

PROOF ONLY

The Extraordinary Recent History of Holocaust Studies in Lithuania

by Dovid Katz (Vilnius)

Proof of a paper whose final version of record appeared in *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*, vol. 31:3 (Dec. 2017), pp. 285-295.

The final version of record is available only from the publishers,

Taylor and Francis:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23256249.2017.1395530>



The Extraordinary Recent History of Holocaust Studies in Lithuania

Dovid Katz

Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Creative Industries, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Vilnius, Lithuania

ABSTRACT

The paper argues that the recent history of Holocaust Studies in Lithuania is characterized by major provision (for research, teaching and publishing) coming from state-sponsored agencies, particularly a state commission on both Nazi and Soviet crimes. Problematically, the commission is itself simultaneously active in revising the narrative per se of the Holocaust, principally according to the 'Double Genocide' theories of the 2008 Prague Declaration that insists on 'equalization' of Nazi and Soviet crimes. Lithuanian agencies have played a disproportionate role in that declaration, in attempts at legislating some of its components in the European Parliament and other EU bodies, and 'export' of the revisionist model to the West. Much international support for solid independent Lithuanian Holocaust researchers and NGOs was cut off as the state commission set out determinedly to dominate the field, which is perceived to have increasing political implications in East-West politics. But this history must not obscure an impressive list of local accomplishments. A tenaciously devoted group of Holocaust survivors themselves, trained as academics or professionals in other fields, educated themselves to publish books, build a mini-museum (that has defied the revisionists) within the larger state-sponsored Jewish museum, and worked to educate both pupils and the wider public. Second, a continuing stream of non-Jewish Lithuanian scholars, educators, documentary film makers and others have at various points valiantly defied state pressures and contributed significantly and selflessly. The wider picture is that Holocaust Studies has been built most successfully by older Holocaust survivors and younger non-Jews, in both groups often by those coming to work in it from other specialties out of a passion for justice and truth in history, while lavishly financed state initiatives have been anchored in the inertia of nationalist regional politics.

KEYWORDS

Holocaust in Lithuania;
Prague Declaration (2008);
Green House (Vilnius);
Double Genocide

Holocaust Studies Per Se as Component of Holocaust Revisionism

In Lithuania, the primary provider for Holocaust studies for close to two decades has been the state-sponsored International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes

of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania (ICECNSORL), which was established in 1998 by decree of the nation's president and is housed in the office of its prime minister, embedding it in the highest strata of Lithuanian politics. Several of its activities have enabled significant contributions in research, education, and public commemoration. It has, however, played a simultaneous and inseparable role in nationalist-based historical revisionism designed for export, and current geopolitics, in a part of the world where these aspects of history *are* contemporary politics. The same commission providing for research is a primary engine for *changing* the actual narrative of the Holocaust per se into the revisionist 'Double Genocide' model, while straddling the political need to appeal to both the local nationalist base and Western and foreign Jewish audiences.¹ The core of the history has perhaps been best summarized by Yitzhak Arad²:

In order to obfuscate and rewrite these [historical] events and the very concept of the Holocaust, elements of the Lithuanian government have widened the definition, using its 'international commission' to bring under single consideration the events of the Second World War as well as the events in Soviet Lithuania until the death of Stalin in March 1953, and even for many years (and decades) after that, all in order to establish the theory of a Holocaust suffered by the Lithuanian people.³

The current Double Genocide myth, which posits supposed equality in principle of Nazi and Soviet crimes, has come to have its own foundational document, the 2008 Prague Declaration, which boasts the word 'same' five times, demanding inter alia that 'consciousness of the crimes against humanity committed by the Communist regimes throughout the continent must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regime's crimes did.'⁴

In the context of the 'equalization' project, the declaration struck many as perilously akin to various forms of Eastern European discourse emanating from antisemitic, Holocaust-obfuscating, far-right and ultranationalist persuasions. Critiques of various aspects of the declaration (or the same points declared in preceding or follow-up documents) came mostly from abroad, in parliamentary statements,⁵ academic papers,⁶ op-eds in

¹The political impetus to simultaneously 'satisfy' both a local nationalist base and Western and Jewish audiences was perhaps first described by N. N. Shneidman in his *Jerusalem of Lithuania: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Vilnius* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1998), pp. 167–168.

²Alternative formulations concerning the commission's role can be found in: Karen Sutton, *The Massacre of the Jews of Lithuania: Lithuanian Collaboration in the Final Solution, 1941–1944* (Jerusalem and New York: Gefen, 2008), pp. 201–211; David Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination: Holocaust Testimonials from Provincial Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2011), p. 204.

³Yitzhak Arad, "The Holocaust in Lithuania, and its Obfuscation, in Lithuanian Sources," *Defending History*, 1 December 2012, section 15 ('Conclusion'), www.defendinghistory.com/yitzhak-arad-on-the-holocaust-in-lithuania-and-its-obfuscation-in-lithuanian-sources/46252#conclusion. For an opposing view, see Saulius Suziedelis, "The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania: Successes, Challenges, Perspectives," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45:1 (2014), pp. 1–16.

⁴Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, 3 June 2008, Prague, Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, www.praguedeclaration.eu/.

