



Mnemonic Conflicts and Cooperation in Memory Politics: Development of Narratives about Historical Traumas in Lithuania after 1991

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Abstract. This article is focused on the most visible narratives about Lithuania's trauma experiences—deportations under Stalin, the anti-Soviet partisan war and the Holocaust. These hegemonic traumatic experiences were essential for the processes of Lithuanian statehood since 1991. 'Separate memories' about the Soviet crimes, associated with the deportations under Stalin and anti-Soviet partisan war, and the Holocaust, were developed in Lithuania. Even though these memories are associated with separate memory regimes, they intersect and often conflict with each other. How were memory regimes, associated with these hegemonic memories, developed? Which actors affected the development of these regimes in separate trajectories? How did these memory regimes get into conflict, and what were the consequences of these conflicts? Is multidirectional memory, when different traumatic experiences 'talk' to each other, possible in Lithuania? The goal of the article is to survey the dominant memory regimes in Lithuania and assess their influence on the development of the Lithuanian statehood. The main research findings highlight the importance of geopolitical developments and international actors for the processes of mnemonic conflicts and mnemonic cooperation locally. In the case of Lithuania, major geopolitical developments coincided with the creation of major trauma narratives. The participation of international actors in the creation of major trauma narratives has resulted in both mnemonic conflicts and mnemonic cooperation.

Keywords: mnemonic conflict, mnemonic cooperation, historical trauma, deportations, Holocaust, anti-Soviet partisan war, Lithuania.

Atminties konfliktai ir bendradarbiavimas atminties politikoje: naratyvų apie istorines traumas vystymasis Lietuvoje po 1991 metų

Santrauka. Straipsnio objektas – labiausiai matomi pasakojimai apie Lietuvos trauminės patirtis – stalininės deportacijas, partizaninį karą ir Holokaustą. Šios hegemoninės trauminės patirtys buvo ypač svarbios nuo 1991 metų formuojant Lietuvos valstybingumą. Mokslininkai atkreipia dėmesį, kad Lietuvoje susiformavo „atskiros atmintys“ – sovietinių nusikaltimų, siejamų su sovietinėmis deportacijomis ir partizaniniu karu, bei Holokausto. Šios atmintys, siejamos su konkrečiais režimais, persipina ir neretai konfrontuoja. Kaip vystėsi režimai, susiję su šiomis hegemoninėmis atmintimis? Kurie veikėjai paveikė jų vystymąsi atskiromis trajektorijomis? Kaip konfliktavo šie atminties režimai, kokios šių konfliktų pasekmės? Ar įmanoma Lietuvoje daugiakryptė atmintis, kai įvairios trauminės patirtys kalbasi tarpusavyje? Straipsnio tikslas ir yra apžvelgti Lietuvoje dominuojančius atminties režimus ir įvertinti jų įtaką Lietuvos valstybingumo vystymuisi. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė,

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kad geopolitiniai procesai ir tarptautiniai veikėjai daro didelę įtaką mnemoniniams, arba atminties, konfliktams ir bendradarbiavimui lokaliu lygmeniu. Lietuvos atvejo analizė parodė, kad pagrindiniai geopolitiniai pokyčiai sutapo su naujų pasakojimų apie traumines patirtis atsiradimu. Tarptautinių veikėjų dalyvavimas kuriant šiuos pasakojimus tapo ir atminties konfliktų, ir bendradarbiavimo priežastimi.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: atminties konfliktas, bendradarbiavimas atminties politikoje, istorinė trauma, deportacijos, Holokaustas, partizaninis karas, Lietuva.

Introduction

A growing body of literature on trauma and memory in political science and related disciplines has demonstrated that nation states develop narratives rooted in traumatic pasts, such as genocides, wars and conquests.¹ These narratives become part of public history and memory regimes (primarily understood as hegemonic narratives supported by the public) and essential for statehood.² They are used to make sense of the world and are essential in interactions with the other states, thus providing ontological security to the states. However, these narratives are subject to scrutiny, both by domestic actors and international actors, who challenge parts of the story, especially those that focus on victimhood and heroism. Under such conditions, there is a strong temptation to defend historical memory, to safeguard what is perceived as ‘our’ history and memory. Attempts to defend memory are closely linked to memory wars, and they can even be related to actual wars between and within the states, as recent literature on memory wars suggests.³ In this way, mnemonic contestation may even become a threat to statehood.

Although there is no shortage of literature on memory wars and mnemonic contestation, much less is known about mnemonic cooperation. Michael Rothberg’s pathbreaking study on multidirectional memory raised a possibility that trauma memories (he focused on the memory of the Holocaust) do not need to be in conflict; they do not need to be part of a zero-sum game; there is such a thing as memory open to borrowing and cooperation.⁴ Thus, as suggested by Rothberg, the Holocaust memory can be an inspiration for fights for decolonization and justice. Despite a huge emotional appeal of this argument, the studies of mnemonic cooperation seem to be lacking as the field continues to focus on memory wars instead, especially given the recent developments in Ukraine, including a full-scale war that started in February 2022.

Drawing on these two bodies of literature (addressing mnemonic conflicts and mnemonic cooperation), the goal of this article is to revisit the development of two major trauma stories in Lithuania—the story about the Soviet crimes, consisting of narratives about anti-Soviet partisan resistance and deportations under Stalin and the transnational narrative about the Holocaust in Lithuania, and assess

¹ See e.g., Edkins, J. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840470>; Lerner, A. B. *From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022; Dixon, J. M. *Dark Pasts: Changing the State’s Story in Turkey and Japan*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9781501730245.001.0001>. In Lithuania, questions related to trauma and memory have been addressed by various authors, including Šutinienė, I. Trauma ir kolektyvinė atmintis: sociokultūrinis aspektas. *Filosofija. Sociologija*, 2002, Nr. 1, p. 57–62; Gyvenimas po lūžio: kultūrinių traumų psichologiniai padariniai / sudarytoja D. Gailienė. Vilnius: Eugrimas, 2015; *Maps of Memory: Trauma, Identity and Exile in Memoirs from the Baltic States* / Eds. V. Davoliūtė, T. Balke-lis. Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2012. When addressing the case of Lithuania, these works have focused on social, cultural and psychological aspects of traumatic memories, less on the ways in which these traumatic memories are used by nation states.

² See e.g., Nikžentaitis, A. *Valstybė ir atmintis: atminties kultūros ir jų reguliavimo būdai Lietuvoje, Vidurio ir Rytų Europoje*. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2021.

³ See Mälksoo, M. ‘Memory Must Be Defended’: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security. *Security Dialogue*, 2015, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 221–237, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614552549>.

⁴ See more Rothberg, M. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804783330>.

the importance of these narratives for the development of the Lithuanian statehood. Although arguably the story about the Holocaust still has not been fully adopted by Lithuania, its impact on the state and society is huge, and it has intersected multiple times with the story about the Soviet crimes. In addition to depicting the instances when these two narratives clashed and mnemonic contestation occurred, the goal of this article is also to search for instances of mnemonic cooperation involving these two hegemonic narratives.

To achieve these goals, the article proceeds in the following way. First, I present a short summary of literature focusing on mnemonic contestation and mnemonic cooperation related to trauma stories in political science. How are memory conflicts constructed? What are the main sources of mnemonic contestation? Which conditions lead to mnemonic cooperation? What is the impact of mnemonic contestation and mnemonic cooperation on state practices and the development of statehood? Second, I explore the most memorable instances of mnemonic contestation between the Soviet crimes and the Holocaust narratives, paying attention to the dynamics of these conflicts and their construction. Third, the article moves to analyze the instances of mnemonic cooperation related to trauma narratives, exploring the strategies used to achieve such cooperation and its impact on the hegemonic trauma stories. I conclude by identifying the sources of mnemonic contestation and mnemonic cooperation in Lithuania after 1991 and dwelling on the future of these processes. My analysis of mnemonic contestation and mnemonic cooperation is based on publicly available sources and insights from the interviews with individuals who were involved in the processes of memory making. The insights from the interviews are used to interpret the dynamics of mnemonic contestation and mnemonic cooperation.

