

# Multidirectional memory and the deportation of Lithuanian Jews

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**ABSTRACT:** Although Jewish Lithuanians were deported in June 1941 in numbers that were fully proportional to their share of the population at the time, their experience has been largely excluded from the collective memory of this historical trauma. Drawing on a series of in-depth interviews with Lithuanian Jewish deportees, memoirs and archival documents this article seeks to restore their experience to its rightful place, and using the framework of “multi-directional memory”, explores the reasons why their unique perspective was “forgotten” for so many years, only to be recovered in recent public discourse.

**Keywords:** displacement, deportation, memory, Jewish-Lithuanian relations.

A quarter-century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Stalinist Gulag is still recalled in Lithuania through the prism of what Michael Rothberg (2009: 5) calls “competitive memory,” where “the boundaries of memory parallel the boundaries of group identity”. The trauma of forced migration, notably the mass deportation to the distant reaches of Siberia of about 17,500 Lithuanian citizens in June 14-18, 1941 is quite often perceived as the “property” of ethnic Lithuanians, a national trauma whose value in terms of symbolic capital is seen to rise or decrease through comparison with the historical traumas of “other” groups, notably the Holocaust of the Jews, which began in Lithuania in the weeks and months that followed the deportations, eliminating over 90% of the Jewish population of the country. The resulting “competition” between the Gulag and the Holocaust in the discourse of the past is one of the obstacles to historical reconciliation between Lithuanians and Jews to this day.

This competition between memories is not, however, inevitable, and can be addressed through what Jasmina Husanović has formulated elsewhere in this volume as “an affirmative politics of witnessing to trauma,” one that navigates between the poles of “ethnopolitist mobilization” on the one hand, and the “aesthetic liberal management of affect” on the other (Husanović, this issue). Indeed, one can point to several initiatives in this direction on the part of the political authorities and its public institutions of memory and education since the early 1990s, which commemorate the traumas of the Holocaust and the Gulag as

crimes committed by the totalitarian occupational regimes, and recognizing the role of local collaborators in each (Davoliūtė, 2011).

However, the inertia of prejudices instilled during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania, such as the notion of “double genocide,” which frames the killing of Jews in the Holocaust as some sort of revenge for the deportation of Lithuanians, remains in place. To address this problem, this article begins by recalling that Lithuanian Jews were targeted by the deportations of June 1941 and suffered in numbers entirely proportional to their share of the population at the time. It then proceeds to trace the evolution of the memory of the Jewish deportation, how the experience of Lithuanian Jewish deportees was initially “forgotten” and belatedly “remembered” through memoirs, commemorative activities and historical studies.

The factors shaping this memory over several decades and continents are complex and controversial, and this paper will only scratch the surface of this issue before proceeding to describe the key features of the experience of deportation for the Lithuanian Jews. It does so on the basis of a series of in-depth interviews conducted with several Jewish deportees, all but one of whom now live in Israel, referring as well to the available archival sources relating to their arrest and deportation, as well as written memoirs of other Jews and Lithuanians deported from Lithuania.

By focussing in this manner on the “real voices and real bodies” of Lithuanian Jews deported to the Gulag, this article concludes that an affirmative politics of witnessing has the potential to overcome the paradigm of “competitive memory” and restore a genuinely multidirectional memory of the traumas of WWII in Lithuania.

## The deportation in fact and memory

Liuba Segal (b. 1927) was almost 14 years old when uniformed men took her from her home in the town of Utena, Lithuania. Her family was given thirty minutes to pack their things, and then were loaded into a lorry and driven to an unknown destination. Liuba had just completed her third and last year of progymnasium (junior high school), but was not present to receive her diploma at the graduation ceremony that took place later that day on Saturday, 14 June 1941 (Liuba Segal, 24 April 2014).

That same night another girl of about the same age, Dalia Grinkevičiūtė (1928-1989), was taken from her home in Kaunas along with her brother, mother and father. Dalia and Liuba were put on different trains, but after a long and excruciating journey through the vast Siberian expanse, they ended up at the same camp in Trofimovsk, an uninhabited island on the icy shores of the Laptev Sea. It was one of the harshest settlements in the entire system of Soviet special settlements, north of the Arctic Circle. One third of those banished to this place died during the winter of 1942. Dalia and Liuba survived the hunger and the cold and became friends.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liuba’s father died in 1942 and Dalia’s father in 1943, both of starvation.

Liuba's family was Jewish, and Dalia's family Lithuanian, but the Soviet deportations from the Western borderlands of 1941 did not distinguish among the victims on the basis of creed or ethnic origin. Nonetheless, the arrest, transport and arrival to the Soviet camp or special settlement were only the beginning of the story of displacement that would continue through exile of varying duration and location, followed by the return to Lithuania and, as was typically more common with Jewish deportees, onward emigration to Israel or other destinations outside the USSR.

Upon her return to Lithuania, Grinkevičiūtė became a dissident, and versions of her memoirs on her deportation and survival in Trofimovsk were smuggled abroad and published as *samizdat* in the 1970s. They were the first account of the deportation to be published openly in Lithuania, at the peak of the popular movement against Soviet rule in the late 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Through her memoirs, and those of other Lithuanian deportees, the deadly winter of 1942 in Trofimovsk became part of a shared national memory, a key building block of the new post-Soviet Lithuanian identity (Davoliūtė, 2012).