⁵British MP John Mann, cofounder of the UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism, rose in the Commons to object to the Prague Declaration's precursor document earlier in 2008; see his speech at: *Parliament.UK*: 31 January 2008, 2:30 pm, Column 509, paragraph 4, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080131/debtext/80131-0010.htm. He later called the Prague Declaration a 'sinister document'; see his "Europe Must Focus on Baltic Hate," *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 October 2009, www.thejc.com/europe-must-focus-on-baltic-hate-1.12095.

⁶See Leonidas Donskis, "The Inflation of Genocide," *EuropeanVoice.com*, 24 July 2009, www.donskis.lt/p/en/1/1_/39; Clemens Heni, "The Prague Declaration, Holocaust Obfuscation and Antisemitism," *Wissenschaft und Publizistik als Kritik*, 26 October 2009, www.clemensheni.wordpress.com/2009/10/26/the-prague-declaration-holocaust-obfuscation-

the media,⁷ and Holocaust survivor groups.⁸ In 2012, a de facto response, the Seventy Years Declaration (co-authored by the present author) was signed by 71 Euro-parliamentarians.⁹ But many years before either document, a number of scholars, including Randolph Braham and Michael Shafir, foresaw the evolving Eastern European Holocaust studies scene in connection with other Eastern European countries.¹⁰ Others, focused on Lithuania, including Solomonas Atamukas and Vytautas Berenis, surveyed the field within the country.¹¹

In addition to displaying, for many years, the Prague Declaration on its website as a kind of constitutional document, the Lithuanian state commission (ICECNSORL) played a public role in its enactment. For example, in the preparatory work for the declaration, in April 2008 the commission announced that it was sending its own chairman, who happened to be the nation's single Jewish member of parliament (from the right-wing Conservative/Homeland Union party), to propose a series of points including several that were indeed incorporated into the text of the Prague Declaration.¹²

To add to the historic drama, this commission, responsible for Holocaust studies, was implicated in arguably the largest Holocaust-related scandal of the twenty-first century. Since 2006, Lithuanian prosecutors have defamed Holocaust survivors with 'pretrial investigations,' starting with one of the commission's own early members, Dr. Yitzhak Arad, the former chairman of Yad Vashem, cited earlier. For years, the ensuing scandal kept the commission 'out of commission.' Amidst a flurry of international protest, the small but dauntless Lithuanian Jewish community passionately protested the prosecutors' pursuit of Arad and other Holocaust survivors who had survived by joining the Soviet-sponsored

andantisemitism and Clemens Heni, *Antisemitism: A Specific Phenomenon. Holocaust Trivialization – Islamism – Postcolonial and Cosmopolitan anti-Zionism* (Berlin: Edition Critic, 2013), pp. 313, 347, 349–372; Dovid Katz, "On Three Definitions: Genocide; Holocaust Denial; Holocaust Obfuscation," in Leonidas Donskis, (ed.), *A Litmus Test Case of Modernity. Examining Modern Sensibilities and the Public Domain in the Baltic States at the Turn of the Century (Interdisciplinary Studies on Central and Eastern Europe, Book 5)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 259–277, www.defendinghistory.com/2009SeptDovidKatz3Definitions.pdf; Alvin Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 244–246.

⁷See Yehuda Bauer, "Remembering Accurately on International Holocaust Remembrance Day," *Jerusalem Post*, 25 January 2010, www.jpost.com/Features/In-TheSpotlight/Remembering-accurately-on-intl-holocaust-remembrance-day; Dovid Katz, "Genocide Industry has Hidden Agenda," *Irish Times*, 30 May 2009, www.irishtimes.com/opinion/genocide-industry-has-hidden-agenda-1.77379.

⁸See, for example, the letter from the Association of Lithuanian Jews to the 2009 Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, signed by chairperson Joseph Melamed, 15 December 2009, www.defendinghistory.com/2009Dec15ALJlonPDec.jpg; an earlier statement appeared on the Association's website: "Prague Declaration: A Distortion of Truth," www.lithuanianjews.org.il/HTMLs/article_list4.aspx?C2014=14500&BSP=13973&BSS59=13971.

⁹Seventy Years Declaration (SYD), 20 January 2012, www.defendinghistory.com/the-seventy-years-declaration-in-various-languages. Its website is www.seventyyearsdeclaration.org/.

¹⁰See Randolph L. Braham, (ed.), *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eastern Europe* (New York: Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, 1994), esp. the editor's introduction, pp. 1–30; Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and 'Comparative Trivialization': Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe* (Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2002).

¹¹See Solomon Atamukas, "The Hard Long Road Toward the Truth: On the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Holocaust in Lithuania," *Lituanis* 47:4 (2001); Vytautas Berenis, "Holokaustas ir lietuvių istorinė sąmonė," *Politologija* 3:19 (2000), pp. 3–24.