1. Trauma Stories in Theory: Mnemonic Contestation and Mnemonic Cooperation

Although the definition of ‘trauma’ in political science literature is contested, it is generally agreed that collective trauma is often linked to the aftermath of mass violence, and it has a capacity to influence identities and understandings of self.⁵ Collective trauma implies a major rupture, a radical change in beliefs, and it affects the interactions of major actors. Trauma can change power relations, and it demands ‘an acknowledgement of a different temporality,’⁶ deviating from an orderly, linear perception of time. The experience of collective trauma becomes crucial in political interactions because it has the capacity to shape the dominant modes of thinking as well as ‘to resurge to importance during pivotal moments and motivate action.’⁷

The literature on trauma argues that it is difficult to articulate trauma; it is merely possible to ‘encircle it.’⁸ Nevertheless, often the experience of collective trauma, such as war or genocide, becomes the backbone of narratives embraced by political communities to make sense of their past. Such narratives can be defined as biographical narratives of the states, and they are often simplified stories that leave out certain things, and make other things (such as the experiences of trauma) visible. Biographical stories are essential for a state because they help political communities to situate themselves in the world, ‘delineate its existence in time and space, to provide us with a necessary sense of orientation about *where* we come from and *where* we are, or could be, going.’⁹

Given the ontological significance of such narratives, challenges to them (e.g., about the omissions that are likely to occur) can become triggers for fierce resistance and even crises. States are extremely

⁵ See Lerner, A.B. *From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics*, p. 11.

⁶ Edkins, J. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, p. 59.

⁷ Lerner, A.B. *From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics*, p. 5.

⁸ See Edkins, J. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, p. 15.

⁹ Berenskoetter, F. Parameters of National Biography. *European Journal of International Relations*, 2014, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 269, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066112445290>.

unlikely to change their biographical narratives, but sometimes this can happen. International pressures can include calls for apologies or demands to change the representation of an event, and sometimes they can ‘challenge the legitimacy of the narrative’ and inspire the leading politicians to change it.¹⁰ Changes usually occur when there is a complex interaction between international and domestic political forces, and the international pressures increase the likelihood of change in the narratives, while domestic factors affect the content of the change.¹¹

Undoubtedly, such contestations can be emotionally charged and painful, and crises over traumatic memory can be considered real ‘critical situations’ when states become disoriented, and their routines as well as relations with the other states are disrupted.¹² During such situations, there is a painful realization that ‘our’ history, ‘our’ memory is being challenged by ‘others’ who do not understand ‘us’ and threaten ‘us.’ Thus, as articulated by Maria Mälksoo, ‘memory must be defended’¹³—traumatic memory enters the realm of security and becomes a battlefield. Various actors—both domestic and international—may become engaged in these memory battles, and, as the recent attack by Russia on Ukraine suggests, such memory battles can become intertwined with the actual battles in war.

Variety and multitude of actors, both international and domestic, has become a feature of current memory wars which tend to spill over into the digital areas. Currently most memory wars are transnational, and they take place in mediatized spaces, such as political debates, journalistic discussions, museums and even trials.¹⁴ It becomes difficult to distinguish between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ actors in these mnemonic contestations. Under these circumstances, it becomes essentially important to trace processes associated with memory wars, and to discern the contested concepts and most important memory agents as well as their tools and strategies used to wage memory wars.

Mnemonic cooperation, albeit rare, also takes place during the time when there is an intense interplay between the global and the local forces, and when memory travels easily. Even though it is tempting to imagine Eastern Europe as ‘a closed space with its own rules and regulations of memory,’¹⁵ it is clear that this region, including Lithuania, has become a space where different memory agents, both local and international, including diasporas, exercise their memory politics and try to shape memory landscape. In this memory landscape, experiences may indeed originate in Eastern Europe, but they are interpreted, negotiated and renegotiated by actors not only from ‘here,’ but also from different parts of the world, exercising different agendas. Are these discourses articulated by various actors likely to compete, creating more memory conflicts, or is mnemonic cooperation possible? As articulated by Michael Rothberg, mnemonic cooperation (or multidirectional memory) is characterized by a refusal to think in terms of the zero-sum logic, thus avoiding competitive approaches to memory, ‘a commitment to exploring memories dialogically across allegedly distinct histories,’ and ‘a deconstruction of the straight line that is assumed to connect collective memory and group identity.’¹⁶ In the European context, this would mean a commitment to ‘a mapping of memory attuned to multidirectional movements, overlaps, and conflicts should factor in the vectors and forces of different pasts as they bear on the present.’¹⁷

¹⁰ See e.g., Dixon, J.M. *Dark Pasts: Changing the State’s Story in Turkey and Japan*, p. 4.

¹¹ See *ibid.*

¹² Cf. Subotić, J. *Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance after Communism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2019, p. 28.

¹³ Mälksoo, M. ‘Memory Must Be Defended’: *Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security*, p. 221. See also *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* / Eds. U. Blacker, A. Etkind, J. Fedor. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

¹⁴ See Saryusz-Wolska, M.; Wawrzyniak, J.; Wóycicka, Z. New Constellations of Mnemonic Wars: An Introduction. *Memory Studies*, 2022, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 1278, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980221133733>.

¹⁵ Sznajder, N. European Memory: Between Jewish and Cosmopolitan. In: *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* / Eds. U. Blacker, A. Etkind, J. Fedor. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 60, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137322067_4.

¹⁶ Rothberg, M. Between Paris and Warsaw: Multidirectional Memory, Ethics and Historical Responsibility. In: *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* / Eds. U. Blacker, A. Etkind, J. Fedor. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. p. 86. Retrieved from https://michael-rothberg.weebly.com/uploads/5/4/6/8/5468139/rothberg_between_paris_and_warsaw.pdf [accessed 28/01/2023].

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

How to navigate such complex memory landscapes that may be sites of both mnemonic cooperation and mnemonic contestation? There is an emerging consensus in the literature on mnemonic wars that ‘new research is needed with regard to the processes of new memory wars.’¹⁸ Drawing on this insight, the other parts of the article engage in process tracing of the ways in which the leading trauma narratives in Lithuania developed after 1991 and how they became the sites of mnemonic contestation and mnemonic cooperation. In depicting the mnemonic struggles and mnemonic cooperation, the leading memory agents, their strategies and impact on mnemonic landscape are analyzed as well.

2. Mnemonic Contestation: The Construction of Trauma Stories and Related Memory Wars

The first series of mnemonic contestations¹⁹ started prior to 1991, when Lithuania was engaged in various processes of strengthening statehood and multiple transitions. They lasted until mid-1990s, when Lithuanian statehood was strengthened, and Lithuania started its ‘return to Europe’ by attempting to gain entry into the EU and NATO. During that time, Lithuania developed a relatively strong ‘fighting and suffering’ memory regime focusing on the losses experienced from deportations under Stalin and resistance waged by the anti-Soviet partisans. Eventually, commemorative practices established during this period highlighted the most painful aspects associated with the Stalinist regime. This was an attempt to establish a clear break with the Soviet past and delegitimize it.

