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*Mir leben ejbig*

מיר לעבן אייביק, עס ברענט אַ וועלט  
 מיר לעבן אייביק, אָן אַ גראַשן געלט  
 און אויף צעפּוקעניש די אַלע שונאים  
 וואָס ווילן אונדז פֿאַרשוואַרצן אונזער פנים

We live forever, a world burns  
 We live forever, without a penny  
 And to hell with all our enemies  
 Who want to dirty our faces

מיר לעבן אייביק, מיר זײַנען דאָ  
 מיר לעבן אייביק, אין יעדער שעה  
 מיר וועלן לעבן און דערלעבן  
 שלעכטע צײַטן איבערלעבן  
 מיר לעבן אייביק, מיר זײַנען דאָ

We live forever, we are here  
 We live forever, in every hour  
 We will live and live on  
 Survive bad times  
 We live forever, we are here.

*Leyb Rozental, Song about the life in the Ghetto of Vilnius*

## Table of content

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Research questions .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. State of the Art.....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 <i>The First Lithuanian Republic (1918).....</i>	7
3.2 <i>The end of Smetona's regime and the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania.....</i>	10
3.3 <i>The Nazi-occupation of Lithuania and the Holocaust.....</i>	13
3.3.1     Excursus: Exemplary sources – the <i>Jäger-Bericht</i> and the Ponary Diary.....	15
3.3.2 <i>Aktion 1005</i> and the end of WWII.....	17
3.4 <i>The second Soviet occupation of Lithuania.....</i>	19
3.5 <i>The Khrushchev Thaw in the LSSR.....</i>	21
3.6 <i>Stagnation – the Brezhnev era.....</i>	23
3.7 <i>Glasnost' and Perestrojka: Gorbachev and the collapse of the Soviet Union.....</i>	25
3.8 <i>Independent Lithuania.....</i>	29
3.8.1     Lithuania and the European Union.....	30
3.8.2     Lustration, (attempts at) reconciliation and transitional justice in post-Soviet Lithuania.....	31
<b>4. Methods and research approach.....</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1 <i>Document analysis .....</i>	38
4.2 <i>Artefact analysis .....</i>	38
4.3 <i>Expert interview.....</i>	39
4.4 <i>Text analysis .....</i>	41
<b>5. Theoretical background.....</b>	<b>43</b>
5.1 <i>The memorial site of Paneriai as a lieu de mémoire.....</i>	43
5.2 <i>Further concepts of memory culture and memory politics .....</i>	45
5.2.1 Mnemonic actors and mnemonic regimes .....	45
5.2.2 The SANE concept of analysing memory politics.....	49
<b>6. Empirical study.....</b>	<b>52</b>
6.1 <i>The memorial site of Paneriai – a historical overview.....</i>	52
6.2 <i>Document analysis.....</i>	54
6.2.1 The document.....	55
6.2.2 Description.....	57
6.2.3 Interpretation.....	59
6.2.4 Excursus: Comparison to another photograph .....	65
6.2.5 Findings.....	66
6.3 <i>Artefact Analysis.....</i>	67
6.3.1 First phase: 1989-1992.....	68
6.3.2 Second phase: 1993-2003 .....	76
6.3.3 Third phase: 2004-2018 .....	83
6.3.4 Findings.....	89
6.4 <i>Expert Interview.....</i>	91
6.4.1 The interview .....	91
6.4.2 Findings.....	93
6.5 <i>Text Analysis.....</i>	95