¹²International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, "In Brussels, Mr. Emanuelis Zingeris Presented Lithuania's Suggestions for the Evaluation of the Totalitarian Regimes on the EU Level," formerly at www.komisija.lt/en/naujienu.php?id=1215150457 (preserved at: www.defendinghistory.com/2008April8Commission.pdf). For an attempt to understand the morally tragic predicament of a lone Jewish MP under party pressure, see Dovid Katz, "Free Trade Awry? The Westward Export of Double Genocide," in Danielle Buschinger et al., (eds.), *Mélanges offerts à Jeff Richards par ses amis à l'occasion de son 65e anniversaire* (Amiens: Centre d'Etudes Médiévales de la Picardie, 2017), pp. 424–425, www.defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Dovid-Katzs-paper-in-Earl-Jeffrey-Richards-festschrift-2017.pdf.

anti-Nazi partisan movement, pointedly noting the commission's disturbing silence.¹³ As of 2017, five Holocaust survivors have been defamed by Lithuanian prosecutors, either for 'war crimes' (having joined the partisans) or for having told the truth, as they see it, about the Lithuanian Holocaust, its perpetrators, and latter-day apologists.¹⁴ None of the five has ever been charged with anything. The effects of 'indefinite defamation' on the internet and in history books could perhaps only be countered by official state apologies, which have heretofore not been forthcoming.¹⁵

When the commission was relaunched in 2012/2013, there were some contradictory gestures with respect to its maligned former member, Yitzhak Arad (who had resigned in protest, as did others from the commission or its associated bodies, including Martin Gilbert, Konrad Kwiet, and Dov Levin).¹⁶ The renewed commission, re-chartered by Lithuania's president in 2012 in renewed affirmation of its link to the highest national political level, sent a kind letter to Dr. Arad expressing anger at what had happened. However, the failure of some of its own prominent Western members, including Timothy Snyder and Jonathan Brent, to add their signatures, led to variegated speculation.¹⁷ Moreover, one of the commission's newly announced members was Arvydas Anušauskas, who did sign the letter, but who had been one of the central figures in initiating the campaign of defamation against Dr. Arad in the first place back in 2006.¹⁸ Such are the typical mystifying contradictions that lurk in the foreground of trying to make sense of Holocaust studies in Lithuania.

The state commission on Nazi and Soviet crimes has carried out important work in its teaching programs in Lithuanian schools. Handsomely published bilingual Lithuanian and English research volumes have regularly made documents from Lithuanian archives widely available, though these volumes tend to suffer from the Soviet style of political figures signing off on the academics' conclusions. Books that deal with the Holocaust remain unknown domestically and unavailable outside a tiny number of outlets. By contrast, those that deal with Soviet crimes are widely available in bookstores.

¹³Shimon Alperovich and Tuvia Jafet, "Jewish Community and Union of Ghetto Survivors Speak Out on Harassment of Holocaust Survivors who Joined the Resistance," 18 June 2008, English translation at www.defendinghistory.com/jewish-community-and-union-of-ghetto-survivors-speak-out-on-harassment-of-holocaust-survivors-who-joined-the-resistance/38731. See also "Responses" in *Defending History*, www.defendinghistory.com/blaming-the-victims/responses. Note that the present author is the founding editor of the web journal *Defending History*.

¹⁴An (incomplete) chronicle: "Blaming the Victims? State Agencies and Other Elites Defame Holocaust Survivors," *Defending History*, www.defendinghistory.com/blaming-the-victims. See, for example, Edward Lucas, "Prosecution and Persecution. Lithuania Must Stop Blaming the Victims," *Economist*, 21 August 2008, www.economist.com/node/11958563.

¹⁵See, for example, Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium: The Land Between the Black and Baltic Seas* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012), pp. 500–519, and this reviewer's rejoinder in *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 7:2 (2013), pp. 169–175, www.defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Dovid-Katz-review-of-Intermarium-in-Israel-Journal-of-Foreign-Affairs-7-2-2013.pdf.

¹⁶For facsimiles of the resignation letters, see Sir Martin Gilbert: www.defendinghistory.com/red-brown-commissions/critiques#sirmartingilbert; Konrad Kwiet: www.defendinghistory.com/red-brown-commissions/critiques#konradkwiet; Dov Levin: www.defendinghistory.com/red-brown-commissions/critiques#dovlevin.

¹⁷A PDF of the letter is available at: www.defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Commissions-letter-to-Dr-Arad-Oct-2014.pdf. The list of members of the renewed commission is at: www.defendinghistory.com/55490/55490; originally at www.komisija.lt/lt/body.php?&m=1366726562. In the spring of 2015, the entire historical website of the commission (www.komisija.lt), rich with the history of Holocaust studies in Lithuania, was removed and replaced with a skeletal site.

¹⁸The affair was launched by an article by Julius Girdvainis, "Expert with Blood on his Hands," in the antisemitic daily *Respublika* on 22 April 2006; English translation at: www.defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Original-attack-on-Arad-April-2006-inc.-ANUSAUSKAS.pdf.