Although the public sphere was full of different historical narratives and different memories, including narratives about the trauma associated with the recent Chernobyl disaster and positive memories associated with the Grand Lithuanian Duchy, the traumas associated with the mass deportations and political repression under Stalin and, to a lesser degree, anti-Soviet armed resistance, increasingly became hegemonic trauma stories in this landscape. During the period of Sąjūdis, those losses became associated with a Soviet genocide paradigm, created by the Lithuanian diaspora in the United States in the 1940s. Members of this diaspora pursued political actions, such as lobbying the United Nations and producing political publications, to argue against the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states.²⁰ During the Sąjūdis era, the emotional power of this term was multiplied by a deluge of published deportee memoirs and moving public rituals, such as the burial of the remains of deportees brought back from the camps in Siberia. In 1992, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (Lith. *Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras*, LGGRTC) and the Museum of the Victims of Genocide (focusing on research on the Soviet crimes) were founded, thus marking the beginning of the institutionalization of the state-supported ‘fighting and suffering’ paradigm focusing on Soviet crimes. The union of the former political prisoners and deportees became a leading political force in Lithuania, uniting thousands of people, and its members became influential memory entrepreneurs supporting the ‘fighting and suffering’ memory regime which crystallized around the concept of the ‘Soviet genocide’—a major national trauma that included commemorations of deportations and repressions under Stalin.²¹ One of important contributions of these memory agents was to add a list of commemorative days to the national calendar: the fourth Sunday in May became a Day of Partisans, June 14—the Day of Mourning and Hope,

¹⁸ Saryusz-Wolska, M.; Wawrzyniak, J.; Wóycicka, Z. *New Constellations of Mnemonic Wars: An Introduction*, p. 1280.

¹⁹ I have discussed memory contestations in more detail in Budrytė, D. *The Construction of Mnemonic Conflicts about the Holocaust in Lithuania: Tensions, Contradictions, Contestations*. In: *World War II and the Holocaust in the Memory, Political and Public Historical Discourses of Eastern Central and Eastern Europe after 1989-1991* / Eds. P. Srodecki, D. Kozlova. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming in 2023.

²⁰ See more Anušauskas, A. *Genocido sąvoka Lietuvos istorijoje. Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2001, Nr. 2, p. 105-108.

²¹ The former deportees and political prisoners created many museums depicting the partisan war and deportations under Stalin. They actively participated in the creation of the main museum associated with the ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative, currently known as the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Struggles (formerly known as the Museum of the Victims of Genocide) in Vilnius.

June 23—the day to commemorate the 1941 June Rebellion (in 1997), and June 15—the Day of Lithuania's Occupation and Genocide (in 1998).²²

As soon as the 'fighting and suffering' trauma narrative started to acquire a hegemonic status in Lithuania, it became contested not only by domestic, but also by international actors. Some historians and journalists started to write about attacks on civilians by anti-Soviet resistance fighters and other sensitive issues, such as the collaboration of some resistance fighters with Nazi Germany during World War II, especially in the Holocaust. After the restoration of independence in 1991, attempts by the Lithuanian government to rehabilitate anti-Soviet resistance fighters (who had been vilified during the Soviet era) coincided with domestic and international tensions. In the early 1990s, when the process was taking place, the Lithuanian bureaucracy was still in its infancy, and was not able (or perhaps even willing) to conduct careful investigations into former resistance fighters, deportees and their helpers—all of whom were considered to be victims of the Soviet regime. In addition, there was a strong urge among many members of society to 'defend' the newly constructed memory about the evils of the Soviet regime and to show respect to its victims. Thus, by spring 1991, the Law on the Reconstitution of Legal Rights of People Repressed for Resistance to the Occupation Regimes rehabilitated over 50,000 people, some of whom had participated in the Holocaust.²³ In 1991, responding to international and local criticism, the Lithuanian government rejected five hundred requests for rehabilitation.²⁴ The local Lithuanian Jewish community was one of the most vocal voices involved in challenging rehabilitation.²⁵ This decision by the Lithuanian government to pursue de-rehabilitation elicited resistance and criticism, especially from some former political prisoners and deportees.

Public preoccupation with traumas of deportations and the anti-Soviet partisan war subsided somewhat in the mid-1990s when the newly elected post-Communist left with President Algirdas Brazauskas as its leader embraced the myth of the Grand Lithuanian Duchy as an official memory. However, the contestation over traumatic collective memory related to World War II re-emerged when in 1995 President Brazauskas visited the Knesset in Israel and expressed remorse on behalf of the state for those Lithuanians who had committed crimes against the Jews during the Holocaust. Brazauskas's apology was an extremely important political act, and it became the basis for the Lithuanian policy towards the Holocaust for years to come.²⁶ This was the birth of another major hegemonic narrative in Lithuania—commemoration of the Holocaust. However, at the time it was delivered, the apology triggered many negative reactions in Lithuania, including in the Lithuanian mass media, which described the visit as a 'diplomatic mistake,' 'ahead of its time.'²⁷

Even worse, reactions to Brazauskas's apology included a revival of the anti-Semitic 'double genocide theory,' according to which there were two genocides in Lithuania: 1) deportations and repressions committed by the Soviet Union in 1940-1941 and 1945-1952 and 2) the Holocaust. According to this belief, in 1940-1941 Lithuanian Jews supported the Soviet occupation and actively participated in the deportation of Lithuanians (ignoring the fact that Lithuanian Jews were severely affected by the 1941 deportations). Thus, the Lithuanian participation in the Holocaust (including collaboration with the Nazis) was an act of 'revenge' against the Jews. Following Brazauskas's apology, some members of the Lithuanian intelligentsia started demanding that the Jews apologize for Soviet crimes against the Lithuanian

²² See Nikžentaitis, A. *Valstybė ir atmintis: atminties kultūros ir jų reguliavimo būdai Lietuvoje, Vidurio ir Rytų Europoje*, p. 206.

²³ See more Geleževičius, R. *Holokausto teisingumas ir restitucija Lietuvoje atkūrus nepriklausomybę (1990–2003)*. Vilnius: Lietuvos teisės universiteto leidybos centras, 2003, p. 11-14.

²⁴ See Pettai, E.-C.; Pettai, V. *Transitional and Retrospective Justice in the Baltic States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 178, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107278943>.

²⁵ Interview with Faina Kukliansky, July 9, 2019, Vilnius.

²⁶ Interview with Dainius Junevičius [Dainius Junevičius is a Lithuanian ambassador. During the time of the interview, he dealt with issues related to the Lithuanian-Jewish relations], July 17, 2019, Vilnius.

²⁷ See Malinauskaitė, G. *Mediated Memories: Narratives and Iconographies of the Holocaust in Lithuania*. Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2019, p. 115.

nation.²⁸ In addition, Brazauskas's apology triggered demands for apologies for communist crimes against the Lithuanian nation (Brazauskas was a former member of the Lithuanian Communist Party). Such contestations over memory illustrate problematic intersections between two collective trauma narratives—the 'fighting and suffering narrative' initially constructed by the Lithuanian diaspora and the former political prisoners and deportees in Lithuania and the transnational Holocaust memory in which collaboration with the Nazis was seen as an ultimate evil which traveled to Lithuania from the West.

The tensions between the two trauma narratives were visible during the second series of mnemonic contestations which took place in the late 1990s until the crisis in Ukraine in 2014. This period is characterized by Lithuania's desire to be considered a member of the West. Many political strategic decisions, including decisions related to traumatic memory, were made with this goal in mind. This implied the attempts to incorporate the 'Western' narrative about World War II and the uniqueness of the Holocaust, including the participation of the Lithuanians in it.

