

Lietuvos Aidas, January 29, 2008, Volume No. 24, p. 8.

A BOY FROM THE WARSAW GHETTO AND THE LITHUANIAN ‘*POŽIŪRIS*’ (*ATTITUDE*)

by Irena Tumavičiūtė

The announcements of the ‘*Amžininkai*’ (Contemporaries) broadcast, which was broadcasted on January 26, promised new insights into Lithuanian-Jewish relations. But what we saw were old stereotypes. We could debate certain numbers or such ”discoveries” such as those of A. Kasparavičius: “In the prayers it is stated that Jews crucified Christ.” Who taught this young guy to pray?

Here is another little question asked by the aforementioned Kasparavičius: “Lithuania did not answer the question as to why their state had failed while other countries had succeeded to retain their statehood?”

Not a single guest of the broadcast mentioned the secret agreements between Germany and the Soviet Union or any documents of Nationalist-Socialist Germany regarding the mass destruction of certain groups of inhabitants.

As regards the Judeophobia in folklore, which was mentioned by some young people during this broadcast, I can only quote the Babylonian Talmud translated into the German language and published in Germany in 2002: “It is forbidden to rob an Israelite, it is permitted to rob a non-Jew, because it is written so.” (Lev 19:13) or “Kill the best of the goyim” (Aboda zara 26 b, Jad chasaka 49 b). We could keep on quoting such “golden thoughts,” for which somebody in Europe can be accused of intolerance to other nations.

It was worth inviting the writer Jonas Mikėlinskas to participate in the broadcast. He has closely investigated historical Lithuanian-Jewish relations right up to the present.

But this time let’s discuss several visual stereotypes that were used during this broadcast, and I have in mind some illustrations. After Stanislovas Źvirgėdas, a famous researcher of the history of photography, exposed falsifications related to the so-called Lietūkis Garage massacre of Jews (different sources mention 16 to 70 victims; even Zuroff has not come up with a more precise list), presenters of serious broadcasts and textbook authors should also critically review illustrations that somebody is trying to push on them. At the beginning of the broadcast, when we heard a text about Lithuania, we saw a familiar photo from many publications and textbooks, in which a scared boy holds his hands up. Among many other photos from the Warsaw Ghetto, we can find on the internet several comments about this photo in various languages. In the book “*Bilder Faelschen*” by Klaus Sojka (Munich, 1999: 40-44) we find several dates for this photo. One book takes us even to Bulgaria in 1940. But most often this photo is associated with the Warsaw Ghetto, with the possible date ranging from 1941 to 1944. Some of the “comments” tell us that the boy perished. But a text at the internet address

http://www.weltchronik.de/dch/dch_3382.htm says the following: “16/5/1943. A boy

from the Warsaw Ghetto, who was taken to a gas chamber in the Treblinka concentration camp.” Only in 1990-1991 did the Finnish historian and film director Matti-Juhani Karila manage to identify the boy in the photo as Dr. Zwi Nussbaum living near New York. Later many interviews with the doctor were publicized, and a documentary film by Matti-Juhani Karila was shown in Germany. A new history textbook was published in Germany with this photo and a comment that read as follows: “The boy was taken directly to the Bergen-Belzen concentration camp. He was the only one of his family who survived; he now works as a doctor and lives near New York.”

Later *Požiūris (Attitude)* published a photo of a long barbed wire fence of the Auschwitz concentration camp and a circle of quite well fed looking children in camp uniforms. By the way, perhaps the authors of the broadcast had some knowledge that there were some among them who were brought from Lithuania during round-ups. Then they should have said so.

At the end of the film, when the sad destiny of Lithuanian Jewry is discussed, these photos appeared without any commentary. It would seem as if they had something to do with Lithuania:

No. 1. These photos are available on the internet with various references: Some claim that the women in the picture were being shot by the German special squads (Einsatzgruppen), some claim that it was done by both the special 2nd squad and the SS with some assistance from the local Latvian militia, while others claim that these were the SD security service squads. The dates, however, are similar: 13, 15, 15 through 16 or 17 December 1941. Also, everywhere the place of the massacre is Latvia, some place close to Liepaja. The only book that refers to two of these photos, No. 2 and No. 3, as Lithuania, is a book by Yitzhak Arad entitled *The Partisan* (1979, New York). This terrorist, who, together with the NKVD butchers, rampaged through the peaceful villages of the Vilnius region, takes the abovementioned scenes even to Švenčionys; the date given is 9 October 1941.

Perhaps the most shocking part in this film was an interview in Russian with Fania Brantsovsky.

Exactly 64 years ago, on the night from January 29 to 30, Soviet terrorists murdered all the inhabitants of the Kaniūkai village and burned down the village for one reason only; the villagers got tired of the pillaging by the Red terrorists and organized a self-defense unit of their village.

By the way, in all the memoirs written by participants in the Soviet terrorist actions in Lithuania, only R. Margolis acknowledges the fact that it was a shame for her that the members of her squad would take not only animals and food from the peasants (so what? I.T.), but also their clothes, watches and money. In fact, the author tries to explain further in her book why it was that way: “There were in the squad many people from the criminal world: former thieves and vagrants for whom plunder was nothing new.”