For Liuba Segal, however, the murder of two of her sisters – those who were not deported – in the Holocaust, along with her grandparents, friends, relatives and the entire Jewish community in her native Utena, radically conditioned her experience of return to Lithuania, and indeed her entire apprehension of the experience of deportation. By the time Lithuanian independence was restored, she had already immigrated to Israel, as had many other Jewish Lithuanians who were deported in June 1941.

The Segal and Grinkevičius families were deported in accordance with the long-established Soviet practice of using forced population transfers as a tool of social engineering.<sup>3</sup> In this case, the objective was to secure the western borderlands of the USSR by “cleansing” the newly occupied territories of potentially non-loyal elements. The Soviet Union had invaded the Baltic States and Poland in line with the terms of the secret protocol to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939, which divided Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence and paved the way for the partition of the region by these two totalitarian regimes.

Over the next year, the Soviets consolidated their sphere of influence. When the Baltic States were occupied in June 1940, the secret police drew up lists of potential enemies. Shortly before Germany attacked the USSR on 22 June 1941, the Soviets launched an operation to deport these hostile elements along the frontier. The NKVD had orders to arrest members of various nationalist parties, police officers, gendarmes, landowners, manufacturers, and former state officials. In effect, entire families were arrested and deported on the basis of

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<sup>2</sup> The first published reference to Grinkevičiūtė's experience of deportation was in 1988, in an article written by a popular Soviet Lithuanian writer and public figure Justinas Marcinkevičius. This publication opened the public debate about deportations in Lithuania (Marcinkevičius, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> For a concise survey of the history and literature on this subject, see Martin (1998).

a “partially imagined relationship between social origin, on the one side, and intention and loyalty on the other” (Blum and Koustova, 2016).

In total, the deportations that took place from 22 May until 22 June 1941 in Western Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltic States and Western Belarus affected about 106,000 persons (Gurjanovas, 1997); including 17,500 from Lithuania, of whom 4,700 were sent to prison camps (i.e., the male heads of families), and 12,800 family members (mostly their wives and children) were moved to special settlements (Burauskaitė, 1999). Among those deported were more than 5,000 children, including 965 children less than four years of age; 1,918 between five and ten; and 2,276 between eleven and eighteen (Balkelis and Davoliūtė, 2016).

The number of Jews among those deported, about 1,700, was roughly proportionate to the percentage of Jews in the general population: 70 per cent of the 17,500 deportees were ethnic Lithuanians, 17.7 per cent were Poles, 9.2 per cent were Jews, and 2 per cent Russians (Anušauskas, 1999: 141). More detailed statistics concerning the repression of Lithuanian Jews during the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1941 can be summarized as follows:

- of the 29,250 Lithuanians repressed by Soviets between 1939–1941 through imprisonment and/or deportation, 2,613 were Lithuanian Jews;
- of the 17,500 Lithuanians deported on 14–18 June 1941, 8.9 per cent were Lithuanian Jews;
- in raw figures, 334 Lithuanian Jews were arrested before 14 June 1941; 385 were deported on 14–18 June to camps (mostly men), 1,660 deported to special settlements (mostly women/children/elderly); and the destination of 234 is not clear (Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas, 1992: 62).

Such are the facts of the deportation, but the memory of the trauma evolved in its own way, under various pressures. Within the Soviet Union, the experience of Lithuanian Jewish deportees (or other Jewish deportees) was repressed for decades. Not only was there a taboo on any memorialization of the deportations and all other forms of Soviet repression, but the Holocaust itself could hardly be mentioned as a distinct tragedy of the Jewish community. Virtually all of the “work of memory” was focused on the sufferings of the “Soviet people” at the hands of the Nazis. Indeed, in Soviet Lithuania it was neither the deportations nor the Holocaust as such, but one particular atrocity committed by German forces that served as the key site of the memory of WWII.

The memorial constructed near the village of Pirčiupiai provides one good example of this perspective. On 3 June 1944, a German punishment squadron burned 119 inhabitants of this village to death, including 49 children under the age of 16, in response to a partisan attack on German forces in the area. A statue was erected near the site in 1960, and it soon came to serve as a regular destination for school outings and an obligatory stop on the route of foreign dignitaries visiting the LSSR. A poem called “Fire and Ashes” was taught in schools and had to be memorized by virtually every Soviet Lithuanian schoolchild (Marcinkevičius, 1997).

Meanwhile, although a few monuments to the deportations were erected from time to time in a clandestine manner, they were always quickly removed, and were seen by very few people. And while a limited number of monuments to mass killings were established at key sites of the Holocaust in Lithuania, such as the 9<sup>th</sup> Fort in Kaunas or at Paneriai, near Vilnius, the accompanying explanations did not refer explicitly to Jews but to the “Soviet people” as the victims of Nazi crimes (Levin, 2010: 53).

Censorship, the suppression of testimony and open discussion of the deportation led not only to the “forgetting” of the events in public discourse, but prevented any efforts to remediate the distorted narratives of Nazi propaganda, imposed by the German occupation that lasted from 1941 to 1944. Nazi-controlled newspapers introduced and perpetuated the myth of the “double genocide,” which implied that the Jews were responsible for the deportation of the Lithuanians, even though, as noted above, ethnic Jews and ethnic Lithuanians were to be found in roughly proportionate measure among the victims of the deportations.<sup>4</sup> The myth of “double genocide” was not dismantled during Soviet times and remained in the distant recesses of Soviet Lithuanian collective memory until open discussion of the deportations became possible in the late 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

In the late 1980s, the open publication of deportee memoirs in Soviet Lithuania was a major part of the “return of memory” that coincided with the de-legitimization of Soviet rule. By 1988 such texts were circulating widely, including the series called *Tremties archyvas* [Archives of Deportation] in *Pergalė*, the official journal of the Soviet Lithuanian Writers Union. The initial serial publication of Grinkevičiūtė’s memoirs, starting in 1988, was followed by other important works, including *Amžino įšalo žemėje* (1989), *Leiskit į Tėvynę* (1989), Jūratė Bičiūnaitė-Masiulienė’s *Jaunystė prie Laptėvų jūros* (1990), Arvydas Vilkaitis’ *Tremtinio dalia* (1990), Romualdas Staugaitis’ *Lietuviai Šiaurėje* (1991) and others.