In 1998, in order to fulfill the unofficial requirement of adoption of the Holocaust memory promoted in Western Europe and the United States, the government of Lithuania created the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania. The Commission has aimed to establish historical truth about the Nazi (1941-1944) and the Soviet (1940-1941 and 1944-1990) occupations. Therefore, it has consisted of two sub-commissions: one focusing on the Nazi occupation, the other on the Soviet occupation. This structure (which was a result of the attempts by the Commission to accommodate both hegemonic trauma stories about the 'Soviet genocide' and the Holocaust) has immediately attracted criticism from several Jewish groups who argued that the name of the Commission 'constituted an offensive conflation of Nazism and Communism,' while some Lithuanian émigrés referred to it as a 'Jewish plot.'²⁹ Dovid Katz, a vocal critic of the 'double genocide theory,' has referred to the Commission as a 'red-brown commission' and has continued to criticize it on his website *Defending History*.³⁰

According to Ronaldas Račinskas, the Executive Director of the Commission, this institution attempts to be 'a field for discussions and negotiations, in which we are aiming to have conflict free discussions and create an all-encompassing narrative which would include all of these perspectives.'³¹ However, the Commission was not able to avoid major memory contestations. Tensions over the memoirs of Yitzhak Arad (1926-2021), one of the members of the Commission, is a case in point. In 2007-2013, the Commission was paralyzed by a controversy surrounding this former anti-Nazi partisan. In 2007, the Lithuanian Chief Prosecutor for War Crimes opened a case against Arad based on the human rights abuse perpetrated by the Soviet partisans and described in Arad's memoirs. The investigation focused on Kaniūkai village, which in 1943-1944 was assaulted by a pro-Soviet partisan unit. This incident can probably be considered one of the cruelest operations by pro-Soviet partisans against civilians, where thirty-five villagers were killed.³² According to Commissioner Saulius Sužiedėlis, this investigation went forward even though Arad's memoirs suggest that 'his account of a partisan attack on a village in which he had taken part was not connected to the killings at Kaniūkai.'³³ Under international pressure, the Prosecutor dropped the case. This case, however, revived the 'double genocide theory' in public consciousness

²⁸ See Sužiedėlis, S.; Liekis, Š. *Conflicting Memories: The Reception of the Holocaust in Lithuania* In: *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe* / Eds. J.B. Michlic, J.-P. Himka. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013, p. 330, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ddr8vf.16>.

²⁹ See Sužiedėlis, S. *The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Regimes in Lithuania: Successes, Challenges, Perspectives*. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2018, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2014.937906>.

³⁰ See more Katz, D. *Red-Brown Commission*. *Defending History*, January 27, 2023. Retrieved from <https://defendinghistory.com/category/the-red-brown-commission> [accessed 27/01/2023].

³¹ *Interview with Ronaldas Račinskas*, July 9, 2018, Vilnius.

³² See Zizas, R. *Sovietiniai partizanai Lietuvoje 1941–1944 m.* Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2014, p. 464.

³³ Sužiedėlis, S. *The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Regimes in Lithuania: Successes, Challenges, Perspectives*, p. 107.

as some Lithuanians saw the Lithuanian Jews who allied with the Soviets against the Nazis as ‘deserving punishment for Soviet crimes.’³⁴

This memory war included both domestic and international actors, and it demonstrated difficulties in trying to accommodate both trauma stories—the transnational story about the Holocaust and the story of the ‘Soviet genocide’ in Lithuania. In Israel, Western Europe, and North America, Jewish anti-Nazi partisans (including the Soviet partisans in the former Soviet Union) are usually seen as brave anti-fascists, who faced an existential threat and fought an unequal and a very dangerous fight against evil. In contrast, in Lithuania after the restoration of independence, the image of anti-fascist partisans (including Jewish partisans) was different. The activities of the so-called ‘Red’ partisans were viewed as inseparable from the political aims of the Soviet Union, which was to keep Lithuania part of the Soviet Union. Not only during the period of Nazi occupation, but also at present, the ‘Red’ partisans are described as ‘bandits’ or ‘robbers’ who treated the civilians of Lithuania harshly during World War II.³⁵

During the Arad investigation, Fania Yocheles-Brantsovskaya, a Holocaust survivor from the Vilna ghetto and former anti-Nazi partisan, was summoned as a witness.³⁶ In her memoir, *A Partisan from Vilna*, Rachel Margolis, another Holocaust survivor from Vilnius, briefly described the Kaniūkai incident (portraying it as a significant victory for the partisans against the Nazis) and asserted that Fania participated in this operation.³⁷ ‘At that time, I was lying in bed after surgery... But Margolis told me that I was very brave (Rus. *boyevaya*), and she wanted to show it. How much health this cost me! And how much the mass media wrote about it!’³⁸ Brantsovskaya recalled that she was described as a ‘bandit’ in the Lithuanian press (in the context of the Kaniūkai incident). She also remembered that there were public protests when she was awarded medals of honor by the German embassy in 2009 and in 2017 by President Dalia Grybauskaitė for her contributions to Lithuania; specifically, for her outstanding work in Holocaust education about the Vilna ghetto.³⁹

Brantsovskaya’s experience during this mnemonic conflict demonstrates the complexities of Holocaust memory in Lithuania. On the one hand, there are commemorative days, public speeches and mandatory Holocaust education in school. On the other hand, there is still difficulty integrating the memory of anti-fascist Jewish partisans who fought with the partisans supported by the Soviet Union into Lithuanian collective memory. The ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative established during the Sąjūdis period associated the Soviet occupation, especially under Stalin, with the ultimate evil, and Lithuanian national independence was associated with the ultimate good. Thus, it became very difficult to empathize with anyone associated with the political forces that opposed Lithuanian independence, and this remains a major challenge for Holocaust memory in Lithuania.

The development of what Dirk Moses has called ‘partisan history’ which is the backbone of the ‘fighting and suffering’ memory regime in Lithuania remains another hurdle for the peaceful coexistence of the two hegemonic trauma narratives. As described by Moses, ‘partisan history’ includes three features: First, the reference to the actual anti-Soviet partisans who fought the Soviet Union during and after World War II; second, it refers to highly partisan attempts to defend the memory of these partisans; third, the past and the present are fused into one entity as those who defend the memory of partisans become ardent fighters for memory themselves.⁴⁰ Negotiation of memory or openness to different mem-

³⁴ See more Bravin, N. In *Other Words: Baltic Ghosts*. *Foreign Policy*, September 30, 2009. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/30/in-other-words-baltic-ghosts/> [accessed 27/01/2023].

³⁵ See more Zizas, R. *Sovietiniai partizanai Lietuvoje 1941–1944 m.*, p. 8-9.

³⁶ A more complete life story of Fania Brantsovskaya, see Brantsovskaya, F. *Biography* / Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya. *Centropa.org*, February, 2005 Retrieved from <https://www.centropa.org/en/biography/fania-brantsovskaya> [accessed 26/04/2023].

³⁷ Margolis, R. *A Partisan from Vilna*. Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2010, p. 484.

³⁸ *Interview with Fania Brantsovskaya*, June 19, 2018, Vilnius.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Moses, D.A. Partisan History and the East European Region of Memory. In: *Regions of Memory: Transnational Formations* / Eds. S. Lewis, J. Olick, J. Wawrzyniak, M. Pakier. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, p. 104, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93705-8_5.

ory paradigms is difficult for those who are devoted to the ‘partisan history’ and engage in attempts to defend memory. Devotion to ‘partisan history’ makes a dialogue between those who consider themselves professional historians and agents of memory difficult. Thus, for example, the historians working for the LGGRTC acknowledged sometimes experiencing tensions with the former political prisoners and deportees (memory activists) who resisted anything that could be considered as disrespectful for their vision of the past associated with the partisans.⁴¹

Perhaps it is not surprising that the third (and ongoing) series of mnemonic contestations is closely related to the ‘partisan history’ and memory. The annexation of Crimea and fight in eastern Ukraine in 2014 (the so-called ‘crisis in Ukraine’) resulted in what Neringa Klumbytė described as ‘sovereign uncertainty’ in Lithuania,⁴² when many Lithuanians started to feel insecure about the survival of their state, and when memories about the anti-Soviet partisans were rekindled. It is impossible to fully understand the dynamics behind the notorious mnemonic conflict surrounding the case of Jonas Noreika (‘Generolas Vėtra’) without taking the geopolitical factors into account. The geopolitical factors and the engagement of international actors made the memory about Jonas Noreika politically relevant in Lithuania, despite his relative invisibility during the first two decades of restored independence.

