jews criticized the misrepresentation of the memory of the famous Jewish singer Liuba Levitska, however, the debate about the sexual violence during the Holocaust did not happen. Thus, in this film, the female body became the catalyst of traumatic memory, but this memory was obfuscated, not only by the camera lens, but also by the film director's decision to hide this sexual violence within a dramatic story of passion. In fact, this common cinematic treatment of sexual violence reveals a problem with many Holocaust films: such violence against women, when hidden from view, "creates a closed space very difficult to describe in words."⁷¹¹

There is a general trend in cinematography, including the film *Ghetto*, to either silence sexual violence or beautify it by weaving it into pseudo-romantic love stories. The beautification of the Holocaust and its victims is also apparent in *Ghetto*'s party

⁷⁰³ KOZLOVSKY-GOLAN, p. 241.

⁷⁰⁴ KERNER, p. 142.

⁷⁰⁵ SONTAG, Fascinating Fascism.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁰⁹ PIPINYTĖ, p. 67.

⁷¹⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹¹ KOZLOVSKY-GOLAN, p. 246.



Fig. 23: Preparation for the party, screenshot from the film *Ghetto*, Lithuania–Germany 2006, Direction: Audrius Juzėnas



Fig. 24: Preparation for the party, screenshot from the film *Ghetto*, Lithuania–Germany 2006, Direction: Audrius Juzėnas



Fig. 25: Hayyah performs the song *Ich bin die fesche Lola*, screenshot from the film *Ghetto*, Lithuania–Germany 2006, Direction: Audrius Juzėnas

scene: The party and its preparation are presented very glamorously, and the atmosphere is reminiscent of a cabaret (fig. 23). The Jewish women choose their dresses and do their makeup in front of big and elegant theatre make up mirrors (fig. 24). The faces of the Jewish women from the ghetto are shining and healthy, as if they have never suffered hunger or harsh living conditions. This beautified perception of life in the ghetto is also reflected in Juzėnas’s interviews while promoting the film. In an interview with Vasinauskaitė, Markas Petuchauskas notes that,

Juzėnas [...] maintained in one of his interviews [in the Lithuanian media] that “the Vilnius ghetto was not so poor as that of Warsaw. It had inconceivable entertainment...” and that the Vilnius ghetto could be compared to a small Paris (!). After having read it, I fell into such nostalgia for the year 1943 that I almost regretted escaping the Vilnius ghetto just before its liquidation.⁷¹²

The cabaret atmosphere in the film is intensified by the film director’s cinematic allusion to the director Josef von Sternberg’s 1930 classic *The Blue Angel*, in which Marlene Dietrich played the seductive cabaret dancer Lola-Lola.⁷¹³ Music plays an important role in *Ghetto* in directing the male gaze and turning Hayyah into an object of male fantasies. During the party scene, Hayyah, like Lola-Lola, performs the song “*Ich bin die fesche Lola*” from *The Blue Angel* and performs a dance similar to Dietrich’s,

⁷¹² Cited from the interview with Petuchauskas in VASINAUSKAITĖ.

⁷¹³ This film was banned in Nazi Germany in 1933.

with her legs up in the air (fig. 25). The scholar Judith Mayne observes that Dietrich serves as “the model of the fetishization of the woman” and as the representation of “the woman rendered desirable yet inaccessible through her demeanor and especially through framing and costumes, from veils to feathers.”⁷¹⁴ Similarly, Richard McCormick seconds Laura Mulvey’s claim that Dietrich portrayed “the ultimate fetish” in patriarchal cinema.⁷¹⁵

The film *Ghetto* thus reverses the aesthetics of horror, turning an atrocity into an “aesthetic pleasure”⁷¹⁶ for the spectator’s eyes. Brett Kaplan, who analyzes contradictory aesthetic and Holocaust history, argues that, “we must face the role of the ‘illicit’ aesthetic pleasure of unwanted beauty in transforming memories of this important event in twentieth-century history.”⁷¹⁷ There is a harsh debate in the field of ethics about beauty in Holocaust representation; some scholars “demonize”⁷¹⁸ this beauty by claiming that it leads to “a betrayal of its victims or naïve forgetting of its perpetrators.”⁷¹⁹ They even argue that the Holocaust requires its own aesthetic approach.⁷²⁰ In 1949, the German philosopher Theodor Adorno even claimed that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”⁷²¹ because, in Elaine Martin’s words, “it will fail to produce the knowledge of its own impossibility due to absolute reification.”⁷²² According to Wiesel, himself a famous Holocaust survivor:

The Holocaust is not a subject like all the others. It imposes certain limits. There are techniques that one may not use, even if they are commercially effective. In order not to betray the dead and humiliate the living, this particular subject demands a special sensibility, a different approach, a rigor strengthened by respect and reverence and, above all, faithfulness to memory.⁷²³

Nevertheless, some historians argue that “there is *no crisis of representation* regarding the Holocaust.”⁷²⁴ While I do not believe that Holocaust is unrepresentable *per se*, the case of the film *Ghetto* illustrates how narratives with such reversed aesthetics might encourage forgetting. As Jean François Lyotard claimed, some representations have the potential to “bring back the very thing against which they work unceasingly.”⁷²⁵ The film *Ghetto*, with its glamorous cabaret aesthetics and pornographic episodes, produces a “kitschy memory,”⁷²⁶ which not only fetishizes the female charac-

⁷¹⁴ MAYNE, p. 349.

⁷¹⁵ MCCORMICK, p. 662.

⁷¹⁶ KAPLAN, *Unwanted Beauty*, p. 1.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁷²¹ ADORNO, p. 30.

⁷²² MARTIN, p. 4.

⁷²³ WIESEL, *Art and the Holocaust*.

⁷²⁴ Italics in original. Cited from KAPLAN, *Unwanted Beauty*, p. 4.

⁷²⁵ LYOTARD, p. 26.