The publication of deportee memoirs and the broader campaign to record the history of Soviet repression emphasizing the suffering of the Lithuanian nation was inseparable from a conscious political strategy of construction of a new, national Lithuanian identity during the popular movement against Soviet rule. The canvassing of data on the repressions was part of an effort of social consolidation and political mobilization. Activists distributed questionnaires to people across the country, to come up with an accurate list of those deported, killed or otherwise repressed during the initial Sovietisation of Lithuania. Special questionnaires about deportation were distributed to former deportees during political rallies, at the *Sąjūdis* centres, in Catholic parishes and so on (Birutė Burauskaitė, personal communication, 13 May 2014).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the two major newspapers allowed under the Nazi occupation: *Į laisvę*, published in Kaunas, along with *Naujoji Lietuva*, published in Vilnius.

<sup>5</sup> On the initial publication of deportee memoirs in Soviet Lithuania under conditions of Gorbachev’s *glasnost*’ and the shaping of this memory by the popular movement against Soviet rule *Sąjūdis*, see Davoliūtė (2012). For more on the participation of the Lithuanian Jewish community in the activities of *Sąjūdis*, see Sirutavičius, Staliūnas and Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (2012: 485-509).

This effort led to the publication in 1992 of a relatively complete list of all those who were deported and otherwise suppressed by the Soviets in 1941 (Burauskaitė, 1999). The list did not include the ethnic or religious identity of the victims, since the intent was to present the nation as a unified whole, and not to emphasize ethnic, confessional or other differences. Hence, the introductory articles penned by the leaders of the initiative, which preceded the list of names of those deported, gave a specific colour to the description of this experience, saying that “the genocide of the Lithuanian nation is a uniquely programmed process of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” and describing the collected testimonies as having a “universal” feature, that of “connecting one’s fate with the fate of Lithuania.” Indeed, Birutė Burauskaitė, the head of the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, says the initial inclusion of the word “genocide” in the title of her organization reflected a strong emotional impulse to signal the suffering of the Lithuanian nation at the hands of the Soviet occupying power (personal communication, 13 May 2014).

It is also worth noting that the “return” of deportee memory in Lithuania had a strong religious aspect. This might be partially explained by the fact that the Catholic Church played such a prominent role in the anti-Soviet underground resistance. The narrative of the repression of the Catholic Church and the imagery of Christian martyrdom were closely intertwined with that of the deportation. For example, during the popular movement, the retrieval from Siberia and the reburial of the remains of deportees in Lithuania was overlain with Catholic rites and ceremonies, crosses and icons – all of which reinforced the ethnic Lithuanian and Catholic dimensions of the identity of the deportees and their experience.

It also reflects the strength of religious practice among those Lithuanians who were deported after 1945. After the elimination of the Lithuanian Jews in the Holocaust and the depopulation of the cities by war and displacement, the communities that survived were predominantly rural, ethnic Lithuanian and Catholic in faith. And while the deportations of June 1941 have an iconic significance in Lithuanian memory as the first mass deportation, they affected “only” 17,500 people, while subsequent waves of deportations beginning in 1935 affected well over 200,000.

As a result, the population of former deportees engaged in the “return of memory” in the late Soviet period probably included a significant number of relatively devout Catholic Lithuanians with rural origins.<sup>6</sup> In their memory, the experience of deportation was closely intertwined with the Catholic faith and their representations of the deportation were infused with images of Christ-like suffering.

Outside the Soviet Union, the first accounts of the deportation of Soviet Jews were collected by scholars and Jewish relief agencies in displaced persons camps in Germany. However, in spite of the fact that the majority of surviving Jews in these camps had returned from the Soviet Union, efforts to document and record

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<sup>6</sup> Arūnas Streikus (2016: 212) notes that religion was an extremely important element of the self-identity of Lithuanians deported after 1945: “religion was kept as the most reliable element of their lost world that helped them to deal with the trauma of displacement.”

their experience were focussed almost exclusively on those who had survived Nazi concentration camps. As noted by Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky:

Although the majority of Jewish DPs who passed through occupied Germany were Polish Jews who had survived in Soviet exile, this distinctive wartime experience did not play a central role in the public memory of the Jewish DPs. The horrific Holocaust experiences of *direct survivors* outweighed and muffled the experiences of Soviet exiles. For both *direct survivors* and *refugees*, early Holocaust commemoration centred on loss and destruction rather than on survival (Jockusch and Lewinsky, 2010).

The marginalization of Jewish refugee history in Europe and America was also the result of the Zionist political orientation of scholars and Jewish relief organizations at the time. According to Atina Grossmann (2012), “the central frame of reference is the DP universe as an autonomous Jewish space, which is narrated simultaneously as the prologue to emigration to the Land of Israel.” She says there was a sense of gratitude towards the Soviet Union for having in effect saved the lives of so many Jews, combined with a sense of *realpolitik* in that they needed the on-going cooperation of the Soviet Union to allow the emigration of more Jews, so criticism of the deportations was kept to a minimum (Grossmann, 2012).

