

Europe for Citizens Program/European Remembrance
April 17, 2015
Vilnius

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"Myths, Stereotypes, and the Search for Truth: Holocaust Narratives in Eastern and Western Europe"

Prologue: What is History?

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said that a person cannot step into the same river twice, thus emphasizing by metaphor the point that every experience is unique, occurs only once, is unrepeatable, instantly disappearing into the flow of time. Thus, any experience of the past is possible only through a reconstruction. History, memoirs, chronicles, myths, legends and folklore—these are all just variations of *retelling* the past, that is, *narratives*. Narratives recreating that which we call "historical truth" are generally considered the most reliable and authentic. Without a doubt, followers of post-modernism would object to the concept of "historical truth" as meaningless or at best useful only as a provisional narrative, since history is only one of many possible subjective reconstructions of the past. But even if we reject this nihilistic view of scholarly history, we would, nonetheless, have to admit that the reconstruction process is rather complicated.

In a book review dealing with repressed memories, the neurobiologist Steven Rose explained the problem of knowing the past as a conflict between two kinds of truth: historical truth, which is what actually happened, and narrative truth, that is, the retelling of a remembered event. If human memories were like computer memories, he wrote, neatly filed somewhere on a disc and waiting to be called up, the two truths [historical and narrative] might be identical. But our memories are not like this; they are biological, labile, and dynamic. [Note: The argument is in Steven Rose, "Two Types of Truth", *NYT Book Review*, May 22, 1994, a review of Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory* and Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories*.] What Rose referred to as "historical truth" might also be termed "experienced truth." The only people to *experience* the Holocaust were the victims, perpetrators and rescuers. In a moral sense, bystanders also lived through the genocide. But it must be remembered that their experienced truth reaches us through the filters of memory and history. The problem arises when the reconstruction of the event is identified as its reality. It is difficult to determine the authenticity of the remembered past by relying exclusively on a person's memory, so historians try to judge the reliability of different versions of the past by searching for additional sources.

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (incidentally a victim of the Nazis who died at Buchenwald in 1945) was probably the first to emphasize the significance of "collective memory." Collective memory, as in that of the individual, is flexible and receptive. It not only

changes over time, but also prepares the ground for stereotypes and myths. Myths created by collective memory are immune to criticism and analysis: usually we either accept or reject them. Halbwachs maintains that it operates not just selectively, not just "remembering" that which is useful, but also by "forgetting" that which is not. (When myths are analyzed scientifically, they become subjects for anthropology, literary studies and folklore).

The marking of historical dates and symbols of the past fortify the foundations of collective memory and create a *memorial* (commemorative, monumental) history, which aspires to memorialize the great deeds of the nation, to recall losses and tragedies, to honor the dead and to inspire loyalty to the nation. Memorial/monumental history is a political-moral activity. War, occupations, collaboration, resistance and genocide, that is, issues, which evoke moral judgements, are particularly sensitive aspects of collective memory.

Calls to "defend history" are often heard, as are demands to introduce an official "history policy" (*istorijos politika*) on the state level, as if this would guarantee a "true" history. In one way or another history's guardians promote the idea that a single exclusively true and unchanging reconstruction of the past actually exists, one that we must preserve and defend from distortion. (Interestingly, we do not hear calls for the need to "defend" chemistry or physics). The discipline of history, or history as a social science, is not a marble statue. As with other disciplines, history does not sit still but instead develops in the context of continuous reinterpretation and change. History is the reconstruction of the past while employing a critical assessment of available narrative sources according to accepted academic practice.

The Formation of the Concept of the Holocaust in the West

Looking briefly at the development of the concept of the Holocaust in the West, there are several distinct and important phases in the formation of our understanding of the genocide of the Jews. Raul Hilberg's major work *The Destruction of the European Jews*, which appeared in 1961, was likely the most powerful impulse for the creation of Holocaust studies in the West. The author is rightly considered the initiator of Holocaust studies. Hilberg focused mainly on a description of the bureaucratic and police apparatus created by the perpetrators of genocide, emphasizing that "the destruction of the Jews was an administrative process, and the annihilation of Jewry required the implementation of systematic administrative measures in successive steps." (*Destruction*, p. 4).