The story of Jonas Noreika is well known—not just domestically, but also internationally. He was an active participant in the struggle to restore Lithuanian independence under both the Soviet and the Nazi occupations; however, he also participated in the creation of ghettos during the Nazi occupation. He got engaged in anti-Soviet resistance activities in June 1940 when he became a leader of a clandestine organization which was part of the Lithuanian Activist Front. During the Nazi occupation, from summer 1941 until winter 1943, he served as the head of the local government in Šiauliai district (Lith. *savivaldybės viršininkas*). In August 1941, following the directives of his German superiors, he signed documents addressed to local officials ordering the creation of a ghetto in Žagarė.⁴³ In September 1941, Noreika issued orders to local officials to confiscate the Jewish belongings.⁴⁴ At the same time, Noreika was part of the underground organization *Lietuvių frontas* (‘The Lithuanian Front’) which boycotted SS legions in Lithuania. From 1943–1945, together with other members of the Lithuanian elite, Noreika was placed in Stutthof concentration camp. After the war, Noreika returned to Lithuania, and in 1946 he created *Lietuvos tautinė taryba* (‘The Lithuanian National Council’) which aspired to be an organization uniting all underground anti-Soviet organizations. During the same year, he was arrested for his anti-Soviet activities and executed in 1947.⁴⁵

In the 1990s, as the memory of anti-Soviet partisans was institutionalized by the Lithuanian state, Noreika’s activities related to the creation of ghettos were obscured, and he was even posthumously awarded state honors. In 1997, a plaque to this partisan commander was placed on the wall of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, which is where he worked in 1945–1946. In 2015, this plaque became the subject of public controversy. A group of prominent intellectuals demanded that the plaque honoring Vėtra be removed. Linas Linkevičius, Lithuania’s foreign minister, was the first prominent government official to ask for the removal of the plaque. He argued that keeping the plaque only helps Russia and other interested actors to ‘perpetuate propaganda’ about Lithuania, and that this weakened Lithuania’s

⁴¹ See Davoliūtė, V.; Budrytė, D. Entangled History, History Education, and Affective Communities in Lithuania. In: *Transitional Justice and the Former Soviet Union: Reviewing the Past, Looking toward the Future* / Eds. C.M. Horne, L. Stan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 331, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108182171.016>.

⁴² See more Klumbytė, N. Sovereign Uncertainty and the Dangers to Liberalism at the Baltic Frontier. *Slavic Review*, 2019, Vol. 78, No. 2, p. 336–347, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2019.89>.

⁴³ See Burauskaitė, T. B. LGGRTC: J. Noreikos veikla vokiečių okupacijos metais negali būti vertinama vienareikšmiškai. *Bernardinai.lt*, November 9, 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2015-11-09-lggrtc-j-noreikos-veikla-vokieciu-okupacijos-metais-vertintina-nevienareiksmiskai/> [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Rukšėnas, A. Jono Noreikos-Generolo Vėtros biografijos kontroversijos. *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2016, Nr. 1 (39), p. 44. Retrieved from <https://etalpykla.lituanistika.lt/fedora/objects/LT-LDB-0001:j.04~2016~1484583550943/datastreams/DS.002.0.01.ARTIC/content> [accessed 28/01/2023].

national security.⁴⁶ Linkevičius was probably the first politician who conceptualized the ways in which ‘defending memory’ can endanger Lithuania’s international status.

This mnemonic conflict became more intense in 2018 when Silvia Foti, the granddaughter of Jonas Noreika, published an essay (which in 2021 became a book *A Nazi’s Granddaughter: How I Discovered My Grandfather Was a War Criminal*⁴⁷) in which she expressed a strong belief that her grandfather was responsible for the killing of thousands of Jews in Plungė, Šiauliai and Telšiai. In her search for the truth about her grandfather, she joined Grant A. Gochin, a Holocaust memory activist who lost one hundred of his relatives during the Holocaust in Lithuania. This mnemonic cooperation turned out to be quite fruitful in the international arena: Foti and Gochin created a film about their perceived Lithuania’s ‘denial of the Holocaust,’ documenting their confrontation with the memory institution—the LGGRTC which in their eyes refused to condemn Noreika’s involvement in mass killings of Jews. The film *J’Accuse* was released in 2022, and it already has attracted quite a bit of attention in the United States.

The LGGRTC did release controversial statements about Jonas Noreika. For example, the LGGRTC argued that in 1941, the Lithuanian residents did not see ghettos as ‘part of the Holocaust’ because they did not know that ‘the isolation of Jews would end in mass killings.’⁴⁸ These arguments received widespread condemnation, especially internationally, including the international Commission which argued that ‘We find utterly unacceptable the Center’s (LGGRTC’s) attempts to surround the actions of Jonas Noreika with exculpatory arguments and obfuscations which are irrelevant to the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania and, in some cases, even offensive to the memory of the victims,’ wrote the members of the Commission in their response to the LGGRTC’s statement about Noreika in April 2019.⁴⁹ There were public discussions on the interpretation of Noreika’s actions and their significance as well.⁵⁰

The intensity and length of this mnemonic conflict reveal the strength of the ‘fighting and suffering’ paradigm after the 2013-2014 crisis in Ukraine and especially after the start of full-scale war in 2022. Some domestic actors (including, although not exclusively, nationalist groups) have continued to ‘defend the memory’ of their anti-Soviet resistance heroes, diminishing, ignoring or dismissing the facts that some of these heroes were also perpetrators and collaborators during the Nazi occupation.⁵¹

In a sense, the mnemonic conflict over Noreika is an expression of the aim of memory agents to secure ‘a desirable memory’ about brave anti-Soviet fighters who resisted the evil empire (the Soviet Union). It is extremely difficult for those who defend memory to insert stories about collaboration or even perpetration of evil into this ‘desirable memory’. At the same time, the process is complicated by the legacy of the Soviet past: The fact that some anti-Soviet resistance fighters collaborated with the Nazis and even participated in the Holocaust was exploited by the Soviet Union to portray the entire movement as ‘criminal.’⁵² It is not

⁴⁶ See more BNS. Linkevičius ragina nedelsti nukelti Generolo Vėtros – Jono Noreikos atminimo lentą. *Delfi.lt*, September 18, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/linkevicius-ragina-nedelsti-nukelti-jono-noreikos-generolo-vetros-at-minimo-lenta.d?id=79106991> [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁴⁷ Foti, S. *The Nazi’s Granddaughter: How I Discovered My Grandfather Was a War Criminal*. Washington: Regnery History, 2021. See as well a book review Klumbys, V. Silvia Foti, *The Nazi’s Granddaughter: How I Discovered My Grandfather Was a War Criminal*. *Lithuanian History Studies*, 2022, Vol. 26, p. 218-224, <https://doi.org/10.30965/25386565-02601016>.

⁴⁸ Dėl kaltinimų Jonui Noreikai (Generolui Vėtrai). *Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras*, March 27, 2019. Retrieved from http://genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/Titulinis/2019/20190327_noreika.pdf [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁴⁹ A Response to the Statement by the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania of 27 March 2019, ‘On the Accusations against Jonas Noreika (Generolas Vėtra)’. *The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania: The Sub-Commission for Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi Occupation Regime and the Holocaust*, April 11, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.komisija.lt/en/a-response-to-the-statement-of-the-genocide-and-resistance-research-centre-of-lithuania-of-27-march-2019-on-the-accusations-against-jonas-noreika-general-vetra/> [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁵⁰ See, for example, a summary of one such discussion in Tamelytė, K. Vertinant Joną Noreiką–Generolą Vėtrą. *Bernardinai.lt*, July 29, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2019-07-29-vertinant-jona-noreika-generola-vetra/> [accessed 26/04/2023].

⁵¹ Thus, after the attempt to remove the plaque to Noreika by Vilnius municipality, it was restored by a non-governmental group and continues to be in place.