The recent revival of interest in the distinct fate of the relatively small number of Lithuanian Jewish deportees must also be understood in a transnational or multidirectional perspective. One rather diffuse source of this interest can be traced to the gradual expansion of the scope of studies of the Soviet deportations in the Baltic States and the rise of scholarly interest in the dynamics of population displacement in twentieth century Europe.<sup>7</sup>

Another reason is a renewed interest in the history of the Lithuanian Jewish community, partly stimulated by programmes supporting Lithuania’s integration into the cultural space of the European Union and also through spontaneous grass roots initiatives. For example, while the wave of the “return” of the Lithuanian memory of deportations took place during the popular movement and shortly after, the published memoirs conveying the experience of the Lithuanian Jewish deportees started appearing only recently with the publication of David Zak’s *Žvilgsnis praeitin* (2012), Rachel and Israel Rachlins’ *Šešiolika metų Sibire* (2012), Levas Feigelovičius’ *Saulėtas šaltas pavasaris* (2009), fragments of Sana Levin’s (Meller) diary (2010) and several others.

Indeed, it was only recently, during the research and preparations for a special exhibition on Lithuanian Jews during the Soviet period in 2014, that a group of researchers from the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum combed through this general list of deportees to identify probable Jewish deportees, based on a visual inspection of the family names of those on the lists of repressed persons. A parallel effort was conducted by researchers working for the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes Committed by the Nazi and Soviet Occupational

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<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive survey of recent works, see Ferrara (2011).

Regimes in Lithuania, and their calculations of the total number of deported Jews differed only slightly (The staff of the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum, personal communication, 23 May 2014). In this manner, researchers were able to establish the percentages of ethnic Jews among Lithuanians deported on 14-18 June 1941, as noted above.

In the end, one could argue that the specific memory of the Lithuanian Jewish deportation was not so much forgotten as significantly belated in its public emergence and circulation, prompted by the maturation of the institutions of commemoration within Lithuania as well as the efforts of individual survivors to record their memoirs and convey their experience to subsequent generations, to which this article now turns.

## The experience of deportation

The interviews conducted for this article took place in 2013-2015, with witnesses who were, at the time of our meetings, between 73 and 91 years of age. As such, even the oldest, Bencel Segal, was only 17 when initially deported, while the youngest, Pesia Einhorn (Kovalevsky), was born in 1941, during the final leg of her family's long journey to the camp in Yakutsk. As such, their experience and recollections differ in many ways from those who were adults at the time.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, their testimony also encapsulates fragments of the experience of their parents, relatives and neighbours. In each testimony the story of the individual and that of the family and broader community of deportees is often woven together. In this manner, the oral testimony they provide is an important complement to what can be gleaned from the archives on the deportations. Indeed, most of the archival materials focus on the adult, usually male head of the family, while documents concerning the spouse and children are included, if at all, as "supplementary" documentation to the case.<sup>9</sup>

The interviewees come from all parts of Lithuania: Anykščiai, Rokiškis, Vilkaviškis, Lazdijai, Utena, Raseiniai. Israel Mey-Tal Montviliski is something of an exception insofar as he came from Druskininkai, which would be incorporated into Lithuania in 1939 but which was part of Poland during the interwar period. The group is representative of all major targets of deportation, from relatively humble small business owners like the Segals to wealthy estate owners like the Montviliskis, Mellers or Aprils. Some families were apolitical while others were members of Lithuanian patriotic organizations, like Daniel Einhorn, a deputy head of the Anykščiai branch of the Lithuanian Jewish War Veteran Society.

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<sup>8</sup> The list of people interviewed is presented in references.

<sup>9</sup> References to the Soviet police and secret service files of the interviewees were examined at the Lithuanian State Archives, the Special Archives section, and are listed in the references below.

In all cases, their displacement was accompanied by significant shifts in identity. For example, Golda Einhornaitė, spoke Yiddish and Lithuanian as a child, and almost no Russian, but this changed with her exile at age six. Immersed in a Russian-speaking environment, she began to speak Russian with her family and the broader community. No longer addressed as Golda, she became Olga Einhorn, received her education in Russian and was formed as an adult in a Soviet cultural environment. She knew Lithuanian well enough to converse upon her return, but she lacked a professional knowledge of the language, which restricted her ability to teach in a Lithuanian school. By the time I met her in Israel, she was speaking in Hebrew in public, in Russian with her sister, and in a mixture of Lithuanian and Russian with me. This model of linguistic and personal transformations applies to all of the interviewed deportees.

Initially, the experience of deportation was no different for Jewish Lithuanians than for any other Lithuanians. Almost half of those deported, or 7,232 people, arrived in the summer of 1941 to the Altai region of Siberia. In June 1942, a large group was sent to the Far North, to the mouth of the Lena River at the Laptev Sea, to develop the local fishing industry. In total, 2,785 people were exiled from Lithuania to Trofimovsk, on the island of Tit-Ary, at the mouth of the Lena, and at various other sites along the banks of the Laptev Sea. Only 1,157 would return to Lithuania. More than half would die, mostly during the winter they spent there in 1942–1943.

