

# **Legacy of Holocaust in Contemporary Lithuania: Rise of Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity Issues**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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New Delhi  
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## DECLARATION


I declare that the dissertation entitled **Legacy of Holocaust in Contemporary Lithuania: Rise of Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity Issues** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

  
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## CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
Prof. Sanjay Pandey  
Chairperson, CRCAS

  
Dr. K. B. Usha  
Supervisor

*Dedicated*

*To*

*My Beloved Parents*

## ***Acknowledgements***

*This dissertation is the end of my research journey towards M. Phil degree in Jawaharlal Nehru University. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. K. B. Usha for her encouragement, support and guidance with valuable suggestions, comments and advices which helped me to complete my dissertation. I would also like to thank all my distinguished teachers from the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, JNU for their encouragement and support.*

*I am extremely indebted to Prof. Yogati Chinna Rao, Chairperson, Centre for the Study of Discrimination and Exclusion (CSDE), School of Social Science, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Dr. Priyadarshini Vijaisri Rao, Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and Mr. Mahesh Chand, Assistant Librarian, JNU, for their support, encouragement and affectionate treatment.*

*I am grateful to Dr. Saleem Ahmad and Dr. Omair Anas, Ms. Rekha Yadav, for their support and encouragement in various ways since the day I joined JNU. I am also deeply indebted to my friends Umesh Kumar, Sunil Kumar, Anirban Chatterji, Vinod Kumar and Durgehs Kumar, for their moral support.*

*I am grateful to the staff of Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, the central library, the hostel and the fellowship section of JNU for their assistance and help in collecting data for my dissertation.*

*Last but not least, I would like to pay high regards to my father Mr. Kripal Singh, my mother Mrs. Rajwati and My Uncle Dr. Subhash Singh, for their love, affection, and encouragement in pursuing higher studies in JNU. I would also like to thank my uncle Mr. Soran Singh, my sisters Manju, Sanju, Renu and Nisha and my brother Deshveer Singh, who have always been a source of inspiration, love and affection.*

*21 July 2015-07-28*

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*New Delhi*

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## Abbreviations

CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
EU	European Union
LAF	Lithuanian Activists' Front
LCVA	<i>Lietuvos Centrinis valstybes Archyvas</i> (Central state Archive of Lithuania)
LSSR	Lithuania Soviet Socialist Republics
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCSJ	The National Conference on Soviet Jewry
NKVD	<i>Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del</i>
UNO	United Nations Organizations
RSDLP	Russian Social-Democratic Labour party
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VMA	Vilnius Museum of Antiquities

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Lithuania began the nation building process in accordance with the norms and values of western liberal democracy after regaining independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991. In this process historical legacy and memory has become the core elements of national identity formation. Lithuania had experienced both the Nazi German Holocaust and invasion and the occupation of Soviet Union during World War II. Therefore, two contested histories exist in the country. In the Holocaust almost 95 percent of Jews were exterminated with the active local Lithuanian participation and collaboration with German Nazis. Such an enormous scale of mass murder did not happen anywhere else in Europe. It is also true that Lithuanians had undergone repression under Soviet rule. A large number Lithuanians had been deported to labour camps in Siberia and were tortured and murdered under Soviet rule, especially under Stalin's regime. However, the experience of Holocaust and Soviet occupation cannot be equated. The Holocaust is considered as the biggest crime against humanity the Europe or the world had ever witnessed. But, the Lithuanian political elites' narrative of "two parallel genocides" equates both Holocaust and Soviet occupation has become a political ideology in Lithuania in the attempt of earning international prestige. The state sponsored programmes are criticised as often involved in the politics of "fixing Holocaust" through a "double genocide" politics.

The politics of "double genocide", i.e., establishing the symmetry between Nazi and Communist crimes was particularly strong in Lithuania (Zuroff 2005) could be seen as an attempt of distortion of and falsification of history of holocaust experience of the Lithuanian Jewish community by minimizing or hiding the role played by the Lithuanian Nazi collaborators in the execution of Jews. The historical injustice experienced by Lithuanian ethnic national majority under Soviet occupation based on Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty of



1939 has been emphasized as the core of defining national identity, citizenship and security. The “return to Europe/west” narrative of political elites highlighting the small size and vulnerability of these nations as they are situating on the periphery of the former Soviet empire and at present sharing direct boundary with mighty Russia, their potential enemy and therefore NATO and EU should come for their security against threat from Russia would become effective only when they hide dark spot of their own history (Usha 2015).

In the “self/other” dichotomy of national identity construction Russian speakers which also include Jews are treated as the hostile “other.” In this definition language, culture and territorial homeland has become salient features of belonging to the nation. State is seen not only as an aspect of national identity but also an instrument of preserving the Lithuanian ethnicity’s language and culture. The Lithuanian majority nationality’s perception about Jewish minorities is that they were equal to communists or closely associated with Soviet occupiers and therefore responsible for the killings and mass deportation of Lithuanians to Siberia during Soviet occupation. The Lithuanian government pursue a politics of restrictive citizenship towards minorities including Jews. Thus, prejudiced attitudes towards Jews transformed into a political and ideological anti-Semitism (Usha 2015).

Revival of anti-Semitism is implicit in the government policies and also exists among the masses. Redefining concepts like genocide deviating from UN definition, rewriting history, reformulating provisions in the criminal code for incorporating Soviet crimes as genocide, commemoration events, Street names for Nazi collaborators and reburial of former puppet Prime Minister who was a German collaborator etc in effect glorify/rehabilitate Nazism. While Lithuanian state is showing great enthusiasm in emphasising Soviet crimes against humanity and bringing communist crimes to justice, it doesn’t

consider the complicity of Lithuanians in holocaust crimes and prosecute them. Such measures led to the revival of anti-Semitism in Lithuania and the government's steps for the protection of the rights of Jews seem to be inadequate. Anti-Semitism is expressed by actions of people like desecration of cemeteries, vandalism, anti-Semitic graffiti and remarks; media articles and so on (Alster 2015).

The issues pertaining to Jewish community and Holocaust revisionism became part of larger issues of minorities and identity. Today Jewish history in Lithuania in general and Jewish-Lithuanian relations in particular are a matter of controversy and debate between Jews and Lithuanians as well as among Lithuanians themselves. The discriminatory approach of the state to Jews calls into question Lithuanian democracy. The Lithuanian attempt to minimize Holocaust and hide the dark spot of their own history does not match with the states' claim that it cherishes the western civilizational values, democratic norms and humanistic traditions. Therefore, this study intends to examine the legacy of holocaust in Lithuania, revival of Anti-Semitism, Jewish identity issues and implications of Holocaust revisionism for democratic nation building.

Jews have a history of more than 700 years as an inseparable part of Lithuanian society. Jewish settlements were said to have found in Lithuania as early as eighth century. Historian Abraham Elijah Harkavi believed that the Jews came to Lithuania in the ninth and eighth centuries from Babylonia (Greenbaum 1995). Some others state that in Lithuania the first Jewish settlements appeared in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They were merchants from southern Europe (Levin 2000). However, permanent settlements appeared only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Lithuania was under the Russian Empire. Mostly they lived in the Pale of Settlements<sup>1</sup> since the creation of such settlements by Catherine

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<sup>1</sup> The Pale of Settlement was the Western region of Imperial Russia to which Jews were restricted by the Tsarist *Ukase* of 1792. It consisted of the territories of former Polish-

the Great in 1791. The Jewish community of Lithuania was known as Litvaks. They flourished through the centuries and became inseparable part of Lithuanian society. Vilnius in those days was known as the “Jerusalem of the North” (Leva 2014). Jewish community contributed to the national intellectual and cultural tradition of Lithuania and enriched the country's economy, culture, science and education.

However, they faced hardships and pogroms and were killed in large numbers even during the 19<sup>th</sup> century under Russian Empire. They were accused of assassination of Russian Emperor Alexander II. In this connection pogroms were held against the Jews all over Russian empire. During the civil war that broke out after the Russian Revolution (1917-1921) Jews were killed in large numbers. Because of the hardships they faced they participated in the independent movement in Lithuania on the eve of the World War I. When Lithuania became independent in 1918, they contributed generously to the rebuilding of the nation. As a result Jews were given certain level of autonomy. Jewish associations, parties, network of Jewish educational institutions, congregations and places of worships, etc were established (Laserson 1943).

Jewish community had its own National Assembly of Jewish Council with local branches and had a Ministry of Jewish Affairs until 1924. During 1919 to 1922 the Jews recognised their well-being and showed patriotism in the newly formed state. Their loyalty to the state made them financing industrial development, fostering economic growth and participating in self-rule. However, the Christian Democratic government assumed power in 1926 Jewish autonomy was ended completely. Lithuania slipped into dictatorship under the then president Anatanas Smetona. Lithuanianization policies began

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Lithuanian Commonwealth, annexed with the existing numerous Jewish population, and the Crimea (which was later cut out from the Pale).

by Antanas Smetona's government carried out the exclusion of Jews. As a result anti-Semitism emerged in society (Usha 2015).

The perception of Lithuanian leadership and the masses that Jews had monopolized the best jobs and began controlling the national wealth led to anti-Semitic expressions. Although did not in principle support anti-Semitism some of the policies of nationalization amounted to the same. The prejudice against and hatred towards Jews was also because of the influence of anti-Semitism in Hitler's Nazi Germany. By late 1930s anti-Semitism express in Lithuania in street violence and vandalism (Sutton 2008).

On the eve of World War II, Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania was one of the biggest centres of Jewish community in Europe. According to US Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1933 the total Jewish population in Lithuania was numbered 155,000, i.e., 7.6 percent of the total population (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2014). According to Yadvashem estimates Lithuania had around 220000 Jews in 1941 (Yadvashem 2015a). It states, "On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941 when the Germans invaded Soviet territory and entered Vilna on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June around 60,000 Jews lived in Vilna where they constituted 30% of the total population" (Yadvashem 2015b).

As a result of the Hitler-Stalin Pact 1939, Lithuania was annexed to the USSR in summer 1940. One year later, in June 1941, Lithuania was occupied by the German army. Under German occupation during 1941-44, Lithuania became one of the mass killing places of Jews in Europe as part of Hitler's *Final Solution* to exterminate Jews of Europe (Browning 2007). During three years of Nazi rule from June 1941, the total people killed in Lithuania amounted to 240,000, "including about 200,000 Jews" (Steele 2008). Almost near total Jewish population (95 percent) was exterminated in Lithuania is a well-known fact today.

The previously existed anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda, Nazi-German policy of Holocaust towards Jews in Soviet territories and wide-scale local collaboration of Lithuanians with Nazis made the mass murder of Jews possible during World War II. After the War ended in 1945 Lithuania had been incorporated into Soviet Union, and the post-Holocaust issues were dealt by the Soviet authorities. The history of local collaboration with the Nazis and its legacy had been obscured during the Soviet rule as several war criminals were prosecuted and punished. In contemporary Lithuania, the state supports Holocaust revisionism, and the resultant anti-Semitism and issues of Jewish minority identity has become contested legacy in the nation building process, in the attempt of emphasising complete victimhood of Lithuanians under Soviet occupation by political elites. Today, Holocaust revisionism and obfuscation has become a nationalistic political ideology rather than a religious and cultural manifestation in Lithuania.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A re-emergence of anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism has become a political phenomenon in Europe and in many European Union member countries including Lithuania. Debates and discussions interpreting and redefining the history of World War II had been constructed and negotiated in parallel with the plurality and inclusivity framework of the European Union. The legacy of Holocaust has been reinterpreted as part of the memory and identity politics in Lithuania. Certain relevant concepts such as anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, Holocaust distortion, Holocaust obfuscation, Historical revisionism, genocide, rehabilitation of Nazis, neo-Nazism, etc could be used as analytical tools to comprehend the legacy of Holocaust and the revival of anti-Semitic expressions in contemporary Lithuania.

Anti-Semitism refers to prejudice or discrimination against Jews as individuals and as a group. This discrimination has a long and dark history mainly in the Christian lands of Europe, marked by expulsions forced

conversion to Christianity, and massacres. Anti-Semitism is based on stereotypes and myths that target Jews as a people, their religious practices and beliefs (Brustein and King 2004:36). It is a social phenomenon and represents a special aspect problem of the social behaviour and group conflict (Reich 1945: 292). A working definition of anti-Semitism is given in the Fundamental Rights Research (FRA) wing of European Union is applicable to Lithuania as one of the EU members. This definition inclusive and updated formulated by European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) was adopted in 2004. Ashas been quoted by European Forum on Antisemitism in 2013 the EUMC definition of antisemitism in its contemporary form in Europe refers the following.

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. ...Anti-Semitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity and it is often used to blame Jews for 'why things go wrong'. It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms, and in actions, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits (European Forum on Antisemitism 2013; EUMC 2004).

The Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism (CPCCA) also relied on the above definition in its report published in 2011 (Moon 2014: 199).

Anti-Semitism became a central issue of world history in the 1930s, when Germany, under the rule of Hitler's Nazi-party, sought first to expel Jews from all positions of trust in Germany, and find a "final solution" to the Jewish problem. As a result during World War II Jews were exterminated in Europe in a massive scale. Approximately, six million Jews were killed in Europe during World War II in what is known as the Holocaust (Jones 2011:233).

The Holocaust is the result of anti-Semitism, the stereotypical perceptions and myths constructed about the Jewish identity. Jews were generally defined as wrong doers and a threat to humanity. The Holocaust refers to the systematic bureaucratic state sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jewish community by the Nazi regime and its collaborators (Yadvashem 2015c). In other words, the Holocaust was the mass murder of the Jewish community.

Anti-Semitism was considered as defeated after the World War II as a result of post-war UN enforcement of international law to curtail the violation of rights of Jewish community. However, now after seventy years of the horrendous Holocaust genocide during the Second World War, the revival and political manifestations of anti-Semitism/neo-anti-Semitism are disturbing trends especially in Eastern Europe which includes post-Soviet Baltic countries that are engaged in nation building according to the norms, values and principles of the civilized west. The current trend of revival of anti-Semitism in Europe has its impact on Lithuania (Usha 2015).

In recent decades, new forms of anti-Semitism have emerged, with some of them, such as Holocaust denial or secondary anti-Semitism, directly related to the *Shoah*.<sup>2</sup> Since the late 1990s, high numbers of violent anti-Semitic incidents have been recorded. Jewish and non-Jewish individuals, their property, and Jewish communal institutions, such as synagogues, have been targeted all across Europe (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) 2007: 3). ODIHR report points out that some people use stereotypes with good intentions without anti-Semitic motives, seeking instead to romantically revive images of, for example, the “Fiddler on the Roof” and the “East European Jew”. In this context, the history of anti-Semitic

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<sup>2</sup>*Shoah* is a Hebrew word used for Holocaust, the mass murder of European Jewry in the 1940s. This was used in the middle ages as a biblical term meaning destruction. The term originally meant a sacrifice burnt entirely on the altar. See for details Yadvashem(2015d): “The Holocaust: Definition and Preliminary Discussion”, at URL: [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource\\_center/the\\_holocaust.asp#!prettyPhoto](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource_center/the_holocaust.asp#!prettyPhoto)

propaganda, which is aimed at creating and reinforcing stereotypes, there is possibility to make certain references offensive to some Jews. For some people, ostensibly harmless images symbolize an entire arsenal and hundreds of years of generalizing and often humiliating imagery (Ibid: 14).

In recent years, an increased and serious attention has been devoted to the supposed danger of “Holocaust denial.” The term Holocaust Denial arose from a lexical polygenesis, entailing numerous occurrences of strings of words such as ‘denying that the Holocaust (murder of the Jewish population in countries under Nazi control). Politicians, newspapers and television warn about the growing influence of those who reject the Holocaust story that some six million European Jews were systematically exterminated during the Second World War, most of them in gas chambers (Kulaszka 1988).

Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of anti-Semitism. The attempt to deny the genocide of the Jews is an effort to exonerate National Socialism and anti-Semitism from guilt or responsibility in the genocide of the Jewish people. Forms of Holocaust denial also include blaming the Jews for either exaggerating or creating the Shoah for political or financial gain as if the Shoah itself was the result of a conspiracy plotted by the Jews. In this, the goal is to make the Jews culpable and anti-Semitism once again legitimate (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance 2013). In several countries, including Israel, France, Germany and Austria, “Holocaust denial” is against the law, and "deniers" have been punished with stiff fines and prison sentences. Some Jewish community leaders are calling for similar government measures in North America against so-called “deniers” (Kulaszka 2007). The factors that constitute Holocaust denial is articulated by Israel Foreign Ministry.

The goals of Holocaust denial often are the rehabilitation of an explicit anti-Semitism and the promotion of political ideologies and conditions suitable for



the advent of the very type of event it denies. Distortion of the Holocaust refers, inter alia, to:

- a) Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany;
- b) Gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources;
- c) Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide;
- d) Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event. Those statements are not Holocaust denial but are closely connected to it as a radical form of antisemitism. They may suggest that the Holocaust did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of “the Final Solution of the Jewish Question”;
- e) Attempts to blur the responsibility for the establishment of concentration and death camps devised and operated by Nazi Germany by putting blame on other nations or ethnic groups (Israel Ministry of Foreign affairs 2013).

The Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion have distinguishable meaning. In the case of Holocaust denial certain incidents are misused by comparing them with the World War II Holocaust. Misuse occurs when aspects of the Holocaust are compared to events, situations, or people where there is no genocide or genocidal intent. The claim that the actions of Israeli government are equivalent to those of the Nazis; equating the treatment of animals with the treatment of Jews and other victims during the Holocaust; Labelling political opponents as Nazis are examples of Holocaust misuse. In other words the Holocaust distortion could be understood as a “debasement of history” by the Holocaust deniers (Lipsatdt 1993: 25).

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The United Nations has given definition of genocide approved by all members. According General Assembly Resolution 260A (III) Article 2 of the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (UNGA 1948).

The politics of “Double genocide” is a movement to equate two parallel genocides under Nazi Germany and Communist Soviet Union. The movement has an array of names, including Symmetry, and the Evaluation of Equal Totalitarian Regimes, the Red-Brown (or ‘red-equals-brown’ movement. Such movement is strong in Eastern Europe particularly in Lithuania(Moses and Rothberg 2014). According to Dovid Katz the double genocide movement in Lithuania seeks to create a moral equivalence between Soviet atrocities committed against the Baltic region and the Holocaust in European history.

The "Double Genocide" debate has garnered political traction/currency since the Baltic States joined the European Union in 2004. Katz states that since joining the EU, the Baltic States have attempted to downplay their nations' massive collaboration with the Nazis and to enlist the West in revising history in the direction of “Double Genocide” thinking. An important part of that effort has been for lawmakers to highlight the crimes committed by Soviets in the Baltic region during and after World War II. In 2008, lawmakers from the Baltic States, , among other new-accession European Union states, played a pivotal role in a January 2008 conference in Tallinn, Estonia, and then in June, 2008, in proclamation of the "Prague Declaration" which attracted wider support (Katz quoted in Liedy2011).

Dovid Katz who is a strong critic of “double genocide movement” introduced the concept of Holocaust obfuscation which is summarised as below. In the words of Katz:

Holocaust Obfuscation is the systematic effort to relativist, minimize, obscure, confuse or eliminate the Holocaust, as a distinct historic entity in European history, without necessarily denying any of the documented murders. By the early twenty first century Holocaust Obfuscation evolved as a major trend of thought in some governmental, political, press, academic and other elite circles of some new-accession states in the east of the European Union. Its ideas have been packaged in a number of declarations and proposed laws aimed at eliciting compliance from Western nations and organizations of nations. The most frequent apparatus includes: inflation of the term genocide to encompass a variety of Soviet crimes; the claim that Nazi and Soviet crimes were inherently equivalent; thereby leaving the Holocaust as a conceptual ‘half’ in the replacement paradigm. At the local level, variants of the model have included claims of overwhelming Jewish complicity in communism; claims that the murder of the Jewish populations in Eastern Europe was a reaction to alleged Jewish communism; claims that the miniscule percentage of Jews who survived by escaping to Soviet-supported partisan groups in the forests are a priori guilty of ‘war crimes’ (hence they may be investigated with neither evidence nor charges) (Katz, 2009: 272).

The Jews fought back against their enemies to a degree no other community anywhere in the world would have been capable of were it to find itself similarly beleaguered. They fought against hunger and starvation, against disease, against a deadly Nazi economic blockade. They fought against murderers and against traitors within their own ranks, and they were utterly alone in their fight. They were forsaken by God and by man, surrounded by hatred or indifference. They fought back on every front where the enemy attacked – the biological front, the economic front, the propaganda front, the cultural front – with every weapon we possess (Jones 2010:249) . At present the revival of anti-Semitism in Lithuania and the support of the government to neo-Nazis force them to fight for their rightful position and identity in the society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Against the backdrop of the above conceptual framework the study follows the research design as elaborated below for further analysis.

## **Research Design**

Contemporary Lithuania after regaining independence from Soviet Union in 1991, engaged in Democratic nation building by emphasising their experience under Soviet occupation. The Lithuanian ethno-nationalist politics of trivialization/falsification of Holocaust experience and the memory politics of titular ethnicity undermines the depth of Jewish experience. Jews have lived in Lithuania since the middle Ages. During 700 years they have become an inseparable part of Lithuanian society, having enriched the country's economy, culture, science and education. It is difficult to imagine how Lithuanian society would appear today, how colourful it would be, if the biggest catastrophe of the 20th century had not occurred. About 200,000 Lithuanian Jews perished during the Holocaust, this reflects their painful history and therefore, to know and understand the reasons of this tragedy and the role of Lithuanians in the mass killing of Jews is explored. Memorials of the innocent victims, graves, testimonies of survivors give a larger picture than the politically motivated studies which trivializes the experience of Jews. The discriminatory approach of state towards rising anti-Semitism and the victims of holocaust and their rights in contemporary Lithuania are discussed in the study.