Still, an intriguing question remains: do the commission's research works on the Holocaust differ from Western scholarship on anything essential outside the (itself very significant) Prague Declaration environment and occasional untoward haggling over the percentage of Jews killed in the Lithuanian Holocaust?¹⁹ The commission's primary volume on the Holocaust is the substantial bilingual tome *The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews During Summer and Fall of 1941*, by Professors Christoph Dieckmann and Saulius Sužiedėlis, since supplemented by Dieckmann's award-winning two-volume work on the Lithuanian Holocaust.²⁰ The key issue, though not the only one, that continues to differentiate the commission's works (even those by some Western members of the commission) from the longstanding Western consensus concerns the question of acknowledging the substantially documented outbreak of local Lithuanian lethal violence against Jewish neighbors in the days following the onset of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941, particularly in the days from the 23rd onward, and before German forces arrived or took administrative control. In addition to murdering thousands of Jewish civilians (the largest number being in Kaunas itself) and generating massive humiliation, plunder, and abuse, this 'local nationalist' initiated violence represents, structurally speaking, the onset of the Lithuanian Holocaust and is documented in at least 40 locations.²¹ Denial of the pre-German arrival outbreak of violence, often by 'explaining' it as a 'non-ethnic' phenomenon, remains a cardinal point of ongoing obfuscation concerning the actual facts of the Lithuanian Holocaust.²²

To fathom Holocaust studies in Eastern Europe, mention must also be made of the honors, medals, grants, publications, trips, conferences, and other largesse provided to scholars, Jewish leaders, and various institutions, particularly from the United States and Israel, to become de facto 'fellow travelers' for Holocaust studies in the revisionist spirit. None set out to be complicit in any such devious enterprise.²³ But as Mark Twain is believed to have said, it is rather easier to fool someone than to get them to admit they were fooled. The flipside is the incessant campaign of personal or professional destruction against those who dissent from Double Genocide revisionism, often by accusing them of being lackeys or agents of Russia.²⁴ In Lithuania, one prime victim has been

¹⁹The accepted figure is around 96.4% of Lithuanian Jewry, with variations depending on method of counting and borders used. See Dina Porat, "The Holocaust in Lithuania. Some Unique Aspects," in David Cesarani, (ed.), *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 159–174. Lithuanian government-supported scholars often engage in sundry acrobatics to whittle down the figure to the 90% range.

²⁰Christoph Dieckmann and Saulius Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2006); Christoph Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011).

²¹See Dov Levin, "Lithuania," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), vol. 3, p. 898. For a sampling of eyewitness testimonies, see the present author's videographed selection: www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA2BAA3ADC43CC101&feature=plpp; Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination*. On the structural historic import of the issue, see Dovid Katz, "The Detonation of the Holocaust in 1941," *East European Jewish Affairs* 41:3 (December 2011), pp. 215–216.

²²See, for example, the comments of the executive director of the Lithuanian government's commission in the Australian-produced documentary *Rewriting History*, www.vimeo.com/ondemand/rewritinghistory; (timecode 45:00); see, for commentary: www.defendinghistory.com/executive-director-of-red-brown-commission-questions-whether-lithuanian-jews-were-killed-on-a-racial-basis-before-arrival-of-german-forces/39766 and his comments in a German documentary, *Liza ruft*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxjJ0DvqJP8&t=1s.

²³See "When Government Honors are Part of a Plan to Rewrite History," www.defendinghistory.com/when-a-picture-tells-a-story.

²⁴Among the 71 Europarliamentary signatories on the 2012 Seventy Years Declaration (see note 9) were eight Lithuanian Social Democrats (six from the national parliament, two from the European Parliament). They were rapidly defamed as Russian lackeys by the then-foreign-minister whose response included the now (in)famous remark that only moustache

Evaldas Balčiūnas, who has faced harassment from police and prosecutors for a series of articles on the Holocaust crimes of various ‘national heroes’ for whom streets are named and memorial plaques in the public space affixed.²⁵ This is truly inseparable from the story of Holocaust studies per se in the country, inter alia because of the potent signal it sends to young scholars who may wish to pursue an academic career in the field.

Holocaust Research in Modern Independent Lithuania

The ‘extraordinary’ tale of Holocaust studies being retooled into a component part of Eastern European ‘Double Genocide’-inspired Holocaust revisionism, and processed for export, must under no circumstances obfuscate the inspiring, if small-scale, growth of bona fide Holocaust studies. This will be irksome to some academics’ sensibilities, but this story cannot be told just by reference to sitting professors and other salaried institutional researchers. It has fallen to ‘non-academics’ and ‘academics from other fields’ to rise to the occasion to build de novo the scholarly field of Holocaust studies in Lithuania. It speaks highly for the country that this has progressed seamlessly across ethnic and generational lines for people of good will committed to Holocaust studies as a self-standing discipline, rather than a presumed half of ‘Genocide studies.’