Hilberg distinguished four stages in the execution of genocide as the paradigm for the destruction of the Jews:

1) [**Definition**]: Definition of the victim/enemy: Who is a Jew? A member of the community, or a member of a certain "gene pool"? (The definitive answer to that question was provided by the so-called Nuremberg laws of the 1930s); 2) [**Expropriation**]: Expropriation, not just of property, but also the abrogation of civil rights; 3) [**Concentration**]: The physical "concentration," or "isolation" (legal, physical) of the defined victims, and their final ghettoization (logical conclusion: if the enemy is dangerous, how can he be allowed to live among us?); 4) [**Destruction**]: The destruction of the victims, the logical final stage usually carried out within the context of total war.

Hilberg's interest lay in the course of the Holocaust, the *how* rather than the *why*. This exposed the author to criticism. Some criticized him for not paying sufficient attention to the victims of the Holocaust, and especially for minimizing the Jewish resistance. Others called upon

him to look more closely at the phenomenon of collaboration, to place more stress on the ideology of Nazism as the major factor. Hilberg's *magnus opus* encouraged historians to take a deeper look at the issue of the Holocaust. Over the years, the result was an impressive scholarly production: thousands of general histories, monographs, articles and bibliographies. Many contentious issues have arisen as well. One of the most important of these: Who murdered, and why?

In the monograph *Ordinary Men* (1992), Christopher Browning tried to answer this essential question. The author investigated the actions of a typical German police battalion in Poland. This unit, consisting of older reservists (about 500 men) murdered or sent to death camps about 83,000 Jews. Browning maintained that the battalion participated in mass murder operations mainly out of obedience to commanders, but also because of peer pressure from their comrades, a submission to the group. In the author's view of things, anti-Semitism, hatred of the victims and Nazi ideology had less influence on the soldiers. Obedience to the bureaucratic mechanism and loyalty to comrades played the main role in turning "ordinary men" into murderers. Sadists and staunch Nazi true believers were the minority.

The sociologist Daniel Goldhagen vigorously attacked Browning's thesis in his *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996). Goldhagen believed the strongest stimulus to destroy the Jews, the entire basis of the Holocaust, was the ideology of "eliminationist anti-Semitism" prevalent in the Third Reich, whose sources were found not just in the political program of 19th-century German anti-Semites, but in the hatred for Judaism which arose in the Middle Ages. Goldhagen believed the genocidal mindset directed exclusively against Jews was characteristic of German society, so that "average Germans" enthusiastically engaged in murder and distinguished themselves with unusual brutality. Goldhagen's *Executioners* became a sensational best-seller and thousands of visitors attended book signings in Germany. Goldhagen didn't fare as well in academic circles, however, and was the subject of much criticism by historians and Holocaust experts. The sharpest critiques came from Hilberg himself and the recognized dean of Holocaust historians, Yehuda Bauer.

"The Goldhagen Controversy" reflected both a wider discussion of the reasons behind the Jewish genocide among historians and growing public interest in the Holocaust in film, literature and the news media. The film *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), based on the well-known diary, had earlier achieved great success. The diary, which until then had only seen limited demand, became a bestseller. In 1960 the much-visited Anne Frank Museum was established and Frank suddenly became something of an icon of Holocaust victims. In 1978 the American miniseries *The Holocaust* aired and drew tens of millions of viewers. It is estimated that about half of the population of West Germany watched the series. After each episode, viewers were provided the opportunity of calling in questions to a group of historians. Thousands of telephone calls bombarded the airwaves. The historians simply did not have time to answer all the questions posed. Many Germans born after the war said it was the first time they had heard about the genocide perpetrated by the Third Reich and persistently asked why it had not been taught in the schools. The official German language association Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache named the word *Holocaust* the word of the year for 1979.

The expansion of historical studies of the Holocaust revealed a series of stereotypes. One of the most enduring was the "innocence of the Wehrmacht" narrative entrenched in Germany, according to which rank-and-file soldiers "fought for the Fatherland" honorably, whereas the crimes of Nazism were committed exclusively by National Socialist fanatics and members of the SS and Gestapo. This myth began to fade after a series of academic works appeared using new-

found archival sources. Examples include German historian Christian Streit's monograph *Keine Kameraden: die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (1978) about the mass murder of Soviet POWs, and also Omer Bartov's 1985 work *The Eastern Front 1941–1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare*. Both works brought into focus the genocidal worldview regarding Jews and Slavs among rank-and-file soldiers as well as German military commanders. In the 1980s an open conflict among historians broke out into the wider society, the so-called *Historikerstreit*. Later historians exposed the *Hungerplan* of Wehrmacht General Georg Thomas and SS Obergruppenführer and agriculture expert Herbert Backe, a program for the long-term supply of the German military and population with food. The death of tens of millions of "unnecessary" people of Eastern Europe were supposed to guarantee the success of this plan, either by murdering or starving to death Jews and many other urban inhabitants of inferior race. Food rations for others were supposed to be reduced to a minimum.