The main strands of literature that have been used in the study related to origin of anti-Semitism in Europe before the World War II, the reasons and factors that led to Holocaust, Nazi propaganda, Nazi policies towards Soviet Union, origin and development of Jewish community in Lithuania, rise of local collaboration in Holocaust in Lithuania, impact of neo-anti-Semitism in Europe on Lithuania, legacy of Holocaust in post-Soviet Lithuania, memory politics and holocaust revisionism, revival of anti-Semitism and Jewish identity question in Lithuania.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The study has the following Objectives.

1. To study the history and legacy of Holocaust in Contemporary Lithuania
2. To analyse the role of Lithuanians in the Holocaust
3. To examine the reasons for the rise of anti-Semitism in contemporary Lithuania
4. To examine the response of state to anti-Semitism and the approach to Jewish minority community in contemporary Lithuanian

### **Hypotheses**

The study tests the following hypotheses.

- Lithuanians' attitude towards Jews was determined by certain stereotypes of Jewish behaviour and mythical assumptions such as Jews dominate in political power and economic sphere, exploit Christians and are wrong doers, and thereby local Lithuanians played a great role in Holocaust.
- Contemporary Lithuania demonstrate discriminatory approach to Jewish identity, shows reluctance to bring those who committed holocaust crimes to justice, trivialize or minimize the Holocaust experience of Jews, and pays inadequate attention towards the rise of anti-Semitism.

### **Methodology**

The study employs various theoretical insights drawn from the disciplines of international relations, political science, sociology, culture studies, etc. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources. It has used primary sources includes government documents and reports available in English language, UN reports and various other primary documents relevant to the study. Personal testimonies of holocaust survivors are also used as relevant primary source for the study. The study has also used relevant secondary sources such as books, articles from journals, newspapers and other online sources available on the subject.

### **Structure of the Study**

The study is structured into five chapters. The first chapter frames a border theoretical perspective on Anti-Semitism and Holocaust in general European contexts to analyse in particular the legacy of Holocaust experience, post-Holocaust politics and Jewish Identity in Lithuania in the contemporary period. The second chapter discusses the emergence of Jews in Lithuania as the biggest minority with a size of 240,000 Jewish populations. The third chapter discusses the history of Jews in Lithuania in the twentieth century and the way they were marred with a sequence of promising and tragic events. The fourth chapter discusses approach of state towards Jewish minority and their issues, measures to combat anti-Semitism and also the role of Jews in *Sajudi* Independence movement in supporting the aspirations of Lithuanians to statehood, rise of anti-Semitism in Lithuania. The final chapter states the conclusions arrived at in the study and the validity of hypotheses.

The next chapter deals with the history of Jewish community in Lithuania until the World War II in brief.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Jewish Community in Lithuania: Historical Background**

Jewish community in Lithuania has a history of more than 700 years. Jewish settlements were said to have found in Lithuania as early as eighth century. Permanent settlements appeared only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Lithuania was under the Russian Empire. Mostly, they lived in the Pale of Settlements<sup>1</sup> since the creation of such settlements by Catherine the Great in 1791. The Jewish community of Lithuania was known as Litvaks. They flourished through the centuries and became inseparable part of Lithuanian society. Jewish community greatly contributed to the national intellectual and cultural tradition of Lithuania and enriched the country's economy, culture, science and education. Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, was one of the biggest centres of Jewish community in Europe. During the interwar period when Lithuania became independent Jews enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. They had Jewish council with branches in provinces. However, anti-Semitic attitude against Jews existed among Lithuanian ethnic majority. Due to the influence of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany on the eve of Second World War prejudice against Jews intensified in Lithuanian society during the 1930s. This chapter discusses the origin and development of Jews, the political developments in Lithuania that shaped Lithuanian-Jewish relations and the emergence of anti-Semitism in the 1930s.

#### **History of Lithuanian State**

Lithuania is an important place in the history of Jews in Eastern Europe. Lithuanian people belong to the Baltic branch of Indo-European language. They were not Slavic or Germanic people. Indications exist that they arrived in the north-eastern Baltic area from the steppes as early as 1500 BCE. They remained for many centuries in primitive seclusion largely bypassed by the great Germanic and Slavic migrations. Historians like Tacitus, Ptolemy and Herodotus briefly mentioned about these people. But only in the beginning of

the tenth century C. E more information about the inhabitants of this area began to appear from the documents written by the German merchants. By the thirteenth century, their history had been recorded (Schoenburg and Schoenburg 1996: 4). In 1009 the name of Lithuania is mentioned for the first time in a historical record, the annals of the monastery of Quedlinberg (Suziedelis 2011: xxiii).

The early inhabitants of Lithuania were pagans and their exact origin is a contested subject. It is generally considered that between 3000 and 2500 BCE agricultural communities were established in areas what now Lithuania and Latvia (Ibid: 3). The people were organized into small groupings or tribes in semi- feudal organizations. They were under local rulers or dukes. Farming was conducted in forest clearings. The tribes were fierce and raided other groups in the area. The people were pagan, believing in demons and monsters and practicing human sacrifice” (Voren 2011: 1).

Around 1250 Lithuanian grand duchy was established along the Baltic coast to Poland. Lithuanian kingdom was established in 13<sup>th</sup> century under the leadership of King Mindaugas. In 1251 Mindaugas adopts Christianity. Mindaugas was assassinated in 1263. His successor Vytenis ascends to the throne and further strengthened Lithuania. By the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had expanded into a large state. He managed to resist the threat by the Teutonic order to defeat the area. During Vytenis’s time Lithuania achieved great reputation.

When Vytenis died in 1315, Gediminas became Grand Duke in 1316, and his period lasted to 1341. He founded Vilna as his capital, organised the Lithuanian nation. He continued the vast expansion of Lithuania and advanced towards Russian empire. He conquered lands in western Russia like Kiev, Dnieper, etc. His son Olgerd assumed the throne in 1345. He also continued expansion of Lithuania. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania remained fiercely



independent and was notably one of the last areas of Europe to adopt Christianity in 1387, as a result of which certain pagan traditions still remain in Lithuania (Nikzentailis, Schreiner and Staliunas 2004:1).

After Olgerd's death his son Jagiello became Grand Duke. He married Queen Jadwiga of Poland. In 1386, Lithuania was joined to Poland in a personal union. The same monarch occupied the thrones of the two states. The Grand Duke Jagiello accepted the Catholicism for Lithuania (Kamuntavicius 2013: 40). Jagiello was King of Lithuania and Poland from 1386 to 1434. He was a very firm and prudent ruler, and did many significant works to make the personal union a success, despite of difficulties with fractious polis nobility. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania remained fiercely independent and was notably one of the last areas of Europe to adopt Christianity in 1387, as a result of which certain pagan traditions still remain in Lithuania (Nikzentailis, Schreiner and Staliunas 2004:1). Jagiello was King of Lithuania for during 1377- 1401. But through Astravas agreement in 1392 Vytautas became the grand duke of Lithuania (Stone 2001: 10).

During the Vytautas the Great (1392-1430) the country became the largest state in the Europe and a formidable power reaching all the way to the black Sea in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This period is generally referred to as the Golden Age. Lithuania conquered territories that today are part of Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine. On this vast area of 390,000 square miles, a total population of two million people lived, of whom approximately only one- eighth were ethnic Lithuanians, who occupied the ruling positions. Most of the people living within the boundaries of the state enjoyed a relative autonomy, with their own identities, laws and customs. During Vytautas time Lithuania achieved its height of political and military power and economic prosperity. He laid the foundation of Lithuania's orientation to Central Europe (Frucht 2005: 170).

In 1569 Lithuania and Poland merged into the Union of Lublin and a state known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita*) was formed. However, the country was erased from the political map of Europe as a result of the partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 (Voren 2011: 7). With the Polish partitions, virtually all of the historic Lithuanian lands were incorporated into the Russian Empire. Thus, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Lithuania came under the rule of Russian Empire. Jews had a distinct history in Lithuania.

### **Origin and Development of Jews**

Jews have a history of more than 700 years as an inseparable part of Lithuanian society. Jews began living in Lithuania as early as the eighth century. Jewish settlements were said to have found in Lithuania as early as eighth century. Historian Abraham Elijah Harkavi believed that the Jews came to Lithuania in the ninth and eighth centuries from Babylonia (Greenbaum 1995). Some others state that the first Jewish settlements appeared in Lithuania in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They were merchants from southern Europe (Levin 2000). However, permanent settlements appeared only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Lithuania was under the Russian Empire. Mostly they lived in the Pale of Settlements<sup>3</sup> since the creation of such settlements by Catherine the Great in 1791.

Even before, 1569 the grand dukes had encourage urban settlements and economic activity by granting foreign merchants, particularly Germans the same rights and privileges given in medieval times to the Jewish merchants of Magdeburg in Germany. This privilege, known as “Magdeburg law” allowed the merchants to organize urban life in Lithuania on German lines. A largely autonomous town council (magistrate) was instituted. Among other things, it

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<sup>3</sup> The Pale of Settlement was the Western region of Imperial Russia to which Jews were restricted by the Tsarist *Ukase* of 1792. It consisted of the territories of former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, annexed with the existing numerous Jewish population, and the Crimea (which was later cut out from the Pale).

established own laws and regulations, runs its own legal system dictated the terms of the trade in the town and collected municipal taxes. After the Union of Lublin, there was sharp deterioration in their situation with many Jews sinking into debt and suffering grievously at the hands of their Christian creditors. The Jewish community also fell behind in their poll-tax payment, which were assessed at a higher level than the other groups in the populations. In 1566 a tax assessed globally 6000 kopa was levied in place of the poll tax. Together with an additional special levy of 4,150 kopa, this was divided among the communities (Levin 2000:48).

In this early period the economy was young and expanding, the position of Jewish society was not seriously challenged. The kings of Poland found the presence of Jews to be profitable both to the country and to the royal treasury. A royal charter for the protection of Jews and Jewish rights was first issued by the king in 1264 and later applied to other Polish provinces. It is extended to Lithuania in 1388. It is important to differentiate and distinguish the several communities that contributed to the establishment of the new community called Lithuanian Jewry, for an individual it is academic (Lange de 2000: 16). The Jews remained a group apart and were neutral in the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. The primary effect on the Jewish community resulted from the waning of the Catholic authority which relieved pressure on the community for a time. In 1573, there was even a call in the Polish diet for complete freedom of religion for all Christians, Jews and Muslims (Lange de 2000: 16).

The Polish Jews deeply suffered as a result of the Khmelnytsky Cossack Uprisings of 1648-1652, which were the result of a decaying Polish state that had entered a state of decline and stagnation. Pillaging Cossack troops set out to kill as many Jews as possible and it is estimated that some 100,000 were killed in the course of the uprising. It also resulted in the destruction of the existing Jewish institutions, destroying the yeshivas and schools and killing

the scholars and teachers. However, the Lithuanian Jews managed to escape much of the destruction by the Cossacks. Although they suffered heavily during the Russo-Swedish wars that ended only in 1661, they escaped the mass murders at the hands of the Cossacks. As a result, the Jewish population of Lithuania grew from an estimated 27,000 in 1578 to approximately 32,000 in 1676.<sup>25</sup> after the 1793 Second Partition of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth; Lithuanian Jews became subjects of the Russian Empire (Voren 2011: 9).

In 1795 Lithuania was forcibly annexed by the Russian empire. From the start a main goal of the Tsarist administration was to check the separatist currents at the fringes of its expanded empire. In practice this meant compulsory “Russification” of the existing nationalities in the northwestern region: the Lithuanians, the Poles, the Finns, the Estonians, and the Latvians. As historian Maksim Kovalevski notes, the Russians regarded themselves as the ruling and overpowering nation. The ideal of the empire was *one Tsar, one religion, one nation*. Russia sought to obliterate the Lithuanian nation through assimilation. In fact, the very name of Lithuania was to be erased from the map. By decree Lithuania was renamed the *Northwestern Territory* and proclaimed original Russian land. Historical Lithuanian territories were divided into nine Russian administrative provinces (gubernia). Lithuania was ruled by decree. Governor General Konstantin Kaufman euphemistically called the bureaucracy’s arbitrary rule “civilian occupation,” a process of “bringing new civilization to the country” (Miniotaite 2013)

The Lithuanians would live under the rule of the Russian Empire until the 20th century. That time, Tsarist policies were very discriminatory towards Lithuanian culture and language, resulting in a nation determined to save its language and traditions and oppose the restrictions imposed by what was seen as foreign domination. Lithuanians proudly remember the so called book smugglers, or *knygnesiai*, who, from 1864 till 1904, smuggled Lithuanian

language books across the Prussian-Russian border into the country to counter the discriminatory language policy of the Tsars, which forbade the use of Lithuanian in Latin letters (Voren 2011: 8).

However, at the same time, one should not forget that when Russia obtained Lithuanian lands at the end of the eighteenth century, it absorbed elites who spoke Polish, peasants who spoke mostly Byelorussian and towns with mainly Jews who spoke Yiddish. As Timothy Snyder writes in *The Reconstruction of Nations*, by the end of the nineteenth century, “The Lithuanian foundations were buried under a good deal of history. The Lithuanian language had not been considered a language of politics for centuries. The Lithuanian grand dukes had never published Lithuanian books. The last Lithuanian grand duke who even knew the Lithuanian language died the year Columbus discovered America” (Ibid).

According to the Russian imperial census of 1897, more people spoke Byelorussian in Vilnius province than all other languages combined. Voren argued “In Vilnius, Minsk, Grodno, Mogilev and Vitebsk provinces, contiguous territories of historic Lithuania, speakers of Byelorussian were three-quarters of the population” (Ibid). When from the late eighteenth century onward, Jewish modernization (Enlightenment) was taking deep hold in Germany, it made more subtle inroads in Lithuania leading by and large to additions rather than replacements of the rabbinical age-old rabbinic culture. Many renowned Jewish thinkers, teachers, writers, sculptors and musicians made their homes in Vilnius, cementing the city’s reputation as a center of modernist alongside traditionalist Jewish culture (European Jewish Congress 2013).

The end of 18th century, Lithuania became part of Tsarist Russia. In the history of Lithuania’s Jews a period began which Zvi Gitelman once called “*a century of ambivalence.*” On the one hand, as early as from 1794, Jews faced

a mixture of outspoken anti-Jewish politics and forced “modernisation” for generations, and many attempts were made to turn them into “useful citizens” of the Russian Empire. The years 1827– 1855, the reign of Nicholas I, were a particularly difficult time for Lithuania’s Jews, alleviated a little bit by the short-lived reforms of Alexander II. After his assassination and the wave of pogroms which erupted immediately after it and terrified hundreds of Jewish communities in the Pale of Settlement, the imperial government again started taking more and more restrictive measures against the Jews which were only lifted when the Tsarist Empire eventually collapsed (Voren 2011: 11).

### **Socio-Economic and Political Status of Jews in Lithuania**

The Jewish communities in Lithuania were the strongest economic and intellectual force that dominated the economic and cultural activities of the nations. Nevertheless, Jews played a very positive role as trade mediators – supplied peasants with industrial goods that were not produced in the natural economy, brought marine products, salt, etc. Due to their closed community system they would have failed in fostering the deep social relations with other Lithuanian communities. In the common perceptions of Lithuanian people, the Jews were considered only as a profit seeking class that could do anything for their business. Since the independence in the 1918s, the Jews controlled the economy and became the money lenders to the royal families and influential people. Slowly, the participation in the political activities was backed up through the economic pressure they used to make on the ruling class. They increased their participation in the state jobs and other institutions.

Jewish community in Lithuania is a very hard working, intellectual, state building community, is continually struggling in their identity and safe their life. But they were dominated and face so many problems in past and present time. Jewish community contributed to the national intellectual and cultural tradition of Lithuania and enriched the country's economy, culture, science and education. Jewish religiously and culturally isolated from the rest of the

Lithuanian society that led the social hatred toward them. In fact Jewish were very innovative and scientific temperament people who had contributed in science and technology of the country. Due to their hard work and new innovation in the country they occupied a rich position in the society and ameliorated their economic condition. Usually they did not fit with other communities and their socio-economic and cultural behaviour became a cause for their persecution also (Arad 1926: 29).

While the Lithuania in large areas a process of polonization was taking place whereby the Lithuanian language was relegated to that of peasantry, a different situation prevailed in the Lutheran German-ruled Lithuania Minor. It was in Lithuania Minor where **Martynas Mazvydas** published the first Lithuanian book on 1547 and a priest **Kristijonas Donelaitis** wrote the first Lithuanian novel in late 18th century. The last famous man of culture to hail from Lithuania Minor was **Vydunas** (real name Vilhelmas Storosta). He was the first philosopher to write in Lithuanian language. He was interested in the Hindu tradition and theosophism.<sup>4</sup>

In 16th-19th centuries the literature of Lithuania-proper (excluding Lithuania Minor) was written largely in Polish. The Lithuanian and Polish nations were not yet fully separated. A kind of diglossia developed where people even referred to themselves in different names in different languages. The tradition of 19th century National Revival put a special importance on Lithuanian language, thus downplaying local historical personalities who published their work in the other languages. However, some luminaries of the era, such as **Adomas Mickevicius** receive a fair share of interest despite publishing major works in Polish.

In 1915 the Germans captured Lithuania during the First World War. In 1917 Russia surrendered to Germany (after the war hardships led to a revolution in

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<sup>4</sup> True Lithuania, sights, cities , culture, History and more [Online : web] Accessed 15 June 2015, URL: <http://www.truelithuania.com/topics/history-and-politics-of-lithuania/famous-lithuanians>

Russia) and renounced any claims to the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, while the subsequent German losses in the Western Front led to a possibility to declare independence of Lithuania on February 16th, 1918.

Although late nineteenth-century Russia was an empire in transition, its sociodemographic structure was still deeply traditional. In the late 1880s, 75 percent of the empire's population still worked in agriculture. According to the first all-Russian census of 1897, peasants made up 71 percent of the population in Kovno; 86% in Suwalki; and 75 percent in Vilna provinces. The positions of Lithuanians and Jews within this social structure were largely inherited from the historical Polish-Lithuanian state. In the mid-nineteenth century tsarist reforms unleashed new forces of modernisation, but they failed to develop a new socio-economic setting that would successfully accommodate them (Balkelis 2010: 1). Before the Partitions of Poland, its Jewish population was almost perfectly homogenous in terms of culture, religion and way of life. Leaving aside local habits, dialectal differences in Yiddish and the early, limited consequences of the Hassidic movement.<sup>5</sup>

Wrobel

The Jewish people mostly dominated the field of economy and culture including trade and fine arts. The way of life and traditions fostered by Lithuanian Jews were different from the non-Jews communities that created very limited to space to contact each other. Basically, the Jews were closed communities culturally but they developed relations very limited in nature with the business class and land owners of Lithuania. Mostly, the economic activities of Jews were concentrated in the cities and towns so they could not foster the good relations with other Lithuanian communities especially with the villagers and local peasants. The Lithuanian scholars analysed that "Lithuanian-Jewish relations pointed out that the two nations lived by each

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<sup>5</sup> Wrobel Piotr, The Jews of Galicia under Austrian-Polish Rule, 1867-1918. [Online: web], Accessed 23 June 2015 URL: <http://easteurotopo.org/articles/wrobel/wrobel.pdf>



other for centuries as two closed communities linked by almost no mutual relations, except for the economic contacts” (Vareikis1940:7). Moreover, the antagonism among Jews communities and Lithuanian Christian communities could easily be found very visible at social and cultural spheres but the existence of Jews communities being tolerated by the Christianity.

When the Lithuanian State was incorporated into the Russian Empire in mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state propagated religion was the Orthodox Church, and the Catholic Church became a persecuted institution. Lithuanian Catholic Church resisted the Tsarist rule and became the centre of nationalist activities. Vareikis described the conflicting relations of Jews and Lithuanian Catholics that “it could intensify the anti-Semitic tendencies among Catholics as Jews were blamed for indulging tsarist officials (reporting against Lithuanians during anti-tsar rebellions, spying on them, etc.) and economic exploitation of Lithuanians. Second, persecution weakened the anti-Semitism because Lithuanian Catholics felt a discriminated minority, thus they became more sensitive towards other discriminated groups”<sup>6</sup>. Later on the images of Jewish people demolished or propagated them against the Catholic people. The Jews rituals were portrayed as the killer of children, economic exploitation of Christians. Already as early as in the first half of the 19th century, the economic competition between Jews and Lithuanians gave birth to a specific type of anti-Semitism aimed at defending the people.

During the 17th-18th centuries the relations between the Jews and non-Jews as well as between the Jewish community and influential Catholic Church in the Lithuanian - Polish Republic developed in the sector of economy and intertwined with growing religious intolerance. The Torah (law) forbade the Jews to borrow money on interest for their own kin. Similarly, the Catholic Church did not approve of usury either, thus, both the communities found

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<sup>6</sup> Vygantas Vareikis, Preconditions Of Holocaust: Anti-Semitism In Lithuania (19th century to mid 20th century (15 June 1940), Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences, Klaipeda University.

something to share in their economic coexistence. The Jews had long enjoyed a wide economic autonomy, paid different taxes (pro tolerantia, compensations for manufacturing spirits, etc.) which went to the Church. There was also a rent arrangement enabling the Jews to sell spirits on the land owned by bishoprics, monasteries and nobility. Agreements concluded between the Jewish community and the Catholic Church allowed to escape economic tensions between the Christians and the Jews and consequent outbursts of anti-Semitism (Vareikis 1940: 2).