⁷²⁶ WENK, *Rhetoriken der Pornografisierung*, p. 283.

ters but also decontextualizes,⁷²⁷ depoliticizes, and dehistoricizes⁷²⁸ Holocaust memory. Instead, art should choose an aesthetic, which is—in the words of the cultural studies scholar Janet Wolff—“adequate to its grave and challenging subject.”⁷²⁹

According to the Israeli film scholar Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan, the cinematic difficulty with depictions of sexual violence persists because film directors are ashamed of this form of abuse or want to respect survivors.⁷³⁰ She suggests that “death in war is easier to stage on film” than rape, as rape “involves physical and emotional injury that cannot be seen.”⁷³¹ This results in sexual violence in Holocaust films quite often being portrayed from a melodramatic or pornographic perspective. The sexualized and melodramatic perception of the Holocaust in films has been labeled as one of the “body genres”⁷³² of contemporary cinema.⁷³³ According to Aaron Kerner, sexual exploitation is a common theme in many of “body genre” Holocaust films, such as Lee Frost’s film *Love Camp 7* (1969) or Tinto Brass’s film *Salon Kitty* (1976).⁷³⁴ Kerner claims that there should be “no intention to ‘save’ or ‘rehabilitate’ pornographic or exploitation films that appropriate Holocaust imagery” because such graphic Holocaust imagery “elicits from us a degree of (negative) pleasure.”⁷³⁵ Kozlovsky-Golan notes that depictions of sexual abuse aim to shock their viewers, but she also suggests that “filming for shock effect can transform a scene from a war crime to a kind of commercial pornography that may injure not only the image of survivor women but also that of the actresses themselves.”⁷³⁶

Petuchauskas argues that, “in the film [*Ghetto*] we see only one genre: a cheap Bordel” [i.e., brothel] and adds that, “in the film, perhaps, seeking a cheap (commercial?) effect, in the scenes of Bordel orgies, we see a character that has nothing to do with [Levitska] and insults her memory.”⁷³⁷ He also asks: “Is it possible to represent the singer in this manner, knowing [Levitska]’s heroic stance in the ghetto, [Lukiškės] prison and [Ponary], without stepping over the limits of morality and correctness?”⁷³⁸ It is known that the historical Levitska experienced real moments of sexual violence in the Vilna ghetto, but not at the hands of SS officers; she was assaulted by Lithuanian men. Her friend Ona Šimaitė writes in her article about Hayyah:

After concerts in the ghetto I have experienced Liuba’s hospitality many times, stayed overnight at her place. One such night she told me how Lithuanian policemen were hunting her

⁷²⁷ Ibidem, p. 290.

⁷²⁸ STIGLEGGER, *Die Sexualisierung*, p. 192.

⁷²⁹ WOLFF, p. 72.

⁷³⁰ KOZLOVSKY-GOLAN, p. 248.

⁷³¹ Ibidem.

⁷³² The concept of body genres was developed by film scholar Linda Williams, who claims that the genres of melodrama, pornography, and horror share “the pertinent features of bodily excess.” See, WILLIAMS, p. 4.

⁷³³ KERNER, p.121.

⁷³⁴ Ibidem, p. 140.

⁷³⁵ Ibidem, pp. 153-154.

⁷³⁶ KOZLOVSKY-GOLAN, p. 247.

⁷³⁷ Cited from his interview with VASINAUSKAITĖ.

⁷³⁸ Ibidem.

as a woman and what gigantic effort she needed to get free. A made-up story that she was infected with syphilis helped. Only Beecher-Stow's quill can describe the spiritual suffering of [Levitska]. And she was happy that she managed to escape the bitterest fate for a woman.⁷³⁹

Šimaitė's account of the sexual violence against Levitska in the Vilna ghetto is a rare exception; until today, not one Jewish Lithuanian woman has spoken about sexual abuse experienced, neither as a resident of the ghetto nor as a partisan hiding in the forests during the armed resistance. The historian Zoë Waxman, who researched rape and sexual abuse in hiding, has observed that women who hid during the Holocaust were "on the margins of society, and this made them extremely vulnerable."⁷⁴⁰ She claims that Jewish women were abused not only by the Nazis but also "by their collaborators and by Jewish men in positions of power."⁷⁴¹ Many of these women could not voice their traumas because they could not "relate their experiences in a context that insists that rape and sexual abuse do not belong to the history of the Holocaust;" they remained "imprisoned by memories that they cannot share."⁷⁴² Thus, even if cinema presents an alternative space for remembering sexual violence, there are still tendencies to conceal and repress sexual violence against Jewish women in these films.⁷⁴³

While *Ghetto* was widely received in the Lithuanian media, sparking extensive discussions among scholars, historians, and Holocaust survivors, other similar feature films, such as *Defiance*, released in Lithuania in 2009, have received far less attention.⁷⁴⁴ Large audiences did turn out for screenings of the film *Ghetto*. The film's opening weekend, which coincided with the national celebration of Lithuanian independence, was especially successful. *Ghetto* was among the most popular films in Lithuania that weekend, selling around ten thousand tickets for a box office total of thirty-five thousand euros.⁷⁴⁵ In total, the film *Ghetto* sold 18,333 tickets in Lithuania, earning 51,109 euros.⁷⁴⁶

The audience reaction to the film was quite varied. For instance, the film critic Skirmantas Valiulis, unlike the Holocaust survivors, did not criticize the historical accuracy

⁷³⁹ Cited from *ibidem*.

⁷⁴⁰ WAXMAN, Rape and Sexual Abuse, p. 124.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

⁷⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 128.

⁷⁴³ KOZLOVSKY-GOLAN, p. 239.

⁷⁴⁴ *Defiance*, directed by the American filmmaker Edward Zick, focused on the story of the Bielski partisans during the Nazi occupation of Belarus; not only was the film shown in Lithuanian cinemas, but it was actually filmed in Lithuanian forests. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian media paid far less attention to *Defiance* than they had to *Ghetto*. The Lithuanian coverage of the film *Defiance* mostly revolved around the main actor Daniel Craig and how the shooting of this film in Lithuania might help to attract more tourists to the country and promote opportunities for the global film industry in Lithuania; historical events played no part in these media discussions. See for instance: 15MIN.LT: Filmas Pasiaprašinimas Lietuva padarė žvaigžde [Film Defiance made Lithuania a star] (8 January 2008), URL: <https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/kinas/filmas-pasipriesinimas-lietuva-padare-zvaigzde-4-22845> (2017-11-19).

⁷⁴⁵ ELTA.