Among the other stereotypes, which have not withstood investigation by historians, is the image of the heroic resistance of the French. American historian Robert Paxton has revealed the role the Vichy government played in the Holocaust and has brought into focus widespread support for fascist and racist ideology in French society and among many intellectuals and politicians.

Some myths and stereotypes have proved more immune to debunking. One example is the myth, promoted by the Danish community in America during the war, about a pro-Jewish solidarity campaign in which Danes, including the King of Denmark, wore the yellow Star of David intended for their Jewish fellow citizens. This myth gained credibility because it became entwined with another fact-based narrative. When the Germans abolished the Protectorate of Denmark in 1943 and introduced direct rule, the Danish anti-Nazi resistance organized the transport of about 7,000 Danish Jews to Sweden, thus removing about 90% of the kingdom's Jews from the threat of death.

An impressive exhibition of Vilna ghetto posters was held in Washington, D.C., in 1999, an event addressed by Thomas Lantos, a member of the House of Representatives of Hungarian Jewish origins who had survived the Holocaust as a young man thanks to the intervention of the celebrated Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. Lantos presented the Danes as an example for Lithuania, a country which had *not* managed to save its fellow citizens. The Congressman recalled that Danes had even saved the pet dogs of Jews who had fled to Sweden, and returned them to their owners after the war, appropriately washed and groomed. The contrast between Denmark and Lithuania could not have been made clearer, although one wonders how one can even begin to compare two vastly different experiences of Nazi rule.

For many, and especially for the youth of the West, the diary of Anne Frank is the primary (and often the only) Holocaust text to which they are exposed: a testimony in which the inner life of a young girl on the brink of adolescence, and family conflicts are central to the story. Since the book does not include an account of the deportation to the Bergen-Belsen camp, "the diary of a young girl" cannot provide the reader with a sufficiently stark picture of what other victims endured, say, the starving children in the Vilna ghetto. It should be noted that Jan and Miep Gies, the Austrians who sheltered the Frank family, were not punished. It is difficult to imagine the Gestapo showing the same kind of mercy to a Polish family hiding Jews.

Without minimizing the scope of the persecution of Jews in Western Europe during World War II, in order to approach the reality of the Holocaust as genocide, we need to look to the East. The centers for the destruction of the Jews are found in Eastern Europe, in what historian Timothy Snyder calls "the blood lands." That is where most Holocaust victims are

buried. Until the close of the 20th century, however, this reality did not resonate in Eastern Europe. Why?

The Problem of Understanding the Holocaust in Lithuania and Eastern Europe

Holocaust research and the concept of a history of Jewish genocide developed much later in Eastern Europe than it did in the West. The growth of Holocaust studies was hindered by the region's political and cultural legacy, as well as by certain specific features of collective memory. In Poland that memory was dominated by memories of the especially brutal occupation policies of the Nazis and the narrative of the nation's heroic resistance to fascism. The issue of Jewish genocide was of secondary importance. Expansion of Holocaust studies and open discussion of the Holocaust in the West had very little effect on Soviet historiography. The Holocaust as a crime against the Jewish people was not often mentioned. An exception was the work *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* [*Mass Murders in Lithuania*] published in 1965. Monuments, i.e., memorial history, contain as a rule inscriptions to "peaceful Soviet citizens." In general, the topics of collaboration by "Soviet citizens" with the Germans and of the Holocaust as a Jewish genocide were not useful to the Soviet regime. Since the end of the 1950s, a rather intense campaign to unmask "bourgeois nationalists" was initiated, as reflected, for example, in the *Faktai kaltina* [*The Facts Accuse*] series of publications. According to the Soviet narrative, the sins of the nationalists, operating both in the underground and in the diaspora, included collaboration with Nazi Germany and mass murder, but this tendentious history was politically motivated and had little to do with serious Holocaust studies.