Besides the nobility and the peasants, there was a third class in the Lithuania the townspeople and burghers. They were merchants, belonged to trade guilds and craftsmen. Almost all of whom were organized in crafts guilds called "cechy." All three classes (nobility burghers and peasants), however, engaged in protracted struggle to protect their vested interest in regard to the other two (Levin 2000:23).

At the time of union, economic and social condition of the Lithuania were significantly different from that of Poland. The country was sparsely populated; its agriculture was backward and economically primitive. The agrarian economy still predominated with the population for each region providing for most of its own needs. Surplus production was minimal, allowing for the export of only a small range of products such as hide, furs, and honey (Katz 2009:40).

In the sixteenth century the feudal system remained strong in Lithuania. The majority of the people engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing and woodcutting: (mostly Jews) made their living from inn keeping and petty trade or peddling, with a tiny minority importing and exporting agricultural produce. The right to farms taxes mercantile customs was generally granted only with those connections in the administration. Initially, trade developed around the castles and estates of the nobility. However, after the fifteenth

century, urban settlements also grew. Centres of local administration also developed there (Levin 2000:24).

The development of a Jewish working class in the cities associated with their appeal towards Marxian Socialism. Jews were attracted to the revolutionary movement emerged in Tsarist Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As early as the 1870s, Jewish workmen resorted to sabotage and violence in strikes, driven by poverty and hardships. In 1888, the Social Democrats founded strike funds and strike treasuries in a variety of trades, setting off a more organized union activity. Soon the first national trade union was organized in Russia, with Jews forming the backbone of the organization (Van 2011: 15).

Russian Tsars ruled Lithuania 18<sup>th</sup> century where state-tolerated, if not sponsored, anti-Semitism led to pogroms and discriminatory regulations. Jews were prohibited from living in cities, for example. Their proportion of high school enrolment was limited to 10%. Jewish boys were required to serve in the Russian military for 25 years. Special taxes applied only to Jews. Tsar Alexander II ascended to rule and introduced relatively liberal reforms in 1855. Forced military service was reduced to only 16 years. *Jews* were permitted to move anywhere within the empire, schools for girls were established: serfdom was abolished by law; rural communities were granted the right to self rule; and trial by jury replaced secret tribunals. Despite these reforms, Jews still experienced severe unemployment; low wages; hunger and cramped living conditions. Nearly 405 of Jewish families in the Russian Empire were supported by contributions from foreign Jewish communities (Balkelis 2010: 48).

In the 1892 Lithuanian Jews (Litvaks) differed from other Russian Jews by their strong adherence to misnagdic (anti-Hasidic) Orthodox Judaism as well as their sympathies to the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment). The tension between the religious leadership of the majority of local Jews who remained

Orthodox, and an increasing secular minority, produced an entire spectrum of political groupings that spoke with a multiplicity of voices. On the secular front, the major split was between the socialist Bund and nationalist Zionists (Balkelis 2010: 48). Lithuania gave strength to the Zionist message. Some of Lithuanian's Jews belonged to the communist party (Arad 2009: 30). While the majority of Jews remained firmly rooted in their traditional Jewish identity, a growing number turned to enlightenment in an attempt to connect their Jewishness with modernity, with progress. Some converted to Christianity; others became Russian in their way of life, or turned to socialism or internationalism. A growing number became politically active, not only trying to change the position of the Jews but with the goal of changing society and the political system as a whole (Voren 2011).

Yet while this growing pluralism within Jewish society weakened its cohesion, it did not necessarily mean that the assimilation of Jews into the surrounding environment and culture was very much stimulated. "Given the fact, that almost every conceivable aspect of life could still take place within the boundaries of the Jewish community, the bulk of the Jews of East Central Europe continued to live separately from their non-Jewish environment". Andre Gerrits writes "Even those Jews, who had liberated themselves from the narrow margin of traditional, religiously defined Jewish life, did not need to merge into non-Jewish society." And thus, again according to Gerrits, "even during the interwar years, the large majority of the East European Jews, those in Poland included, remained within their own, gradually more pluralistic society. The point however, is that these barriers were not exclusively, and perhaps not even primarily, the result of anti-Jewish sentiments among their Christian neighbours. Jewish isolation was also self-selected" (Voren 2011: 11).

### **Emergence of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania**

The period Tsar Alexander II was assassinated and the flash of enlightenment ended in 1881. Restrictions against censorship lifted in 1882 led to the publication of attacks on Jews in newspapers and pamphlets. Pogroms and false accusations against Jews resumed. Jews were prohibited from doing business on Sundays and Christian holidays and prohibited from owning farmland or managing agricultural assets. Educational institutions were closed. Approximately, 650 legal enactments, specifically targeting Jews in the Russian Empire were instituted. Jews were expelled from the areas within 35 miles of the Austrian and German borders. Upon the ascension of Tsar Nicholas II in 1894, pogroms and systematic anti-Semitic practices broke out. Ritual murder trials of Jews were held in Vilna in Lithuania. Jews were evicted from villages to rural areas. The severity of Russian rule against all inhabitants, not just the Jews, fuelled anti-Tsarist sentiments, which would build until the 1917 revolution (Jewish web Index 2015).

The Russian Revolution of 1917 drastically altered Russia in almost every way imaginable, from politics and economics to foreign policy and civil rights. An empire became a nominal republic, ascendant liberal and leftist politicians replaced a tsar, and a new policy toward national and ethnic minorities began to emerge. Each change affected the Jewish population, a small but significant portion of the overall Russian population (Levin 2013).

Russian revolution had an impact on the emergence of anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through the onset of the 1917 Revolution, the vast majority of Jews lived in these western territories collectively named the Pale of Settlement. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea, along the Russian borders with Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and Romania, and extended south to encompass some regions on the Black Sea. It included major cities, for Jews and Russia more generally, like Odessa, Vilna, Warsaw, and Kiev, belying the common misconception that all Jews in the Pale lived in shtetls

(rural Jewish villages). The 1897 census, the last comprehensive one until the 1920s, found that 94 percent of all Russian Jews just under five million lived within the territory of the Pale, though they comprised only 11.6 percent of the Pale's total population (Skolni and Berenbaum 2007: 578). Though these numbers may have changed by 1917, it is important to remember that the vast majority of Jews lived on a major front of World War I and were actually distant from the critical revolutionary centres of Petrograd and Moscow (Skolni and Berenbaum 2007: 578).

Between 1901 and 1903, of the 7,791 persons imprisoned in Russia for political reasons, 2,269 were Jews. Political activism among the Jews also resulted in higher numbers among political prisoners. From March 1903 to November 1904, 54 percent of those sentenced for political reasons were Jews; of the women sentenced for political crimes, more than 64 percent were Jewish. In 1904, of an estimated 30,000 organized Jewish workers, 4,476 were imprisoned or exiled to Siberia. In 1897, a "General League Bund of Jewish Workingmen in Russia and Poland" was founded in Vilnius, forming a national organization of social democratic and Marxist labour organizations. In 1901, Lithuania was added to the name. Between 1897 and 1900, the Bund led 312 strikes that led to higher wages and better working conditions. In 1898, the Bund was instrumental in founding the Russian Social-Democratic Labour party (RSDLP) during a meeting in Minsk, and it entered this party itself as "an autonomous organization, independent only in matters which specifically concern the Jewish proletariat." However, at the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903, the Bund was expelled from the party because of its "nationalistic positions". (Voren: 2011).

The Russian Revolution began in late February 1917 on the streets of Petrograd. Within days, the tsarist regime essentially lost all control and Nicholas II soon abdicated his throne, ending the Russian monarchy and Empire. Some political leaders promptly began to create a new central

political structure to lead the country, which they called the Provisional Government. By the beginning of March, the Provisional Government began to truly function and issue new laws for Russia, some of which significantly affected the Jewish population. The initial weeks of Revolution were a high point for Russian Jews in 1917, and perhaps in the entirety of modern Russian history (Levine 2014)

Several laws enacted which represented a fundamental shift in governmental policy toward religious and national minorities which were significant for Jewish population. On March 9, the Provisional Government issued a decision “*to authorize the Minister of Justice to introduce for the consideration of the Provisional Government a bill abolishing all national and religious restrictions*” (Robert and Kerensky 1991: 210). By March 20, such an action had taken place and Prince Lvov, the newly minted Minister-President of the Government, authorized a law entitled “*The Abolition of Restrictions Based on Religion and Nationality*”. In grand terms, the law declared, all restrictions by existing legislation on the rights of citizens of Russia by reasons of their adherence to a particular religious denomination or sect by reason of nationality are abolished. The law, then, applied not only to the Jews of Russia, but other religious minorities (Ibid).

Official policies discriminating against Jews continued well into the Soviet Union and could be categorized into three broad areas Jews were restricted from entering certain professions-specifically, higher-level positions in the party, the state, the administration of academia, the Foreign Service and the foreign trade apparatus, the secret police, and the armed forces. Second, Soviet authorities failed to censor the publication of viciously anti-Semitic works. And finally, the state prevented the establishment or improvement of facilities promoting Jewish culture, education, or language (Salomoni 1987: 18).

Because of the discrimination against Jews they participated in Lithuania's independent movement began in 1918. In the beginning of World War I, Jews expanded into already forbidden areas, thus coming to constitute up to one-third of the population in some major cities. They also created, managed, or owned much of the region's industry, financial institutions, and businesses, as well as constituting the majority of medical doctors, lawyers, journalists, and scientists. Moreover, Jews were making inroads into such previously non-Jewish positions as landownership, public service, politics, the administration, public education, the judiciary, and the military (Ginaite and Kafrissen 2008: 7).

On 16 February 1918, Lithuania proclaimed its independence after the defeat of both Germany and Russia in World War I. The new Bolshevik government in Moscow attempted to establish Soviet power in Lithuania, but failed. After a series of armed border conflicts between Lithuania, Russia and Poland, in 1920 Moscow recognized Lithuanian independence, but Poland annexed Vilnius, and the Lithuanian capital had to be moved to Kaunas. Jews greatly contributed in the rebuilding of nations after independence. Lithuanian government granted them autonomy. They had a Jewish Council with branches in provinces. However, when the initial democratic phase ended up in dictatorship in 1926, their limited autonomy and rights enjoyed were also restricted (Ginaite and Kafrissen 2008: 7).

The Jews confronted anti-Semitism and prejudice. The influence of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany was one of the reasons for Jews' hatred. Jews were viewed by Lithuanians as associated with communist Soviet Union. Anti-Semitism emerged as a political and ideological expression apart from religious and racial elements by the 1930s. The phenomenal progress achieved was stopped and then was gradually eroded by anti-Semitic administrations and public opinion, culminating in the genocide of World War II and the subsequent emigration of the great majority of Jewish survivors (Lindemann



and Levy 2010: 223). The great depression was one of the important economic reasons for prejudice against Jews (Ginaite and Kafrissen 2008: 7). Jews were treated by Lithuanians as collaborators with communism in Russia.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, the situation changed, although only briefly, for the Jews. Lenin and his colleagues specifically attacked anti-Semitism and instituted policies that significantly opened up opportunities for Russian Jews. They were, for example, permitted to settle in urban areas. But these enlightened official attitudes lasted only until the 1930s when resentment over the advances of Jews in the new Soviet society increased considerably (Gitelman 1986: 142). Official policy in the 1930s turned toward combating “petit bourgeois nationalism” and as part of this campaign officials worked to undermine expressions of ethnic and national distinctions (Gitelman 1986: 142).

### **Jewish - Lithuanian Relations**

The emancipation of Jews took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Jewish community had made a specific identity with costume, habits, culture, occupation, religion, and language. Religion only confuses matters because many families of Jewish origin have converted to Christianity or are without religion. Ethnicity is even less helpful because during the past one hundred sixty-odd years, millions of Jews embraced the nationality of the most powerful ethnic group around them. Race is also nearly useless because many people of Jewish origin show no Semitic physical characteristics. The Jews themselves are no help in this matter because many, especially among the educated and the successful, have long tended to keep their Jewish descent a secret (Lindemann and Levy 2010: 223).

The creation of the “Council of the Land of Lithuania” in the early 17th century, the establishment of an independent system of autonomy separate from the Polish Jews, as well as the emergence of various cultural centres in

the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in general and its capital in particular, indicate how far a “regional identity” of Lithuanian Jews had developed. Not without reason the latter city was named *Jerusholayim de Lite* “Lithuanian Jerusalem” and considered to be the spiritual centre and cultural capital of those Jews who regarded themselves as Litvaks (Nikzentaitis and Schreiner and Staliunas 2014: 8 ).

Social mobility greatly increased .no longer confined to their own ghettos Jewish families could try to migrate to the suburbs to the countryside, or even to foreign countries in Galicia, it was often in jest that the only successful expedition of 1848 was the long march of the Jews on the two miles from kazimierz to Cracow. In Russian Poland, in Warsaw wealthy Jewish families moved out from the city centres. In some cases, they moved over the frontier into Galicia where they were free to buy land economic constraints and severe overcrowding forced increase of the Jews of the pole was in the order of 500 percent .similar conditions prevailed emigration and turned a steady stream into a stampede which continued until the First World War. Although statistics vary, there can be little doubt that more Jews left the polish lands than stayed behind. They went in stages first to Vienna or Berlin, and then to England or France and able all to America some were well prepared and departed legally. Invited by their landmannschaft or “regional council” abroad, they were provided with tickets for the journey and with work when they arrived. Others departed illegally, especially from Russia and could make no preparations. At the ports of embarked, they sold themselves to redemption agents, who gave them a free passage to America in exchange for three ,five or seven year’s bonded labour on arrival (Strauss 1993: 975).

Reflecting this situation, it was argued, the Jews developed an ideology of passivity and political quietism in order to rationalise their powerless state. There was an interpretation of a passage in the “Song of Songs” that gave rise

to the legend of “the three oaths.” According to this *midrash*<sup>7</sup>, God made the Jews swear that they would not emigrate en masse to Erets Israel, nor force the coming of the Messiah. In turn, the nations of the world swore not to oppress the Jews “too much.” The practical application of this worldview was the law of the realm is the law for the Jews, which placed a high premium on political loyalty and obedience to the lawful state authority (Nikzentaitis and Schreiner and Staliunas 2014: 5).

Specialists in the study of East European Jewish history are aware that such stereotypes offer only the palest image of the sophisticated political activity that characterised the Jewish communities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The representatives of the community are often called *shtadlanim*, but they differed in important ways from the classic representative of this type in Western Europe, the “Court Jew.” The essential point was that the representatives of Polish-Jewish communities were not “accidental people” who owed their position to a changing and unstable status, but elected members of the community. Moreover, their activities were not based on chance opportunity, but were an acknowledged part of the Commonwealth’s political system (Nikzentaitis and Schreiner and Staliunas 2014: 5).

The privileges which authorised Jewish political representation were analogous to those rights exercised by the nobility of the Commonwealth. Even when the national gatherings of representatives of the Jewish communities were abolished in 1764, the Jews still retained their right of communal autonomy (the *kehillah*<sup>8</sup> or *kahal*), which often operated on a regional basis. But these bodies disappeared under Russian rule. David Biale<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>7</sup> It is a Hebrew scripture ancient commentary, attached to the biblical text. The first Madrshim come from the second century AD, although much of their content is older.

<sup>8</sup> Kehillah is a Estonian village

<sup>9</sup> David Biale is distinguished professor of Jewish history and chair of the department of History at the University of California

who has done so much to correct the misconceptions regarding Jewish powerlessness, observes that “it was in the Russian Empire, starting largely in the 1890s, that the Jews achieved the most impressive level of political and economic activism.” Certain archival material demonstrates high level of Jewish political activity in the first decades of Russian rule, and then its occasional reappearance at other moments of crisis. In such narrative, the Jews of the Lithuanian lands play a very important role. Indeed, political activism might be described as the legacy of Lithuanian Jewry to their new rulers (Nikzentaitis and Schreiner and Staliunas, 2014: 5).

The existence of small groups, such as Tatars, Karaims, and Roma, does not, for example, cause conflicts. Things are, however, far more complicated with regard to the Jewish minority. The problem for Lithuanian Jews is that quite a large sector of Lithuanian society including not a few representatives of the intelligentsia is still inclined to consider the Jews as collectively responsible for the mass killings and deportations of civilians, as well as for other atrocities committed during the Soviet occupation on the eve of the Second World War. Russia, like many European countries, had expelled its Jews in the late Middle Ages, and afterwards contacts remained rare. Jews who converted to Christianity escaped any legal restrictions, a situation that held for the most part until the downfall of tsarist in 1917 (Lindemann, and Levy, 2010: 1).

Russia and the Soviet empire looked to the West for ideas to reform government, society, economy, and in particular Jewish culture and character traits. France had emancipated its Jews in a revolutionary way, giving equal rights to all by 1791. Central European states through most of the nineteenth century laboured to reconstruct the social, economic, and religious characteristics of the Jews they deemed unacceptable, and gradually granted them greater rights; these were understood to be the reward for the improvements made in Jewish behaviour (Lindemann, and Levy 2010: 1).

Within this framework Russia and the Soviet Union stood at the extreme of a policy of active intervention into internal Jewish affairs. Russia borrowed the aim of reconstruction from enlightened absolutism and the writings of Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, a Prussian bureaucratic reformer. Reconstruction meant the integration of the Jews into the state's administrative structure by a variety of means, for example, abolition of special Jewish corporatist institutions, and "productivization" of their economic activities (that is, removing them from "exploitative" activities, such as money lending and inn keeping, and moving them toward "productive" manual labour). Efforts were also made to introduce them to modern education, weaning them away from their traditional learning. However, the Russian state, deviating from the central European pattern, tended to dictate policies without immediately offering meaningful incentives (Lindemann, and Levy 2010: 1).

The Jewish community in Lithuania shared a historical background, relation between the Jewish and non Jewish in these countries during the reign of the Tsars were better than others part of Russia. Nationalism in Lithuania was not as strong as Poland and Romania, and on receiving independence, the Baltic nation did not bring with them a powerful traditions of the anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism encased in these countries during the year of independence, especially, during the 1930s when the middle classes, with the sport of the government competed increasingly with Jewish tradesman artisans in the cities. Most revelations of anti-Semitism were economic based (Arad 1926: 29).

The Lithuanian Jewry's relations with the other national groups inhabiting the region they rather imprecisely referred to as *Lietuva* is important to mention. It must be emphasised that this geographical expression did not correspond to a clearly demarcated territory. Rather, it is best understood as that area lying between ethnic Polish and ethnic Russian territory (on the east-west axis),

bordering Latvian and Ukrainian settlements to the north and south. Within this territory lived, besides the Jews, several other distinct nationalities, most prominent among them Lithuanians, Poles, Belarusians (by today's definition), and Russians. Among these national groups, only two enjoyed unchallenged legitimacy in the 19th century as "cultural nations" – the Russians (mainly, of course, officials and soldiers here, not natives) and Poles (primarily landowners, but also significant as townspeople, intelligentsia, and in some areas peasantry). The late 19th century witnessed the rise of national feeling and nationally-based organisations in this region, not only among Lithuanians and Jews, but also among Poles, Russians, and even (to a smaller extent) Belarusians. The fact that no one nationality could dominate here (though the Russians certainly tried to do so) also influenced the development of relations between Lithuanians and Jews (Arad 1926: 29).

Jewish communities suffered from persecution by Christians and Muslims, many very likely immigrated to khazaria. Records of the time indicate that the practice was not uncommon. How many sought refuge in khazaria is not know. All we can safely say is that there existed in a country of Jewish dominion a large community of the both native converts and immigrant Jews who lived together and comingled. As the conquering Lithuania moved south through Byelorussia, volkynia and the Ukraine, they came upon towns with either established Jewish communities or a Jewish presence (Lange de 2000: 15).

These communities were established by a mixture of Jews who came via khazaria khazarian Jews and Jews who came directly from older Jewish communities. What was the proportion of each or their numbers is not known. Grand duke Vytautas brought Turkic speaking karaites from the Crimea to garrison the troki fortress. Troki later became a centre of the karate community. After the southern immigration the combined Jewish population of all Poland and Lithuania did not exceed 30,000. Most of this Jewish

population was centered in western Poland this estimate does not include small settlements. In the early middle ages, the frontiers of civilization were in bohemia eastern Germany, Selesia, and western Poland towns would be established land would be claimed for agriculture and the population would increase. In established communities the Jews were in economic competition with the descents of German merchants who were in the process of becoming totally polarized (Lange de 2000: 15).