⁷⁴⁶ Financial data about all Lithuanian films is taken from: LITHUANIAN FILM CENTER. As mentioned above, *Ghetto* was less popular than such historical films as *Utterly Alone*, which sold 31,147 tickets for a total of 77,594 euros, or the film *The Forest of the Gods*, with 70,917 viewers and total earnings of 186,372 euros.

of the film, but, in fact, praised the film for “moving forward historically.”⁷⁴⁷ In his article, he focused on the criticism related to the staging of the scenes of nudity, which seemed to him to be “unnatural” and “lacking artistic creativity,” and he wished that the scenes had been filmed more subtly.⁷⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Valiulis did not discuss the fact that these “unnatural” scenes of nudity might have represented actual sexual violence against women during the Holocaust. Valiulis also describes his wife’s reaction to the film: “After the film, my wife started to cry. I understand her completely; it has been a long time since we have seen a film which touched us emotionally in this way. Lithuanians usually create quite boring historical films.”⁷⁴⁹ The head of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, Simonas Alperavičius, who escaped to the Soviet Union with his family at the beginning of the Second World War, called it a highly interesting film that reveals the horrors of the Holocaust experienced by the Jewish community.⁷⁵⁰ Of course, Alperavičius acknowledged a certain dissatisfaction with the misrepresentation of some historical facts, but his general evaluation was quite positive because *Ghetto*—which included scenes with Lithuanian Jewish partisans, of which Hayyah, the main character was one—presented Jews not as passively falling victim to the Nazi regime, but also as actively resisting.⁷⁵¹

Vilnius ghetto survivors, however, especially Petuchauskas, publicly voiced harsh criticism of the film in the Lithuanian press. Petuchauskas wrote: “I am surprised that this has happened in a film screened in 2006 that pretends to be the first feature film, a revelation of the history of the Vilna ghetto and its theater based on authentic documents.”⁷⁵² In Petuchauskas’s opinion, the film invents a new history of the Vilnius ghetto and Levitska’s personality and surpasses the memoirs of former Vilna ghetto prisoners. He writes:

Of course, I would not like to ‘scourge’ the director who has touched this subject for the first time. Perhaps, we can see a certain progress in his work. However, in this case, I am worried about the effect of the film ... Besides, before going to see the film, I was reading reviews by Lithuanian journalists and even upset that they were writing about the ‘easy’ life in the Jewish ghetto. Yet when I saw the film, I understood that this was the only possible way to see the ghetto. And, perhaps, this is what most of [the] people will think of it: the life in the ghetto was effervescent, people used to come to performances, sat there in fur coats and wearing expensive jewellery, etc. I understand that this is props, perhaps, the artist’s ignorance, but when all details accumulate, you cannot stop wondering ... The ghetto was not like this; the Ghetto Theatre was not like this; Vilnius was not like this then ... Sobol wrote that he was shocked having learned about a Ghetto Theatre in Vilnius. After the premiere, I was shocked having learned from the film that such a unique theatre did not exist...⁷⁵³

⁷⁴⁷ VALIULIS.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁵⁰ Cited from BERNARDINALI.T.

⁷⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁷⁵² Cited from VASINAUSKAITĖ.

⁷⁵³ Ibidem.

Such deviation from the historical record can, on the one hand, be regarded as an artistic choice; on the other hand, however, it also reflects the ignorance and disrespect of filmmakers for Jewish Holocaust victims and their memories. The Jewish literary scholar Alvin H. Rosenfeld claims that “all such efforts at ‘adapting’ the Holocaust are bound to fail—artistically, for reasons of conceptual distortion, and morally, for misusing the suffering of others.”⁷⁵⁴ In this manner, cinema becomes paradoxical; it possesses both the “power of life and death” over representations of reality and collective memory.⁷⁵⁵ In addition to supplementing collective memory, it also “acts as a source of societal amnesia.”⁷⁵⁶ Hence, *Ghetto* illustrates quite well what Norman Finkelstein defined as the “Holocaust industry,” which exploits the memory of the Holocaust for political and financial gains.⁷⁵⁷ Similarly, the Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész in his article, “Who Owns Auschwitz?,” observes that “a Holocaust conformism has arisen, along with a Holocaust sentimentalism, a Holocaust canon, and a system of Holocaust taboos together with the ceremonial discourse that goes with it; Holocaust products for Holocaust consumers have been developed.”⁷⁵⁸ Petuchauskas, likewise, ascertains that, as director of *Ghetto*, Juzėnas “allows treating this film as a swallow of the so-called ‘Holocaust industry.’”⁷⁵⁹ When Holocaust survivors in Lithuania saw this film, they likely felt the same way Kertész did after the premiere of Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* when he wrote: “But why should I, as a Holocaust survivor and as one in possession of a broader experience of terror, be pleased when more and more people see these experiences reproduced on the big screen—and falsified at that?”⁷⁶⁰

The film *Ghetto*’s presentation of the history of the Vilna ghetto thus straddles the boundary between factual history and fiction. It uses the female body as a tool of cinematic narration and chooses sexuality as a strategy for speaking about the Holocaust, replacing the aesthetics of horror with the aesthetics of pleasure. Živilė Pipinytė argued that the film was neither authentic nor, properly speaking, a historical reflection.⁷⁶¹ In her opinion, the film not only completely misrepresented historical facts but also turned actual victims into objects of erotic fantasies. This beautification of the Vilna ghetto and its history, completely removed from the original context, only served to normalize and soften the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania by presenting ghetto inmates as having lived an “easy” life in some version of Marlene Dietrich’s cabaret world. The filmmakers thereby completely ignored actual living conditions in the ghetto, which were characterized by sexual violence, extreme poverty, and the Jewish inmates’ constant fear.

⁷⁵⁴ ROSENFELD, p. 154.

⁷⁵⁵ KURASAWA, p. 29.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 35.

⁷⁵⁷ FINKELSTEIN.

⁷⁵⁸ KERTÉSZ, p. 269.

⁷⁵⁹ Cited from VASINAUSKAITĖ.

⁷⁶⁰ KERTÉSZ, p. 269.

⁷⁶¹ PIPINYTĖ, p. 67.

6 Conclusions

The main goal of this book was to investigate the mediation of Holocaust memory in Lithuania by analyzing different forms of media. Three questions guided this investigation: (1) How has the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania been represented in different mediating arenas since 1990? (2) What role has gender played in the development of the Holocaust memory? (3) How have mediated representations of the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania changed since 1990? These questions were examined following the assumption that Holocaust memories in Lithuania should be studied in transnational contexts, in other words, that any study should include the memories of the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora around the world. The results of this research can be used to answer these questions.

6.1 Arenas of Mediation and Representations of Holocaust Narratives

In many cases, the kinds of media that were scrutinized in this work serve not only as an arena of debate but also a place of history writing. Journalists, historians, and witnesses of the Second World War from the Lithuanian exile in the USA began to publish accounts of the Holocaust already in the 1970s, not only in the form of published memoirs and scholarly articles but also interviews and accounts in newspapers catering to the exile community. After Lithuania gained independence in 1990, the media there played a leading role in the formation of historical memories and contributed to the history writing of the Holocaust in Lithuania.