6.5.1 The march of the living – general information .....	95
6.5.2 Text 1: Holocaust victims honored in March of Living in Vilnius.....	96
6.5.3 Text 2: Participants of march of living in Lithuania honour Holocaust Victims, Righteous among Nations .....	97
6.5.4 Text 3: Lithuanian officials ‘need history lessons’, says Jewish community leader .....	98
6.5.5 Text 4: Paneriai Memorial holds 10 <sup>th</sup> March of the Living .....	100
6.5.6 Text 5: Holocaust victims commemorated in Vilnius on Remembrance Day.....	101
6.5.7 Excursus: Short expert interview .....	102
6.5.8 Findings.....	103
<b>7. Conclusion and Findings .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>8. References .....</b>	<b>108</b>
8.1 Bibliography .....	108
8.2 Images and Figures .....	118
<b>9. Annex.....</b>	<b>120</b>
9.1 Text 1.....	120
9.2 Text 2.....	121
9.3 Text 3.....	122
9.4 Text 4.....	123
9.5 Text 5.....	124
<b>10. Abstract.....</b>	<b>125</b>

# 1. Introduction

Leyb Rozental, the author of “Mir leben ejbig”, lived in the ghetto of Vilnius from the Nazi occupation of Lithuania in 1941 until the liquidation of the ghetto in 1943. The song shows a clear and fierce opposition to the Nazis, combined with the will to survive. Rozental and his family were brought to the Estonian concentration camp, where most of them died. Others who were still living in the ghetto of Vilnius in these days were brought to Paneriai, a village not far from the city of Vilnius: It is a small village, near to a forest, with a train station and two bus stops. It is the place, where between 1941 and 1944 around 90 000 people were killed by the Nazi Regime and its Lithuanian collaborators. Most of the victims were members of the once flourishing Lithuanian Jewry whose centre – for several centuries – had been the city of Vilnius: the “Jerusalem of the North”, the hometown of one of the biggest and most active Jewish communities all over Europe. Between 50 000 and 60 000 Jews lived in Vilnius before the anti-Semitic pogroms and persecutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century started. Paneriai became a sad part of the Jewish history in Lithuania. The place – earlier used for storage purposes by the Soviets – became a execution site and later a mass grave: When it became clear that the war could not be won anymore, the Nazi-occupants and their Lithuanian collaborators tried to destroy all traces of the mass killings. The *Sonderkommando 1005* exhumed the corpses and burned them – with the help of forced laborers, also Jews in most cases.

Nevertheless, the place became a memorial site immediately after WWII: Those survivors and their descendants who did not leave Lithuania for Israel or the US fought for a memorial culture which would not just put the German Nazi regime at the centre of attention but also the Lithuanian collaboration and anti-Jewish pogroms. Furthermore, the Soviet Union showed interest in the place: In order to stress the narrative of the USSR winning over fascism in Europe a huge obelisk was added to the site without, however, taking into account the needs or wishes of the survivors and the remaining Jewish community. With the independence of Lithuania in 1991, again, the meaning of the site changed: It became first part of the Vilnius Municipality and then of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum immediately in 2013. Only in 2016 – more than 70 years after the end of WWII – did an international group of researchers find the secret tunnel through which a small group of forced laborers was able to flee in April 1944<sup>1</sup>.

This thesis aims to re-construct and analyse a part of the development of Lithuanian memorial culture based on the changes made to the memorial site of Paneriai: It examines the

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<sup>1</sup> See St. Fleur, 2016

transformation process starting back from the present day condition of the memorial site to the moment Lithuania gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Furthermore, based on the theory of the *lieux de mémoire* of Pierre Nora also the history preceding the re-establishment of the Lithuanian state will be taken into account.

The topic under discussion and its related questions became important to me when I lived in Vilnius during my Erasmus semester. A visit to the memorial site as well as discussions in class and with fellow students made me curious about the transformation process Lithuania underwent regarding its memorial culture, marked by competing narratives, an obviously fractured mnemonic regime – as Kubik and Bernhard describe it<sup>2</sup> – and, most importantly, an ongoing, emotional debate about the role of Lithuanians in the Holocaust. All this led me to the assumption, that Paneriai could be a possible place to explore the development of today's memorial culture in Lithuania and to understand and trace its ruptures and potential conflicts.

At this point, I would like to thank Karin Liebhart for her support and advice in writing this thesis – a job which has not always been easy. Additionally, I want to thank my mother, Gusti Gasteiger, for her permanent encouragement and endorsement in completing my studies. As I am the first in my family to study, I am well aware that this support is not self-evident.