⁵² See more Davoliūtė, V. Heroes, Villains and Matters of State: The Partisan and Popular Memory in Lithuania. *Cultures of History Forum*, November 17, 2017, p. 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.25626/0078>.

surprising, therefore, that often those who try to discuss the fact that the anti-Soviet resistance fighters collaborated with the Nazis are associated with the Kremlin propaganda (as narrated by Silvia Foti⁵³), while the resistance fighters some of whom collaborated with the Nazis are described as ‘fascists’ or ‘Nazis.’ As demonstrated by this story, in memory wars, there is a huge temptation to simplify stories and present clear-cut, simple arguments, and this tendency complicates the processes of addressing the dark pasts.

Due to the current geopolitical developments, most importantly, the genocidal war of Russia against Ukraine, the commitment to the ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative in Lithuania and, arguably, the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe remains strong. This makes the adoption of the ‘Western’ narrative about the Holocaust’s uniqueness unlikely; on the contrary, there is a strong tendency even in Western Europe to move away from the narrative about the Holocaust’s uniqueness, paying attention to the colonial pasts of the leading European states. Increasingly, there are calls to address Russia’s colonial past as well, especially in the context of the ongoing war, and such calls only strengthen the ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative about the Soviet crimes.

In 2019 the ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative was strengthened when the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg agreed with the interpretation of the Supreme Court of Lithuania that the ‘systematic annihilation of the (anti-Soviet) Lithuanian partisans and their helpers could be seen as genocide.’⁵⁴ Lithuania’s political elite and the nationalist-leaning public viewed this decision as a major victory for foreign policy (as the condemnation of the Soviet crimes has been viewed as one of the methods of struggle against Russia in the information war), and a sign that the West is finally starting to recognize the ‘East European’ version of history.⁵⁵ Furthermore, this was when the ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative entered into the ‘international legal forum—the ECtHR,’ and when ‘memories of Soviet crimes were shared with Western audiences’ and even included into ‘narratives developed by other EU members after 2004.’⁵⁶ These developments seem to suggest that the war in Ukraine empowered the ‘fighting and suffering narrative’ and, by extension, partisan history in Lithuania and elsewhere in the region, which means that future memory contestations, especially over the Holocaust memory (linked to the participation of the anti-Soviet partisans in the Holocaust) remain likely.

3. Emerging Roma Holocaust Memory and Hegemonic Trauma Narratives: Instances of Mnemonic Cooperation

In addition to the visible and well-established trauma narratives in Lithuania—the ‘fighting and suffering’ memory regime focusing on deportations under Stalin and anti-Soviet partisan resistance and the transnational Jewish Holocaust memory—another trauma narrative started to emerge during the past decade. This is the narrative about the Roma Holocaust experienced during World War II which until recently has been described as a ‘forgotten genocide.’⁵⁷ Even though it is probably too early to call

⁵³ Cf. Liphshiz, C. After US Teacher Exposes Her Grandfather as Nazi Collaborator, Lithuania Listens. *The Times of Israel*, October 6, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-us-teacher-exposes-her-grandfather-as-nazi-collaborator-lithuania-listens/> [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁵⁴ Beniušis, V. Istorinė byla: Strasbūro teismas patvirtino sprendimą dėl sovietų genocido Lietuvoje. *LRT.lt*, September 10, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1096370/istorine-by-la-strasburo-teismas-patvirtino-sprendima-del-sovietu-genocido-lietuvoje> [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁵⁵ See more Bruveris, V. Lietuva ir Holokaustas: vietoj žaizdų gydymo – nesibaigiantys traukuliai. *Lrytas.lt*, May 3, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2020/05/03/news/lietuva-ir-holokaustas-vietoj-zaizdu-gydymo-nesibaigiantys-traukuliai-iii-dalis--14716742> [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁵⁶ Sagatienė, D. The Transformation of Lithuanian Memories from Soviet Crimes to Genocide Recognition. *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 2022, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 397, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijac022>.

⁵⁷ I have described the developments associated with the commemoration of the Roma genocide in Lithuania in more detail in Budrytė, D. Activist Memory and Human Rights: The Commemoration of the Roma Genocide in Lithuania. *Darbai ir dienos*, 2022, t. 77, p. 123-142, <https://doi.org/10.7220/2335-8769.77.7>.

this narrative an established public memory, it has been gaining recognition and visibility.⁵⁸ This narrative found a way to coexist with the hegemonic trauma narratives, and memory activists creating and perpetuating the narrative about the Roma genocide found ways to engage in mnemonic cooperation with those who support the memory of the Jewish Holocaust.

Given the lack of written sources, such as reports, orders and memoirs, there is still little written about the Roma genocide in Lithuania. It is estimated that there may have been approximately 1,500 Roma in Lithuania during World War II.⁵⁹ Although it is difficult to assert the exact number of Lithuanian Roma who were killed during World War II, the scholarly agreement suggests that the number is close to 500.⁶⁰ There is a handful of recorded oral testimonies in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and they attest to immense suffering experienced by Roma during World War II. The narrators remembered exhausting work, poor conditions, food shortages, mass murders and mass violence.⁶¹ Similar extremely traumatic experiences associated with World War II emerge from the testimonies recorded by Aušra Simoniukštytė,⁶² Vida Beinortienė and Daiva Tumasonytė⁶³ as well as historian Vytautas Toleikis⁶⁴ who recorded Roma life stories in 1998-1999. In 2022, several Roma stories about World War II were included in *Lietuvos romų sakytinės istorijos archyvas*.⁶⁵

According to Aurėja Jutelytė, who was one of the first researchers to start analyzing Roma memory, this memory became publicly visible in Lithuania in 2012, when the commemorative events focusing on the Roma genocide in Paneriai, a major Holocaust memorial, was covered in the Lithuanian mass media.⁶⁶ As reported by the media, during that year, the ceremony commemorating August 2, the day associated with the Roma genocide, was attended by representatives from the US embassy and a US servicewoman stationed in Lithuania, attesting to the transnational origin of the commemoration of the Roma Holocaust memory in Lithuania.⁶⁷ The only Lithuanian government representative during that ceremony was Gražina Sluško from the Department of National Minorities.⁶⁸ Such commemorative events have continued, and, although they have not attracted crowds of people, the representatives from the Department of National Minorities have traditionally been present. Svetlana Novopolskaja, a Roma

⁵⁸ See firstly Avin, A.; Pilarczyk-Palaitis, A. On the Way to Visibility: The Process of Creating a Cultural Memory of the Genocide of Lithuanian Roma. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2023, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 87-102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2023.2153889>.

⁵⁹ See Bubnys, A. Romų persekiojimas Lietuvoje. In: *Užmirštas genocidas: Lietuvos romai nacių okupacijos metais* / sudarė A. Jutelytė. Vilnius: Petro ofsetas / Tautinių mažumų departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės, 2020, p. 25.

⁶⁰ See also *International Commission for the Evaluation of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania: Lithuanian Roma during the Years of the Nazi Occupation: Conclusions* / Chairman Emanuelis Zingeris; Executive Director Ronaldas Račinskas. Approved on 19 June, 2002. Retrieved from https://www.komisija.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/V.Toleikis_Roma_app-concl...pdf [accessed 28/01/2023].

⁶¹ See, for example, *Oral History Interview with Zofija Sinkevičienė* / Interviewer: Saulius Berzinis. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, September 22, 1998. Retrieved from <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508587> [accessed 30/01/2023]; *Oral History Interview with Ona Arlauskienė* / Interviewer: Saulius Berzinis. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, September 26, 1998. Retrieved from <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508608> [accessed 30/01/2023]; *Oral History Interview with Aleksas Aleksandravičius* / Interviewer: Saulius Berzinis. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, September 25, 1998. Retrieved from <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508607> [accessed 30/01/2023].