Sara Prusakaitė, who was deported and forced to work in different settlements in the Olekminsk area, vividly recalls the extreme conditions of the first winters (although this area was much less harsh than Trofimovsk). She highlights the specific predicament faced by women deportees; namely, their relations with the male representatives of the administration of the special settlements. This issue is rarely addressed in the memoirs of Lithuanian deportees with such exceptions as the above mentioned Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's account.

Like Grinkevičiūtė in her memoirs, she points out that submitting to sexual liaisons with administrators was one of the strategies of survival. "This Laptev, the chief accountant of the Olekminsk district, a married man, had intimate relations with several of his subordinates: my Jewish friend from Marijampolė whose Lithuanian fiancée was sent to another location to work, one Russian girl and one Yakutian employee," Sara recalls. She recounts how the very same Jewish girlfriend Judita (not her real name), confided to her that the intimacy between her and her married and much older supervisor was forced upon her when they were on the way to check the accountant's work in the neighbouring sub-district. She continued having intimate relations with her supervisor, and thanks to this liaison she was able to get extra food rations and help out her family. She was also not forced to perform the back breaking work of cutting wood, and was allowed to remain in the office until her fiancée came back, by which time she had given birth to a daughter. The fiancée, his Lithuanian family (also deportees who travelled in the same train car) and the Jewish family members of Judita accepted the

illegitimate daughter as their own since this was seen by all as the form of survival through the hardest time of war (Sara Prusakaitė, 10 November 2013).

Sara emphasized that such strategies saved a number of women from perishing in the camps. The primary targets of camp administrators were young widows whose husbands were either murdered or separated from them, or young women who did not have a boyfriend nearby. Those who were in a relationship with the partner who was around in the same settlement were spared open advances by the male authorities.<sup>10</sup> The illegitimate children from camp administrators usually were brought back into the families from the earlier relationships as these liaisons were not seen as voluntary but forced. Such narratives of survival are usually only mentioned in passing, as in the memoirs of Grinkevičiūtė, and generally avoided altogether in the written memoirs of Lithuanian deportees, or presented in an elusive and romanticized way, as in the account of the Lithuanian deportee Elena Červinskienė (1995), who was in the same settlement as Sara Prusakaitė's family.<sup>11</sup>

Another notable motif in the interviews is the relatively marginal role played by religion in the experience of deportation. None of the fathers of those interviewed was religious, aside from the father of Pesia and Golda Einhornaitė, who, as already mentioned, was deported for being a member of a Lithuanian patriotic organization. In the accounts and interviews collected for this study, religion does not stand out as an essential factor for coping with the traumatic experience. This stands in contrast to studies pointing to the relatively strong role of religion among Lithuanians deported after 1945, when deportation was directed primarily against the rural population that was resisting collectivization (see Streikus, 2016: 212).

The absence of a strong role for religion in these accounts may be explained by the fact that those families deported in 1941 were primarily from the urban, educated elites. Several interviewees pointed out that while their families preserved Jewish traditions, the last truly religious members of their families were their grandparents. For example, Aviva Ziv's grandmother was "a holy woman who prayed a lot", while her father "did not care about religion or going to synagogue" (Aviva Ziv, 28 November 2013). Similar generational split was pointed out by Aharon April, the Segals, Sana Levin, and Prusakaitė sisters. All of them noted that they celebrated traditional holidays and some rituals (for example, lit Sabbath candles) but were not strictly observing religious practices, Sara and Perla Prusakaitė noted that, in general, ethnic Lithuanian deportees relied on religion more, although she and her family were always invited to share whatever little there was to share among deportees during such events as Christmas and Easter.

In general, all of those interviewed mention the unity of deportees as one of the comforting and rewarding aspects of this traumatising experience. This motif is also reinforced in the written memoirs of Jewish deportees; for example, in those of Rachel and Israel Rachlin or David Zak who point out that

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<sup>10</sup> This dynamic is also mentioned by Ann Applebaum (2003: 307-333).

<sup>11</sup> Červinskienė (1995: 23) obliquely refers to her liaison with an "aristocrat" of the camp, the district head, and how she was helped by him and her relative, a high party official in Lithuania, to leave the deportation very early, in 1947, and eventually to study in Moscow.

solidarity and mutual support of deportees were one of the few comforts of this harsh experience. This points to the development of a community of experience, a community of those formed by the displacement (Rachlin and Rachlin, 2012: 25; Zak, 2012: 134, 138, 146).

The motif of closeness among deportees of different ethnicities is strong, running through all the narratives of this experience. “We were like one family”, claims Perla Prusakaitė. “Even after many years when we met people from the same places of deportation, we were extremely close” (24 April 2015). “We shared everything, down to the last bits”, recall Golda and Pesia Einhorn (26 April 2015). Liuba Segal (24 April 2015) points out that even after her return to Lithuania and difficult encounter with the aftermath of the Holocaust and unease over the extent of participation of her Lithuanian neighbours; it did not affect her attitude towards her fellow Lithuanian deportees. “After many years when I would meet anybody from there, it was still like my family—that’s how close we all were.”

From these testimonies one might infer that ethnic difference did not play an overriding role in the formation of community among the deportees, and the only real “outsiders” to this community of experience were those who actively cooperated with the authorities and denounced their fellows. Such people could be found in all ethnic groups. “We usually knew who they were and we all tried to avoid them as much as possible”, recalls Sara Prusakaitė (10 November 2013).

## The experience of return

The biographical trajectories of Lithuanian Jewish deportees would diverge from those of other Lithuanian deportees with the process of return to Lithuania. Most obviously, the fact of the Holocaust, which began just days after they were deported, radically conditioned their sense of “homeland.” Moreover, once they were back from exile, the possibility of immigrating to Israel was another factor that conditioned the Jewish experience of “return.”