Special thanks also go to my interview partners in Vilnius, Mantas Šikšnianas and Faina Kukliansky: They are experts on the topic and inspirational teachers at the same time – I would not have been able to do profound research without the strong support from the employees of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. Also, I have to thank my Lithuanian friends Indrė Kasiulynaitė, Lukas Beržanskis and Morgana Daniele – without their help the coronavirus would have hindered me from ever completing this thesis: Thank you so much!

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<sup>2</sup> See Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 17

## 2. Research questions

This thesis will examine the development of a changing memorial culture and its manifestations on a specific memorial site – in this case: on the memorial site of Paneriai. This *lieux de mémoire* was chosen because it has served as a vivid place of remembrance activities before and after the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1948<sup>3</sup> was dissolved soon following WWII and the Holocaust. Although there will be an overview about how Paneriai became the place it is nowadays, the clear focus will lie on the period between Lithuania gaining its independence in 1991 and today. Also, the Soviet period and the period of the First Lithuanian Republic (1918-1939) shall be considered at least in part in order to understand the developing process.

At first, however, several questions regarding the memorial site itself shall be answered, taking the present condition of the site as starting point: What does the memorial site look like, how is it currently organised? What are predominant elements, were they changed over the last three decades and if so, why, how and by whom? These questions will be addressed by using different methods combined to a coherent and expedient methodological mix which will provide an overall picture of the memorial site and its younger history.

These questions and their answers will shine a light on the changing manifestation of memorial cultures in a specific memorial site such as Paneriai: How do disruptions – like gaining independence – influence a memorial culture and how are they made visible in a specific memorial site like Paneriai? Leonidas Donskis, the Jewish-Lithuanian philosopher, describes that after WWII during the rule of the Soviet Union “all Jewish history, including the Shoah, disappeared from public life, leaving very few traces.”<sup>4</sup> But this does not draw attention to the fact that there was a significant change later on. In 2010, Karlsson stated “when the Holocaust gradually turned into an important historical-cultural symbol, neither the inspiration nor the initiative was European.”<sup>5</sup> Donskis and Karlsson stress how deep the ruptures in the Lithuanian memorial culture were and still are: To omit the remembrance of the almost complete extinction of one third of the population of Vilnius and to have efforts in this regard “reintroduced” later from the outside cannot be described in other words than a rupture within the memorial continuity of a country, growing into a supposed homogenous nation state. In order to understand the development of the memorial site of Paneriai the first part of this thesis will discuss the history of Lithuania before and after WWII until the country’s independence in 1991.

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<sup>3</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 204

<sup>4</sup> Donskis, 2006, p. 21

<sup>5</sup> Karlsson, 2010, p. 40

### 3. State of the Art

Generally speaking, research about remembrance policies, especially about holocaust remembrance, is currently experiencing a boom all over Europe. It is strongly connected with the desire for a common narrative which is able to build bridges between western, central and eastern member states of the European Union. The Austrian researcher Ljiljana Radonić describes this ambition and the connected outcome as “Europeanisation of the Holocaust”, which means “that the Holocaust has become a universal imperative for the respect of human rights in general and a ‘container’ for the memory of different victims and victim groups”<sup>6</sup>.

In order to understand Lithuania’s memory politics and the origin and development of the memorial site of Paneriai this chapter takes as its starting point the First Republic of Lithuania in 1918. This is also necessary in order to develop a profound understanding of the country which would go on legitimise its independence with exactly that period. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is crucial in the further development of Lithuanian nationalism and anti-Semitism – although, of course, “antisemitism as such did not form in the period under discussion and did not gain a wider, more visible character”.<sup>7</sup> However, to provide an adequate and profound insight into the Lithuanian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the following chapter outlines the most important developments and milestones of the last century, turning only briefly to crucial topics such as growing anti-Semitism and the situation of the Jewish population.