The next chapter discusses the emergence of anti-Semitism since the 1930s, Holocaust in Lithuania and the local collaboration and participation in Holocaust during 1941-1944.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Anti-Semitism, German Invasion and Holocaust in Lithuania during World War II**

Lithuania was a country which did not pursue any anti-Semitic state policies before the World War II. But, historical prejudices against Jews among the masses were already prevalent in Lithuania in the 1920s and 1930s. Stereotyped and prejudiced imagination prevalent in the consciousness of Lithuanians was that Jews use the blood of Christian babies for their rituals. Such acts of Jews that ended up in political trials or manifestations explicitly describe Jewry as a clandestine and treacherous force (Donskis 2006: 10). Anti-Semitism became a central issue of world history in the 1900s, when Germany, under the rule of the Nazi-party, sought first to expel Jews from all positions of trust in Germany, and later to exterminate Jews completely in all the lands it controlled. As a result six million Jews were killed in Europe during World War II in what is known as the Holocaust (Jones 2011: 233). The anti-Semitism in Germany, Nazi propaganda and Hitler's policy towards Jews also had influenced Lithuanian society. Thus, anti-Semitism emerged as strong force in Lithuania on the eve of WWII and became the precondition of Holocaust during the war. This chapter tries to explore the factors that led to the emergence of anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the 1930s, and the specific characteristics of the Holocaust in Lithuania that happened under German invasion, i.e., the mass slaughter of around 95 percent of Jews that did not happen elsewhere in Europe.

#### **Emergence of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania**

Anti-Semitism emerged in Lithuania as a result of hatred and prejudice against Jews prevalent among the Lithuanian masses. Anti-Semitism emerged in Europe since the 19<sup>th</sup> century had an impact on Lithuanians and thereby remain as one of the factors that led to the rise of anti-Semitism in Lithuania.



Because, Lithuanians were greatly influenced by the political developments that took place in Europe especially in Germany. As far as the rise of anti-Semitism in modern Europe is concerned, the year 1899 to 1939 is commonly accepted as a highpoint (Brustein and King 2004: 36).

*a) Rise of Anti-Semitism in Europe in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

In Europe, especially in Germany anti-Semitism was the result of Social Darwinism, the theory of racial hierarchy, according to which the Jewish race found itself at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Jews were seen as something alien, hostile, and a threat to racial purity. They were also suspected of a plot to dominate the whole world (Voren 2011: 33).

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, anti-Semitism became a regular feature in European politics. This era led to the expression of the tension and crisis that had very diverse grounds: national conflicts, social upheavals, economic crisis, fight for the political power and rapid and cultural changes. Due to all those developments, for many groups, the Jewish community became the objects of their frustration and aggression (Voren 2011:35). The anti-Semitism rose in the nineteenth and twentieth century, incorporating religious, economic, racial and political prejudices.

Religiously Jews are considered to be murderers of Jesus Christ by the Christian community. The most primitive and powerful myth prevailed among the Christian community was that Jews are blood libel. It was claimed that Jews seized and murdered the Christian's children in order to use their blood in the baking of ceremonial bread for the Passover celebration (Jones 2011: 235). The Jewish community had a strong feeling of religion and culture; they do not assimilate themselves easily with local culture and society in which they live. The Jewish community had been marginalised in Western Christian societies for a long time; they administered themselves, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it gave

the rise to widespread impression that Jews formed the state within the state (Bergman 2009: 348).

The concept of racial inferiority and being alien, in the view of anti-Semites, neither assimilation nor conversion to Christianity could alter the situation: once a Jew, always a Jew. As a result, the only answer was found in the development of regulations to keep the Jews from “infecting” the superior race, such as bans on inter-racial marriage, birth control, forced sterilization or forced emigration (Voren 2011: 35). European Christian societies failed to assimilate Jewish within their culture and religion. There was tendency to shift away from attempt at complete cultural and genetic assimilation of Jewish in the early stages of group conflict in European societies, it eventually followed by the rise of collectivist, authoritarian anti-Semitic group strategies aimed at exclusion, expulsion, or genocides, when it was clear that efforts at assimilation had failed (Harrison 2015: 9). In every country of the European soil witnessed persecution of the Jewish community. However, European country varied in terms of their popular anti-Semitism (Brustein and King 2004: 36).

Several publications also appeared in Europe supporting anti-Semitism. In November 1879 in Berlin, Reichstag member and historian published an article in which he protested the mass immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe and blamed the German Jews for having assimilated themselves insufficiently. Treitschke became one of the principal advocates of anti-Semitism and has often been misquoted as having coined the phrase *Die Judensindunser Unglück*. In later period it adopted as a motto by the Nazis. This phrase popularised throughout the Germany by the Nazis (Voren 2011:35).

In Europe, the unpopularity of Jewish was compounded by their choice of professions. Jewish people were basically middlemen and merchants, often disdaining the hard physical labour done by gentile commoners. Jewish

monopolized the money lending trade and during the middle ages charged annual rates of 20 to 40 per cent interest (Brustein and King 2004: 39). In fact Jewish community is one of the hardworking, intelligent and scientific temperaments. The drastic economic and social advancement in most of the European societies and their continuing connection with money economy were interpreted in a way and created the myths about the Jews that they want secretly economy and political world (Bergman 2009: 346).

Due to involvement of Jews in money lending business, for a long time the charge was repeatedly made, that Jews are economic parasites they enjoy profits on other's cast, they engage in unproductive economic activities, and that causes the anti-Jewish feeling among gentiles (Reich 1945: 297). In fact core of the anti-Semitic prejudice in other communities of European society was; Jews were not seen as an individual but as collective force, putting their own group before all other communities. Jews seen in the surrounding societies and they bring disaster into their host societies, or the whole world, and they were doing it secretly (Bergman 2009: 346).

One of the political factors of the rise of anti-Semitism can be associated with Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 in Russia. Particularly in after 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, many European non-Jewish associated recent eastern European Jews immigrants with Bolshevism (Burstein and King 2004: 36). It was perceived by the non-Jewish European societies that Jewish immigrants came from former Russian empire were favour the parties of political left. What made matter worse for Jews were the numerous press reports in the West claiming that Jews were over represented in the leadership of the Bolshevik and the Communist Party (Burstein and King 2004: 36). This became one the significant cause of Holocaust by the Nazi Germany. It created a sinister link in the minds of right-wing German nationalists between Judaism and Communism (Neville 1999: 9). Many European viewed growing Bolshevism as threat to their existing social, economic and religious order. Anti-Bolshevik

temperament fed the anti-Semitic attitudes. More over in case of German anti-Semitism feeling of superiority of race played a crucial role.

The rise of modernity and nation state changed the nature and produced relatively more violent and verbal anti-Semitism. In fact, for several centuries Jews in Eastern Europe enjoyed a period of comparative peace, tolerance, and the flowering of Jewish religious life (Jones 2011: 235). The era of late nineteenth and early twentieth century are seen as golden age for Jewish in France, Britain, and Germany, even while approximately two and a half million Jews were fleeing pogroms in Tsarist Russia (Jones 2011: 235).

Germany was viewed as one of the more tolerant European countries; the Prussia the first German state granted citizenship to Jews in 1812. As it has been mentioned the European countries experience major political, economic, social turbulence in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It raised a different and more violent anti-Semitism or Jews hatred among the different societies. States and societies were widely blamed their Jews communities for economic crisis, political upheavals and social conflicts in the European countries (Burstein and King 2004: 36). However, prior to 1945 (World War Second) anti-Semitism was not very widespread in the countries such as in Scandinavian countries, the Netherland, the United kingdom, Italy and Czech Republic, population was less anti-Semitic, than in those countries with a more deeply rooted tradition of anti-Semitism, such as Germany, Austria, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia (Bergman 2009: 345).

In term of rise of anti-Semitism the event of Alfred Dreyfus termination from French military was significant. He was falsely accused and convicted of selling military secrets to the Germans in 1894. In the end of the inquiry Dreyfus found to be innocent and he restored to his position in the army in 1906, the case revealed the perception of the political right, the army's high command and catholic church towards Jews (Neville 1999: 6). Russia has a

series of Jewish persecution, and anti-Semitic tendency from a long time of the history, but during late nineteenth and early twentieth century it witnessed a very cruel massacre and persecution of Jews community. Following, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, very serious persecution landed on Russian Jews. With the declaration of May Law of 1882 Jews were forced to leave Urban centres and rural shtetls in Western in Western Russia, and moved to the newly established pale of Jews settlements (Gibson and Howard 2007: 198). It led to the rise of state-sponsored anti-Semitism in Russia.

From 1880 to outbreak of First World War there were numerous pogroms<sup>10</sup> happened, and Jews were officially excluded from many areas of normal life. The most inhuman anti-Semitic outbreak took place in Kishinev in 1903, when, for two days, the local population was allowed to attack Jews without interference from the police and army (Neville 1996: 5). Moreover, During Tsarist period in Russia secret police published a forged collection of document that known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The Tsarist police made very effective use of this growing fear of a Jewish conspiracy when compiling the notorious “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” the publication of which sparked off a whole series of pogroms that shook the Jewish world and led to a sharp increase in emigration to America (Voren 2011:33).Between 1900 and 1914 alone, 1.5 million Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States mainly to escape anti-Semitism and resulting poverty. At the same time, ideas about the superior “Aryan” or “Nordic” race found a very fertile breeding ground, particularly among the petty bourgeois circles (Voren 2011: 34).

However, in the Bolshevik revolution Jews played a crucial role but their persecution continued. After the revolution Russian Jews continued to be viewed as scapegoat. Between 1917 to 1921, after Bolshevik Revolution, more than five hundred Jewish communities in the Ukraine were wiped out in

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<sup>10</sup>Pogrom, the word which is basically used for anti-Jewish atrocities

pogroms, in which approximately 60,000 Jewish were killed, including men women and children. Jews led group like Jewish anti-Fascist Committee and Bund played a leading role in the socialist enterprise, it made them particularly easy targets for the Stalinist purge of the 1930 (Gibson and Howard 2007: 198).

*b) Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany*

In Germany anti-Semitism steadily raised in virulent form following the World War First. There were number of factors contributed in rise of German anti-Semitism after the World War First. The first was itself the outbreak of First World war and its consequences, second was the German economic inflation and its legacy, third is appointment of the Hitler as chancellor (Heilbronner2011: 11). Germany was defeated in the First World War, and German society was destabilised by the imposition of Versailles treaty 1919, by the victorious countries. Germany was blamed for the outbreak of the Great War. It lost its overseas colonies, along with some of its European territories; its armed forces were reduced (Jones 2011: 236). Consequently, Germany faced a hyperinflation in 1923, and then the widespread unemployment of the great depression in 1929. It was considered as national humiliation by the Germans, resulted Germany witnessed a force with political extremism.

However, different ideological factions and Jews were together fighting in the War, but when the Germany began to lose the war anti-Jewish prejudice was revived (Neville 1996: 9). During the war right wing organisations blamed and spread the rumours that Jews were not serving at the front, were instead profiting from the war situation (Voigtlander and Voth 2011: 9). They were blamed for food storage and involvement in the black market. Consequently it led to the virulent hatred and aggression towards Jews communities. Moreover, the leading role Jewish politician in the Revolution of 1918 more intensified the anti-Semitic sentiment among the German gentiles. After the

war within few months Jews witnessed their dangerous persecution; their business places were boycotted, they dismissed from the hospitals, the school and civil services (Jones 2011: 236). During the World War First the German Fatherland Party came into existence that was the result of the union of the various conservative, anti-Semitic, racial forces in Germany, was preaching an anti-Semitic racial ideology in the latter part of the war (Heilbronner 2011: 10). It provided the conceptual and organisational anti-Semitic movement following the war. Before 1933 there were anti-Jewish sentiment was not only among the right wing politician but also greatly prevailed among the student and young peoples.

There were number of right wing parties sprung up during Weimer Germany's period of economic decline and social unrest after 1918. Hitler founded National Socialist German Workers Party, which was only one of many, but amongst the most radical and anti-Semitic (Voigtlander and Voth 2011: 10). He had the vision of resurrecting Germany and imposing its hegemony on all Europe. However, Hitler tried to control the power by *putsch* but he failed. By 1932 he seemed too many to have passed his peak. Although Nazi won only a minority of parliamentary seats in that year election but the division between the socialist and communist made the Nazis largest single party, and allowed Hitler to become Chancellor in January 1933 (Jones 2011: 236). Once Nazi came in power they proved unstoppable, and within three months they seized the total control of the German state; they abolished its federal structure, dismantled democratic government and outlawed political parties and trade unions (Jones 2011: 236).

Consequently their persecutory stance towards Jews became plain. Extremism of the Jewish persecution and holocaust can be seen in the Germany by Adolf Hitler. He believed that Jewish would contaminate what he referred to as the superior Aryan race. Therefore according to Hitler's doctrine, all Jewish and their genetic pool must be eliminated (Longerich 2010: 73). Due to threat and

worse measures a large number of Jews fled to abroad. Hundreds of Jews who were not able to go abroad were committed suicide, and Nazi government imposed upon them a social death (Jones 2011: 236). Nazi government led to the third wave of anti-Semitism during 1937 and 1938 a large number of pogroms were initiated by the Hitler and thousand of Jewish were killed and expelled from the country (Longerich 2010:73). These attempt to flee increased dramatically, but this occurred just as Hitler was driving Europe towards crisis and World War, and as Western countries all but closed their frontiers to Jewish would be immigrants (Jones: 2011: 237). Furthermore, during world war Nazi government led Jewish holocaust in all the controlled and occupied territories.

Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators murdered six million Jews and five million other civilians, including Sinti and Roma people (also known by their derogatory label as Gypsies), Poles, people with physical and mental disabilities, gay men, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents. Even though Jews comprised less than one percent of the total German population in 1933 (600,000), Hitler used anti-Semitism as a political weapon to gain popular support, blaming Jews for all of Germany's problems - their defeat in World War I, economic depression, and the Bolshevik threat of communism. That Hitler's accusations were blatantly contradictory and his facts often fabricated made little difference.

### *c) Anti-Semitism in Lithuania*

In Lithuania two irreconcilable parallel cultures, Jewish and Lithuania existed and it was a multiethnic/national society. In Lithuania anti-Semitism should be stressed that exclusion and alienation became the fate of Jewish throughout Central and Eastern Europe Including Lithuania (Donskis: 2006, 11). During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the relation between the Jews and non-Jews as well as between the Jews community and influential Catholic Church in the



Lithuanian-polish Republic developed in the sector of economy and intertwined with growing religious intolerance (Vareikis, 1941: 2).

Jews community and Lithuanians lived in isolated and distant social and cultural world, as a result, developed negative stereotypes sentiments to each other. Presumably this gap between Jews and Lithuanians was one of the major factors that facilitated the rise of mutual suspicion and anti-Semitism that violently exploded in the mid-twentieth century (Balkelis, 2010: 49). Lithuanian society was strictly Catholic, and it was the Catholic Church that was the main driving force behind the popular belief that the Jews had not only killed Jesus Christ and needed to be punished for that (Vareikis, 1941: 2). Moreover the myth also that the Jews maintained the ritual of using fresh blood of Christian children in preparing matzos, often intensified anti-Semitism (Jones, 2011: 236).

Moreover, in late nineteenth and early twentieth century rural Lithuanian had some terrible myths about Jews such as, Jews have extra territorial capabilities, their links with devils, the ability to harm gentile person (Assoc and Vareikis, 1941: 31). These caricatures were fed to children from an early age and, thus, became standard “knowledge” in people's heads. They did not speak Lithuanian but Yiddish, their shops had Yiddish signs and not Lithuanian ones (if they had signs in a different language, it was usually Russian and not Lithuanian), they purposely remained a rather closed and separate community and integrated into Lithuanian society only to a certain level. Remaining outsiders, they unwillingly contributed to the concept of being alien, and thus Lithuanian nationalists and anti-Semites found fertile soil in the country (Vareikis, 1941: 8).

Lithuanian Anti-Semitism was unlike other nationalist movements such as the Polish National Democrats. Lithuanian nationalism did not initially target the Jews as a perceived barrier to national fulfilment. However, the spread of Lithuanian self-consciousness and the establishment of a state in 1918

inaugurated a process of Jewish exclusion. First, there was the linguistic factor, which was the most visible marker of Lithuanian identity. A small percentage of urban Jews, typically middle class and associated with the free professions and commerce, spoke Lithuanian. The majority of Lithuanian Jews spoke Yiddish, and if they spoke a second language, it tended to be Polish or Russian. Some poorer Jews, such as market traders who dealt directly with peasants, spoke enough Lithuanian to suffice for commercial transactions. But in general there were few bonds connecting Lithuania's Jews to the linguistic community that defined the nation.

As mentioned earlier, the Jews were, from early on, considered to be the murderers of Jesus Christ and ritual murderers who used fresh children's blood for the preparation of matzos. For instance, a 1908 Catechism stated: “priests and elderly Jews hated Christ the Lord. In his analysis of anti-Semitism in Lithuania, Vygantas Vareikis points out that in nineteenth century prayer books and catechisms, based on texts of the 18th and even 17th century, as well as in writings by Lithuanian priests, there were references to the murder of God and the torture of Christ by the Jews (Vareikis, 1941: 7). Moreover in 19<sup>th</sup> century Lithuanian authors borrowed the anti-Semitic ideas from the neighbouring countries where the anti-Semitism stereotype merged with nationalism and competition in the economic sectors.

Also in Lithuanian literature, anti-Semitism was a frequent issue, and many well-known and respected Lithuanian writers and intellectuals such as Simonas Daukantas, Motiejus Valancius, and Vincas Kudirka professed quite rabid anti-Semitic views in their writings. Kudirka, for instance, wrote in 1890 about “the blight of Jews with their dirt and self-neglect polluting the air with secrets of the Talmud, with the dirty and virtuous morale distorted by the harm made to Christians”. In an article in *Varpas* (The Bell), Kudirka rallied against “the Jews. Our most terrible enemies the most vicious wolves dressed in sheep's clothing”. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Lithuanian

clergy started linking Jews also to Masonry and Socialism; Jews were considered to be enemies of Catholicism, accused of seeking power as the main goal in all their actions (Vareikis, 1941: 41).

Tsarist regime of Russian ruled the Baltic nations from 18<sup>th</sup> century to World War First, oppressed the Jewish minorities as well as the local nationals, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians. Such kind of situation led the cooperation with between Jews and Lithuanians such as during the political uprising in 1905, and in the election of Duma in 1906 (Levin, 1990: 54). As far as political cause of anti-Semitism is concerned in the twentieth century, it was the Russian State Duma election in 1906, Jews and Lithuanian formed a block and supported the same candidates against the block of the Polish Gentry. It provided a basis for rapprochement of the Jewish and Lithuanian political elite, whereas in Poland, anti-Semitism intensified, resulted into a boycott of Jews shops in Warsaw in 1912 organised by leaders of the nationalist Roman Dmowski (Vareikis, 1941: 20).

Anti-Semitism in the second half of the nineteenth century in Eastern and Central Europe was a modern phenomenon. It was caused by the development of nationalism and capitalism, comprising certain ideas and concept of such as, racial segregation that was not characteristic of old anti-Judaism (Assoc and Vareikis). Lithuanian intellectual and positivist, such as Vincas Kudirka, promoted the idea of honest and industrious craftsmen in partial fulfilment of their wish for Lithuanian industry and commerce to be strong without alien Jewish participation (Assoc and Vareikis, 39). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the root cause of anti-Semitism became the economic rivalry between Jews and Lithuanians.

With the beginning to outbreak of World War First Jews faced a new wave of Tsarist persecution. About 200 thousand Jews deported from Kaunas, Kursas, and Grodno provinces to the inner provinces of Russia as accused of being “unreliable and pro-German”. Russian soldiers carried out the pogroms and

plundered the Jews. Moreover, Jewish involvement in the Bolshevik Revolution in a large number that contributed to further development of the theory of the international Jewish conspiracy (Vareikis, 1941: 19).

After the First World War, Lithuania became an independent state, then Jewish numbers were about 1,500,000 and made up 9 per cent of the nation's population (Goldstein and Goldstein: 1996). Now in the independent state, Jews had difficulties in identifying themselves with the Lithuanian State. The Jews of the former territory of the Russian Empire were dispersed in the three states. The Litvaks were demographically divided among Poland, Lithuania and Soviet Russia. In Lithuania, anti-Semitism found itself a base also in a number of other aspects.

The Jewish community in Lithuania, which formed approximately nine per cent of the total population, was seen as an alien element in society and many Lithuanian nationalists considered Jews to be "unfaithful" to the young independent Lithuanian republic. However, several thousand Jews were participated and worked as volunteers in the war. Local influential Jewish personalities, who attained influential positions in the international organisations and solicited political and economic support from among their coreligionists in the west for the newly established Lithuania, even during that ideal period there were pogroms in several areas in Lithuania (Levin, 1996: 54).

Moreover, in 1920, the anti-Semitic tendencies intensified in Lithuania because of the issue of refugees. The treaty signed between Lithuania and Soviet Russia on 12 July 1920 for returning Jewish refugees who were forcibly sent to the inner part of the Russian by the Tsarist regime in 1915 (Vareikis, 1941: 22). Even Russian and Ukrainian Jews who were living under the Bolshevik rule unwillingly started to immigrate to Lithuania. It led to the rapid growth of Jewish population in Lithuania that threatened the economic interests of the Lithuanian community. In 1923 Jews constituted 153,743 who were

controlled 77 percent of trade 22 percent of industrial enterprise, while 90 percent of Lithuanians were involved in the agricultural field. This situation other myths related to Jews exacerbated the anti-Jews sentiment among the Lithuanians (Vareikis, 1941: 32).

There were several organisations were involved to restrict the growing Jewish's expansion over the trade and commerce. This tendency of anti-Semitism led the various radical nationalist organisations such as Home Guard Union. Furthermore in 1930 anti-Semitism spread among the Low middle class, workers and peasant, as well as among the University students, civil servants and journalists (Vareikis, 1941: 32). In addition in 1933 a book Jonas Alaska boost the radical nationalism and anti-Semitic sentiments among the Lithuanians.