The mass release of exiles from the Gulag began after Stalin’s death. In 1954 the number of Baltic deportees fell from 170,000 to just over 130,000. There were 48,000 Baltic deportees in 1956, 41,000 in 1957 and 34,000 in 1958. On 1 January 1959, the number of deportees from the Baltics was just over 7,000 people (Blum and Koustova, 2016: 67). The other Jewish deportees interviewed for this study spent well over ten years in deportation, and in some cases close to 20 (Sana Levin, Pesia Einhorn).

When the deportees began to return to Lithuania the communities to which they returned were not the same as before. The Holocaust, post-war Sovietisation, and the successive waves of deportation and repression drastically changed the texture of society. The same applied equally to the Jewish and ethnic Lithuanian deportees. For example, already in 1946 Algimantas Indriūnas, who returned illegally to Lithuania even before the death of Stalin, wrote: “Having returned to Lithuania, I felt that life here moved a couple decades ahead, while I did not even stay in the same spot but moved some decades back” (Indriūnas, 2005: 133).

Deportees were generally met with suspicion by members of society and were seen as a source of unnecessary trouble. People were afraid that the returnees would lay claims to their former property, thus disrupting the stability that had recently been established. There was also fear of the criminal ways that the deportees had allegedly adopted during their incarceration; in some cases they were seen as no better than the criminals whose company they had kept. The *propiska* (registration) system of local residence permits was another challenge and some deportees saw it as yet another means of keeping them marginalized.<sup>12</sup>

Aviva Ziv returned to Lithuania in 1956 with her Russian husband, twenty years senior to her, whom she met in Ust Lekchim. He was a decorated soldier who fought and was wounded four times at the front. "Lithuania seemed totally different than before the war. We wanted to return so much. We would all get together – ethnic Lithuanian and Jewish deportees, and sing 'Let us go back to our homeland, let us go back to our own people...'"

"But when we came back," she recalls, "it was not the same... Those who were already in the administration or power positions had no compassion for us." Moreover, they had nowhere to live, and so Aviva, her husband and their three young children, all born in Ust Lekchim, continued on to Dubno, in the RSFSR, where his family lived. There Aviva stayed for 16 years until they were able to acquire a house in Lithuania and move there in 1972 to live closer to her sister who survived the Holocaust in Lithuania in hiding but was deeply traumatized by this experience. Aviva lived in Kaunas until she finally departed for Israel in 1990.

Many Lithuanian returnees of all ethnic groups felt disillusioned by the way they were treated in their homeland, but for the Jewish returnees the situation was nonetheless unique. By the end of war, news of the murder of the Jewish population of Lithuania and the role of some local collaborators had reached even the most remote deportation settlements, sharply affecting attitudes towards the homeland and the prospect of returning to Lithuania. Indeed, even before the actual opportunity to return was anywhere in sight, some Jewish deportees felt a strong reluctance and ambivalence about going back.

Golda Einhorn was in Trofimovsk when she found out about what had happened in her hometown of Anykščiai. Until then, she like the other Lithuanian deportees had been singing songs like the famous deportee song "Let us back to our Homeland." But having heard how the entire community in her hometown had been murdered, she did not want to go back. "And then something happened to me, something changed," recalls Golda, "I just did not want to return anymore. People were asking, what? It is still your home. But I did not want to go there anymore. But then this somehow slowly passed..." (26 April 2015). She never returned to her native Anykščiai but eventually found a job in Belarus, and then got a position in Lithuania, in the newly built industrial town of Naujoji Akmenė, as a mathematics teacher.

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent overview of their return, see Dobson (2011).

Liuba Segal (24 April 2015) also conveys this sense of estrangement on hearing the news of the Holocaust:

We had always been friends with Lithuanians. The Lithuanian language was always with us as well. My best friend was a Lithuanian girl, Rūta Sadūnaitė, the niece of Lithuanian President Antanas Smetona. She managed to avoid deportation by hiding. We lived together, we were friends. When I came back from deportation I met some of my friends, some of my former classmates, and as we talked I could not get the question out of my mind ‘Could he have done that? Did he take part in this? How is this possible?’ You know, I must say that when we were deported on 14 June 1941 we did not feel any kind of anti-Semitism coming. There were no signs of anything, really. And in one week such horrible things happened ... how is this possible?

Segal left Trofimovsk in 1947 for the regional capital of Yakutsk. The town attracted deportees from many special settlements in the area. Yakutsk had a sizable Jewish community, and Jewish youth socialized together, going to the cinema together.

Segal returned to Lithuania in 1952, even before the death of Stalin and soon travelled to see her native Utena. The town seemed uncannily unchanged and yet completely different than before. She did not recognize any residents in the town or in the neighbourhood where her family used to live. The population at the centre of Utena was mostly Jewish before the war, but now none were there. She saw none of her former acquaintances who had been evacuated to Russia during the war.

She eventually found a Lithuanian family that had rented an apartment from her family before the war. They now lived in a different house and they invited her to visit. Upon entry she noticed some pieces of furniture that her family had owned before they were taken away. “I asked no questions and they did not volunteer to say anything. We talked a bit and then before leaving I asked if they would let me take a small table, the one where her father taught my brother to read and write, as a relict. I said calmly: ‘Madam Gražina, can I take this table please for memory?’ She agreed and so I walked out of their house with that little table in my hands. The atmosphere was grim.”