First came the simple truth-tellers from the depths of Lithuanian culture. They were invariably scholars, though not of Holocaust studies. First and foremost was émigré Yale University professor Tomas Venclova, whose 1970s essay ‘Jews and Lithuanians’ set out the most basic facts about the Holocaust in Lithuania with the talent of the essayist and the analytic thinking of the scholar.²⁶ He was followed by Leonidas Donskis (1962–2016), who became his nation’s leading philosophy professor before a stint as member of the European Parliament, which preceded his untimely death.²⁷

From the 1990s onward, a number of younger Lithuanian intellectuals paved the road that would evolve into a continuum of cultural and civic projects synergistically interacting with academia. The tenacious documentary film director Saulius Beržinis recorded his own extensive interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators (in the Baltic sense of ‘actual shooters’). His academically significant collection of material deserves more attention and anthologization in Holocaust studies internationally. Jonas Morkus and Vaidotas Reivytiš produced an excellent series of a multi-part film and educational materials in partnership with the country’s most progressive educational institution, the Center for School Improvement, which played a key role in introducing a painful subject into schools with dignity and in a spirit of truthfulness, with much credit due to its farsighted leader

length differentiates Hitler from Stalin. See “Lithuanian Foreign Minister Berates his Country’s Parliamentarians who Signed ‘70 Years Declaration,’” *Defending History*, 22 January 2012, www.defendinghistory.com/lithuanian-foreign-minister-attacks-his-nations-social-democrats-who-signed-the-seventy-years-declaration/29402. Then British MP Denis MacShane rushed to the Lithuanian signatories’ defense; see “UK MP Denis MacShane Rushes to Defense of Lithuanian Parliamentarians who Signed Seventy Years Declaration; Slams Foreign Minister’s Hitler-Stalin ‘Joke,’” *Defending History*, 25 January 2012, www.defendinghistory.com/29696/29696.

²⁵See the ‘Evaldas Balčiūnas’ section in *Defending History*: <http://defendinghistory.com/category/balciunas-evaldas>.

²⁶The standard English text of Tomas Venclova’s ‘Jews and Lithuanians’ appears in his book *Forms of Hope: Essays* (Riverdale-on-Hudson: Sheep Meadow Press, 1999), pp. 43–63.

²⁷See the ‘Leonidas Donskis’ section in *Defending History*: www.defendinghistory.com/category/donskis-leonidas, as well as his “Another Word for Uncertainty: Antisemitism in Lithuania,” *NORDEUROPAForum* (2006), vol. 1, pp. 7–26, www.edoc.hu-berlin.de/nordeuropaforum/2006-1/donskis-leonidas-7/PDF/donskis.pdf.

Eglė Pranckūnienė.²⁸ A handful of regional museum directors, including Rimantas Žirgulis in Kėdainiai (Keydán in Yiddish) and Viktorija Kazlienė in Molėtai (Malát), made certain that the story of Jewish life and annihilation in their towns is told without obfuscation or false equivalences in their museums' permanent exhibitions. All these works entailed actual research. One of the most inspiring projects of modern Lithuania was the House of Memory founded in the late 1990s by the leading intellectual Linas Vildžiūnas. His best-known series of publications, *Our Grandparents' Jewish Neighbors*, in effect, mobilized school children, via national competitions, to collect oral history from their grandparents. Though educational rather than scholarly, the endeavor has produced a corpus of valuable oral history available for future academic analysis.²⁹

This takes us to the situation of effectively rigged state-sponsored Holocaust studies undermining bona fide grassroots-origin Holocaust studies. Projects like *Our Grandparents' Jewish Neighbors* were largely snuffed out by the official commission (ICECNSORL), as its leaders targeted 'competition,' especially of the kind that would 'just do the Holocaust' instead of 'Nazi-and-Soviet-genocide studies.' A prime benefactor of Holocaust studies, the local branch of George Soros's Open Society Foundation, Atviros Lietuvos Fondas (Open Society of Lithuania Foundation, or ALFas for short), cut off support for most of the non-commission initiatives in the land, whether in education, research, or public affairs, presumably at government direction. But in recent years, a number of middle-aged intellectuals have risen to the fore. Among them are philosophy professor Andrius Kulikauskas and former protestant minister Julius Norvila (Norwilla).³⁰ Similarly, filmmaker Alicija Žukauskaitė recently completed an outstanding film, not yet released, which includes her research on current attitudes toward the Holocaust in Kaunas. Each of them has undertaken original research in an environment in which 'professional professors' are often wont, as are many academics everywhere, to shirk career-threatening controversial topics.

Among senior academics, there were two who bucked the trend to take their scholarship precisely where the evidence led. Their seminal works will remain. They are Prof. Liudas Truska³¹ and Dr. Valentinas Brandišauskas.³² Both contributed to publications by state bodies that operate in the nationalist tradition, including the Genocide Center and the commission, and both were sidelined from these institutions.

Two major initiatives came to the fore in 2016, both stemming from 'non-academic' Lithuanian–Jewish partnerships. First, popular author and political PR specialist Rūta

²⁸See Jonas Morkus and Vaidotas Reivytytis, *Saulelydis Lietuvoje* (2000), 110 minutes (4 parts); *Saulelydis Lietuvoje: pazintis su Lietuvos žydu bei holokausto istorija* (Vilnius: Garnelis, 2001).

²⁹Three volumes appeared of *Mano senelių ir prosenelių kaimynai zydai* ["Our Grandparents' and Great-Grandparents' Jewish Neighbors"] (Vilnius: House of Memory & Garnelis, 2002, 2003, 2007).

³⁰See their *Defending History* sections: www.defendinghistory.com/category/kulikauskas-andrius; www.defendinghistory.com/category/norwilla-julius.