#### *d) Lithuania-German Relations*

Nazi Germany not only led the massacre of the Jews community in the occupied territory but also anti-Semitism among the local citizens of the respective countries was equally responsible for the Jews holocaust. As Jews were accused of supporter of communism and USSR occupation in Lithuania, the nationalist group of the country with collaboration of Nazi Germany killed the Millions of the Jews. In Lithuanian Holocaust more than 95 per cent 220,000 were murdered the Holocaust (Gerstenfeld, 2009: 67). The prominent writer on Jewish holocaust Zuroff says "a significant part of those victims were murdered by fellow Lithuanians, initially in spontaneous pogroms led primarily by armed vigilantes, and later by security police unite". The Jewish Killing was started by the local Lithuanians before the German army arrived in 1941 (ibid, p 68). Dove Levin an another expert on Holocaust in the country says that "the local population who were Lithuanians helped the helped the Nazis. Before the first German soldier entered Lithuania, the Lithuanians at different level of organisations, already harassed the Jews". Furthermore he added "once the Germans arrived, Lithuanian collaborators

not only murdered but murdered stole and raped. Even the military and police helped the Germans”.

### **Outbreak of World War II and Holocaust**

The genesis of the Second World War can be traced back to the World War First. Victorious powers of First World War imposed Versailles treaty which destabilised the German society and economy. First World War and Versailles treaty were the major cause of development of fascism, or Nazism in post-war Germany (Neville, 1999: 9). According to Versailles Treaty Germany lost its territory that was divided among the victorious countries including Poland and Lithuania. Memel (today's Klaipeda) was annexed by Lithuania. Germany never accepted loss of its territory from the Versailles treaty. Eventually this unhealed wound motivated Hitler for reunite its people and territory (Grimshaw, 2008: 8).

In 1935, Hitler took first step to begin to restore the military power that the treaty of Versailles had taken away when he announced the restoration of enlistment and the expansion of the German army (Grimshaw, 2008: 10). Then Hitler start to regain Germany's lost territories, from Czechoslovakia, and Austria he gained some territories in 1938 in the Munich agreement. Finally, on 1 September 1939 the final straw came when Hitler made one attempt to truly end the restriction put on Germany by the treaty of Versailles when he invaded Poland to get back the Polish Corridor (Grimshaw, 2008: 10). In response Britain and France declared war against Germany on 3 September in 1939. (Arad, 2009: 38).

There were already anti-Semitism was culminated among the European societies due to the economic crisis, outbreak of World War Second led the anti-Semitism aggression and frustration in a huge Jews massacre in different part of Europe. The start of the war also marked the start of the physical annihilation of alien races and the racially inferior on a large scale (Longerich,

2010: 132). The Second World War and the holocaust caused the near complete destruction of the Jewish community in Lithuania. Before the war Lithuania was known for its very large Jewish community in Europe (Donskis 2006: 5).

As far as persecution of Jews was concerned it culminated with *Kristallnacht* on 9 November 1938, a proto-genocidal assault that targeted Jewish properties, houses, and people (Jones, 2011: 237). In this genocides several dozen Jews were Killed and around 30,000 male Jews were rounded up and imprisoned in concentration camps. As Nazi Party came to power in Germany anti-Semitism became state policy. Later this was transferred to areas of Europe occupied by the Nazi Germany. We should stress that the persecution and destruction of Jews was initiated by Nazi Germany, but in certain occupied countries, including Lithuania, the Nazis managed to involve part of the local population and local collaborating institutions in this criminal action. Nazi propaganda succeeded in exploiting anti- communist and anti-Semitic moods that had developed during a year of Soviet occupation and convince some Lithuanians that Bolshevism meant Jewish power and that the Jews were primarily responsible for the misfortunes endured during Soviet annexation and occupation.

After the outbreak of World War II Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were forced, with the enactment of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact between Germany and Soviet Union in 1939, to make the military bases in their territories available to the despised Soviets. This severely wounded the national pride of the recently liberated Baltic peoples. The Jews once again became a scapegoat and were singled out for violent attacks. When Vilna was returned to the Lithuanians in October 1939, bloody riots ensued against the Jews resulting in nearly 200 casualties (Arad, 2009: 37).

Similarly, there were an increasing number of attacks against Jews in the city streets. In several towns, windows of Jewish homes were smashed and some

dwelling were even set on fire. Since these acts and others were committed in several locations at the same time, it can be assumed that the activity was organized and probably carried out by extreme Right-wing groups associated with Nazi Germany. That was the situation in June 1940, when Soviet troops occupied the three Baltic States, soon making them Soviet republics. It is not surprising that the entry of the Red Army came as a relief to a large sector of the Jewish population, particularly when every-one agreed that the alternative would have been Nazi occupation and all that it entailed. The Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, however, were upset and bitter about the Russian occupation, since for them it meant losing the independence they had gained after more than a hundred years of Russian rule (Segal, 1942: 251).

In order to attack on the Soviet Union and the annihilation of the Jews, on 18 December in 1940 the OKW (*oberkommando der Wehrmach*, High Command of Armed forces) issued Directive No. 21 "Operation Barbarossa" (Arad, 2009: 51). On March 3 1941 Hitler gave special order to OKW No. 21 that mentioned the elimination of Bolshevist-Jewish intelligentsia. This was the first document mentioning the destruction of the Jews that was published as part of Germany's preparation for its attack on the Soviet Union. It did not mention that all the Jews only Bolshevist would be eliminated, but the *Wehrmacht* (the German armed forces) were one step forward in the murder of the Jews in the occupied territory (Arad, 2009: 52).

Following the 13 May 1941, directive Sipo began recruiting and organizing the Einsatzgruppen, their number around 3,000 that was divided in four parts. Einsatzgruppe A; it has 990 members, under the command of SS-Standartenfuhrer Walter Stahlecker. It operated in the area of Army Group North, via the Baltic States towards Leningrad. Einsatzgruppe B; it has 665 members, under the command of SS-Brigadefuhrer Arthur Nebe. It operated in the area of Army Group Centre, in Beloruussia, toward Moscow. Einsatzgruppe C: it has 700-800 members, under the command of



Brigadeführer Dr. Otto Rasch. It was active in the area of Army Group South, in Central Ukraine, toward Kiev and eastward. And Einsatzgruppe D: it has 600 members, under the command of SS-Standartenführer Otto Ohlendorf that was operated in the area of the German Eleventh Army, in Bessarabia and South Ukraine toward Crimea and Caucasus (Arad, 2009: 55) In July in 1940 these groups received instructions that were extra-ordinary radical. Now they had the authority to murder member of the intelligentsia, the clergy, and the nobility, as well as Jews and the mentally ill (Longerich, 2009: 144).

Nazi propaganda against Soviet Union and policy against Jews on the eve of Second World War had implications for German-Lithuanian relations. Jews were already being accused of supporter of Bolshevik revolution and sympathiser of communism, the soviet occupation in 1940 in Lithuania more influenced the growth of anti-Semitism and formation of certain precondition of holocaust. Lithuanian Activist Front a nationalist radical organisation collaborated with the Nazi government during World War Second in the Jewish holocaust in Lithuania (Levin, 1996: 56). The scale of local collaboration with the Nazis and brutality in Holocaust assumes a specific character in Lithuania.

The amazing scale of local collaboration of Lithuanians with the Nazis and voluntary participation in brutal killing of Jews and indifference of intelligentsia towards the killing of Jews form the specific character of Holocaust in Lithuania. Germany attacked Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The German occupation lasted for four years in Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), which were annexed by Soviet Union under Molotov Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. In March 1941 Hitler already stressed that the war with Russia would be a fight to the death between two irreconcilable ideologies Nazism and communism. All real and potential enemies of Nazism were to be destroyed misfortune. The Holocaust in occupied territories of Baltic States in

Soviet Union lasted from the summer of 1941 until the summer of 1944 (Arad 2009: 12).

As we know, the Jews were regarded by the Nazis as the Third Reich's most important enemy. The Northern Army which was to occupy the Baltic States. On 25 June 1941, Stahlecker arrived in Kaunas with the first Wehrmacht contingents and on 2 July 1941 *Einsatzkommando* led by Jaeger took over security police functions in Lithuania. Jaeger's staff set up its head quarter in Kaunas and on 9 September 1941 the Vilnius district came under its control as did the Siauliai District on 2 October. The slaughter of Lithuanian Jewry began during the first days of the Soviet-Nazi war. Even before the ghettos were set up in August 1941 thousands of Jews were killed in Lithuania. The earliest organized mass murders were committed in areas of Lithuania that bordered on Germany and in Kaunas. On the first day of the war Stahlecker arrived in Tilsit and instructed the Tilsit security police leader, H. J. Boehme, to begin the murder of Jews and communists within a 25 km band of territory in Lithuania. The Tilsit operative group comprising Gestapo, SD agents and Klaipeda's German police force soon began "cleansing" actions in the Lithuanian frontier zones (Porats, 2006: 162).

The Tilsit Gestapo group arranged the first murders in Gargzdai on 24 June when 201 people were shot. By 11 July 1941 the Tilsit Group had murdered 1,542 people in various sites in Lithuania and during summer 1941 their murder victims totalled 5,502. The absolute majority of victims were Jewish (Porats: 2006, 160). On June 25 Stahlecker arrived in Kaunas and set about organizing actions to destroy Jews and communists. Later (on 15 October 1941) Stahlecker wrote a detailed report on his activities to Himmler. One of Stahlecker's main concerns was involving local people in the killings of Jews and hiding Nazi guilt (Porat, 2006: 160).

After Algirdas Klimaitis's gang formed and armed itself Stahlecker managed to carry out mass pogroms in Kaunas. It should be stressed that A. Klimaitis's

gang of around 300 men was not subject to either the Lithuanian Activists' Front (LAF) which had organized the armed anti- Soviet uprising or the Provisional Lithuanian Government. During the first night of the pogrom in the night of June 25–26 Lithuanian partisans liquidated more than 1,500 Jews, burned or otherwise destroyed several synagogues and set the Jewish quarter, where there were around 60 houses, on fire. On the following nights 2,300 Jews were neutralized in the same way. According to Kaunas's example other Lithuanian towns had similar actions albeit on a smaller scale and these affected communists who were still in those places too (Segal, 1941: 252).

The number of Jews killed and buildings burned during those pogroms (3,800 and 60 respectively) give grounds for doubt. Witnesses of those events often only recall the killings in the Lietukis garage on 27 June 1941, when more than a dozen or several dozen Jews were killed; but Kaunas people do not remember there having been great fires at that time. Gestapo-initiated pogroms continued in Kaunas until 29 June 1941. After that regular slaughters of Jews began in the Kaunas forts. Some famous Israeli historians such as Yitzak Arad and Dov Levin stress the active role of Lithuanian anti- Soviet partisans and rebels in encounters with Jews during the first two weeks of the war and the Nazi occupation (Kartz, 2011: 23).

It is alleged that in the period between 22 June 1941 and 5 July Lithuanians perpetrated anti-Jewish acts and controlled the situation in Lithuania. For example Dov Levin calculates there were around forty places where during these days where Lithuanian groups carried out pogroms. During the first week of the war the Wehrmacht occupied Lithuania and the country was brought under German military rule (until the end of July 1941). During the first week of the war the German security police and SD operational and special groups began operating in Lithuania. They took the initiative in carrying out murders of Jews and communists (the Tilsit Gestapo group and Stahlecker's group in Kaunas). Thus, the Provisional Lithuanian Government

that formed at the beginning of the war, the civil administration, police and partisan groups were not sole masters of the country but had to carry out the orders of the German military administration and operational groups (Voren, 2011: 138).

In many places in Lithuania anti-Soviet Lithuanian partisans were shooting retreating Red Army soldiers, Soviet officials and activists. There were many Jews among those retreating and some of them could and did fall victim to such encounters. Retreating Red Army and NKVD units also carried out dreadful acts of terror against Lithuanian rebels, political prisoners and even civilians (such as at Pravieniskès, Rainiai, Cervenè and so forth). The red terror led to acts of revenge during which innocent people may also have died (Voren, 2011: 138).

Beginning in July 1941, when the whole of Lithuania was occupied by the Nazis and an occupation regime was set up there, persecution of the Jews took on a different form. There was a move from separate pogroms to the mass murder of Jews. This was done first of all in Kaunas. The Lithuanian partisans groups that had formed in Kaunas were disarmed on 28 June (Dnskis, 2006: 3). That same day (28 June) work began on organizing a National Labour Defense Battalion Together with the German Gestapo agents the TDA battalion began carrying out systematic mass killings of Jews in the Kaunas forts and the provinces. The first site chosen for mass murders was the Kaunas Seventh Fort. On the order of *Einsatzgruppe* 3A Commander Jaeger, 463 Jews were shot here on 4 July 1941 and on 6 July 2,514 Jews were slaughtered (Arad, 2009: 32).

According to the evidence of former TDA battalion members tried by the Soviet Union, we can conclude that the murders in Kaunas Seventh Fort were carried out by units 1 and 3 of the TDA battalion. Unit 3 took part more frequently in later murders of Jews and this was led by Lieutenants B. Norkus, J. Barzda and A. Dagys. When particularly large mass murders were

committed almost all members of the battalion took part, except for soldiers on other duties. In August 1941 Kaunas Jews were murdered in Kaunas Fourth Fort and from October 1941 in the Ninth Fort. Here executions were carried out until the very end of the Nazi occupation (Seymour, 2013: 43).

The largest mass murder of Kaunas Jews took place on 29 October 1941. The evening before the murders the Gestapo selected Jews from the Kaunas ghetto. Around 10,000 people were selected for death. They selected families with many children, physically weak persons, old people and the sick for murder. Members of the TDA, later called the First Police battalion, also took part in the selection of ghetto prisoners. According to Jaeger's report 9,200 Jews were killed in the fort on 29 October of who 2,007 were men, 2,920 were women and 4,273 were children. Jaeger referred to these murders cynically as "the cleansing of the ghetto from unnecessary Jews. The greater part of Jewish murders committed in Lithuania in 1941, except for those in the Vilnius and Siauliai districts were connected with SS Obersturmführer Joachim Hamann's "flying unit" (Rollkommando Hamann) (Voren, 2011: 231).

In Lithuania (the Kaunas, Alytus and other districts) unit 3 of this battalion murdered around 12,000 Jews in at least fifteen sites (not counting Kaunas). Hamann's flying unit was a very efficient tool for carrying out Nazi Holocaust policy. According to figures of murdered Jews (at least 39,000), only the German security police battalion and special SD unit in Vilnius, and the Second Lithuanian Police battalion organised and led by major Antanas Impulevicius in Kaunas could match Hamann's unit. However, Impulevicius's group murdered Jews in Belarus rather than Lithuania. In general it should be stressed that the role played in the Holocaust by Lithuanian police battalions was particularly significant (Nikzentaitis, at all 2004: 210). Although almost every type of Lithuanian police force (public police, security police, auxiliary police, partisan [white armband] groups) took part in the persecution and murder of Jews, their role in the Holocaust was not as important as that of the

police battalions (or “self-defence” units). On the basis of my research I can say that ten Lithuanian police battalions out of twenty five took part in the Holocaust in various ways (direct shooting, guarding the shooting sites during the murders, transporting victims to the killing sites, ghetto and concentration camp security). According to my calculations these Lithuanian police battalions together with the Gestapo and local policemen shot around 78,000 Jews in Lithuania, Belarus and the Ukraine (Shepherd and Pattinson 2010: 7).

The latter, together with Mayor Dabulevicius selected a site for the ghetto in the old town. On 6 September 1941 Vilnius Jews were transferred by the police to the ghetto. Before the ghetto was established German security police and special SD units killed between 10,000 and 20,000 Vilnius Jews in Pieria. Around 30,000 people were located in Ghetto 1, and around 9,000–11,000 were imprisoned in Ghetto 2. But even after the Jews had been forced into the ghettos the killings continued until the very end of 1941. After several operations carried out in October 1941 Ghetto 2 was liquidated. All the inmates were murdered in Paneriai (Voren, 2011: 165).

Until the beginning of the Nazi-Soviet war around 57,000 Jews had lived in Vilnius and by the end of 1941 around 33,000–34,000 had been murdered. More than 20,000 Vilnius ghetto Jews were left to live for the time being and do war work required by the Germans. Jewish ghettos were set up in other large and small Lithuanian towns but most of these were liquidated in summer and autumn 1941. After 1941 only the Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai and Svencionys ghettos remained. According to the Israeli historian Y. Arad’s calculations of the number of Jews murdered in Lithuania between June and December 1941, some 164,000–167,000 people, or approximately 80 percent of Lithuanian Jewry, were killed in those six or so months. At the end of this period there were only around 43,000 Jews in Lithuania: around 20,000 in the Vilnius ghetto, 17,500 in the Kaunas ghetto, 5,500 in the Siauliai ghetto and 500 in Svencionys (Nikzentaitis, at all 2004: 210).

During the end of June 1941 to mid-July 1941 this period was dominated by politically-motivated persecution. Jews were most often arrested, imprisoned and shot as former communists, members of the communist youth organization, Soviet officials and supporters. Non-Jews were also terrorized for these reasons. In this period it was mostly male Jews who were persecuted. Women and children were murdered less frequently. The persecution and murder of Jews was organized by the German authorities (military commanders, officers in the security police and SD, and a little later, and district commissars). However, the Lithuanian administration took part in this process from the very beginning of the Nazi occupation (district leaders, town mayors), as did the Lithuanian police and so-called partisan groups (with white armbands) (Voren, 2011: 167).

In this period going on racialist genocide Jews were not persecuted for political reasons but simply because they were Jews. At this time almost all Lithuanian provincial Jewry was slaughtered. Murders took place intensively from August to mid-September 1941. Temporary ghettos and isolation camps were set up before the mass murders got under way. This was a period of preparation for massmurder. The ghettoisation process began in the provinces around the end of July and lasted until mid-August. A particularly important moment was the third secret memorandum of Police Director Vytautas Reivytis (16 August 1941), "On the detention and concentration of Jews in special locations." Carrying out the instructions and orders of Lithuanian administration officials and the Nazis, all provincial Jews were rounded up into ghettos and isolation camps (Browning2004: 54).

In many places all surviving Jews, women, children, the aged, were shot before the final liquidation of the ghettos and camps. Normally the murders were committed in woods or fields a few kilometers away from the ghettos and camps. The most important groups in the slaughter of provincial Jews were: Hamann's flying unit (formed basically by unit 3 of the TDA battalion),

local self-defense units (in Jonava, Kupiskis, and Zarasaietc), local partisan groups (white armbands) and police officers. Mass shootings were often led by German Gestapo officers but there were many small towns where people were murdered without direct German involvement. The latest mass provincial murders of Jews took place in Lazdijai (3 November 1941) and Vilkaviskis (15 November 1941). By November 1941 virtually all provincial Jews had been shot. Only a small number escaped or were saved by local people (hardly more than 3–5 percent)<sup>11</sup>

This period called be a relatively stable or calm period. At that time there were no mass murders of Jews. Nazi efforts were concentrated in making maximum use of the Jews as a workforce in the interests of the German war economy. Almost all men and women of working age had various jobs in the ghetto workshops, different factories, firms and special Jewish labour camps. In the report of the German security police and SD chief in Lithuania in February 1943 it was said that daily around 9,600 Kaunas ghetto Jews worked in 140 work sites. 1,400 men and women worked in ghetto workshops. Most Jewish laborers carried out work required by the army and met military orders. Every week around fifty people died in the Kaunas ghetto as a result of hard labour, food shortages and poor medical care (Voren, 2011: 167).

The September 1943 German security police and SD chief's report said that after the SS took over the Kaunas ghetto the number of work teams was reduced from 93 to 44. There were provisions for setting up eight concentration camps: for 2,500 Jews in the Aleksotas barracks, for 1,200 in Ezereliai, 1,200 in Sanciai, 600 in the army car park in Petrasijunai, 500 in Palemonas, 500 in the Kaunas rubber factory, 400 in Marijampolė, 400 in Kaisiadorys and 2,000 in the Kaunas ghetto. Ghetto leaders were of the opinion that while the ghettos were economically useful for the Nazis, they

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<sup>11</sup> Symposium (2005) Center for advanced Holocaust studies United States Holocaust memorial museum 2004.



would not be liquidated. Therefore the ghetto administration tried to employ as many workers as possible and increase their workload. For example, in summer 1943 around 14,000 Vilnius ghetto Jews (two thirds of the ghetto population) were working in various firms and Jewish labour camps. In April 1943 the German security police and SD chief in Lithuania informed the Reichssicherheitshauptamt that at that time 44,584 Jews were left in the Lithuanian general district 23,950 in the Vilnius ghetto, 15,875 in the Kaunas ghetto and 4,759 in the Siauliai ghetto. Around 30,000 Jews were doing jobs needed by the German army (Voren, 2011: 167).

The calm period came to an end in spring 1943. In February 1943 the Nazi administration decided to begin liquidating the ghettos. This was done first in the districts of Svyriai and Asmena which had been joined to the Lithuanian General District. At this time the Soviet partisan movement became stronger in the eastern part of the Vilnius District. Some of the Jews who managed to escape from the ghettos joined Soviet partisan groups. This led the Nazi administration to begin liquidating ghettos and labour camps in the Vilnius district. First in March 1943 the Svencionys, Mikaliskes, Asmena and Salos ghettos were liquidated. Around 3,000 people were moved from these ghettos to the Vilnius ghetto and others were told that they would be transferred to Kaunas (Voren, 2011: 167).