The situation in the large émigré centers in the US and Canada was not favorable for a discussion of the Holocaust either. Post-war immigrants, although living in the West, were not interested in the Jewish genocide. The public statements by members of the Lithuanian diaspora were often limited to defensive polemics, denials of the nation's guilt, and sometimes even included aggressive accusations against the victims of genocide. The discussion, which took place at the 1978 congress of the Santara-Šviesa [Harmony and Light] organization, was an exception. The members who gathered there resolved to discuss, in their words, "several popular opinions in our press on the Jewish question." Among the statements, which were characteristic of significant portions of the immigrant population, we find the following theses:

- Lithuanian participation in the mass murder of Jews was an understandable response to Jewish participation in the destruction of Lithuanians;
- Lithuanian Jews at least partially deserved their fate, having constituted a closed society exploiting Lithuanians during the period of independence and having committed extraordinary crimes against the Lithuanian people during the first Soviet period [1940], during which Jews marched in lockstep with the Communists, while there were no Jews among those deported;
- Many Lithuanians saved Jews during the period of German occupation;
- The Nazis carried out the entire genocide of the Jews, sometimes wearing Lithuanian uniforms, and perhaps they were aided by a handful of social rejects and former Communists who wanted to make amends for their complicity;

- Allusions to Lithuanians in the SS in the Western press are libel, because we all know Lithuanians, unlike Latvians and Estonians, resolutely refused to form an SS legion;
- Accusations against individual people, especially those who are important figures in patriotic activities, are a political maneuver by the occupying power, based on forged KGB documents;
- The Western press is controlled by the Jews who bring all attention to bear on the genocide carried out by the Germans, basically ignoring Communist crimes of a much broader scope.

The mixture of these and other claims acquired a certain amount of credibility because, apart from wholly false claims, for example, that there were no Jews among those deported, there are claims, which can be supported, by individual examples. Today, when there is access to the requisite archival sources, almost all of these sorts of simplistic claims can be either rejected, or placed within an appropriate context. Participants at the above-mentioned conference resolved: "... We have not thought about that matter [the Holocaust] appropriately and are not prepared sufficiently to recognize it and tell the entire truth as we know it, a truth which, unfortunately, is not always in our favor." (*Akiračiai* no. 10, 1978). Today this conclusion is probably still relevant for Lithuanian society.

The geography of the genocide encouraged defensive reactions and complicated acquisition of the Holocaust narrative. The genocide of European Jewry directed by the Third Reich, the "Final Solution (*Endlösung*) of the Jewish question," cost almost six million lives. The overwhelming majority of Holocaust victims (perhaps, as many as 99.5% of the dead) were murdered through the application of three genocidal methods: mass shooting operations, suffocation by gas, and the exploitation of ghetto and concentration camp prisoners for labor leading to systematic starvation. Large-scale shooting operations took place in Lithuania (Ninth Fort, Ponar), Latvia (Rumbuli), Belarus (Minsk), Ukraine (Babi Yar), as well as in Romania and elsewhere. All of the modern industrialized killing centers, the well-known death camps (Auschwitz, Sobibór, Treblinka, Maidanek, Bełżec and Chełmno), were constructed in Poland. As a rule the large ghettos, where disease and starvation ruled, were a feature characteristic of Eastern Europe. To ensure the successful operation of the mechanism of mass murder, the following were required: careful administrative preparation, an effective bureaucratic and police apparatus, as well as political leadership determined to carry out genocide (see Hilberg).

The fact that the Third Reich's planners of genocide chose Eastern Europe for the Final Solution has given impulse to certain stereotypes/myths. One popular misconception is the belief that the Nazis chose Poland and the Baltic as mass murder sites because of historical anti-Semitism there, which consequently led to mass collaboration in carrying out the Holocaust. Cultural historian Lucy Dawidowicz in her book, *The War against the Jews*, wrote: "...the Baltic and Ukrainian *populations* [my emphasis] collaborated voluntarily with the Germans in murdering the Jews" (p. 541). Eastern Europeans are condemned without exception. This is not the only example of this sort of writing.