³¹See, for example, Liudas Truska's "Lietuviai ir žydai. Apie vieną gajų mitą," *Literatūra ir menas*, 24 April 1993, followed in 1996 by his "Lietuvos valdžios įstaigų rusifikavimas, 1940–1941," *Darbai*, vol. 1, pp. 3–28. Truska and Vygantas Vareikis went on to publish an important volume under the commission's aegis, *The Preconditions for the Holocaust: Antisemitism in Lithuania. Second Half of the 19th Century – June 1941* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004). See also Liudas Truska, "Contemporary Attitudes Toward the Holocaust in Lithuania," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 2:45 (Fall 2001), pp. 5–26. Truska's deep personal friendship with the late Jerusalem professor Dov Levin (1925–2016) became symbolic of the potential for Lithuanian–Jewish harmony in Holocaust Studies.

³²See, for example, the English translation of Valentinas Brandišauskas' critique of works that rehabilitate perpetrators at: www.defendinghistory.com/v-brandisaukass-classic-review-of-a-liekis/71845; his "The June Uprising of 1941," *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 3 (1998), pp. 49–72, which was expanded to his book, in Lithuanian, *1941 m. Birželio sukilimas* (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2000).

Vanagaitė, with the assistance of Nazi hunter Dr. Efraim Zuroff, published her *Mūsiškiai* (Our Guys) documenting the overwhelming degree of murder by local forces considered 'heroes' by the country's national institutions.³³ It drew a large and variegated debate.³⁴ The same year, two Vilnius-born second-generation survivors, Tzvi Kritzer (now of Israel) and Leon Kaplan (in Vilnius), spearheaded a march on 29 August 2016 to mark the 75th anniversary of the massacre at Malát (Molėtai), a town in eastern Lithuania. It drew several thousand Lithuanians, by far the largest-ever turnout for a Holocaust commemoration, in large measure due to dedicated cooperation from Viktorija Kazlienė, the director of the regional museum who enlisted the town's native-son famous playwright Marius Ivaškevičius. The event drew attention nationwide and beyond.³⁵ It was followed a year later by Kritzer's Israeli-made documentary film *The Last Sunday in August*, which premiered in Vilnius on 24 September 2017. Gruesome eyewitness testimony made for sharp contrast with the sanitized, adjusted narratives of some Holocaust-studies specialists.

But the larger picture, covering the last 30 years, is that it was a group of highly educated Holocaust survivors themselves who left for posterity, in Lithuanian and other languages, the history of what had happened to their people, making for the rise of actual Lithuanian Holocaust studies, initiated by the last generation with intimate knowledge of the events.³⁶ A few points of clarification are in order. First, these are people highly educated in other spheres, whether academic or non-academic, who *became* (self-taught) Holocaust scholars in the Glasnost era of the late 1980s and the first years of independence in the early 1990s without the specialist formal training that can be a sine qua non in the West. They went on to publish major books and studies. Milan Chersonski, who had been head of the Vilnius Yiddish Folk Theater for two decades, assumed editorship of the Jewish community's quadrilingual (English, Lithuanian, Russian, and Yiddish) newspaper in 1999. During his dozen years of editorship, he published hundreds of articles containing previously unpublished facts about the Holocaust in various locations, in addition to leading a conceptual intellectual effort against the nationalist revisionists. The journalist Saliomonas Vaintraubas (Solomon Weintraub, 1922–2002) published numerous facts about the Lithuanian Holocaust, most famously in his book *Garažas*, which could not find a publisher and was in the end published by the Jewish community itself in 2002.³⁷

Joseph Levinson (1917–2015) was an engineer in Soviet times, but he left for posterity the indispensable book *The Shoah in Lithuania*, which remains the standard introductory text for Lithuanian Holocaust studies.³⁸ Rachel Kostanian, who completed a law degree in her youth and eventually turned to English language studies and worked for years as an English teacher in a music school and then as a translator of technical journals in a

³³Rūta Vanagaitė, *Mūsiškiai* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 2016).

³⁴Bibliography at "Vanagaitė and Zuroff's "Mūsiškiai," www.defendinghistory.com/media-reaction-and-reviews-vanagaite-and-zuroffs-musiskiai/79963.

³⁵Bibliography at "Media Coverage of the Malát (Molėtai) Holocaust Remembrance Project," www.defendinghistory.com/media-coverage-of-the-malat-moletai-holocaust-remembrance-project-selection/83789.

³⁶The term 'Holocaust survivor' used here includes also the 'flight survivors' who fled to the Soviet Union, usually during the last week of June 1941.

³⁷See Saliomonas Vaintraubas, *Garažas: Aukos, Budeliai, Stebėtojai* (Vilnius: Jewish Community of Lithuania, 2002). The reference is to the infamous Lietūkis Garage Massacre of June 1941. Various attempts to organize an English translation have thus far failed.

³⁸Joseph Levinson, *The Shoah in Lithuania* (Vilnius: Vaga, 2006); earlier Lithuanian version: *Šoa (Holokaustas) Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2001).