On 5 April 1943 trains with Jews from the small towns of eastern Lithuania halted in Paneriai. Here the Jews were taken out and shot in the Paneriai woods. "Men" from the First Lithuanian Police Battalion took part in the killings. Around 5,000 Jews were murdered in all. Only a few managed to escape and return to the Vilnius ghetto. At the beginning of July 1943 the Jewish labour camps in Kena and Bezdonys that were part of the Vilnius ghetto were liquidated. Around 500–600 Jewish workers from these camps were shot by Gestapo and Lithuanian policemen. Around 600–700 Jews from

the Baltoji Voke and Riese labour camps were transferred to the Vilnius ghetto or managed to escape (Voren, 2011: 167).

On 21 June Himmler issued an order to liquidate all ghettos on Ostland territory. Jews who were fit for work were to be transferred to SS-controlled concentration camps. The Kaunas and Siauliai ghettos were turned into concentration camps and the Vilnius ghetto was destroyed. The Vilnius ghetto was liquidated on 23–24 September 1943. The inmates were divided into two groups. The men and women (around 11,000 in number) who were fit for work were transported to concentration camps in Estonia (Kloga, Vaivara) and Latvia (Kaiserwald), while the elderly, women and children were taken away to be murdered in Auschwitz (Voren, 2011: 167).

After the Vilnius ghetto had been liquidated, around 1,200 Jews were left in Vilnius to work in the “Kailis” factory and a similar number were employed in the army motor vehicle repair shops in Subacius St. According to data from the German security police and SD there were 24,108 Jews in ghettos in the Vilnius district before the Vilnius ghetto was liquidated; 14,000 Jews were transported to Estonia for work, 2,382 Jews were left in Vilnius and there were a further 1,720 Jews in the villages. Of more than 50,000 Jews hardly 2,000–3,000 survived to the end of the Nazi occupation. Approximately two-thirds of these survivors were escapees from the ghetto and most of them joined Soviet partisan groups (Voren, 2011: 176).

Killings were resumed in Kaunas on 26 March 1944. That day there was a particularly vicious round-up of children led by W. Fuchs and B. Kittel. SS men and Ukrainian policemen entered the ghetto, visited houses, took children away from their mothers and threw them into buses (Zuroff, 2012: 3).. Mothers who resisted were beaten with rifle-butts and attacked by dogs. In two days around 1,700 children and old people were rounded up. 130 ghetto policemen were arrested. The next day (27 March 1944) those arrested (including 34 Jewish policemen) were shot in the Ninth Fort. As the front

drew closer to Kaunas the Nazis decided to liquidate the concentration camps completely (Donskis, 2006: 7).

The liquidation of the Kaunas ghetto began on 8 July 1944 when around 1,200 were transported by barge; on 12 July the Gestapo began burning ghetto buildings. Anyone who ran out of a burning building was shot. Almost all the houses and workshops were burned down. Hundreds of people perished in the flames or from Gestapo bullets. In all around 6,000–7,000 people were taken out of the Kaunas ghetto; around 1,000 were killed during the liquidation of the ghetto and approximately 300–400 Jews escaped. Men from the Kaunas ghetto were transported to the Dachau concentration camp and the women were sent to Stutthof. The Kaunas Jews sent to Dachau built an underground aircraft factory and did other work. Several prisoners died every day from exhaustion. Death rates were particularly high in October and November 1944 (Voren, 2011: 201).

In Dachau the former chairman of the Kaunas ghetto council of elders E. Elkes perished. When the war was ending Dachau was liberated by the Americans. Around 1,000 Lithuanian Jews lived to see Dachau liberated. Around 100 returned to Lithuania and the rest remained in the west. The women and children of the Kaunas ghetto were taken to Stutthof. On 19 July 1944 1,208 women and children were placed in this camp. On 26 July 1,893 Jews from the Kaunas and Siauliai ghettos (801 women, 546 girls and 546 boys) were moved from Stutthof to Auschwitz. Very few survived to be liberated. There are data showing that only around 2,400 people, 8 percent of the population, from Kaunas ghetto lived to see the end of the war (Porat, 2006: 163).

Until October 1943 the Siauliai ghetto was under the control of Siauliai District Commissar Hans Gewecke and from 1 October 1943 the SS took control of the ghetto. The ghetto became a concentration camp headed by SS Hauptschar fuhrer Hermann Schleef. Since the murders of spring and autumn

1941 the ghetto had a relatively calm existence. There had been a selection of children and people unfit for work on 5 November 1943. This was led by SS-Sturmhaupt fuhrer Foerster. That day SS and Vlasov men came from Kaunas to shoot or transport to the German camps (probably Auschwitz) 570 children and 260 elderly Jews. Jewish Council members B. Kartun and A. Kac volunteered to accompany the detainees (Porat, 2006, 165).

On 15 July 1944 the liquidation of the Siauliai ghetto began. Around 2,000 Siauliai Jews were transported in four stages to Stutthof and from thence the men were taken to Dachau and the women and children to Auschwitz. Siauliai survivors in Dachau were liberated by the Americans on 2 May 1945. Only 350–500 Siauliai Jews lived to the end of the war. It is very difficult to answer the question of how many Lithuanian Jews were killed in all during the years of Nazi occupation. Historians differed markedly on this issue. Numbers of Holocaust victims in Lithuania vary from 165,000 to 254,000. It is most probably impossible to give an exact figure. Neither full statistical records nor lists of the names of the dead survive in the archives. The present author bases himself on the following calculations: according to data from the statistics department, on 1 January 1941 there were 208,000 Jews (6.86 percent of the total population) in Lithuania. At the beginning of the war around 8,500 Jews went to Russia. During the Nazi occupation 1,500–2,000 escaped from the Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos and 2,000–3,000 lived in concentration camps to the end of the war. Thus around 195,000–196,000 Lithuanian Jews were murdered. This figure is neither final nor indisputable, but the present author considers it to be close to reality (Voren, 2011: 201).

Vilnius was a prize target for the Germans. The city had the largest Jewish community and, on top of that, was historically the base of many Jewish socialist and communist groups, and thus a “centre of Judeo-Bolshevism”. The city formally remained under Soviet control until June 24, 1941, when the city fell to the invading Germans. However, most Soviet troops left the city

during the night of 23 June. The following days the city was almost continuously bombed, but remained, in fact, somewhat unattended, as only a few German troops stayed behind while the rest continued their attack on the Soviet Union. As a result, the Germans had to rely to a large degree on local Lithuanian support and so the main forces in the city were Lithuanian partisans and remnants of the 29th Corps of the pre-Soviet Lithuanian Army that regrouped the moment the invasion had started (Courtois, and Kramer 1999: 363).

Vilnius resident Grigory Szur describes the atmosphere in the city vividly in his memoirs and reports that many killings took place during that intermediate period. Schoschana Rabinovici writes in her memoirs that she saw the first German soldiers in the city on 24 June and that the moment the Soviets left, members of the pre-Soviet Lithuanian police appeared on the streets. Yet at the same time, the “Jewish issue” seems not to have been the main concern of the Lithuanians who took control of the city. Einsatzgruppen: July 9, 1941,) stated that “the Lithuanian activists are trying in all possible ways to exploit the unclear situation and to give the city of Vilnius a purely Lithuanian character by decorating the city with eye-catching Lithuanian flags”. Stahlecker wrote in his report: “As far as the Lithuanian population in Vilnius is concerned, the Jewish problem is secondary to the Polish” (Voren, 2011: 201).

Initially the impression was that they had been taken away for forced labour. Only later did the Jewish community realize that they had been taken to the Paneriai forest outside the city and killed by Germans and Lithuanian auxiliary forces (Voren, 2011: 201). Anti-Jewish measures followed soon after the arrival of the Germans. On July 8, 1941, an order was issued stating that all Jews must wear a special patch on their back and, subsequently, on their chest. The commandant of the town of Vilnius, Oberstleutnant (lieutenant colonel) Max Zehnpfennig, signed this order. But two days later

another commander, Oberst Georg Neymann, ordered that the Jews should not display these patches but must, instead, wear the yellow Star of David (Browning2004: 54).

In addition, Jews were forbidden to walk along the main streets of the city, and shops were ordered to sell them food only in limited amounts. Jewish people were fired from their jobs, deprived of the means of personal transportation and radios, forbidden to use public transport, and prohibited from public places. The first organized shootings of Jews in Vilnius occurred on July 4, 1941 (or possibly even earlier), after the military administration was replaced by a civil administration. On the same date the Germans ordered the establishment of a Judenrat (Jewish Council) which was intended to control the Jewish ghetto police and various departments of work, health service, social welfare, food, housing, etc. Of special importance was the department of work. The Judenrat believed that as long as the Jewish workforce was of use to the Germans, the ghetto would not be liquidated. This was a kind of warranty, allowing Jews to retain some hope of continued existence and eventual survival. Almost all men and women of suitable age and fitness were employed in different factories and workshops, but were often also moved to forced labour (Porat, 2006: 163).

When the time of the German occupation of the city, according to Noah Shneidman, the creation of the ghettos on September 6, 1941, 35,000 Jews either vanished or was killed outright. By the end of 1941, the murdered Jews of Paneriai numbered at least 48,000, the majority of them from Vilnius (Voren, 2011: 201). In the provinces, the killings started spontaneously, often locally organized, but fairly soon took on a systematic character and were organized with German *Grundlichkeit*. At first the Jewish elite was registered and killed. Subsequently, all Jews who were not productive women, children, and elderly were annihilated, and last came those who had been members of the work force and could now be eliminated. A system developed by

Rollkommando Hamann proved to be extraordinarily effective, thanks to the active and diligent support of local authorities. As a first step, Jews were subjected to expropriations, forced labour, harassments and forced to wear a clearly visible sign that they were Jews. “Thus within weeks Lithuania's Jews had been effectively identified and segregated, their harm to society enunciated to the public (Zuroff, 2012: 7).

The concentration stage was next the Jews would have to be corralled”. To that effect, a system was set up by which Jews were rounded up in towns and villages, transported to so-called collection points and from there transported further to the designated execution sites. Local civil authorities collected all the necessary demographical data and transmitted the individuals to the higher officials at the request of the police authorities in Kaunas”. In the provinces, smaller temporary Jewish ghettos were established, for example, in Telsiai, Zagare, Raseiniai, Skuodas, Jurbarkas, Kedainiai and other towns. In fact, there were provisional ghettos and gathering points in each and every district. Sometimes these small ghettos existed but a few weeks, at times, for months (as in Telsiai). But as a rule, these 'ghettos' were, in fact, temporary holding areas for Jews awaiting their death and were eliminated during the operations organized by (Einsatzkommando) which gained momentum rapidly after mid-August 1941” (Voren, 2011: 219).

All over Lithuania, local gangs or units formed by the Lietuvi Aktyvist Frontas (LAF) took things into their own hands and organized local shootings. Also here the killings went on with extraordinary speed and vengeance and with active participation of local Lithuanians. Jews were herded together, driven into the woods and shot. The Genkind family, who tried to flee the onslaught, was witness to one of those killings. “When I got closer to the bank, I looked up and stiffened. On the other side of the river, a group of naked people was standing in the water. Before them were standing members of the Riflemen's Union, Lithuanian nationalists, dressed in old Lithuanian

uniforms, their guns in position. One of the men shouted 'Fire!' and they pulled the trigger” (Browning2004: 55).

In Jurbarkas, some thirty Lithuanians participated in the extermination of approximately 1,900 Jews, and in Alytus, a town 60 kilometers south of Kaunas with a population of just over 9,000 inhabitants, some 2,200 Jews were executed in August, September, the first execution being on 13 August. By mid-September not one Jew was alive in the region around Alytus, which had a total population of 123,000 inhabitants. These are just a few examples; elsewhere the picture was very much the same. Everywhere, the killings started after mid-August and, with some exceptions, ended by October-November 1941. The horror of these killing surpasses all imagination. Not only were the Jews murdered in the most brutal, systematic manner, they were literally erased from the face of the earth (Zuroff, 2012: 4). Their possessions were stolen, their personal belongings divided among the killers or destroyed; everything reminiscent of their existence ceased to exist, and all this within a period of not more than four months. The Lithuanian rural landscape changed fundamentally; all that remained of five centuries of Jewish life were a few cemeteries and synagogues that escaped destruction and at least two hundred execution sites dotting the countryside (Voren, 2011: 207).

Also in the Eastern part of Lithuania, anti-Communist partisans, who had been fighting the Soviet authorities, played a vicious role and participated actively in many of the future killings? In towns with hardly any Lithuanian community (the region had been part of Poland until 1939 and most of the inhabitants were Polish, Jewish and Byelorussians), Lithuanian anti-Communist partisans from elsewhere assumed a leading role in the mass murder of Jews. Most of the men had been members of the Riflemen's Union before 1940, and they were now out for revenge. For instance, in the region around Pabrade and Svencionys, many thousands were rounded up, taken to pre-selected places in the forest and murdered (Zuroff: 2012, 5).



On September 1, all Jews in Pabrade were forced to move to a temporary ghetto. On September 27, approximately 300 of them were taken to the shooting range Polygon further west of the town, and brutally murdered (Zuroff: 2012, 7). A larger group was kept in Army barracks for periods often days, living under terrible circumstances, and subsequently taken to the forest west of Svencioneliai. There they were, together with almost eight thousand other Jews from the region, mowed down with machine guns and finished off by Lithuanian partisans, while the Germans stood by watching. The shootings continued for several days; the mountains of decomposing corpses covered with only a thin layer of sand made the earth move for more than a week. The Einsatzgruppe A reported by October 15 that 71,105 Jews had been killed in Lithuania. In total, according to Karen Sutton, 133,346 Jews had been killed by December 1941. A map and listing made by Franz Walter Stahlecker, commander of Einsatzgruppe A, indicate that 136,421 Jews were murdered in Lithuania by the end of 1941 (Nikzentaitis, at all 2004: 210).

The Holocaust of Lithuanian Jewry is the worst tragedy of Lithuania's history. Never in Lithuanian history have so many people been killed in so short a time. Lithuanian society is insufficiently aware of the scale and severity of this tragedy and does not grasp its significance or empathise with its victims. However, over recent years more and more books and articles have been printed in Lithuania on this theme. This is not just an academic history problem but a moral problem for all Lithuanians. It is very important that we grasp the fact that the Holocaust was not just a Jewish tragedy but the total destruction of our fellow-citizens and thus it was a Lithuanian tragedy. Such an understanding does not come immediately or without effort. It requires certain effort on the part of historians, teachers, politicians and the mass media. Knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust are necessary to overcome nationalist and anti-democratic ideologies, expand society, foster tolerance and understand other cultures (Voren, 2011).

## Chapter 4

### **State, Holocaust Revisionism, Revival of Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity Issues in Contemporary Lithuania**

The current Holocaust revisionism in contemporary Lithuania is deeply rooted in the broader context of revival and rise of the new forms of anti-Semitism and Holocaust obfuscation taking place across Europe. In Lithuania Holocaust revisionism has taken the form of a political ideology supported by the political elites in relation to nation building. Today the history of the Second World War experience of Soviet occupation and Nazi Holocaust became a big controversy of victimhood vs victory remains a key object of Historical revisionism and the trivialization or holocaust denial/obfuscation in Lithuania based on the dominant argument that Jews facilitated Soviet occupation and crimes against the Lithuanians. This has led to the revival of anti-Semitism in Lithuania. During Russia's commemoration of victory day on 9 May 2015 the above controversy and glorification of Nazism occurred in many places in Europe like Ukraine, Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, is a noticeable fact in terms of nationalist political agenda and rise of anti-Semitism. The current anti-Russian stance seems to have its roots in Hitler's conspiracy against the Jews for Bolshevism. Currently, neo-anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism for historical reasons is emerging as a challenge to modernization and democratic politics in the 21st century Lithuania.

#### **Holocaust Revisionism in Lithuania**

The recent emerging phenomenon in the Eastern Europe is the widespread scourge of Holocaust denial. There have been several attempts by the revisionist to the fact that 6 million Jews were brutally killed by the Nazi regime. In other words this denial is manifested in the form of attempts to minimize the genocidal horrors committed against the Jewish people and revise history. In fact the new nationalist governments of these newly

independent nations are trying to equate the crimes of communist regime with the genocides of Jews communities during the time of Second World War (Perry, Frederick and Schweitzer 2002: 214).

Efraim Zuroff, the head Nazi hunter at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, expressed his views over the development of this phenomenon in the Eastern Europe. In this interview given to Israeli news paper *Arutz Sheva* in 2015, at the time for International Holocaust Memorial Day, he emphasized that "In post-Communist eastern Europe, they're trying to play down the crimes of the Nazi cooperators and claim that the crimes of the Communists were just as bad, and that both of them committed genocide." Further Zuroff elaborated "they're trying to reduce the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and even to claim that among the Communist criminals were Jews too." This holocaust revisionist tendency could be seen the state manipulations of the holocaust history, memory and replacing the documentations related to the Jews genocide. The chief Nazi hunter reminds that the Prague Declaration of 2008 included an open attempt to connect the crimes of the Communists and the Nazis, and equate them (Zuroff 2012: 6).

This phenomenon can best be analyzed by examining the reactions in various countries to specific Holocaust-related issues that have emerged as central questions in Eastern Europe since the fall of Communism and the dismantlement of the Soviet Union. The Lithuania democratic country, and a member of European Union and NATO still closely following the policies of the government on Holocaust-related issues over the years could not have failed to discern a deep-seated reluctance to honestly confront its Holocaust past and especially the extensive collaboration of local Nazi collaborators in the mass murder of Jews, primarily inside Lithuania, but outside its borders as well. Very similar to other East European countries, Lithuania also followed almost same side. Zuroff (2010) wrote in *The Guardian* newspaper that "Lithuania has been the leader of a insidious campaign to try to distort the

history of the Holocaust by seeking recognition that Communist crimes were just as terrible as those of the Nazis. This false equivalence would unjustly rob the Shoah of its universally-accepted uniqueness and historical significance, turning the worst case of genocide in human history into merely one of many tragedies”. Lithuanian authorities very rhetorically had tried to equate the Jews killing by Nazi Germany with crimes done by the communist regime (Zuroff 2012: 6).

However, there have been certain efforts against the Holocaust denial to punish the revisionists for the false premises of the issue. For instance, in 2010, the new rightwing government in Hungary passed a law that effectively criminalized the opinion that there was only one genocide in the region during World War II (maximum jail-time for offenders: three years). Katz (2008) pointed out that “This was rapidly followed by a similar law passed by the Lithuanian parliament and signed by its president (with two years max). Momentum for this trend picked up in 2014 when a similar law was passed by the Latvian parliament (up to five years of imprisonment)”. Furthermore, The Lithuania Young anti-fascists from Antifa Lietuva stage a march in Kaunas, Lithuania (June 2013) protesting the glorification of the Lithuanian Activist Front, which unleashed murder upon Jewish citizens in 1941 in dozens of locations. The banner reads: “Real heroes rescued people instead of killing them. Remember the victims of the Holocaust” (Katz 2008).

Nation building process As soon as the Lithuania declared its independence in 1990s, the all residents living within the territories of Lithuania granted the citizenship rights. The Jews also considered as the legal citizen of the nation as used to be the part of it. Many people belonging to the Lithuanian Diaspora and who are descendants of Lithuanian immigrants have the right to Lithuanian citizenship regardless of where they were born or where they live. Lithuanian immigration has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people with Lithuanian ancestry living outside Lithuania. Large waves of Lithuanian

migration occurred during the 19th and 20th century, a large portion of who were Jewish. Yosef Govrin, (2003: 142) very rightly observed that “It is true that full, unlimited constitutional freedom was granted to the Jewish public to organize itself in communities and social frameworks on national, religious, and social bases. This public is entirely free to maintain and foster links with the State of Israel and with the Jewish Diaspora the world over, and to develop an educational and cultural network as well as its own communications media”.

### ***Nation Building Process***

However, the post-independence nation building process grappled with the extremist ideas of right wing nationalists. The nationalist forces of Lithuania started the nation building project based on the vision of national identity and culture. The minority groups including Russians, poles and Jews had to face several consequences of nationalist uprisings. The national identity was being defined in line of majority elites. The Jews communities had to face the bitter consequences; the hatred towards their past in the form of increasing anti-Semitic assaults over their historical memories and symbols. In the other direction, the liberalization process enabled the ultra-nationalistic and anti-Semitic movements to organize themselves. Their public weight is constantly growing, reaching an extent unknown during the communist era. They conduct harsh anti-Semitic propaganda in hundreds of magazines and newspapers all over Eastern Europe (Yosef Govrin 2003: 142). Despite too many anti-Semitic activities, no definite steps have been taken to prohibit them, especially not the dozens of anti-Semitic newspapers and magazines that daily spread anti-Semitic poison under the guise of so-called respect for freedom of expression.

The issue of identity, crucial for the discourse on heritage, is quite complex when it comes to definition. The individual identities or group identities are some social attributes which define that particular group in comparison of

others. The main social attributes which categorise the individuals in various identities are caste, class, religion, gender, colour and race, etc. Moreover, the shared experiences of history, culture and language also contributes a lot to determine the identity of an individual to whom he/she feel associated with. In addition, Castells (1997: 7) argued that “The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations”. The identity construction based on the above discussed markers has several socio-political manifestations. That is why individual identities have been very important factors in determining the inter-ethnic relations in a highly heterogeneous society (David 1991: 33).