Nevertheless, in the first years of nation-state building, there was a media consensus to speak only about the heroism of anti-Soviet partisans and Lithuanian victimhood during the Soviet occupation. In this period, the Jewish voice and the memory of the Holocaust were not considered. It was only through the process of seeking integration into Western diplomatic organizations that more critical analysis of Lithuanian history gained ground and the Holocaust became a mediated issue. Representations of the Holocaust in Lithuanian national print media—i.e., in the two most popular daily newspapers *Lietuvos Rytas* and *Respublika*—reveal a one-dimensional perception of the past. The Holocaust was usually conceived in the Lithuanian media as the memory of “others.” Lithuanian Jews were presented as a foreign element in Lithuanian historical memory and seldom given a voice to speak for themselves. Even when Lithuanian Jews did appear in Lithuanian newspapers, they were typically consigned to the role of

the commentator monitoring emergent Holocaust narratives. These accounts typically lacked a sense of Jewish agency; there was no Jewish narrative present in the Lithuanian media.

Hence, the memories of the Holocaust in the Lithuanian press devoid of Jews. The media discussion about the photographs in the Lietūkis garage illustrates this tendency. These perpetrator images taken by the German army photographers were the most widely reprinted photographs of the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania. The Lithuanian press treated the images of the Lietūkis garage, which had been popular within Soviet iconography of the Holocaust, not only as Nazi propaganda but also as part of the Soviet visual legacy. As a consequence, Lithuanian journalists, photographers, and even some historians have claimed in the national media that these pictures could be Soviet falsifications and should not be seen as evidence of Lithuanian perpetratorhood in the Holocaust. The memories of Jewish survivors, however, though absent in the Lithuanian media narratives, challenged such assumptions and confirmed that Lithuanians had collaborated with the Nazi perpetrators during the mass atrocities in the Lietūkis garage.

Moreover, the fact that precisely these images have been chosen to discuss the memory of the Holocaust also reveals the ignorance of the Lithuanian media towards the Jewish visual narrative. The Lithuanian newspapers analyzed have printed almost no images made by Lithuanian Jews. The photographs taken in the Kovno ghetto by the survivor George Kadish have been rarely published in the Lithuanian press, even though these pictures have appeared in exhibitions and scholarly publications around the world. It seems that the Lithuanian media favored the visual perspective of the perpetrator; in the meantime, the photographs of Kadish—as well as Kadish himself—have been deleted from the media landscape; they can be found only in museums and some historical publications in Lithuania. Even today, Lithuanian scholarship fails to attribute these photographs to the photographer, as if his name were unknown. They are used to illustrate the mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews without ever discussing the context and conditions under which they were taken.

Therefore, a further aim of this book has also been to approach Jewish narratives of the Holocaust in Lithuania and their representation in the media. I have chosen to depict these narratives through Kadish's photographs of the Kovno ghetto and through documentary films. First, I investigated films documenting Lithuanian Jews' return to their homeland because this is the most frequently recurring narrative in documentaries related to the Holocaust in Lithuania. Documentary films, in contrast to the Lithuanian press, gave Lithuanian Jews a possibility of returning to their homeland. Visual media has also brought the Jewish narrative back into Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania. These documentaries are part of the permanent Holocaust exhibition of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. I analyzed two documentary films which present such narratives. In the analysis of the film *Out of the Forest*, Lithuanian Jews who returned to Lithuania were confronted with landscape memories at the sites of mass atrocities, where almost all of the Lithuanian Jews and their culture were annihilated. All that was left was an empty forest, which, in the film, becomes the main catalyst of memory and awakens the past in the minds of the survivors. My analysis of the film, however, depicts how the forest landscape might serve as an unstable witness or even an implicit

culprit of the Holocaust, transforming and demolishing the material traces of the atrocities. During their visits, survivors were confronted with the incongruity of the beautiful, calm landscape and the erasure of evidence of what had happened there with the traumatic memories of those atrocities.

Nonetheless, in the case of the documentary film *The World Was Ours* by Jedwabnik van Doren, it has been argued that sometimes the bodily return is impossible and only the visual homecoming can be realized. This documentary film serves as a form of visual return for many Holocaust survivors. It presents the Holocaust as a rupture of Jewish life that makes any return to Jewish Vilna impossible. This film narrates the past through pre-war community and family photographs. The aesthetics of the film aids the nostalgic narrative that prevails within the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora. The film not only reveals an unbridgeable distance between the past and present, but it also engages in a restorative form of nostalgia; in other words, this film has visually recreated the pre-war community of the Lithuanian Jews, ninety percent of whom were lost during the war. This documentary provides not only a cinematic representation of memories but has also turned into a site of memory and offers a safe substitution for a physical return to their lost homeland.

The Jewish perspective was also been shown from another angle via the analysis of George Kadish's clandestine images of the Kovno ghetto. His photographs of ghetto streets and portraits of the Lithuanian Jews depicted the spiritual resistance of the inhabitants of the Kovno ghetto. Kadish, in recording ghetto life with his camera, resisted the Nazi regime and its aim to erase completely not only the Jews but also any trace of their existence. Most of his images testify to this inner resistance of the Lithuanian Jews. He presented the Jews in the Kovno ghetto as human beings and not as piles of dead corpses, which was the way that the German photographers usually depicted them. Kadish's photography aimed to show that the inhabitants of the ghetto, in spite of the harsh, humiliating, inhumane conditions, were capable of surviving in a human manner. Therefore, it is not surprising that these photographs were later published by media outlets around the world and incorporated not only into numerous exhibitions but also as important visual material into the memoirs of Lithuanian Jewish survivors. In some cases the images themselves even evoked memories and triggered the author's recollections and writing. In the Lithuanian media, however, as mentioned above, these photographs have been and still are barely present.

6.2 Gendered Memories

This research also asked the question how the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania has been gendered. The answers to this question were offered in the section focused on gendered memories, in which I analyzed the use and abuse of child narratives, the emergence of female partisan narratives, and the representation of Jewish woman as sexual objects in the feature film *Ghetto*. The absence of female perpetratorhood during the Holocaust was also noted in other parts of this work. Moreover, the lack of a gender-based perspective has been also observed in the Lithuanian historiography of the Holocaust.

The chapter on gendered memories discussed how the centrality of the child's image in constructing the visual narration of the Holocaust in Lithuania has many different functions. It analyzed the reception of Kadish's famous picture of two brothers from the Kovno ghetto; the exhibition *Rescued Lithuanian Jewish Child Tells about Shoah*, which was filled with the images of the Lithuanian Jewish children; and the use of Warsaw ghetto boy's photograph in the art of Samuel Bak. The use of these images of children leads to the construction of narratives from the perspective of the most innocent and vulnerable victims of the Holocaust. Children cannot be blamed for collaboration or betrayal, and, therefore, their narratives in Lithuania might be more easily accepted and appropriated by museumgoers and readers. The pictures of children that are used to represent the Holocaust in Lithuania do not typically depict show them dead or suffering; instead, the photos often show them in the ghettos with their families or their lives prior to the creation of the ghetto and the Holocaust, as in case of the exhibition at the Jewish State Museum in Vilnius.