#### 3.1 The First Lithuanian Republic (1918)

When the independence of Lithuania was declared by the Council of Lithuania on 16 February 1918, German troops were still in the country. However, they did not hinder or interfere with the declaration owing to a promised “perpetual alliance” between Lithuania and Germany, which was basically ignored, when it became increasingly clear that Germany was going to lose the war. Furthermore, the declaration of independence called for the election of a Constituent Assembly in order to adopt a constitution based on the legitimisation of the people of Lithuania. The council presidium decided to appoint Augustinas Voldemaras as first prime minister of Lithuania in November 1918. Following this event, the next few years were “marked by battles for independence with Bolshevik Russia, Poland (Lithuania lost Vilnius) and the Bermondians, but Lithuania finally defended its independence at the cost of losing Vilnius to Poland”.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Radonić, 2017, p. 269f

<sup>7</sup> Sirutavičius, 2004, p. 63

<sup>8</sup> Ivanauskas, 2018, p. 102



subsequent elections for the Constituent Assembly were carried out in April 1920; men and women were entitled to vote. Kaunas became the new capital of the young state. In 1922 the permanent constitution was adopted by the Assembly and, finally, in October 1922 the new and first *Seimas* elected Aleksandras Stulginskis as first president of Lithuania and Ernestas Galvanauskas as new Prime Minister. The country became a member of the League of Nations in 1921.

The period of the First Lithuanian Republic is known for being a renaissance of Lithuanian language and culture. “For the first time in the nation’s history, the language of the kitchen was the official language of government, and the result was a new consciousness, the depths of which many observers, including Lithuanians themselves underestimated”<sup>9</sup>, as Senn and Motulaitė describe it. This period is also seen as “golden age for modern Jewish autonomy”<sup>10</sup> in Lithuania, as the Jewish community “supported Lithuanian aspirations for independence”<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, growing nationalism and anti-Semitism as well as the beginning of the ousting of Jews also fall in this period: Stereotypes of the time cast Jews as exploiters of the (mainly Lithuanian) peasantry – as innkeepers, merchants and middlemen. Additionally, the “overwhelming identification of Catholicism with the Polish and Lithuanian nation made it quite difficult for Jews [...] to be accepted as entirely ‘one of ours’”<sup>12</sup>, although the Lithuanian government even introduced a ministry for Jewish Affairs. The US historian Theodore Weeks sees Jewish autonomy as being increasingly undermined during the mid-1920s<sup>13</sup>. Also, anti-Semitism became more widespread in exactly this period: Jews were held responsible for the deteriorating economic situation, a political crisis and depicted as disloyal to the young Lithuanian state<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, president Smetona’s “Lithuanizing” the economy – starting with his assumption of power in 1926 – had its effects on the Jewish community, as Christoph Dieckmann points out with the example of the small town Jurbarkas in south-western Lithuania: Out of about 4 400 inhabitants around one third was Jewish, which so far had not caused any issues. However, as 69 out of 75 shops in the town were owned by Jews, the closure of the bigger shops in 1931 had severe consequences for the local economy, even though the shops were then run by state supported cooperatives<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Senn/Motulaitė, 1993, p. 26

<sup>10</sup> Schoenburg/Schoenburg 1991, p. 38f

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Weeks, 2004, p. 46

<sup>13</sup> Weeks, 2004, p. 54

<sup>14</sup> See Sirutavičius, 2020, p. 354ff

<sup>15</sup> See Dieckmann, 2011, p. 74

Vilnius at that time was not part of the Lithuanian territory but of a Polish province. Nevertheless, Lithuanians always saw Vilnius as the capital of their country and Kaunas as a temporary solution. The city of Vilnius was often described as the “Jerusalem of the North”, as it did not only have a large Jewish community belonging to the orthodoxy but it was also the “time and place, where, for the first time, Zionism was transformed into a considerable force”<sup>16</sup>. However, even before becoming part of Poland, the number of Lithuanians in Vilnius was actually very low, as they were mainly living in smaller towns and in the countryside, whereas Poles and Jews, so called Litvaks, lived in the bigger towns and cities<sup>17</sup>. Vilnius itself was an important centre for Belarusians as well: The first Belarusian newspaper *Nasha Niva* was published there in 1906, which was one of the most important milestones for the Belarusian language.<sup>18</sup>