Soviet welding factory, is another survivor who reeducated herself as a Holocaust scholar. Her works include *Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto*, and, in partnership with two other survivors, the massive tome *Vilna Ghetto Posters*.³⁹ They, along with other survivors, among them Genrich Agranovsky, Jenny Biber, Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, and Dr. Rachel Margolis (a professor of biology), set up the Green House, as the Holocaust component of the state Jewish museum is known, at the end of the 1980s. Its many publications are a testament to Kostanian's tenacious leadership in particular. The enabler for this institution's founding was parliamentarian Emanuelis Zingeris, who was the de facto founder of the state Jewish museum. One of the major early accomplishments was an international academic conference convened in 1993, on the 50th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto. The resulting multilingual volume, *Days of Memory*, continues to be regarded as 'the starting point' for Holocaust studies in Lithuania.⁴⁰ The museum went on to issue various publications, including some volumes of an *Almanac* series (in Lithuanian).⁴¹

Over the years, Zingeris increasingly parted ways with the group of survivor-scholars he had enabled to establish the Green House, most extremely so when he became the only Jewish signatory of the Prague Declaration in 2008. The museum was in 2005 taken over by his brother Markas Zingeris, a prominent novelist. Its 'Green House' component, at Pamėnkalnio Street 12, is situated up a steep driveway, virtually invisible from the street, and for most of its years was marked at street level by a tiny sign generally missed by any who were not looking for it. This 'segregation' meant that many official events and tours could be held at the 'other,' much grander structures of the museum, particularly its headquarters, the Tolerance Center at Naugarduko 10, an imposingly restored prewar Jewish building that once housed a popular Yiddish theater, and Pylimo 4, an elegant Russian imperial building housed next door to the Jewish community headquarters. Even today, the starkly different treatments of the Holocaust are evident. The Western narrative prevails at the Green House, unusual for the Baltics and unique in Lithuania. By contrast, at the Tolerance Center, the Holocaust is treated in the spirit of Baltic revisionism.⁴²

For most of the Green House's history, Rachel Kostanian played the role not only of de facto director, but also gatekeeper of the Western-Jewish narrative, keeping the Double Genocide revisionists at bay. She paid a stiff price. In one episode, after arranging for a new film by Saulius Beržinis (which included academically important interviews with local shooters) and raising the funds for it from donors in Scotland, she was threatened with being fired in 48 hours over a petty technicality by one of the museum's assistant directors, only to win a reprieve thanks to an urgent intervention from the late Sir Martin Gilbert in London, a longtime champion of the Green House ('Sir Martin to the rescue' came into play more than once over the years). Her heroism in Eastern European Holocaust studies was the subject of two articles published in Canada by Esther Goldberg

³⁹Rachel Kostanian-Danzig, *Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto* (Vilnius: Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2002); Jevgenija (Jenny) Biber, Rachel Kostanian, and Judita Rozina, *Vilna Ghetto Posters* (Vilnius: Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum and Baltos lankos, 2006).

⁴⁰Emanuelis Zingeris, (ed.), *The Days of Memory / Atmininties dienos* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 1995).

⁴¹See Dalia Epšteinaitė (Dalia Epstein), (ed.), *žydų muziejus* series. The 2005 volume is dedicated to research on the Vilna Ghetto.

⁴²See Dovid Katz, "Would a Jewish Museum in Vilnius Graywash the Lithuanian Holocaust?," *Defending History*, 7 July 2013, www.defendinghistory.com/would-a-jewish-museum-in-vilnius-graywash-the-lithuanian-holocaust/55902.

Gilbert in 2010.⁴³ Two of the museum's founding personalities, Vilna Ghetto survivors Dr. Rachel Margolis and Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, were themselves targeted as part of 'war crimes investigations' from 2008 onward for having fought with the Soviet anti-Nazi partisans.⁴⁴ Margolis, who for many years split her time between Rehovot in Israel and Vilnius, was unable to return to her beloved native Vilna for one last visit before her death.⁴⁵ Her cause was taken up by former UK prime minister Gordon Brown, among others.⁴⁶ A primary reason she was loathed by much of the nationalist academic establishment, particularly 'mainstream historians' with doctorates and good jobs, was her major academic accomplishment in Holocaust studies: discovery, meticulous reconstruction, and publication of the long-lost diary of Christian Holocaust witness Kazimierz Sakowicz, who had seen and described the murders of tens of thousands of Jews and others, mostly at the hands of Lithuanian volunteer shooters, at Ponár (Ponary, Paneriai), the mass murder site outside Vilnius. Margolis published the diary in the original Polish, and it subsequently appeared in German and English, infuriating many elites in view of the revealed degree of participation in the genocide by local Lithuanian forces.⁴⁷ It is, like many other cases, an illustration of the inseparably interwoven narrative of 'Holocaust studies' and 'Holocaust affairs' in Lithuania.