The use of such photographs in Lithuania has tended to normalize the Jewish experience during the Holocaust and create a space in which the the beholder can identify with the individuals pictured or experience a sense of wanting to be a protector. Children's images also have a strong narrative potential for the emotionalization of past memories. Children in photographs appeal to various identities: parents, brothers, sisters, and the child the viewers themselves used to be. In the case of the painter Bak, photographs of children might be even internalized and projected onto one's past. Bak included the image of the Warsaw boy in his paintings because he saw in this boy both his closest friend, whom he lost in the ghetto, and an image of himself as a child during the Holocaust.

The picture of two brothers from the Kovno ghetto has been used in exhibitions all over the world and was also chosen for the cover of a publication about the mass murder of the Lithuanian Jews. However, the public use of this image has revealed that images of children that are decontextualized, anonymized, and used as a universal representation of victimhood might contribute to the erasure of the perpetratorhood. The analysis here has shown how the use of such photographs in exhibitions and publications has softened the atrocities and created a more universal and emotional narrative of the Holocaust in Lithuania.

The Holocaust memories in Lithuania are also gendered through the visual representation of Jewish femininity. For instance, in the case of Jewish female partisans, during the Soviet occupation, their public memories of the partisan fight were silenced and relegated to the sphere of their private lives. The female heroism of Jewish partisans was celebrated in the Soviet Union and Soviet Lithuania for only a very short period of time immediately after the war. Later, in the post-Stalinist years, Jewish female partisans were visualized through photographs as demilitarized Soviet heroes of the Second World War, and only the pacified representations of femininity were visible. Lithuanian Jewish female partisans lacked a visual representation of their active fight during the Holocaust, and none of them published memoirs in the Soviet years. As a result, female partisans' stories were overshadowed by the male narrative of the Second World War in the Soviet period, and the partisan warfare of the Lithuanian Jews had lost its female face. Women in Soviet Lithuania had to overcome a double hurdle: first, as Jewish war

victims, and second, as women, whose role in the narrative of war martyrdom changed in different periods of time. After independence in 1990, these Lithuanian Jewish female partisans started to reclaim their narrative in the armed struggle during the war. Sara Ginaitė-Rubinson and Rachel Margolis published memoirs, in which they claimed that Jewish women fought bravely alongside male partisans and were often in the center of important partisan activities. They negated the unfair devaluation of female combat in the Jewish armed struggle. Fania Brantsovskaya, another female partisan, presented her narrative in various documentary films, focusing on her active participation in the resistance. In all the documentary films, she was presented through the narrative of partisan fight and survival. However, this narrative of partisan warfare came under fire in Lithuania, where some of these partisans were even investigated for crimes against the humanity. Nevertheless, these investigations were inconclusive and closed without charges being brought. As I have noted, the negative reception of these female narratives might be related to Soviet legacies. Soviet narratives of the war depicted the Lithuanian Jewish partisans as the heroes of the war. Therefore, after independence in 1990, Lithuanian Jewish female partisans were associated with the Soviet regime and seen as enemies of the Lithuanian nation; they became anti-heroes and were even blamed for collaborating with the communist regime.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Lithuanian Jewish women also became objects of cinematic representation, but the only feature film to date about the Holocaust in Lithuania, *Ghetto*, presented women as objects of sexual desire and eroticism. This film told the life story of the famous Lithuanian Jewish opera singer Liuba Levitska. The director Audrius Juzėnas emphasized the importance of authenticity in making this film, but, as my research has shown, the memories about Levitska were not only inauthentic but also distorted by a voyeuristic perspective. The film presents Jewish women as sex objects and invents a love story as the backdrop for a Nazi police commander to sexually abuse the film's protagonist. Because the issue of sexual violence has been never thematized by the filmmakers or in the media, this film has reinforced a masculine, voyeuristic narrative about Lithuanian Jewish women; instead of commemorating their collective destiny during the Holocaust, the film has posited a competing fictional narrative which means that the historical suffering of this group is in danger of being forgotten.

Another important gender-based issue in the field of Holocaust research in Lithuania is the representation of perpetratorhood. In the case of Lithuanian collaboration with Nazi Germany, it is difficult to find any women who have been visualized or framed as perpetrators. Only Helene Holzman, in a diary written during the war, claims that some wives of the ghetto administration used Jewish victims, without any compassion, as "servants" in their households. Nevertheless, neither the extant visual images nor written accounts of the June uprising in Lithuania suggest the presence of female among the White Armbanders or partisans. The pictures of the Lietūkis garage massacre are also an example of male perpetratorhood; they depict women as passive observers of the mass atrocities. Lithuanian historiography in general has discounted women's historical agency, portraying them thus neither as heroes nor as perpetrators. The question of female perpetratorhood in Lithuania during the Holocaust has not yet been addressed and requires further research.

For many years, the memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania has been dominated by male narratives. This phenomenon might be related not only with the memory legacies from Soviet times but with the mostly male-dominated historiography of the Holocaust. Male historians and journalists have been responsible for the bulk of the books, research, and debates about the Holocaust in Lithuania, however, ignoring the dimension of gender. In the case of Lithuania, the gendered-based perspective of the Holocaust is evident primarily in the female survivors' accounts. As has been shown, however, in the case of the Lithuanian Jewish female partisans, their versions of memory have not always (or not so quickly) been legitimized in the public arena or been accepted in the established scholarship on the Holocaust in Lithuania.

6.3 Changes in Holocaust Narratives

There have been several phases of development of Holocaust narratives in Lithuania in the decades since Lithuania gained independence: (1) the first years of independence between 1990 and 1995; (2) the years of seeking integration into Western organizations between 1995 and 2004; and (3) since the admission to the EU and NATO in 2004. Although it is difficult to draw the line between these transformations in the memorialization of the Holocaust, my analysis of different sources of Lithuanian media pointed to this periodization based on the existence of distinct Holocaust narratives at different historical moments in Lithuania.