⁶² Simoniukštytė, A. Lietuvos romai: tarp istorijos ir atminties. *Lietuvos etnologija: socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, 2006, t. 6, Nr. 15, p. 123-154. Retrieved from <https://www.istorija.lt/data/public/uploads/2020/09/lietuvos-etnologija-6-15-2006-8-a-simoniukc5a1tytc497-lietuvos-romai-tarp-istorijos-ir-atminties-p-123-154.pdf> [accessed 29/01/2023].

⁶³ *Panevėžio romų kančių keliai 1941–1945 m. = Exploring the Untold Suffering of the Roma People of Panevėžys: 1941-1945* / sudarytojos V. Beinortienė, D. Tumasonytė. Panevėžys: Komunikacijos centras „Kalba. Knyga. Kultūra“, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Panev%C4%97%C5%BEio-rom%C5%B3-kan%C4%8Di%C5%B3-keliai.pdf> [accessed 30/01/2023].

⁶⁴ *Lietuvos čigonai: tarp praeities ir dabarties* / sudarė V. Toleikis. Vilnius: Garnelis, 2001.

⁶⁵ *Litovskone romengiro rakiribnytko archive / Lietuvos romų sakytinės istorijos archyvas* / sudarė A. Avin, K. Kozhanov, G. Michailovskis. Vilnius: Romų visuomenės centras, 2022. Retrieved from http://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Romu-istorijos_elektronine-compressed.pdf [accessed 28/01/2023].

⁶⁶ Jutelytė, A. Įvadas. In: *Užmirštas genocidas: Lietuvos romai nacių okupacijos metais* / sudarė A. Jutelytė. Vilnius: Petro ofsetas / Tautinių mažumų departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės, 2020, p. 8.

⁶⁷ The US embassy has traditionally supported events related to the Holocaust memory in Lithuania.

⁶⁸ See Tumavičiūtė, I. Romų holokausto aukų atminimas Lietuvoje. *Lietuvos aidas*, August 4, 2012, p. 3.

activist and a Director of the Romų Visuomenės Centras, described this government agency as an ‘ally’ and supporter of her work for Roma rights.⁶⁹

Although the Lithuanian mass media started covering the commemoration of the Roma genocide only in 2012, Novopolskaja argued that the local Roma community started to commemorate the Roma genocide as early as 2003. The community was looking for various places to commemorate the genocide, including Paneriai and Pravieniškės, where many Roma suffered; however, the Roma community chose Paneriai because ‘it became clear that many Roma were killed there.’⁷⁰ Pravieniškės was rejected for fear of perpetuation of a stereotypes associating Roma with criminality.⁷¹ Choosing Paneriai as the place for commemoration implied that this memory landscape will have to be shared with other groups commemorating the Holocaust—most notably, the Lithuanian Jewish community. Thus, as the Roma genocide memory was gaining visibility, it became clear that memory space will have to be shared, and that the Lithuanian state will be involved in the making of this memory. The weakness and marginality of Roma community in the Lithuanian society made mnemonic cooperation with the Lithuanian state a must.

A breakthrough came in 2019 when the Lithuanian government added August 2 as a commemorative day to its national calendar. August 12 is commemorated to remember the 4,300 Roma and Sinti in Auschwitz-Birkenau who lost their lives on this day in 1944 even though they resisted fiercely. The Lithuanian government recognition of the Roma genocide came after a resolution to commemorate the Roma genocide was passed by the European Parliament in 2015, and many European states, including states in Central and Eastern Europe established their own national commemoration dates. This European-level development can be attributed to decades-long activism by Roma groups and non-governmental movements supporting Roma rights in Western Europe, such as the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the International Romani Union. From the beginning, the development of this transnational memory to commemorate the Roma genocide was linked to the desire to promote human rights and confront anti-Gypsyism, which is understood as a type of racism prevalent in Europe and beyond.

A variety of international organizations, such as the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), IHRA (the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) and the Council of Europe, became memory agents of the Roma genocide and started a variety of programs to promote the memory of the Roma genocide. By 2019, Lithuania has consolidated its membership in these organizations, and, as a small state, tried to deepen its commitment to international norms and, by extension, minority rights. International norms that were created during the first two decades of the 21st century linked the commemoration of the Roma genocide to the current human rights agenda. These international developments affected the decision of Lithuania to start commemorating the Roma Holocaust and express a commitment to Roma rights. It is not a coincidence that the Lithuanian government developed its first national Roma integration program in 2000, when it was doing its best to join the European Union. The commemoration of the Roma genocide was specifically addressed much later, only in its 2015–2020 integration program.⁷²

It is important to highlight that in 2015, after the European Parliament’s resolution to commemorate the Roma genocide, the LGGRTC, a major memory institution in Lithuania committed to

⁶⁹ Interview with Svetlana Novopolskaja, September 21, 2020 (Online).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See Jutelytė, A. *Lietuvos romų genocido atmintis kaip atminties kūrėjų veikimo laukas* [politikos mokslų specialybės bakalauro darbas; darbo vadovė dr. D. Budrytė]. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto Tarptautinių santykių ir politikos mokslų institutas, 2016, p. 32. Retrieved from <https://epublications.vu.lt/object/elaba:35558538/MAIN> [accessed 27/01/2023].

⁷² See Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2015–2020 metų veiksmų planas. *Lietuvos Respublikos kultūros ministras*, 2015 m. sausio 29 d. įsakymas Nr. ĮV-48. Retrieved from http://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Romu_planas_01_merged.pdf [accessed 28/01/2023].

the development of the ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative during the first two decades after the restoration of independence, became engaged in commemorative activities of the Roma genocide. There was a commemorative public event in 2015, including the opening of an exhibition in one of the halls of the Museum of the Occupations and Struggles for Freedom (previously known as the Museum of the Victims of Genocide). Drawing on surviving archival records and family photographs, this exhibition presented a story about the life of Roma in Lithuania before World War II and their traumas during the Holocaust, including the suffering experienced in Pravieniškės. In a sense, as suggested by Ljiljana Radonić, the presentation of the Roma genocide in this museum is even more emotional and personalized (with the presentation of pictures of individuals) than the presentation of the Jewish Holocaust in the same museum, which is mostly using the language of facts and historical information.⁷³ This suggests that the memorialization of the Roma genocide did not threaten the hegemonic memory account of Lithuania’s suffering and fighting (which focuses mostly on Communist crimes and the anti-Soviet partisan resistance) that is presented in this museum.

In addition, there has been cooperation between the Lithuanian Jewish community and Lithuania’s Roma community supported by the international actor—the Erinnerung Verantwortung Zukunft (EVZ) foundation in Germany—which sponsored several projects related to Roma Holocaust memory in Lithuania. In the beginning, this cooperation was difficult. According to Faina Kukliansky, the leader of Lithuania’s Jewish Community (the Litvaks), prior to 2015 the two memories did not peacefully coexist, and there was even competition between them. There were some who questioned whether the Roma did indeed experience a genocide, and whether their experiences should be described using the term ‘Holocaust.’ According to Kukliansky, these were ‘childish arguments.’⁷⁴ She argues that it is essential for the two communities to cooperate, and these two communities do share a common history: ‘We were already hurt one time in the past. [There was an attempt to] kill all Jews, all Roma in Lithuania.’⁷⁵ The construction of narratives about a shared trauma (the Holocaust) prompted mnemonic cooperation between Lithuania’s Jewish and Roma communities.