The fact of the Holocaust made every return to the native location, including a visit to the mass graves of the Jewish community of Utena, into an extremely traumatic experience for the survivors. “It was not my native town anymore. This new Utena seemed hostile to me and evoked fear mixed with hatred,” writes another child deportee David Zak (2012: 347). “It seemed to me there with every step that blood is soaking from under the ground,” describes Liuba Segal. That same year, she started to file applications to immigrate to Israel and finally was permitted to leave after almost 13 years in Lithuania, in 1966.

Sara Prusakaitė too recalls the shock when she returned to her hometown of Lazdijai. “It seemed horrible. There was nothing. No electricity. The entire town seemed to be in ruins. It was not safe, not even the cemetery was safe due to crime. There was no question of ever settling there.” So she made use of some connections that she maintained in Vilnius and through these contacts she was

able to obtain permission to settle in the nearby settlement of Nemenčinė, where she worked once again as an accountant for a logging company.

The difficult process of reintegration in Soviet Lithuania was determined in large part by the proximity of surviving family members, the networks established with the community of deportees, and close personal relationships. Thus, several Jewish families, including both of the Prusakaitė sisters and the Kushner family settled in Nemenčinė, a large lumber plant near Vilnius. Others, like the Segals, ended up in Vilnius and lived there until their departure for Israel. Sana Levin used Vilnius as a transitional stop to go to Israel as well. One of the latest arrivals in Israel, Golda Einhorn, worked in Naujoji Vilnia as a teacher until she travelled to her new home in 1988.

Most, but not all of the Jewish deportees ended up immigrating to Israel. The ease with which they integrated there depended in large part on how soon they arrived. Israel Montviliski, released in 1942 thanks to his Polish citizenship, arrived in Israel the day after the State of Israel was established in 1948. He adopted the Hebrew name Mey-Tal, made a point of socializing with locals, not fellow immigrants, married a sixth-generation Israeli, and started a successful business (25 November 2013).

The others, who had only Soviet (Lithuanian) citizenship, remained in exile until the late 1940s or even early 1960s, returning to settle in Lithuania or other parts of the Soviet Union and only then making an application to emigrate. The process was usually quite tortuous with many rejected applications, fragmentary and interrupted relations with family members in Israel, along with fear and anxiety over the prospect of never seeing them again.

Upon arrival, the success of their integration depended not only on the time of the arrival but also on how much prior knowledge they had of the new society and levels of family support. For example, Aviva Ziv recalls how initially her life in Israel was not as she had imagined it would be: "I had no idea what it would really be like. My sister had been there one time before and described it as paradise on earth. So I imagined that finally I would be able not to work as hard as I had all my life, that I would finally be "Madame Ziv", but nothing like that. I had to work 15 hours per day as a nanny and cleaning lady, and other hard jobs, just to help my family and myself" (28 November 2013). Perla Prusakaitė also points out to no previous in depth knowledge of her new country and how her late husband, also a Jewish deportee, had to work incredibly long hours as a driver, just to sustain his family while she had to take care of the three children and all of the family chores (24 April 2015).

Their current relationship with their country of birth, Lithuania, also differs, depending on their ability to cope with the memory of the Holocaust, connection with friends or any remaining relatives left behind. For example, Mey-Tal Montviliski has a keen interest in his native Druskininkai, wishes to contribute to the opening of a Jewish museum there, and has travelled several times to the region, together with his family. He is convinced that none of his former neighbours in Druskininkai took part in the massacre and this conviction makes

his attitude towards his native region more positive. Aharon April, on the other hand, was never able to force himself to return to his native *audini kiai* estate, which he remembers so vividly from his childhood. “I travelled there twice, by taxi from Vilnius, but I turned back halfway both times, and I don’t think I’ll ever try that again” (26 November 2013).

Liuba Segal’s brother Bencel Segal travelled to his native town in 2013 upon the request of his children but left the country after two or three days because “it was difficult” (24 April 2014). Sana Levin, on the other hand, returned to her native *Roki kis* at the request of her sons at the age of 80, wrote one set of memoirs and is in the process of writing an account of her return. Perla Prusakaitė visited independent Lithuania several times and maintains a rather positive attitude towards her country of birth. “I am proud to be from Lithuania and, in fact, I consider that I have two homelands, Lithuania and Israel. We even arranged all the documents and got Lithuanian citizenship. Initially, here in Israel, not many knew that we are not Russians or Poles, but *Litvaks*, so I would always correct people, that I am not a Russian, I am a Lithuanian” (25 April 2015). Pesia Einhorn, who was born in exile and had no memories of Lithuania as a child, travels to Lithuania almost every summer, maintains close friendships with former Lithuanian deportees, and participates in the commemorative activities of the deportee association “*Lapteviečiai*” although, as already mentioned, she does not speak Lithuanian.

Sara Prusakaitė is quite unique among the interviewees in that she decided to return to Lithuania and to remain there till the present day. Her fate seems to have been determined when she fell in love at the age of 17 with a fellow Lithuanian deportee from *Lazdijai* named Mečislovas Stanislovas Radžiūnas with whom she travelled to the final place of her exile, in the same cattle train. Their relationship was undisturbed by the difference of ethnicity, hardship of deportation and integration in Lithuanian society after the Holocaust. Such stories of intermarriage among deportees seemed to be quite common, especially those coming from the same region and sharing common acquaintances. For example, the parents of Sara’s Lithuanian husband knew the *Prusaks* from before the war. Her brother also married Lithuanian deportee, and so did several of her Jewish friends and acquaintances. None of their parents were against their marriage, but she recalls that some deportees warned that it would be difficult for them, as a mixed couple, to integrate socially upon their return to Lithuania.