In December 1926 within three days a *coup d'état* changed the power balance in Lithuania: The coalition government of that time (the third *Seimas* of Lithuania had been elected just in May 1926) formed of the Social Democrats and the Peasant Popular Union was forced to resign by the military and the participants of the coup, the Christian Democrats and the Nationalists. The Lithuanian historian Kasparavičius – referring to official documents – describes the takeover in Kaunas as follows:

*“In the early morning of 17 December 1926 (around 2-3 a.m.) the military in Lithuania revolted and broke up the parliament of the country, the Seimas; the rebels isolated and forced the left-of-centre coalition government of the Peasant Popular Union and Social Democrats to resign. The headquarters of the coup participants established in the Ministry of Defence announced that ‘the coup d’état was effected exclusively by one army which was forced to do the same due to the Polonisation of the country and the pro-Bolshevik policy pursued by the government which was a real threat to the existence of the state’”<sup>19</sup>.*

The Lithuanian president, Kazys Grinius, who had been elected democratically, was forced to resign, and the *Seimas* elected Antanas Smetona as new president. Augustinas Voldemaras was

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<sup>16</sup> Mendelsohn, 2004, p. 83

<sup>17</sup> See Weeks, 2004, p. 52 f

<sup>18</sup> The complex and permanently changing situation of the city of Vilnius at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is addressed by Timothy Snyder’s “The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999”.

<sup>19</sup> Kasparavičius, 2007, p. 114f

appointed as new prime minister. In the following years Smetona excluded the Seimas step by step from legislative procedures and to establish an authoritarian regime. He distanced himself more and more from Voldemaras who had been his friend and ally already long before 1926. Furthermore, he set up a personality cult, presenting himself as successor to Vytautas the Great, the ruler of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Kasparavičius argues that Lithuanian authoritarianism developed in five different stages starting with the open dictatorship during and after the *coup d'état* (similar to the Italian “March on Rome”) and ending with the “golden age” of Smetona’s authoritarianism when he broke with Voldemaras and concentrated more and more power in his own hands<sup>20</sup>. Certainly it is true that the extent of authoritarianism and its interferences with people’s live changed over the years of Smetona’s reign. However, this is the case with every authoritarian or totalitarian regime Europe has experienced over the last centuries and is nothing especially Lithuanian or unique. “Smetona implemented nationalist policies and there was a little chance for political participation for other political groups [...]. The rights of national minorities were secured”<sup>21</sup>, describes Ivanauskas. Smetona was able to increase Lithuania’s productivity and to raise literacy levels significantly; also, as Vilnius University was lost to Poland, the Vytautas Magnus University had to be founded in Kaunas.

### 3.2 The end of Smetona’s regime and the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania

Smetona’s regime lost support over the last years of independent Lithuania: This was partly owing to the loss of the Klaipeda region to Germany – which did not provoke the slightest reaction from the League of Nations (similarly to earlier and comparable occurrences regarding in Czechoslovakia and Austria<sup>22</sup>) – and the ongoing tensions with Poland regarding the Vilnius question. In October 1939, when Molotov and Ribbentrop had already signed the pact of non-aggression including the secret protocols which divided Eastern Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union, Lithuania took up negotiations with the Soviet Union. The US-American historian Timothy Snyder describes the most important outcomes as follows:

*“Rather than annexing Vilnius to the Soviet Union, he [i.e. Stalin] granted it to still-independent Lithuania. The price, not surprisingly, was the establishment of Soviet military bases on Lithuanian territory. Soviet forces, already installed in Lithuania, stood at the ready as a political revolution, even more hasty and artificial than in eastern*

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<sup>20</sup> See Kasparavičius, 2006, p. 304f

<sup>21</sup> Ivanauskas, 2018, p. 102

<sup>22</sup> See Liekis, 2010, p. 119

*Poland, was imposed in summer 1940. Much of the Lithuanian political elite escaped to Nazi Germany.”*<sup>23</sup>

When the Red Army invaded Poland only two weeks after Nazi Germany had started WWII, Vilnius was captured (or “liberated”<sup>24</sup>) within one day. After the city had been handed over to Lithuanian authorities, a strong anti-Polish Lithuanisation took place<sup>25</sup> (e.g. citizenship rights were denied to Poles living in Vilnius and Vilnius province, Polish schools were closed etc.).