The joint mnemonic projects between the Jewish community and Roma community included a project to install Stolpersteine (‘stepping stones’) to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust—not only the Jewish victims, but Roma victims as well. This act of remembrance included placing small commemorative plaques in the places where Roma lived before they were deported to camps during World War II. Another project sponsored by the EVZ included cooperation between the Jewish and Roma communities on how to fight antigypsism and antisemitism in Lithuania. This project took place in 2017 and 2018, and it included meetings, workshops and focus groups during which the communities learned about each other, their histories and memories. This cooperation continued in 2019 when the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture recruited Rūta Sinkevičienė, a journalist who has dealt with topics related to Lithuania’s Roma community in the past, to create the first documentary film *Juodasis paukštis. Romų genocido atmintis* (The Black Bird: Memory of the Roma Genocide). This documentary included comparisons between the experiences of Lithuania’s Jewish and Roma communities (e.g., both communities were described as ‘new others’ in Lithuania; both were depicted as having experienced traumas associated with the Holocaust), but it also made it clear that the Roma genocide was still a ‘forgotten’ genocide and ‘an open wound’ for Lithuania’s Roma. The two communities joined their forces in a joint online event in November 2020, when they articulated their common strategic goals to work for tolerance in the Lithuanian society and to try to eliminate institutional discrimination. These memory projects sponsored by the EVZ seemed to have been quite impactful for both communities, promoting cooperation and

⁷³ This observation was made during the Q and A session of the Panel CE8 The Roma in Central Europe. In: *Conference: Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN)*, May 5-8, 2021 (Online), p. 2. Retrieved from <https://networks.h-net.org/node/7534905/pdf> [accessed 28/01/2023].

⁷⁴ *Interview with Faina Kukliansky*, October 5, 2020 (Online).

⁷⁵ Kukliansky, F. *Speech during the Showing of ‘Juodasis paukštis,’* November 13, 2020 (Online).

increasing knowledge about each other. In addition, these projects helped to expand the concept of the Holocaust to include the Roma experiences.⁷⁶

Mnemonic cooperation between the Roma and Jewish communities has especially been visible in the cultural sphere. In 2018, the Roma community created, in the words of Novopolskaja, ‘their own’ event—the musical play *Samudaripen. Mergaitė iš vagono* [Samudaripen. A Girl from a Railcar] which included Roma performers and which was shown in three major towns in Lithuania (Vilnius, Šiauliai and Panevėžys). The play was accompanied by an exhibition created by the LGGRTC for educational purposes. The play featured a Roma family that was being transported to a concentration camp in a railcar. On the next track, a Jewish family was being transported. During stops, a young Roma girl engaged in conversations with a Jewish boy. At some point, the Jewish boy is gone, and the Roma girl does not have anyone to talk to. In the end, the Roma family is gone as well, and only ashes remain. The play has highlighted the similarities between the traumas associated with the Jewish Holocaust and the Roma Holocaust.

Similar portrayal of the Roma and Jewish experiences emerge from the Oral History Archive of Lithuania’s Roma (Lietuvos romų sakytinės istorijos archyvas). In that archive, there is a story about a Roma family who saved a Jewish girl during the Holocaust. At one point, the Roma family was hiding a Jewish girl, and this girl shared a physical resemblance to the Roma. In this moving story, there is a phrase: ‘The Jews and Roma—are basically the same’ [Lith. *Juk žydai ir romai—tai praktiškai tas pats*],⁷⁷ which exemplifies an instance of multidirectional memory between the two communities.

This analysis of mnemonic cooperation between Lithuania’s Jewish community and the Roma as well as between Lithuania’s state institutions and the Roma community suggests that, like other minorities, Roma had often to rely on ‘interethnic mediators’ (members of more powerful groups) to communicate their memory.⁷⁸ It appears that the collaboration with Lithuania’s Jewish community has resulted in the hybridization of the Holocaust memory in Lithuania, as Roma’s experiences and memories have increasingly been recognized publicly—often with the help of the Jewish community. Lithuania’s desire to be a ‘good European’ and integrate the European norms, such as commemoration of the Roma genocide, was one of the stimuli behind the cooperation between Lithuanian state institutions and the Roma community.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this article explored both mnemonic conflicts and mnemonic cooperation surrounding the leading trauma narratives in Lithuania. I argued that, since the Sąjūdis period in the 1980s, Lithuania has embraced a ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative focused on anti-Soviet resistance and deportations and repressions under Stalin. The main challenges to the ‘fighting and suffering’ narrative emerged when the ‘Western’ narrative about the uniqueness of the Holocaust was introduced there after Lithuania regained its independence in 1991. This narrative was hybridized when stories about the Roma Holocaust were incorporated during the second decade of the 21st century, after the commemoration of the Roma genocide became a European norm.

This analysis of mnemonic wars and mnemonic cooperation highlights the importance of geopolitical conditions surrounding the formation of the Lithuanian statehood on the trauma narratives. Major geopolitical developments—the disintegration of the USSR, the expansion of the European Union and NATO as well as the war in Ukraine—had a major effect on the Lithuanian statehood. These developments also

⁷⁶ Interview with Dovilė Rūkaitė Rūkaitė, September 27, 2020 (Online) [Dovilė Rūkaitė is the Project Leader of Lithuania’s Jewish Community].

⁷⁷ *Litovskone romengiro rakiribnytko archive / Lietuvos romų sakytinės istorijos archyvas*, p. 93.

⁷⁸ Cf. Avin, A.; Pilarczyk-Palaitis, A. *On the Way to Visibility: The Process of Creating a Cultural Memory of the Genocide of Lithuanian Roma*, p. 89-90.

coincided with the creation of a major trauma narrative ('the fighting and suffering' memory regime), attempts to integrate the transnational Holocaust narrative (EU/NATO expansion), and the assertion of the partisan history (strengthening of 'the fighting and suffering' memory regime) associated with the war in Ukraine.

International interventions during these major geopolitical events became the sources of both mnemonic conflicts and mnemonic cooperation. Thus, for example, my analysis of the three series of mnemonic wars in Lithuania since 1991 demonstrates that major mnemonic conflicts resulted from the clashes between the local 'partisan' memory and international actors 'defending' transnational Holocaust memory. At the same time, the international actors, such as the EVZ foundation, became essential in helping to develop a hybrid Holocaust memory in Lithuania and promoting cooperation between the local Jewish and Roma communities. The decision by the European Parliament to pass a resolution recognizing a memorial day commemorating the Roma genocide during World War II resulted in the actions of recognition by the Lithuanian government and its institutions.

Recognizing the crucial importance of geopolitical developments related to statehood and international actors for the development of trauma narratives does not mean, as some (e.g., Kathrin Bachleitner) have argued that 'a country's memory [originates] in foreign policy strategy within the international environment.'⁷⁹ The case of Lithuania demonstrates that there is an important link between the developments associated with the Lithuanian statehood (such as the disintegration of the USSR, EU/NATO expansion and the war in Ukraine) and Lithuania's collective memory. These 'critical situations' coincide with the (re)creation of new trauma narratives and related discourses. After trauma narratives are articulated, various actors—both domestic and international—attempt to influence these narratives and discourses as well as to introduce new ones, and these interventions may result in memory wars (attempts to 'defend memory') and mnemonic cooperation.

Exploration of various developments associated with the Roma memory suggest that the remembrance of collective trauma and the involvement of international actors does not need to lead to mnemonic conflicts. Empathetic emotional engagement taking place beyond the borders of the immediate community of suffering is difficult, but not impossible. Sometimes such engagement can be a result of strategic calculations, including a desire to be a 'good European.' Such engagement suggests the acknowledgment of various traumas experienced by different communities and a movement towards a sense of shared human vulnerability. Perhaps a focus on the local and individual levels and an acknowledgment of the multiple traumas experienced by various communities may help to alleviate mnemonic conflicts in the future.

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⁷⁹ Bachleitner, K. *Collective Memory in International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, p. 3.

and 2015 she was a visiting professor at Vytautas Magnus University and Vilnius University in Lithuania. Her articles on minorities, women and historical trauma in Lithuania have appeared in the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, *Gender and History*, and *Journal of International Relations and Development*. Her most recent book is *Crisis and Change in Post-Cold War Global Politics: Ukraine in a Comparative Perspective*, co-edited with Erica Resende and Didem Buhari-Gulmez (Palgrave, 2018). Her other publications include books and articles on minority rights and historical memory in Eastern Europe. She is President of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS).

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