As far as Jews national identity in Lithuania is concerned they have been living in Lithuania for a long time but they had no intention of learning Lithuanian language and becoming consumers of Lithuanian culture. Yiddish and Hebrew cultures are considered probably far more developed than that of Lithuania (Janusauskas, 2010: 16). Strong Yiddish tradition as well as world famous rabbinical teaching of Yeshivot in Telsiai was the reflections of strong Lithuanian Jews identity (Ibid). Following independence in 1990 the ethnic and minorities issues arose once again in Lithuania. Lithuanian nationalist group sought to restrict the minority and Lithuanize them (James 2006). In independent Lithuania Jews including other minorities faced systematic discrimination sponsored by the state. In January 1997, Lithuanian education minister questioned the existence of non-Lithuanian schools in the country. He said that the people who did not have sufficient knowledge of the Lithuanian language would were not Lithuanian Citizen (Ibid).

### ***Rewriting History: Narratives of Soviet Occupation and Holocaust***

The holocaust in Lithuania is still an unresolved issue. The discussion of the issue is involved not only among the historians but also among the writers,

journalist and political figures (Truska, 2001: 1). In the independent Lithuania, the Nationalist historiographer of the country systematically ignored and normalised the Holocaust that was happened during interwar period in Lithuania by the Nazi government with collaboration of Lithuanians. Even government by various efforts systematically is trying to delete the history of Holocaust. Zuroff remarks: The government's approach to Lithuania's Holocaust past reveals a stubborn reluctance to honestly confront the crimes committed by local Nazi collaborators, and what amounts to an aggressive campaign to minimize Lithuanian guilt by distorting history. When Lithuania was admitted to NATO and the European Union, things only became worse. Freed from their fear of failing to become part of these bodies, the Lithuanians began an aggressive campaign to downplay their responsibility for Holocaust atrocities, and maximize recognition for their suffering under the Soviets (Gerstenfeld, 2009: 68). The genocide of the Jewish in Baltic state in general and Lithuania in particular was brutal. In Lithuania politics have fused to distort the History of the holocaust (Williams, 2012: 49). Historians of the country have devoted particular attention to the period of sovietisation of the country and the role of various ethnic group including Jews. However, despite the fact that millions of Jews had been killed, the topic of Holocaust often arouses the anger of Lithuanians (Ibid).

While in the west holocaust is basically perceived as the gravest crime ever committed, one can never be justified, but in Lithuania the interpretation of holocaust has been different. For Lithuanians holocaust has been considered less important than the repression, deportations, and incarcerations carried out by the Soviet Union in the early 1940 (Truska, 2001: 7). This perspective of the holocaust continues to be expressed in the contemporary Lithuania by the Lithuanian Politicians historians and intellectuals. Now days in Lithuania the topic of holocaust is not only unpopular, but to many it has become tedious. The issue of responsibility for the mass murder of Jews has led to such different perspective on the part of historians, writers, journalist and political

figures. Even the Jews persecution during Soviet rule portrayed not as Jews but Soviet citizen among others (Truska, 2001: 13)

### **The Approach of Lithuanian State towards Anti-Semitism**

The Holocaust report of Lithuania prepared by Dr. Efraim Zuroff (2012) pointed out some of the following relevant concerns related to Jews in Lithuania and the approach of state towards anti-Semitism:

1. In the wake of the transition from Communism to Democracy of many Eastern European countries during the years 1990-1991, these new democracies were forced to confront six practical Holocaust-related issues. These issues significantly influenced their foreign policy and their relations with Israel and with world Jewry:
  - a. Admission of guilt and apology for participation of local Nazi collaborators in Holocaust crimes;
  - b. Commemoration of the victims;
  - c. Prosecution of unprosecuted perpetrators;
  - d. Documentation of the crimes;
  - e. Holocaust education;
  - f. Restitution
2. The fact that local collaboration with the Nazis in most of Eastern Europe included active participation in mass murder (unlike the situation elsewhere in Europe), made dealing with the above issues particularly difficult for the new democracies.
3. As long as these countries were seeking entry into the European Union and NATO, their efforts regarding these issues were only very partially successful, but there were no full-scale government-sponsored systematic efforts to significantly rewrite the local history of the Holocaust to purposely hide or minimize the crimes committed by local collaborators. Thus prosecution efforts were for the most part a total failure, but there were positive initiatives regarding commemoration and apologies were rendered by most countries, usually in Israel, by political leaders.
4. Starting in late 2007, however, the situation changed drastically, especially in Lithuania, where the government began supporting a series of steps to de-emphasize local participation in Holocaust crimes and focus attention on the suffering of the victims of Communism in Eastern Europe. The latter objective was one of the primary goals of the Prague Declaration of June 3, 2008, which promoted the canard of historical equivalency between Nazi and Communist crimes. Lithuanian politicians Vytautas Landsbergis and Emmanuelis Zingeris played an important role



in formulating the declaration and the government has made its promotion and important foreign policy objective.

5. Another particularly reprehensible step taken by the government was a campaign to prosecute Jewish anti-Nazi Soviet partisans for ostensible "war crimes" against "civilian" Lithuanians who were in fact Nazi collaborators. The campaign was accompanied by a significant number of viciously anti-Semitic articles in the local media directed at these individuals who were accused of the most heinous crimes. Among those accused was noted Israeli Holocaust scholar Dr. Yitzchak Arad, who had served as the Chairman of Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust museum and research centre ( Zuroff 2012: 2).

6. In the wake of these steps by the government, there has been a dangerous increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents vandalism of Jewish institutions, sites of Holocaust mass murders, and attacks on Jewish public figures in the local mass media. These phenomena were exacerbated by the public debate regarding the restitution of public Jewish property and the passage by the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) of a bill which called for the payment of 128 million litas to the Jewish community over the coming ten years (a figure which represented only a small fraction of the current value of the property confiscated or stolen).

### **Holocaust Education in Lithuania**

The 1990s were a golden age for revival of the many social sciences and humanities disciplines in Lithuanian academia. As in many other fields, the history and study of the Lithuanian Jewish world has evoked interest but has also presented Lithuanian society with challenges. The Holocaust and the Soviet period in modern Lithuanian history completely destroyed earlier Jewish creativity. During the whole Soviet period between 1940–1990, Jewish studies did not exist as an academic subject in Lithuania, as elsewhere in the territory of the Soviet Union (Liekis 2011: 1). The Holocaust began in 1944 when the Lithuanian Jewish museum, the only such institution in the USSR, was founded by returning survivors who organized the first post-war exhibition: "The Brutal Destruction of the Jews during the German Occupation." This short-lived museum in Vilnius (1945–1948) attempted to collect and restore the treasures lost in the flames of the Second World War.

However, in June 1949, the Soviet Lithuanian government's reorganization of cultural institutions effectively liquidated the museum. In 1949, word reached the West that the Jewish museum had been liquidated and ransacked by the NKVD (Nikzentaitis, at all 2004: 135).

There was one exception to the rule of ignoring Jewish subjects of research. Research in Yiddish dialectology by Chackel Lemchen contravened the general pattern where, for ideological and methodological reasons, studies in this field, and Jewish studies in particular, have been ignored. In the end, Lemchen's work was never presented in the framework of the Soviet academic establishment. It was simply a side product of this individual's academic interests who happened to work in the field of modern Lithuania's Jewish studies. Today, Jewish studies are but a topic in the difficult conversation on the history of Jewish-Lithuanian relations and are closely linked to the broader transformation of historical memory of the post-Soviet era. Traditionally, most Lithuanian historians are dedicated professionals specializing in a single theme during their active research career. They were able to engage Jewish topics as much as they were themselves aware of their specificity and to the extent that they knew Jewish languages. The more ideographic the issue was, and providing it lay within the local domain, the easier it was for local historians to deal with it. The beginnings of Jewish studies were admittedly modest (Liekis 2011: 94).

In October 1993, the first academic Judaic Studies Centre, led by Prof. Meyer Shub, was established at Vilnius University. This was the first attempt to institutionalize Jewish studies in Lithuanian universities. The centre was slow to take up research because of the lack of qualified teachers and students sufficiently specialized in Jewish subjects. On April 23 1999, a remarkable discussion on the Holocaust took place in the Seimas, the Lithuanian parliament. It included politicians, historians, archival researchers and jurists. Serious Lithuanian-language scholarship on the Holocaust ceased to be a

novelty. Not everyone welcomed this development. As expected, many Lithuanians instinctively resisted “the others” interfering in their exclusivist nationalist narrative. Outside Lithuania this indigenous scholarship had little impact. (Liekis: 2011) The reasons for its international marginality are linguistic and ideological. Language is still an obstacle for the older generation of western scholars who used to operating in the Russian, or at best, the Polish language environment. The ideological reluctance by some Israeli scholars to using the new studies based on newly available archival sources, and therefore seriously correct facts and interpretations, especially on native collaboration, in addition to demonstrating a lack of background training, as well as ineptitude, regarding the general paradigms of East Central European history, seems to have been a problem at the time (Nikzentaitis, at all 2004: 136).

In May 1998, the three Baltic presidents approved in principle the creation of international commissions to investigate the Soviet and Nazi occupations and publish their findings. The new body in Vilnius, with its rather cumbersome title of International Commission for the Evaluation the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania (hence for threferred to as the Commission), was established by presidential decree on September 7 of that year. Emanuelis Zingeris, the only Jewish member of the Seimas (Lithuanian parliament), was named chairman of the group which initially included Lithuanian, American, German and Russian scholars and community leaders (Liekis 2011: 1).

The Commission was immediately attacked by groups in Israel, including the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, as both an awkward and offensive conflation of Nazism and Communism and a cynical “facade- painting” gambit intended to facilitate Lithuania’s political stature as a candidate for the European Union and NATO (Arad 2009: 45). Some Lithuanian merges, suspecting that the Commission would undertake an

investigation of native collaboration in the Holocaust, charged that the President's initiative was a Jewish plot designed under American pressure. In fact, the third plenum meeting held on 29 August 1999 committed the Commission, as both a practical matter and a point of principle, to handle research on the Nazi and Soviet periods separately by creating two distinct working groups, in order to clearly distinguish between the crimes committed by the two occupation regimes and to avoid superficial analogies during their analysis and evaluation. Following extensive negotiations, a preliminary working arrangement was initiated with representatives of Yad Vashem, and with Dr Yitzhak Arad and Dr Dov Levin participating in the Commission's meetings and conferences from 2000–2005 (Vareikis 1940: 12 ).

### **Revival of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania**

A few anti-Semitism incidents occurred in 2000 and 2001. Nazi flags were waved and anti-Semitism slogans appeared in Vilnius and Kaunas on 20 April 2000 the anniversary of Hitler's birthday (Gimzauskas 1993: 54). Jewish cemeteries were desecrated in pasualis on 2 June 2000 and in Vilnius Kanunas and 2 June 2000 and in Vilnius Kaunas and kelme in august the perpetrators in the last two cases were apprehended and face criminal charges (Stephen and Darius 2004: 9 ). In Lithuania, as in Latvia the prosecutions of war criminals in 2000 and the first half of 2001 were impeded by bureaucratic delays. The case of Aleksandra's lileikis commander of the security police 1941-44 and his deputy Kazys Gimzauskas, both 92 were on trial for over three years. Both men had been deprived of their citizenship and deported Lileikis from the United States, were they had lived since the end of World War II for concealing Nazi past. In February 1999, their trials were halted on the grounds of ill health since Lithuanian law forbade trying a man who was unable to appear in court (Lileikis 1996: 8).

On 15 February 2000 parliament amended this law to permit those suspected of genocide to be even when their health did not permit those suspected of

genocide in court, and the trials of both were re-opened at the end of April 2000 in contrast to the legal delays and the evident unwillingness of the Lithuania public to re-examine cases of position of the government is firmly in favour of trying Lithuania Nazi war criminals and of combating any evidence of current anti-Semitism. This was the positions taken by minister Andrius Kubilius on 22 September 2000 when they marked the Memorial Day to those killed in the Vilnius ghetto. The Lithuanian catholic church joined them in condemning anti-Semitism when, at a conference of bishops on 13 march 2000, the participants expressed regret that during the Nazi period “some of the persecuted Jews failed grasp an opportunity to defend them and lacked the determination to influence those who aided the Nazis” (Stephen 2002: 175).

In the course of 2000 the trials of Nazi war criminals drew to their close with the death of Aleksandras Lileikis on 27 September, before the court could issue a decision and a guilty verdict for kazys Gimauskas at his trial by a Vilnius court on 14 February 2001. No jail sentence was imposed on Gimauskas on the Grounder that he suffered from Alzheimer’s disease. At the same time the Lithuania government asked Britain to extradite Antans gecas. Who lived in Edinburgh, and who is suspected of taking part in the mass murder of Jews during world war II in Lithuania and Belarus investigations of Gekas activities was begun in 1984, under the soviet regime in Lithuania, but was hastily closed when there seemed to be little closed when there seemed to be little evidence (Stephen 2002: 175).

In this connection it should be mentioned that on 12 September 2000 there was an attempt by extreme rightists in parliament to give national status to the parliamentary declaration on 23 June 1941, when a provisional government was set up under the Nazis. Public outrage at this legislation which would have made Lithuania, and not the conquering power, culpable of the mass murder of Jews during the war forced the lawmakers to retract and cancel this

proposal within a week. The Nazis themselves had actually abolished Lithuanian independence on 5 August 1941, less than two months after the provisional government was declared adding Lithuania of their province outland, which also included Latvia Estonia and bordering Russian areas (Arad 2009: 45). If the only problem concerning Lithuania would be the battle over the history of the Holocaust, it would be bad enough, but unfortunately the struggle over the accuracy of the historical narrative is also the backdrop for a dangerous rise in anti-Semitic incitement, vandalizing of Jewish institutions, cemeteries, and sites of mass murder, as well as demonstrations of neo-Nazis and ultra nationalists extremists along the major avenues of Lithuania's two largest cities. The Lithuanian Jewish community had experienced a few such incidents during the years prior to 2008, but things took a serious turn for the worse in this regard during the past four years (ibid, p 46).

The event that signalled the beginning of the deterioration of the situation was undoubtedly the 11, March 2008 march of several hundred neo-Nazis and ultra nationalists down Gediminas Boulevard, the main street in downtown Vilnius, to mark Lithuanian Independence Day. Shouting nationalist, anti-Semitic (Juden Raus), and anti-Russian slogans and carrying Nazi symbols, they marched down the main thoroughfare of Lithuania's capital to the Parliament, as local police stood idly by, taking no measures against them. In an opinion poll conducted shortly thereafter by Lithuania's most reputable daily *Lietuvos Rytas*, 32% of the more than 4,300 respondents replied that they approved of the slogans and another 22% indicated approval of the march. The strength of public support might help explain why the three participants, who were prosecuted for their participation in the march three months later, were only fined and not sent to jail, even though the offense they committed carried a potential punishment of up to two years' incarceration (Zuroff 2012: 3).

During the months following the neo-Nazi march in Vilnius, there was a wave of anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish institutions and memorial sites. In August 2008, the building of the Jewish community in Vilnius was daubed with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans and the wall of the Jewish community of Klaipeda was vandalized, attacks which were preceded by desecrations of the sites of the mass murder of Jews in Rokisikis, Varnikiai forest near Trakai, (where the Jews of Aukstadvaris, Rudiskes and other villages were killed) and Mariampole, where bones were heaped next to the memorial for the victims of the Shoah. When asked for their response to the attack in Vilnius, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus and Prime Minister Kirkilas denounced the attacks because they gave Lithuania “a bad name.” Given this tepid response by Lithuanian leaders, it is hardly surprising that such attacks have continued ever since (Truska 2004: 7).

Besides the ongoing wave of anti-Semitic incidents, the Jewish community also had to deal with a continuous barrage of vicious anti-Semitic attacks and caricatures in the local media, especially in right-wing dailies such as Respublika, Lietuvos Aidas, Lietuvos Zinios, and Vakaro Zinios. The themes of almost all of these articles are the same Holocaust-related issues referred to previously, which continue to be points of bitter contention between Lithuanians and Jews. The only exception are those concerning a dispute over the site of a very old Jewish cemetery, where a plan to build a residential building was stopped by Jewish protests (Ibid).

In the articles on other themes, the authors among them a former MP (Ruta Gajauskaite) and the editor of the Respublika daily (Vitas Tomkus), repeatedly attack Jews in general, and the local Jewish community in particular, for attempting to preserve the accuracy of the Holocaust narrative in Lithuania, and especially the important role played by local Nazi collaborators in Shoah crimes, as well as attacks on the Jewish anti-Nazi partisans who were accused of war crimes. Other popular themes are the

demands by the Jewish community, with the backing of international Jewish organizations, for communal restitution, as well as personal attacks on those Jewish figures who have repeatedly accused Lithuania of failing to acknowledge the scope of local complicity in Holocaust crimes. The target of numerous attacks in recent years was Yosef Melamed, the Chairman of Igud Yotzei Lita (Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel) who posted the names of 23,000 Lithuanians accused of participating in the murder of Jews on his organization's website, among them at least nine who are considered heroes of the "forest brothers," Lithuanians who fought against the Soviet occupation after the end of World War II. The size of the list, as well as the names of their heroes, listed shocked Lithuanians, and triggered numerous anti-Semitic attacks regarding this subject (Vareikis 2005: 63).

The only problem concerning Lithuania would be the battle over the history of the Holocaust, it would be bad enough, but unfortunately the struggle over the accuracy of the historical narrative is also the backdrop for a dangerous rise in anti-Semitic incitement, vandalizing of Jewish institutions, cemeteries, and sites of mass murder, as well as demonstrations of neo-Nazis and ultra nationalists extremists along the major avenues of Lithuania's two largest cities (Perry, Frederick and Schweitzer 2002: 214).

The Lithuanian Jewish community had experienced a few such incidents during the years prior to 2008, but things took a serious turn for the worse in this regard during the past four years. The event that signalled the beginning of the deterioration of the situation was undoubtedly the March 11, 2008 march of several hundred neo-Nazis and ultra nationalists down Gediminas Boulevard, the main street in downtown Vilnius, to mark Lithuanian Independence Day. Shouting nationalist, anti-Semitic (Judens Raus), and anti-Russian slogans and carrying Nazi symbols, they marched down the main thoroughfare of Lithuania's capital to the Parliament, as local police stood idly by, taking no measures against them. In an opinion poll conducted shortly



thereafter by Lithuania's most reputable daily *Lietuvos Rytas*, 32% of the more than 4,300 respondents replied that they approved of the slogans and another 22% indicated approval of the march. The strength of public support might help explain why the three participants, who were prosecuted for their participation in the march three months later, were only fined and not sent to jail, even though the offense they committed carried a potential punishment of up to two years' incarceration (Ibid).

During the months following the neo-Nazi march in Vilnius, there was a wave of anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish institutions and memorial sites. In August 2008, the building of the Jewish community in Vilnius was daubed with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans and the wall of the Jewish community of Klaipeda was vandalized, attacks which were preceded by desecrations of the sites of the mass murder of Jews in Rokisikis, Varnikiai forest near Trakai, (where the Jews of Aukstadvaris, Rudiskes and other villages were killed) and Mariampole, where bones were heaped next to the memorial for the victims of the Shoah. When asked for their response to the attack in Vilnius, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus and Prime Minister Kirkilas denounced the attacks because they gave Lithuania "a bad name." Given this tepid response by Lithuanian leaders, it is hardly surprising that such attacks have continued ever since (Petersen 2001: 19).

Besides the ongoing wave of anti-Semitic incidents, the Jewish community also had to deal with a continuous barrage of vicious anti-Semitic attacks and caricatures in the local media, especially in right-wing dailies such as *Respublika*, *Lietuvos Aidas*, *Lietuvos Zinios*, and *Vakaro Zinios*. The themes of almost all of these articles are the same Holocaust-related issues referred to previously, which continue to be points of bitter contention between Lithuanians and Jews. The only exception are those concerning a dispute over the site of a very old Jewish cemetery, where a plan to build a residential building was stopped by Jewish protests. The fact that the site was a very

lucrative piece of urban real estate made the issue of great interest and controversy, with numerous accusations in the nationalist press against the intervention of foreign rabbis and Jewish organizations (Shamir 2015: 8).

In the articles on other themes, the authors among them a former MP (Ruta Gajauskaite) and the editor of the Respublika daily (Vitas Tomkus), repeatedly attack Jews in general, and the local Jewish community in particular, for attempting to preserve the accuracy of the Holocaust narrative in Lithuania, and especially the important role played by local Nazi collaborators in Shoah crimes, as well as attacks on the Jewish anti-Nazi partisans who were accused of war crimes. Other popular themes are the demands by the Jewish community, with the backing of international Jewish organizations, for communal restitution, as well as personal attacks on those Jewish figures who have repeatedly accused Lithuania of failing to acknowledge the scope of local complicity in Holocaust crimes. The target of numerous attacks in recent years was Yosef Melamed, the Chairman of Igud Yotzei Lita (Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel) who posted the names of 23,000 Lithuanians accused of participating in the murder of Jews on his organization's website, among them at least nine who are considered heroes of the "forest brothers," Lithuanians who fought against the Soviet occupation after the end of World War II. The size of the list, as well as the names of their heroes, listed shocked Lithuanians, and triggered numerous anti-Semitic attacks regarding this subject (Donskis 2009: 34).