Specifically in this book we discover that the abovementioned Fania Brantsovsky was among the murderers of the Kaniūkai villagers destroying the village.

For a better illustration of the events in village of Kaniūkai, we will quote from the book *Destruction and Resistance* by Chaim Lazar, which was published in New York in 1985. The book contains many other stories about the killings of Poles, German collaborators, and shady Lithuanians; the author lashes out against the measures taken by the villages to protect themselves from plunder.

“For some time it was known that the village Kaniūkai was a nest of bandits and a seedbed of intrigues against partisans. The villagers, who were well-known for their crimes, engaged the inhabitants from their surroundings and distributed among them weapons which they had received from the Germans, and led all their attacks against the partisans. The village was well-protected. Every house was a fortress and there were trenches around each homestead. Both sides of the village had watchtowers, so it was not so simple to enter the village. Nevertheless, the partisans chose precisely this village for revenge and to scare off others. The brigade headquarters decided to level the Kaniūkai village so as to teach others a lesson.

“One evening 120 of the best partisans selected from all the camps and armed with the best weapons in their possession started out to village Kaniūkai. Among them there were about 50 Jews headed by Jakov Prener. At midnight they approached the village and took the offensive. They had orders to leave nobody alive. Even animals were to be slaughtered; all property was to be destroyed.

“No participant was allowed to take any spoils; at that time the goal was to show everyone in the region that partisans came not to rob the village but to completely destroy it. The signal was given right before dawn. In a few minutes the village was surrounded from three sides. On the fourth side there was a river and the only bridge over it was seized by the partisans. With torches prepared beforehand, partisans set fire to houses, stables, and barns while never taking fire directed at them. Loud explosions were heard when the hidden ammunition store exploded. Peasants were jumping from the windows half-dressed, trying to escape. But deadly bullets would get them everywhere. Many attempted to jump into the river and swim across it to the other shore, but the same destiny awaited them, too. In a short period of time the mission was completed. Sixty homesteads were destroyed, about 300 people killed, nobody survived. This operation was fruitful. The region remained calm for a long time.”

Chaim Lazar’s book is also interesting for its many other aspects. We learned many interesting details about the life of Jews in the Vilnius Ghetto, especially about the relations between Jews and Jews, Jews and Poles, and Jews and Lithuanians during the years of the Nazi occupation of Vilnius.

The historians who took part in the broadcast could also learn many new things from it.

Lithuanian internet sites do not have any information on the commemoration of the Kaniūkai village's tragedy. Well, this is not the Pirčiupiai village that was burnt down by the Germans! We might even come to think that the Kaniūkai village is part of Poland again. The 60th anniversary of the destruction of the Kaniūkai village saw such well known Poles as Dr. Jan Nowicki, Councillor of the Polish Embassy, Michał Mackiewicz, member of the Union of the Poles of Lithuania, Valdemaras Tomačevskis, vice-chair and member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the mayor and the vice-mayor of Šalčininkai, and other well-known Poles.

And so why is nobody prosecuting Fania Brantsovsky? After a search in the internet, we get to know that she is deputy chairman of the Union of Former Ghetto and Concentration Camps Prisoners and a guide of excursions for foreigners in Vilnius and Paneriai. She took part in the international seminar "Education on the Holocaust in the East European Secondary Schools" etc.

Mrs. R. Margolis could also be questioned as an important witness.

Crimes against humanity do not fall under the statute of limitations. But those are just empty words. During the eighteen years of independent Lithuania only one Soviet storm trooper was sentenced to imprisonment, while there are murderers among the people in important positions in Lithuania (not to mention prosecutors, lawyers, KGB agents or informers who parade the cases of the victims of Communism). Then how can we look into the eyes of the children or grandchildren of these victims?

Recently a surprised Austrian journalist called me to ask why the name Arad, who is suspected of crimes against humanity, was still on the list of the members of the International Commission for the Investigation of Nazi and Soviet Crimes. I could not answer her question; I only said that there was not a single Lithuanian citizen among the members of the Commission who had suffered as a victim of the Communist genocide, while the name of a person who shot Lithuanians is second on the list right after the name of the chairperson. Who could deny that Arad deliberately associated those photos with Lithuania? If he did this out of his ignorance, it was also a disgrace for him as a doctor of history.

Maybe the young people from the *Požiūris* broadcast could also prepare a program on the Lithuanian policemen killed by the Nazis because the former refused to shoot the Jews, or a program on the Lithuanians who were shot for hiding the Jews? Or, a program on the Lithuanians who do not appear in the lists of the rescuers (there were 15 such people in our family alone). How many of these people were there in all of Lithuania?

Also, we could also follow the German example and start organizing exhibitions about the Roma Holocaust. One hundred percent of the Roma were exterminated in the land of Lithuania.

Such thoughts came to my mind after watching *Požiūris (Attitude)*.