Immediately following independence, Holocaust memory was silenced and forgotten. In this period, the narratives of the conservative stream of the Lithuanian exile were revived in which Lithuanians were seen as heroes of the anti-Soviet resistance. The June uprising—which occurred in June 1941 and coincided with the beginning of the Holocaust—was chosen as an important moment in Lithuanian history. This narrative of the uprising aimed to confirm the heroism of non-Jewish Lithuanians fighting against the Soviet regime, but the fact that some of the uprising's participants later took part in mass executions of Lithuanian Jews has been silenced. The nation-state building process required a narrative of heroes and victims rather than of perpetrators. The marginalization of the Holocaust narrative has also materialized through the state reburial of Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis and Kazys Škirpa, the former leader of the LAF. Škirpa, for instance, was known for his antisemitism in the interwar period. Despite his views on Jews during the war, he was brought back to Lithuania and reburied as a national hero. The return of his body to Lithuania might also have been seen as a symbolic return of the exilic narrative of the Second World War, in which Lithuanian Jews and the Holocaust were not seen as part of the history of Lithuania.

The marginalization of Holocaust narratives in the first phase of Lithuanian independence was influenced by two historical legacies; first, by the memorialization of the war within the conservative stream of the Lithuanian exile, and, second, by the ideologization and selective representation of Holocaust memories in Soviet Lithuania. This study has shown that memories of the Holocaust within the exile communities were very dynamic, which led to the first debates about the Holocaust in Lithuania within Lithuanian exile media. Numerous accounts of these historic events were pub-

lished in such media outlets. Some Lithuanians, however, promoted a heroic narrative of Lithuanian history and refuted all accusations of collaboration. This conservative narrative became very influential during the nation-state building process in Lithuania after 1990. Other Lithuanians in exile, including Lithuanian Jews, urged the nation to admit its mistakes and acknowledge its responsibility in the killing of the Jews. Conservative members of the Lithuanian exile community, residing mostly in the USA, have blamed Americans for “overmemorializing” the Holocaust. Moreover, they have contributed, in some cases with their silence and ignorance, to antisemitic campaigns carried out in the USA against local Jews, including Lithuanian Jews, who lived in their neighborhood.

Soviet ideologies also played a role in the silence about the Holocaust. In Soviet Lithuania, the official Holocaust memory was very static; there were no debates, only the official representation of the facts used to reach ideological goals. After the repressive Stalinist era ended in 1953 with the dictator’s death, Soviet Lithuania became a “Jewish island” in the Soviet Union. Literary works by Lithuanian Jewish writers, survivors’ memoirs, and semi-scholarly works started to appear. Even though most of the works were censored or ideologically influenced, Lithuanian Jewish writers such as Icchokas Meras and Grigorij Kanovič managed to transmit Jewish memories in Soviet Lithuania. Other Holocaust memories diverging from the Soviet ideology remained in the realm of private remembering. Nevertheless, narratives in Soviet publications or cinematic representations of the Second World War often turned Jews into anonymous victims. Jews have been depicted as “Soviet citizens” and their memories were used to create narratives of the Soviet victory in the Second World War. The legacies of Holocaust memorialization in exile and in Soviet Lithuania were challenged in 1995, when changes in Holocaust remembrance occurred. In 1995, the Lithuanian president Algirdas Brazauskas apologized in Israel for Lithuanian collaboration in the Holocaust, acknowledging that some Lithuanians had committed atrocities against the Lithuanian Jews. Even though this apology was criticized in Lithuanian national media, it marked the beginning of new phase of Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania.

In this book, I have examined how the Holocaust has emerged as a historical, political, and media topic in Lithuania. These changes in the perception of the Holocaust are closely associated with Lithuania’s admission to the European Union and NATO. In 1995, Lithuania initiated the process of integration into these Western organizations. The accession to the EU and NATO required Lithuanian foreign policy to reconsider the issue of the Holocaust in Lithuania. Thus, it is not surprising that Brazauskas chose the Council of Europe as the first location to deliver the speech of apology; only afterwards did he speak in front of the Knesset in Israel. In 1998, President Valdas Adamkus issued a decree creating The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania. The Holocaust had become part of a political agenda. However, despite these changes, some Lithuanian politicians tried to foster a nationalistic historical narrative: in 2000, the Lithuanian parliament tried to pass a law which would make the day of the June uprising a national day of celebration. Some Lithuanian historians and members of the Lithuanian Jewish community used the media as an arena to express their disappointment with this politics of memory, and they succeeded in stopping the implementation of this law. This protest in media also

revealed that the Lithuanian media had become historically sensitive and open a diversity of memories, allowing for the discussion of different versions of history.

The year 2004 marks another shift in Holocaust memorialization; this is the year that Lithuania entered the EU and NATO. Lithuanian politicians in the EU started to use the Holocaust as a template for condemning communist crimes under the Soviet regime. Lithuania, like other Eastern European countries, chose to take a defensive position, claiming victim status for their nation and equating communist atrocities with the Holocaust. Therefore, it could be claimed that the Holocaust memory in Lithuania developed in a circular manner; until 1995, it was an invisible and marginalized memory, whereas in the period of integration into Western organizations, it emerged as part of the Lithuanian memory of the Second World War, and a representative of the state even delivered an apology speech in Israel. However, after 2004, when Lithuania became an official member of the EU and NATO, Holocaust memory started to be seen again as the memory of “others” and was used in the international arena in order to articulate the crimes of the Soviet regime.

As this research has shown, Lithuanian Jews living in the international diaspora have challenged the memorialization of the Holocaust in Lithuania and its narratives in the national media. Some of these challenges have been in the form of film: In 2003, Israeli filmmakers convinced Lithuanian Jews to return to Lithuania and to testify at the site of the mass killing in the Ponary forest for their film *Out of the Forest*. This film depicted not only the existing conflicts of memory in Lithuania but also highlighted the fact that all that is left of the Lithuanian Jewry after the war is the forests of death. *Out of the Forest* remains one of the most internationally acknowledged documentary films about the Holocaust in Lithuania. It has been shown at the Berlinale and discussed in international media. In 2006, Mira Jedwabnik van Doren also reacted to the loss of Jewish Vilna and created an alternative narrative about the Jewish Lithuania, showing how vivid and important the Jewish community had been in the pre-war years with her film *The World Was Ours*. The narrative of the Holocaust as somehow separate from Lithuanian history, as a history of “others,” also contradicts the photographic legacies represented by the images of the Lietūkis garage massacre and George Kadish’s photographs, which serve as visual proof that the Holocaust and its atrocities should be seen as part of the Lithuanian memory landscape. Thus, this book portrays how the narratives of the Holocaust, which have been shaped in Lithuania and its media, have often been reflected and contradicted by visual narratives of the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora, international media, and international filmmaking, especially since Lithuania’s admission to Western organizations.