It is also interesting that the opposite sides arguing over collaboration in the Holocaust can sometimes utilize the same myth. In this regard, the Friends of the Lithuanian Front used to cite a statistic pulled out of the air: supposedly, 100,000 Lithuanians participated in the June

Uprising of 1941, and from 2,000 to 4,000 of the fighters died. This can serve as a dramatic example of patriotism. At the same time, the Litvak writer and Holocaust researcher Sara Neshamit also cites the hundred thousand figure, but with another aim in mind: to show mass collaboration by Lithuanians. (In reality, a more reliable figure is from 10,000 to 15,000 Lithuanian insurgents, with a maximum of 600 dead). The convoluted errors of some pundits have been nothing less than tragicomic. Sol Littman published a book in Canada in 1983 about the Holocaust in Kaunas, in which he identified one, Algirdas Klimaitis, the leader of the pogrom in Viliampolė, as the prime minister of Lithuania (*War Criminal on Trial: The Rauca Case*). The negative image of collaboration was also due to the numerous Lithuanian and Ukrainian surnames which figured prominently in the case files of the OSI (Office of Special Investigations) unit of the US Justice Department which has investigated Nazi war crimes since the 1980s.

During the period of national rebirth, the movements overturning the Soviet order, including Sąjūdis and the other "singing revolutions," received generally sympathetic treatment in the Western media. Unfortunately, the spectre of Nazism also rose from the ashes. The *Los Angeles Times* published an article calling Lithuanian nationalists saboteurs of *perestroika* who were undeserving of independence because their leader and hero was that same pogromchik, Algirdas Klimaitis (Benjamin Frankel and Brian D. Kux, "Recalling the Dark Past of Lithuanian Nationalism," April 29, 1990 edition). A typical example of misunderstanding was the article in *Newsweek* magazine (September 16, 1991) entitled "An Unpardonable Amnesty." A photo showed Hitler arriving in Klaipėda [Memel] in March of 1939 with the caption "Lithuanians welcome Hitler, 1939," despite the fact that the banner above the heads of the local German storm troopers clearly states: *Dieses Land bleibt ewig deutsch*, "This land remains forever German."

Lithuanian scholars and cultural figures were puzzled, even stunned, by rude attacks at conferences in the US and Western Europe because of their fellow countrymen's previous participation in the Holocaust. There were even cases of demonstrative refusals to shake hands. Lithuanian society and those of other "Soviet bloc" countries were utterly unprepared for a face-to-face encounter with the Holocaust narrative widespread in the West.

Western, including Israeli, historians have, at times, adopted the stereotypes which have appeared in the press. A superficial knowledge of the Baltic countries, dependence on sources in the German, Russian and Polish languages to the exclusion of others, and an inability to make use of local archives—all of this has hindered a better understanding of the realities of local history. The monograph by Knut Stang published by the well-known academic publisher Peter Lang in 1996, *Kollaboration und Massenmord. Die litauische Hilfspolizei, das Rollkommando Hamann und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden* [*Collaboration and Mass Murder. The Lithuanian Auxiliary Police, the Hamann Flying Squadron and the Murder of Lithuanian Jews*], for example, contained many factual errors.

It is not surprising that accusations of collaboration have elicited an understandably defensive reaction. Even so, regardless of certain distortions and factual errors, the point of view of Western and Israeli historians on the issue of collaboration by Eastern Europeans is not without foundation. The accusations leveled have forced historians to pay attention to the facts of the past. It goes without saying that the genocide of the Jews perpetrated in the Lithuanian countryside in the summer and autumn of 1941 was by far the bloodiest episode in Lithuanian history. The months of August and September were especially noteworthy for their concentrated violence.

Mass Murder Statistics (Victims) according to the Jäger Report of December 1941:

June	4,000
July	4,237
Aug. 1-14 d.	4,756
Aug. 15-31	32,909
Sept. 1-15	28,707
Sept. 16-30	11,671
Oct. 1-15	10,752
Oct. 16-31	18,027
Nov. 1-15	2,991
Nov. 16-30	252