Sara visited Israel in 1986 but never thought of moving there because she felt that her husband would not find his place in life in Israel. Even after his death, when her family members insisted that she moves to Israel, she refused to go, saying that she wants to be buried in Lithuania in the same grave as her spouse. Sara emphasized that she agreed to be interviewed and share her experiences and documents for this research, first of all, because she wished to preserve the memory of her deceased husband.

## Conclusion

Although Jews were not specifically targeted by the Soviet deportations of June 1941, and the overall number of Lithuanian Jews deported in June 1941 is quite small - about 1,700 - the study of their distinct experience is important in several aspects.

If nothing else, their unique “subject position” places the mainstream Lithuanian narrative of the deportation as a national trauma in a new light. When we look at the events of WWII from the perspective of Lithuanian Jewish deportees, we are simply forced to see the historical atrocities committed by the Nazi and Soviet occupations during this short period of time in relation to one another, through the biographical threads that entangle one with the other, the Gulag with the Holocaust.

The distinct nature of the deportation of Lithuanian Jews conditioned the belated emergence of its memory. This belatedness has many aspects, starting with the interest that scholars have shown in the topic. By this point in time, the interviewees, who were all children or teenagers at the time of deportation (some were born *en route* to Siberia or in exile), were already well advanced in age. The age of the interviewees at the time of the events recalled and their advanced age at the time of the interview are important considerations when interpreting their testimonies. Their perspective on the events as children is distinct. It complements other perspectives and needs to be seen in that context.

The belated emergence of the deportation memory of Lithuanian Jews stems from two main factors: first of all, from the priority given to the Holocaust in the collective memory of the Jewish community within Europe, and commemorative focus on the Holocaust within Israel. Within the Lithuanian national context, the emergence of deportee memory during the popular movement against Soviet rule tended to project a narrative of national martyrdom, which did not distinguish among the range of different subjectivities among the deportees, from women to children to people of different ethnicities and faiths, and was portrayed as an essentially “Lithuanian” experience.

The people interviewed for this project had relatively clear and shared views on questions of inter-ethnic relations among the deportees. While my data is of necessity limited, I was impressed by their recollection of cooperative and friendly relations among ethnic Jews and Lithuanians in deportation. This needs to be seen in the context of their young age at the time, and perhaps even the context of the interviews, conducted by an ethnic Lithuanian accepted as a guest in their homes in Israel today, so many years after the events.

But even keeping these limitations in mind, I was struck by the cosmopolitan nature of the memory of the interviewees. And this, I believe, reflects more than a sense of politeness or political correctness regarding the interview process itself. It stems from three main sources. First, it recalls how the June 1941 deportations targeted the elites of interwar Lithuanian society. The families that were deported, be they Jewish, Lithuanian or Polish, were all relatively well educated, established and integrated in a modern, secular and urban environment.

The cosmopolitanism of the former deportees also reflects their biographical trajectories after release from the Gulag, which generally followed a path through several different societies across Europe and Asia before reaching their final destination, typically in Israel or America. The third and perhaps most striking source of this cosmopolitanism stems from the *community of experience* among the former deportees, regardless of creed or ethnic origin.

The recovery of the experience of Lithuanian Jewish deportees provides an opening for the reframing of established narratives of WWII and the post-war era in Lithuanian historiography. Indeed, one of recurring issues of the process of historical reconciliation between Lithuanians and Jews concerns the gap between the collective memory of each community of the war and post-war era. For example, the crude myth of “double genocide” could be effectively countered through greater public awareness of the fact that the Lithuanian Jewish elites, like the ethnic Lithuanian elites, were targeted and suffered in equal proportion by Soviet repressions, including the iconic mass deportations of June 1941.

In this respect, the experience of Jewish deportees is essential to bringing back the multidirectionality of the memory of the Soviet deportations, and breaking down the paradigm of “competitive memory” that would draw a firm line around the deportations as the “property” of the Lithuanian nation. Indeed, the distinct narrative shape of their life trajectories – childhood in interwar Lithuania, survival of the Holocaust and the Gulag, return to Soviet Lithuania and onward emigration to Israel – offers clear evidence of what Michael Rothberg described as the “jagged” borders between memory and identity (2009: 5).

Through the recovery and popularization of their narratives of the war and post-war years, historians will not only establish a more nuanced and accurate account of this unprecedentedly complex and traumatic period of European history, but will demonstrate how collective memory does not simply articulate a pre-existing past but comes into being through its dialogical interaction with other memories.

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## Daugiakryptė atmintis ir 1941 m. Lietuvos žydai tremtiniai

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**SANTRAUKA:** Straipsnyje apžvelgiamos 1941 m. birželį ištremtų Lietuvos žydų patirtys. Remiantis pusiau struktūruotais giluminiais pokalbiais su tremtiniais Izraelyje ir Lietuvoje, memuarais ir archyviniais dokumentais, siekiama bent iš dalies rekonstruoti šią menkai reprezentuotą sovietmečio tremčių istorijos dalį. Naudojant „daugiakryptės atminties“ perspektyvą siūloma esmingai papildyti lietuviškąjį sovietmečio tremčių naratyvą.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** išvietinimas, deportacija, atmintis, lietuvių ir žydų santykiai.