6.4 Critical Considerations

This book aimed to analyze the mediation and representations of media narratives and iconographies of the Holocaust in Lithuania and to trace the changes in those representations from Lithuania’s independence in 1990 to the present, while also examining alternate narratives constructed in Soviet Lithuania and the Lithuanian exile community in the United States, as well. One of the challenges of this research has been the

broad spectrum of material which required that I limit myself by focusing on two national newspapers and selected Holocaust photographs and films. This research could have been conducted by focusing solely on Lithuanian national media and Holocaust documentary films created in Lithuania, but such an attempt would have shown only a small part of the Holocaust narratives and iconography. Furthermore, the Holocaust documentaries made in Lithuania, as has been mentioned, have already been thoroughly analyzed in doctoral research by another Lithuanian historian, Rūta Šermukšnytė. Moreover, most of the narratives, especially those in national media, lacked Jewish agency and such analysis would have represented the memory of the Holocaust without Lithuanian Jews. The inclusion of documentary films made outside Lithuania, albeit in many cases by exiled Lithuanian Jews, or the examination of the photographs captured by Lithuanian Jew Kadish, allowed me to reconstruct Jewish perceptions of the past.

Of course, I could have also focused solely on visual material, i.e. films and photographs. Doing so, however, would have lost the background and context of the visual material essential to understanding both the development of the Holocaust narratives and the visual iconography. This work has also shown that, in some cases, the development of Holocaust narratives has resulted in the production of documentary films which presented these alternative narratives.

While my research has focused only on one group of Holocaust victims, the Jews, future research should investigate memories of the “forgotten Holocaust”—e.g., violence against Romanies, the mentally disabled, homosexuals, Soviet war prisoners, and others—in order to complete the picture of the Holocaust in Lithuania. There is a dearth of such research for the Lithuanian context, with the exception of several studies on the fate of the Lithuanian Romanies and Soviet war prisoners during the Nazi occupation.

7 Zusammenfassung

Mediated Memories: Narratives and Iconographies of the Holocaust in Lithuania

Ziel des vorliegenden Bandes ist es, Darstellungen des Holocaust in den litauischen Medien, Fotografien und Dokumentar- und Spielfilmen zu analysieren. Die Studie fokussiert auf mediale Darstellungen und Inszenierungen seit 1990 bis zur Gegenwart unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Geschichte der Juden in Litauen sowie der Geschichte des Holocaust und der Nachwirkungen des Krieges. In den Nachkriegsjahren wanderten die wenigen litauischen Holocaust-Überlebenden aus und trugen ihre Erinnerungen an das Kriegselend mit sich. Daher werden im ersten Teil der Studie nicht nur Vernichtung und Überleben des litauischen Judentums aufgezeigt, sondern darüber hinaus auch die Migration von jüdischen Erinnerungen sowie die historischen Rahmenbedingungen für die Entstehung transnationaler Holocaust-Erinnerungen beleuchtet.

Im zweiten, chronologisch angeordneten Teil konzentriert sich die Analyse auf die Entwicklung von Holocaust-Narrativen in Litauen. Bei dieser Untersuchung werden zunächst die sowjetischen Narrationen des Holocaust sowie die medialen Holocaust-Debatten im litauisch-amerikanischen Exil, wo man sich bereits Mitte der Siebzigerjahre mit den Ereignissen des Zweiten Weltkriegs und dem Massenmord an den Juden in Litauen auseinandersetzte, eingehend diskutiert. Der Band legt dar, dass die Entstehung von Holocaust-Narrativen in Litauen seit 1990 überwiegend mit den Erinnerungskulturen der Sowjetzeit sowie mit den medialen Kriegsdarstellungen in der Exilgemeinde verwoben ist, deren Mitglieder ebenfalls in den Nachkriegsjahren das Land verlassen hatten. Bei der Analyse der Konstruktion der Holocaust-Narrative nach der Wiederherstellung der Unabhängigkeit Litauens im Jahr 1990 werden drei Perioden der Erinnerungen an den Holocaust beschrieben: die ersten Jahre der litauischen Unabhängigkeit (1990-1995), die Phase der Integration Litauens in die westlichen Organisationen (1995-2004) und die Zeit nach dem Beitritt zu EU und NATO (2004 bis heute). Dabei wird ein dynamischer Wechsel der Narrative herausgearbeitet.

In den ersten Jahren nach der Auflösung der Sowjetunion gerieten die Erfahrungen der Juden während des Zweiten Weltkriegs sowie deren Vernichtung mithilfe zahlreicher einheimischer litauischer Kollaborateure in Vergessenheit. In diesem Buch wird dargelegt, dass in jener historischen Periode das litauische Opfernarrativ und die Heroisierung des antisowjetischen Kampfes von besonderer Wichtigkeit waren. Der

Nation-Building-Prozess machte Nationalhelden und Opfermythos erforderlich und somit blieben die litauischen Holocaust-Täter und ihr Handeln von den medialen und politischen Narrationen ausgegrenzt. Die Studie führt aus, wie die Integration Litauens in die westlichen Organisationen, besonders die Einbindung in NATO und EU, die Entwicklung von Holocaust-Narrativen im Land geprägt hat und wie sich der Holocaust zu einem medialen sowie politischen Thema hin entwickelt hat. Es wird aufgezeigt, dass der Beitritt in die EU und die NATO die Entwicklung neuer Erinnerungsmuster verlangte. Im Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit steht die Frage, welche Bedeutung der Israel-Besuch des damaligen Präsidenten Algirdas Brazauskas, seine öffentliche Entschuldigung an das jüdische Volk sowie deren mediale Inszenierung und Rezeption für die medialen Darstellungen des Holocaust und der Kriegereignisse in Litauen hatte. Außerdem wird dargelegt, dass in den Jahren nach der erfolgreichen Einbeziehung in die westlichen Organisationen der Holocaust häufig von litauischen politischen Akteuren und den litauischen Medien als Vorlage für die Anerkennung von Verbrechen des kommunistischen Regimes ausgenutzt wurde. Dennoch wird nun, nach fast 30 Jahren Unabhängigkeit, die Entfaltung der Holocaust-Debatte nicht nur von lokalen, nicht-jüdischen Akteuren geprägt, sondern auch von der Medialisierung der rückkehrenden transnationalen jüdischen Erinnerungen – durch die litauische Presse und/oder filmische Darstellungen – bestimmt.