In Lithuania the Germans who participated directly in the mass murder of Jews numbered at least several hundred, mainly the staff of different security organizations and Wehrmacht personnel. Local people, mainly ethnic Lithuanians, constituted a much larger number: at least several thousand acted directly as murderers, thus contradicting the myth about a handful of low-life "Jew-shooters." The so-called National Labor Security (TDA) soldiers operated in Hamann's *Rollkomando* [Flying Squadron, or more accurately Motorized Squadron], the co-opted local police or "white armbands," the Special Unit [Ypatingasis būrys] operating in Vilnius under the SD and some self-defense units (including, for example, the infamous 2nd aka 12th "Impulevičius" battalion) distinguished themselves in the mass murder. Was this many people, or a few? The historian Solomon Atamuk has attempted to answer this question, admitting that determining precisely the number of perpetrators is made difficult by the problem of defining various degrees of complicity. In any case, one can agree with his logic: "... thousands of local people participated in the process of the persecution of Jews, pogroms, robbery, herding Jews into ghettos, guarding them, concentrating them further, herding, transporting and shooting them. Although this was only a small portion of the [country's] more than 2.7 million inhabitants, it is still a significant number of people who committed crimes against humanity." (S. Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias* [*The Way of Lithuanian Jews*], 2007, 2nd ed., p. 261).

Analysis of the history of genocide shows that the mass murder of millions required an appropriately organized political and military structure. As Atamuk writes: "The Germans organized the entire planning for murder and its joint implementation," i.e., the planners of and inspiration for the Holocaust came from the government and police structures of the Reich. In essence, Berlin was the deciding factor in the Holocaust, explaining why, considering Europe as a whole, the relative rates of Jewish death and survival varied so much by country. As stated, 90% of Jews in Denmark were saved while in Lithuania less than a tenth survived. In Hungary and Romania, where, unlike in Lithuania, mass fascist movements dominated in the interwar period, the percentage of Holocaust survivors was considerably higher (in Romania half of the country's Jews were saved). France lost roughly a quarter of its Jewish population, while almost three-quarters of the Jewish community in Holland were deported and murdered. Hungary's example is especially informative. In the spring of 1944, most of the country's Jews, some

800,000 people, were still alive. During the war, many of them experienced repression and persecution, some died, and yet the Hungarian leader, Admiral Miklós Horthy, rejected Berlin's demands that the Jews be handed over for destruction. The death of the majority of Hungarian Jews is connected with the March 1944 German invasion and the installation of a pro-German puppet government. Only when the Reich and its closest collaborators acquired executive power in Hungary did the fourth (and final) stage of genocide (as defined by Hilberg) commence as Adolf Eichmann initiated mass deportations to the death camps.

It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the rates of death and survival during the Holocaust are linked to the nature and practice of wartime governance. The least opportunities for survival existed in places where the Nazis installed a regime of occupation and were able to direct local administrative structures towards collaboration. Local collaborators and endemic anti-Semitism considerably facilitated the work of the Berlin planners, but they were not the deciding factor in the historic destruction of the Jews as a *community*. On the other hand, it is self-evident that, within the context of occupation, the lives of Jews in hiding depended almost entirely upon the attitudes of the local inhabitants: it was they who decided the question of the life and death of their fellow citizens.

Epilogue: When History Isn't Enough

The moral legacy of the Holocaust awaits assessment, but here historians can only play an auxiliary role. The genocidal mechanism of the Third Reich was put to a purpose, which itself was unprecedented in scope and intent: the total annihilation of an ethnicity in the name of a paranoid and utterly fantastic racial ideology to be carried out through the application of rational, consistent and modern methods of mass murder. History might explain the structure of the mechanism, identify its drivers, and name the cogs of the genocidal machine. Historians might even be able to clarify the *historical responsibility* of the executors of the genocide, and to indicate those crucial factors, which facilitated the course of the mass murders. But scholars are powerless to decide the issues of moral responsibility, of guilt and innocence. While local collaborators were not the deciding factors in the fate of the Jews as a community at the European level, can we then say that the guilt of the cogs, big and small, of the genocidal mechanism is less than that of the true organizers of the mass murder? I cannot believe this. The genocidal machine of the Holocaust was not made of metal parts: the mechanism consisted of people who possessed free will and the ability to make decisions. What sort of people could have brought themselves to carry out the Children's Action in the Kovno ghetto on March 27, 1944 as so devastatingly described by Waldemar Ginsburg? (see "*...Ir Kaunas verkė*", 2010, pp. 103-105 [a Lithuanian translation of Ginsburg's "And Kovno Wept," published as part of the Witness Collection, Laxton, Newark, Nottinghamshire : Beth Shalom, 1998])? Neither memoirs, nor history, are capable of conveying the essence of that horrific event which drove the parents of the doomed children to the edge of madness. Only a well-informed, mature society will be able to judge the moral legacy of this bloody past and to understand what tasks it presents for today and for the future.