### **Jewish Response to State Sponsored Anti-Semitism in Lithuania**

In the contemporary Lithuania the emergence of neo-Nazis associated with the adulation of Hitlerism is evident in the form of the racist, anti-Semitic and homophobic hate. The rewriting history project is also being initiated by the state. The postmodernist methodology provides a base for such met narratives. Dovid Katz shares his experience of living in Lithuania that state have been pro-vigilance on the holocaust survivor he says, "for years, state agencies

have been “investigating” Holocaust survivors who joined the anti-Nazi resistance, while honouring the “Lithuanian Activist Front” butchers, who unleashed the Holocaust in dozens of locations before the Germans even came.” Lithuanian state is even sponsoring many jovial conferences on the Jewish Holocaust and their history. The academicians who support the state’s idea and produce history in the favour of butchers are being awarded with medals. Where one side these western racist puppets propagate the idea of human rights and other they at the same time carry the Hitler’s forces to glorify the nationalist history. Katz Further condemns, “No, sir, you cannot adulate Hitler’s forces and be committed to human rights at same time” (Katz, 2012).

The state institutions hide or ignore very significant documents regarding the murders which are critically important to construct narrative of the Holocaust in Lithuania accurately. Without documentary evidences the narratives are considered hallow and dramatic. States invested power in ignoring and defeating the truth is evident at every juncture of the Jewish experiences in the present Lithuania (Zuroff, 2012). The all three Baltic state’s governments; Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia always try to side line the Holocaust with their Russian Imperial experiences. What went awry was the idea of tackling the issues by trying to make Soviet crimes “equal” to Nazi crimes in the eyes of the world. The Lithuanian government reburied with full honours and glorified the 1941 Nazi puppet prime minister who had presided over the initiation of the Holocaust in his country (Katz, 2012).

The main reason behind Lithuanian and state not being tolerant to Jewish is the inferiority of the culture and race. As philosopher Arvydas Juozaitis says, “ if we are tolerant, we will be drowned by foreign cultures and races, all manner of invaders will crowd our sacred amber beaches, against whom we have desperately defended ourselves and more or less have succeeded in

defending ourselves (although, of course, not completely) during the Soviet period (I'm Suffocating, Tomas Venclova, 14 July 2010).

### **Jewish Criticism of Holocaust Narrative of State**

Starting in the fall of 2007, and even more so during 2008, the Lithuanian government began to intensify its efforts to challenge the accepted historical narrative of the Holocaust and to more actively deflect international criticism in response to its failings in addressing specific Holocaust-related issues. The primary problems in this regard were the government's abysmal failure to punish a single Lithuanian Holocaust perpetrator despite an abundance of potential suspects, and the continuing efforts of government leaders and officials to promote the canard of historical equivalency between Communist and Nazi crimes. The failure to achieve progress on restitution also played a role. The first step which clearly marked a new phase in official Lithuania's attitude toward Holocaust-related issues was the decision in September 2007 to investigate former Yad Vashem Chairman and noted Holocaust scholar Dr. Yitzhak Arad on the suspicion of war crimes, ostensibly committed while he was a Soviet anti-Nazi partisan in Lithuania (Arad 2009: 45).

The next significant upgrade in this campaign was the signing of the Prague Declaration on June 3, 2008 by 27 Eastern European political leaders and intellectuals. Lithuanian MP's Vytautas Landsbergis and Emanuelis Zingeris played an instrumental role in formulating the document and organizing its publication, and it is Lithuania, along with her Baltic neighbours, which has ever since led the efforts to promote its recommendations and have them passed as resolutions in numerous European political forums. The best way to summarize its contents is to explain that it seeks to convince Europe that the crimes of Communism are at least equivalent to those of the Nazis and they deserve the same recognition and their victims the same compensation, as awarded to Shoah survivors. Or as the declaration warns: "Europe will not be

united unless it is able to reunite its history and recognize Communism and Nazism as a common legacy (Zuroff 2012: 6).

The Declaration also includes a call for a variety of practical steps which if implemented, would undermine the current status of the Holocaust as a unique *sui generis* case of genocide and reduce it to just another of many tragedies. Thus, for example, the Prague Declaration seeks to rewrite European history textbooks in the spirit of the equivalency between Communism and Nazism, as well as to establish an Institute of European Memory and Conscience, which would then serve as a research centre for “totalitarian studies” (a currently nonexistent fields). It would also support national research institutes “specializing in the subject of totalitarian experience,” along with a museum/memorial for the victims of all totalitarian regimes. If current experience is any indication, the national research institutes which already exist (in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia for example) concentrate on Communist crimes, completely or virtually ignoring those committed against Jews during the Holocaust, making them major disseminators for the revisionist narrative preferred in post-Communist Eastern Europe and especially in the Baltic (Zuroff 2012: 7).

Another idea designed to promote the canard of historical equivalency is the call by the Prague Declaration to designate 23 August as a joint memorial day for all the victims of totalitarian regimes. The choice of the date of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Agreement, the Soviet-Nazi Non Aggression Pact, seeks to equally blame the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany for the atrocities and civilian losses of World War II, a choice that purposely ignores the decisive role played by the Red Army in the defeat of the Third Reich. By putting those who planned, built, and operated Auschwitz, the largest of the death camps, on the same level as those who liberated the camp, the formulators of The Prague Declaration seek to create a new and level playing field, which

would absolve the nations of Eastern Europe of their guilt for serving as executioners of Jews in the service of the Nazis (Stone 2014: 338). .

Ever since the publication of the Prague Declaration, Lithuania has done more than any other country to promote its principles and have its practical recommendations supported or passed in resolutions in European political forums. This, for example, on 2 April 2, 2009 533 members of the European Parliament voted in favour of a resolution similar to the Prague Declaration, while only 44 voted against and 33 abstained. Three months later, on June 1, 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting in Vilnius adopted a resolution entitled “Divided Europe Reunited” which equally condemned Nazi and Communist calls and called for August 23rd to be designated as a joint memorial day for all the victims of Communist crimes (Zuroff 2014: 3).

During the past four years, and especially in the wake of the Prague Declaration, the Lithuanian government has intensified its efforts to rewrite the accepted western narrative of World War II and especially the Holocaust, putting itself on an inevitable collision course with the Jewish community and with international Jewish organizations. The results, in practical terms, have been quite negative and have seriously exacerbated Lithuanian-Jewish relations. The fact that government ministers are actively promoting the revisionist agenda has created an atmosphere that has unfortunately only stoked the flames of local anti-Semitism even higher (Peter 1995: 34).

In some cases, the revisionism on Holocaust issues and anti-Semitism are linked tighter, such as in the case of the campaign against former Jewish KGB operative Nachman Dushansky, who during the past two decades became the personification of the Jews who committed severe crimes against Lithuanians in the service of Moscow. Dushansky left Lithuania for Israel in the mid-nineties, but was wanted in Vilnius on the war crimes charges, which he

denied. Given the fact that Dushansky was the only one of more than twenty officers of equivalent rank who served in the unit which is accused of committing the crimes in question, it is clear that he was singled out for punishment because he was Jewish. A documentary film on his case, shown in May 2008 was publicized using anti-Semitic themes, which emphasized the role of Jews in the Communist KGB. Dushansky's death was reported in Lithuania as a major news event, with extensive mention of the murder of Lithuanians in the Rainiai forest near Telsiai, although there is no clear evidence to implicate Dushansky in those crimes (Dobroszycki 1993: 8).

A case in which the government attempts to rewrite the history of the Holocaust led to an embarrassing statement by a leading minister took place in December 2009. After Lithuanian Prime Minister Kubilius appeared on the BBC interview show "Hard Talk" and was politely but firmly questioned by the presenter Johanathan Charles regarding his country's poor record in confronting its Holocaust complicity, Justice Minister Remigijus Simasius came to his defence the next day. According to Simasius, the fact that many Jews were killed in Lithuania does not mean that Lithuanians are "Jew killers" a statement which is technically true but totally divorced from the history of the Shoah in Lithuania. He then compared his country favourably to the United States and Great Britain, which limited the entry of Jewish refugees during the Nazi period, as if that policy could be compared to the extensive participation of so many Lithuanians in the mass murder of Jews during the Shoah. Needless to say, Justice Minister Simasius' grasp of his country's wartime history aroused protests and incredulity (Shamir 2015: 8).

There is no question that the increasingly anti-Semitic atmosphere in Lithuania is directly linked to the ongoing controversies regarding Holocaust-related issues. The small and vulnerable Jewish community is facing increasingly blatant anti-Semitic attacks, both physical and verbal. One of the most offensive examples of the latter is a front-page story, which appeared in

the right-wing Lithuanian tabloid *Vakaro Zinios* on December 21, 2011. The cover page had a usually large lead caption with only one word *Zydai* (The Jews) and an extremely large photograph of local Chabad rabbi Sholom-Ber Krinsky in ultra-Orthodox attire. In much smaller letters the explanation is given that the Jews, in this case the local Chabad School, “see no reason to pay their Social Security taxes” (Peter 1995: ). Thus the impression is created that Rabbi Krinsky is the major offender in this regard, but if one bothers to read the accompanying article on pages 3 and 5, it emerges that Chabad is only one of numerous institutions and companies (such as Western Union, for example) which are guilty of the same offense . In fact, the Chabad School is not even among the worst offenders. In the same months, the same tabloid and the major Lithuanian newspaper published offensive and blatantly anti-Semitic articles on their front pages with other publicly prominent Jewish leaders such Dr. Simon Alperovich, the elected chairman of the Jewish community, as the subject of their attacks (Peter 1995: 32).

The chronicle presented above leaves one very important question unanswered. Why have the events, which have taken place during the past four years, been virtually ignored outside of Lithuania? One of the major reasons has been the determined efforts of the Lithuanian government to deflect public attention from its campaigns to hide and/or minimize the role of Lithuanian Nazi war criminals in Holocaust crimes and its attempts to convince the world that Communist and Nazi crimes are equivalent by a multitude of events related to the Holocaust in general, and the history of Lithuanian Jewry in particular, which do not directly deal with the controversial issues in question Donskis. Thus during the past four years, the government has sponsored conferences, symposia, and events in many places all over the Western world, including Israel, to reinforce the illusion that it is honestly trying to confront its Holocaust past, but nothing could be further from the truth. (Donskis 2009: 34).



Another tactic employed was to say one thing to Jewish audiences and another to Lithuanians, or to emphasize different aspects of government decisions on these issues to different groups. A very good example of this policy was the September 21, 2010 decision made by the Seimas, and announced at the ceremony to mark Lithuanian Holocaust Memorial Day at the Ponar mass murder site, to designate 2011 as the “Year of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust,” which was followed a mere week later by a second decision by the same parliament to designate 2011 as the “Year of Commemoration of the Defence of Freedom and Great Losses.” If these subjects were perfectly compatible, perhaps these decisions would not appear contradictory, but when some of the people whom the Lithuanians seek to honour as “freedom fighters” actively participated in Holocaust crimes, the duplicity of the government in dealing with this sensitive issue becomes obviously apparent (Zuroff 2012: 7).

This duplicity is clearly reinforced when one sees the difference between the Seimas’ Lithuanian- language website which only notes that 2011 will be devoted to the “Defence of Freedom and of Great Losses,” while its English- language website informs the public that the same year has been designated as the “Year of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania” (Sirutavicius, Staliuna 2001: 34).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

After the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991, Lithuania emerged a democratic independent country. They began nation building based on the western liberal democratic norms. Since memory and identity centred on the experience of Lithuanians under Soviet occupation became the dominant aspect of national identity, minority issues emerged as a contested problem. Therefore, the Jewish identity issues the Holocaust revisionism with state support and the revival of Nazism stands as irreconcilable legacy of Holocaust in Lithuania. Even after the independence, the Jews community has been discriminated and the growing anti-Semitism has been remained unchecked. The Lithuanian state failed to manage the social harmony within the country despite the process of the state building based on democratic values and human traditions. There is a reluctance to bring those who committed holocaust crimes to justice and less attention towards the rise of anti-Semitism from the part of the state which has still been remains unresolved.

The history of Jewish community owes certain linkages with Lithuania as this country has been the home for the Jews since the centuries. In the entire Eastern Europe, Lithuania became the most important country as far as the Jewish community is concerned. With the passage of time the Jewish community became an integral part of the Lithuanian society. Jews in Lithuania has tremendously contributed to the development of the country's economy, culture and education. However, the intensity of the problems faced by the Jews remains a significant issue even till today.

The question of amalgamation and the coexistence of the Jewish community with the indigenous Lithuanians paved the way for the emergence of a new issue linked with the identity. The devastating impact of holocaust on the Jewish Community in Lithuania made their life miserable and they are still

struggling for their life and justice and making efforts to establish their own identity in the Lithuanian Society. The approach of Lithuanians toward the Jews and the growing anti Semitist feelings pose a serious challenge to the entire Jewish community in the contemporary Lithuanian society. The reaction of the state to these problems is another most challenging factor that needs to be reinvented.

The life has been difficult for the Jews both in past and present times. The adversary policies against the Jews continued even today. Even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Independence of Lithuania, the Jewish community faced various discriminatory policies at different depths. Ever since Lithuania freed itself from Soviet Occupation, the official position of Lithuania towards the Nazi war criminals and Soviet oppressors remained somewhat neutral which was later on supported by the majority of the Lithuanians. Even though the political culture of Lithuania since 1990 has been demonstrating a fresh political willingness to accommodate the diverse culture, things are however far more intricate as far the Jewish community is concerned.

The rise of anti Semitism poses a serious threat to the existence of Jewish community in Baltic States in general and Lithuania in particular. Anti-Semites justify the holocaust of the Jews on basis of the narration that the Jews collaborated with the Soviet authorities in 1940-1941. This approach culminated in propaganda justifying the cruel mass murder of Jews by the local population when the German Nazi invasion occurred. The history of anti Semitism in Lithuania has been inextricably linked with their historical existence in the country. Over the centuries, Lithuania had developed one of the most distinguished Jewish communities in Eastern Europe.

Jews community and Lithuanians lived in isolated and distant social and cultural world, as a result, developed negative stereotypes sentiments to each other. Presumably this gap between Jews and Lithuanians was one of the

major factors that facilitated the rise of mutual suspicion and anti-Semitism that violently exploded in the mid-twentieth century. Lithuanian society was strictly Catholic, and it was the Catholic Church that was the main driving force behind the popular belief that the Jews had not only killed Jesus Christ and needed to be punished for that. Moreover the myth also that the Jews maintained the ritual of using fresh blood of Christian children in preparing matzos, often intensified anti-Semitism. Moreover, in late nineteenth and early twentieth century rural Lithuanian had some terrible myths about Jews such as, Jews have extra territorial capabilities, their links with devils, the ability to harm gentile person.

**Lithuanian Anti-Semitism** Unlike other nationalist movements such as the Polish National Democrats, Lithuanian nationalism did not initially target the Jews as a perceived barrier to national fulfilment. However, the spread of Lithuanian self-consciousness and the establishment of a state in 1918 inaugurated a process of Jewish exclusion. First, there was the linguistic factor, which was the most visible marker of Lithuanian identity. In general there were few bonds connecting Lithuania's Jews to the linguistic community that defined the nation.

Anti-Semitism in the second half of the nineteenth century in Eastern and Central Europe was a modern phenomenon. It was caused by the development of nationalism and capitalism, comprising certain ideas and concept of such as, racial segregation that was not characteristic of old anti-Judaism. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the root cause of anti-Semitism became the economic rivalry between Jews and Lithuanians. With the beginning to outbreak of World War First Jews faced a new wave of Tsarist persecution.

After the First World War, Lithuania became an independent state, then Jewish number were about 1,50000 and made up 9 per cent of the nation's population. Now in the independent state, Jews had difficulties in identifying themselves with the Lithuanian State. There were several organisations were

involved to restrict the growing Jewish's expansion over the trade and commerce. This tendency of anti-Semitism led the various radical nationalist organisations such as Home Guard Union. Furthermore in 1930 anti-Semitism spread among the Low middle class, workers and peasant, as well as among the University students, civil servants and journalists.

The Second World War and the holocaust caused the complete destruction of the Jewish community in Lithuania. Before the war Lithuania was known for its very large Jewish community. Even though most of the Baltic peoples were religious Christian peasants, there were hardly any expressions of extreme religious fanaticism among them. However, between the two World Wars the relations between Christian and Jewish religious leaders usually did not go beyond formal meetings. In any event, the relations were good enough that the Jews were justified in expecting their support. Before Second World War, there were already anti-Semitism was culminated among the European societies due to the economic crisis, outbreak of World War Second led the ant-Semitism aggression and frustration in a huge Jews massacre in different part of Europe. The start of the war also marked the start of the physical annihilation of alien races and the racially inferior on a large scale.

After the outbreak of World War II Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were forced, with the enactment of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact between Germany and Soviet Union in 1939, to make the military bases in their territories available to the despised Soviets. This severely wounded the national pride of the recently liberated Baltic peoples. The Jews once again became a scapegoat and were singled out for violent attacks. There were an increasing number of attacks against Jews in the city streets. In several towns, windows of Jewish homes were smashed and some dwellings were even set on fire.

In order to attack on the Soviet Union and the annihilation of the Jews, on 18 December in 1940 the OKW (*oberkommando der Wehrmach*, High Command of Armed forces) issued Directive No. 21 "Operation Barbarossa" (Arad,

2009: 51). On March 3 1941 Hitler gave special order to OKW No. 21 that mentioned the elimination of Bolshevist-Jewish intelligentsia. This was the first document mentioning the destruction of the Jews that was published as part of Germany's preparation for its attack on the Soviet Union. It is a fact that after the Nazi Party came to power in Germany anti-Semitism became state policy.

Later this was transferred to areas of Europe occupied by the Nazi Germany. We should stress that the persecution and destruction of Jews was initiated by Nazi Germany, but in certain occupied countries, including Lithuania, the Nazis managed to involve part of the local population and local collaborating institutions in this criminal action. Nazi propaganda succeeded in exploiting anti- communist and anti-Semitic moods that had developed during a year of Soviet occupation and convince some Lithuanians that Bolshevism meant Jewish power and that the Jews were primarily responsible for the misfortunes endured during Soviet annexation and occupation. This period most tragic for Lithuanian Jewry was the second half of 1941. By December 1941, 80 per cent of Jews resident in Lithuania at that time were murdered.

In the Lithuanian State, the issue of the Jewish identity, crucial for the discourse on heritage, is quite complex when it comes to definition. Starting in the fall of 2007, and even more so during 2008, the Lithuanian government began to intensify its efforts to challenge the accepted historical narrative of the Holocaust and to more actively deflect international criticism in response to its failings in addressing specific Holocaust- related issues. The primary problems in this regard were the government's abysmal failure to punish a single Lithuanian Holocaust perpetrator despite an abundance of potential suspects, and the continuing efforts of government leaders and officials to promote the canard of historical equivalency between Communist and Nazi crimes.

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, Lithuania emerged a democratic independent country. Even after the independence, the Jews community has been discriminated and the growing anti-Semitism has been remained unchecked. The Lithuanian state failed to manage the social harmony within the country despite the process of the state building based on democratic values and human traditions. There is a reluctance to bring those who committed holocaust crimes to justice and less attention towards the rise of anti-Semitism from the part of the state which has still been remains unresolved.

Today, anti-Semitic expressions are on the rise in Baltic states. Glorification of Nazism is a common phenomenon in Baltic states. For example, Combat Support Forces of Waffen SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Armed Protective Squadron) legions are regularly celebrating their commemoration events in all major Baltic cities. Governments give permission for such activities. The process of falsifying Holocaust in the Baltic states is expressed in various forms in government policies and among the masses: double genocide, rewriting history, redefining concepts related to Holocaust, legislations, desecration of monuments, commemoration events, Holocaust education and so on.

While the state is showing great enthusiasm in bringing communist crimes to justice, their refusal to consider the complicity of local collaborators in holocaust crimes and prosecute them, and the Baltic attempt to hide the dark spot in their own history; do not match with the claim of Baltic states claim that they cherish the democratic values and humanistic traditions of the west.

In order to whitewash the dark spot in their history, nation building politics in Lithuania is to depict the nation as “victims” of Soviet occupation which happened on the basis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. Blame Russia and Putin as responsible for their vulnerability due to which they are forced to depend on NATO, US and EU for ensuring security. Despite independence

and orientation to principles and norms of western democracy for their political system, the national question remains the centre of politics as a contested issue in Lithuania with multinational societies. Therefore, the Lithuanian democratic system calls into question when they have to make attempts to hide their own crimes for which they can use Soviet crimes as an excuse for Holocaust mystification or ultra-nationalism. The complex, rightist, nationalist political agenda is at the core of the democratic nation building strategy in Lithuania.

The study intended to test the following hypotheses.

- 1) Lithuanians' attitude towards Jews was determined by certain stereotypes of Jewish behaviour and mythical assumptions such as Jews dominate in political power and economic sphere, exploit Christians and are wrong doers, and thereby local Lithuanians played a great role in holocaust.
- 2) Contemporary Lithuania demonstrate discriminatory approach to Jewish identity, shows reluctance to bring those who committed holocaust crimes to justice, trivialize or minimize the holocaust experience of Jews, and pays inadequate attention towards the rise of anti-Semitism.

Relatively the above hypotheses tested positive in the case of contemporary Lithuania. However, there are several factors requires further scrutiny in regard to the nation building strategy and politics over Holocaust and memory of Soviet occupation. Both the experiences should be studied separately acknowledging the reality each community had faced in the past rather than trivialising or privileging one experience over the other.



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