Der dritte Teil des vorliegenden Bandes setzt sich mit fotografischen und filmischen Darstellungen des Holocaust in Litauen auseinander. Dabei geht es zunächst um die Analyse von Bildern der Heimkehr. Hier werden die Funktionen des Mediums Film für die jüdischen Überlebenden diskutiert und narrative Vermittlungen von Holocaust-Erinnerungen untersucht. Im Zentrum dieses Teils stehen zwei Dokumentarfilme: *Out of the Forest* (2003) und *The World Was Ours* (2006). Diese zwei filmischen Darbietungen zeigen die Vielschichtigkeit der Heimkehr jüdischer Überlebender nach Litauen. In dem israelischen Film *Out of the Forest* kehren die litauischen Juden real, physisch nach Litauen zurück. Es wird darüber gesprochen, dass sie dort nicht nur mit Tod kontaminierte und sprachlose Landschaften finden, sondern auch dem gesellschaftlichen Schweigen über die dort begangenen Verbrechen begegnen. Demgegenüber zeigt der Dokumentarfilm *The World Was Ours* von Mira Jedwabnik van Doren, einer litauischen Jüdin aus New York, deutlich, dass eine physische Heimkehr aus der neuen Heimat in die alte für viele litauisch-jüdische Überlebende nicht möglich ist. Hier wird eine Narration nostalgischer und mentaler Heimkehr thematisiert. Die beiden Filme sind auch im musealen Kontext ausgestellt und damit für ein breiteres litauisches Publikum öffentlich zugänglich. Daneben befasst sich die Arbeit auch mit fotografischen Darstellungen des Judenmords. Die Analyse der Fotografien beschäftigt sich nicht nur mit der visuellen Perspektive der Täter, sondern auch mit der Sichtweise der Opfer. Untersucht werden hierbei die fotografischen Aufnahmen deutscher Offiziere sowie die Fotografien des jüdischen Überlebenden aus dem Ghetto Kaunas, George Kadish. Der Schwerpunkt der Analyse liegt nicht nur auf den unterschiedlichen Entstehungskontexten dieser Aufnahmen und ihrer Bedeutung als Erinnerungsmedium, sondern auch auf ihrer medialen Rezeption und dem zeitlichen Bedeutungswandel.

Ein weiterer Aspekt, der in diesem Band analysiert wird, bezieht sich auf geschlechtsspezifische Visualisierungen von jüdischen Frauen, Holocaust-Kindern und

jüdischen Partisaninnen. Zunächst geht es um die visuellen Darstellungen von Holocaust-Kindern. Es wird dargelegt, dass die Kinderopfer als Metapher für die Schuldlosigkeit und Normalisierung des Kriegsalltags fungieren. Daraufhin wird der Frage nachgegangen, wie die Holocaust-Kinderbilder in Litauen dargestellt und kontextualisiert sind. Das Buch möchte aufzeigen, wie die Verwendung fotografischer Aufnahmen von jüdischen Kindern und deren starke emotionale Aufladung zur Normalisierung des jüdischen Lebens während des Krieges beitragen können. Die geschlechtsspezifische Perspektive des Holocaust in Litauen lässt sich auch anhand der visuellen Darstellungen jüdischer Partisaninnen sichtbar machen. Bei der Untersuchung dieser Problematik wird zunächst die Vermännlichung des Partisanenkampfes in der Sowjetzeit betont sowie das Schweigen der jüdischen Partisaninnen in Sowjetlitauen unterstrichen. Der vorliegende Band zeigt, wie nach der Erlangung der Unabhängigkeit Litauens die weiblichen Partisaninnen eine doppelte Hürde, als Frauen und gleichzeitig auch als jüdische Opfer, überwinden mussten, um in den medialen Erinnerungsdiskurs integriert zu werden. Hier wird nach deren neuer Selbstwahrnehmung sowie medialen Darstellungsmustern in den Jahren nach der Erlangung der Unabhängigkeit Litauens gefragt. Schließlich wird anhand der Analyse des Spielfilms *Ghetto* auf die Vergeschlechtlichung des Holocaust fokussiert. Dabei wird die voyeuristische und sexualisierte Erzählung der Judenvernichtung untersucht und der Frage nach der Funktion solcher Hypersexualisierung der jüdischen Frauen und deren Holocausterinnerungen nachgegangen. Außerdem werden die kinematografische Authentizität und deren Auswirkung für die Memorialisierung des Holocaust in Litauen problematisiert.

Die Studie leistet einen Beitrag zur Herausbildung einer litauischen Forschung zur Erinnerung an den Holocaust und schließt damit eine Lücke zu litauischen Darstellungen des Holocaust in visuellen Medien unter starker vergleichender sowie geschlechtsspezifischer Perspektive.

8 List of Abbreviations

AFO	Anti-Fascist Organization
DP	Displaced Person
FPO	Fareynigte Partizaner Organizatsye (in Yiddish); United Partisan Organization
EU	European Union
HKP	Heereskraftpark (in German); Army Motor Vehicle Repair Park; Forced labor camp in Vilna
JAC	Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee
JDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
LAF	Lithuanian Activist Front
LRT	Lithuanian National Radio and Television
LSP	Lithuanian Secret Police
LSSR/LiSSR	Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NKVD	Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (in Russian); The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
N.N.	Nomen nescio (lat.), anonymous or unknown person
ORT	Organization for Rehabilitation through Training
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe

TOZ	Society for the Protection of Health of the Jews
UNCG	The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
URO	United Restitution Organization
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
YIVO	Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut (in Yiddish); Institute for Jewish Research

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HERDER-INSTITUT
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This book explores mediated memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania from 1990 until today. The analysis focuses on press, photographs, and films. The first section of the book examines the history of the Holocaust in German occupied Lithuania as well as its memorialization in Soviet Lithuania and in the Lithuanian-American exile community. A substantial examination of the construction of Holocaust memories in the Soviet times and in the Lithuanian exile in the postwar years is crucial in understanding the development of Holocaust narratives and iconographies in Lithuania after 1990.

The second half of the study then reveals the development of Holocaust narratives and offers a periodization of the Holocaust memorialization in Lithuania after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Three main periods are distinguished: the first years of independence (1990-1995), the years of integration into Western organizations (1995-2004), and the period after Lithuania's accession to the EU and NATO (2004 to present).

The third section of the book focuses on iconographies of the Holocaust in Lithuania in film and photography. These narratives are first depicted through the analysis of film images of the homecoming of Lithuanian Jews. The visual perspective of the Holocaust is then enriched by the study of photographs taken by perpetrators and Jewish victims during the Holocaust in Lithuania. The book discusses how these Holocaust images have been perceived and mediated after collapse of the Soviet Union. Finally, by exploring the representation of Jewish femininity, the use of Holocaust images of children and the emergence of iconographic female partisan narratives, the book discusses how the memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania have been gendered in recent times. This work offers a multi-perspective insight into how memories of the Holocaust in Lithuania are narrated, visualized, and gendered through different types of media.

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