Two Jewish professors who had been scholars of Marxism in Soviet times, Prof. Meir Shub (1924–2009) and Dr. Izraelis Lempertas (Yisroel Lempert, 1925–2012), both began, as the Soviet Union was collapsing, to energetically immerse themselves in Jewish history generally and Lithuanian Jewish studies, including the Holocaust, especially. Shub founded the Center for Judaic Studies at Vilnius University in the late 1980s, the precursor of all the various Judaic studies programs in Vilnius ever since. He would take his Lithuanian students to the Green House and wait for them outside while Rachel Kostanian gave them the historic tour, which left many quite shocked (he would explain that his heart condition precluded his own revisit to the unvarnished, painful exhibits). A number of those students, all ethnic Lithuanians, went on to become professional Holocaust researchers. Lempertas became the academic advisor to the Lithuanian Jewish Community and taught a number of courses on Lithuanian Jewish history at Vilnius University's Yiddish institute after its establishment in 2001.

Among the younger generation of Lithuanian Holocaust scholars that emerged from these circles are Milda Jakulytė, author of the *Lithuanian Holocaust Atlas*, and Neringa Latvytė-Gustaitienė, currently in charge of the Jewish museum's history department

⁴³Esther Goldberg (Gilbert), "Historian Whose Task is Remembrance of the Holocaust: Rachel Kostanian," *Canadian Jewish News*, 8 September 2010, pp. B39–B42, www.holocaustinthebaltics.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/201008SeptGGoldbergOnKostanian.pdf; Esther Goldberg (Gilbert), "Nazi Crimes Have Been Downgraded in Lithuania," *Canadian Jewish News*, 7 October 2010, p. 9, www.defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/2010Oct7EstherGoldberg.pdf.

⁴⁴See the page "Blaming the Victims? State Agencies & Other Elites Defame Holocaust Survivors," *Defending History*, www.defendinghistory.com/blaming-the-victims.

⁴⁵See Avi Lehrer, "Dr. Rachel Margolis Wants to See her Native Vilna Again," *Youtube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCHHNBUuE9s.

⁴⁶Gordon Brown, "Women of Courage: Rachel Margolis," *Independent*, 9 March 2011, www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/women-of-courage-rachel-margolis-2236081.html.

⁴⁷Margolis published Sakowicz's diary in the original Polish, *Dziennik – Pisany w Ponarach*, in 1999 and followed up with a German edition, *Die geheimen Notizen des K. Sakowicz*, in 2003 (with Jim G. Tobias). The subsequent English translation was edited by Yitzhak Arad: *Ponary Diary, 1941–1943: A Bystander's Account of a Mass Murder by Kazimierz Sakowicz* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005). It contains Margolis's foreword (pp. vii–xii).

and the author of various works.⁴⁸ Their work competes locally with publications in the nationalist spirit emanating from the Genocide Research Center and other agencies.⁴⁹

The recent history of Holocaust studies in Lithuania is an inextricably interwoven tale of scholarship and politics. It may leave us with some lessons to take away.⁵⁰ ‘Scholarship about scholarship’ in a history-of-ideas framework must be able to bypass the border posts of specialized higher degrees and careers in universities and research institutes to study contributions to the field whatever their provenance. Holocaust studies potentially manipulated by government agencies with political and national security agendas – agencies with budgets and political will to distribute advancement and opprobrium on colleagues – must be subject to dauntless critical academic scrutiny. In Eastern Europe of our time, the historian of Holocaust studies will have to factor in the various laws effectively criminalizing expression of the idea that the Holocaust was a unique genocide in these countries.⁵¹ Last but not least, the historian of ideas must face up to a Holocaust studies that has been artfully linked to efforts to rewrite the narrative of what it is that is being studied.⁵² In modern, democratic Lithuania, which has made so many inspiring strides in so many fields, it is high time for the discipline’s academic, intellectual, social, and political liberation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Dovid Katz was born in New York City, founded and led Yiddish Studies at Oxford University (1978–1996), and after a year as visiting professor at Yale (1998–1999) founded and led Yiddish Studies at Vilnius University (1999–2010). Founded DefendingHistory.com in 2009, and since 2016 professor at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. See website: www.dovidkatz.net.

⁴⁸See Milda Jakulytė-Vasil, *Lithuanian Holocaust Atlas* (Vilnius: Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2011); Neringa Latvytė-Gustaitienė, *Holokaustas Ukmergėje / Holocaust in Ukmergė* (Vilnius: Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2012).

⁴⁹See, for example, Arūnas Bubnys, *Vilnius Ghetto, 1941–1943* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2013).

⁵⁰See, for comparison, regarding the situation elsewhere in Eastern Europe: Michael Shafir, “Conceptualizing Hungarian Negationism in Comparative Perspective: Deflection and Obfuscation,” *Cahiers d’Études Hongroises et Finlandaises* 20 (2014), pp. 265–310, www.defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/MICHAEL-SHAFIR-ON-NEGATIONISM-IN-HUNGARY3.pdf; Michael Shafir, “Unacademic Academics: Holocaust Deniers and Trivializers in Post-communist Romania,” *Nationalities Papers: Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 42:6 (2014), pp. 942–964.

⁵¹See Dovid Katz, “Is Eastern European ‘Double Genocide’ Revisionism Reaching Museums?” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 30:3 (2016), pp. 191–220, text on pp. 215–216.

⁵²The alleged instrumentalization of academically weaker branches of modern Judaic studies, particularly Yiddish studies, for the purposes of covering for Holocaust revisionism, is outside the scope of this survey. See Dovid Katz, *Yiddish and Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp. 295–300.