Tensions between Lithuanians and the Red Army started very soon after Soviet military forces arrived in Lithuania: Lithuanians were accused of attacking Soviet officials, kidnapping soldiers, minor infractions like the stealing of weapons or stocks and similar incidents which had a notable impact on the political climate. Alfred Senn describes the Soviet accusations against Lithuania as a “Soviet campaign accusing the Lithuanians of abusing and seducing Red Army soldiers”<sup>26</sup>. He further states that the Soviets “were probably already drafting their plans, and Moscow decided that this was a useful issue upon which to mount an offensive.”<sup>27</sup> The Soviet Union accused the Baltic States of forming a “Baltic Entente” against the USSR which led to an escalation of the ongoing tensions<sup>28</sup>. In June 1940 the Soviet Union posed an ultimatum which demanded more Soviet troops to be deployed to Lithuania, the minister of internal affairs and the head of the security department to be handed over to the courts because of “alleged provocations against the Soviet Union”<sup>29</sup> and a new Lithuanian government to be formed to ensure “the honest implementation of the Soviet-Lithuanian Pact”<sup>30</sup>. As Smetona did not find a majority within the ministries for armed resistance, he resigned and left the country. In this situation, Antanas Merkys, as current prime minister, became acting president of the country. Stasys Raštikis was asked to form a new government, but Molotov himself decreed Raštikis as unacceptable. Later on they were informed “that Vladimir Dekanozov, the Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs, would now fly to Kaunas to direct the cleanup.”<sup>31</sup> At Dekanozov’s direction, Antanas Merkys himself asked Juozas Paleckis, “a well-known leftist journalist, to take the post of prime minister and to form a new government.”<sup>32</sup> Merkys himself

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<sup>23</sup> Snyder, 2010, p. 143

<sup>24</sup> See Liekis, 2010, p. 142

<sup>25</sup> See Liekis, 2010, p. 171ff

<sup>26</sup> Senn, 2007, p. 90

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See Liekis, 2010, p. 328

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Senn, 2007, p. 98

<sup>32</sup> Senn, 2007, p. 138

tried to flee subsequently but was unable to leave: He was caught at the airport in Riga and deported to Russia, where he died in 1955<sup>33</sup>. Paleckis formed a new government and announced new elections (in which only communists and their allies could be elected) for July. He became head of the parliament afterwards.

The Sovietization of Lithuania proceeded very quickly: In June 1940 still armed forces took over Vilnius and Kaunas. On 21 July 1940 the newly elected Seimas prepared for joining the Soviet Union, in August Lithuania adopted a “Soviet style constitution, setting the party in power over the state and making the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars the leading figure in the state structure.”<sup>34</sup> And, beyond that, of course, “guards protected agricultural and industrial capital from former owners; businessmen had to deposit daily receipts in the banks, which had long been under government watch to prevent them from dissipating their capital in the form of “loans” to “bourgeois” costumers.”<sup>35</sup> However, as all Baltic leaders argued that collectivization was incompatible with local cultural values, it did not happen to the same extent as in other parts of the Soviet Union at that time. Some officials tried to encourage the rural population to initiate kolkhozes, but by June 1941 only 12 collective farms had started operating in Lithuania<sup>36</sup>.

At that time, anti-Jewish resentments started increasing: Jews were seen as profiteers of the new rule and as its collaborators. Furthermore, attacks against refugees – Jewish or Polish – fleeing from the battlefields in Poland became more frequent. Pogroms and riots could be observed nearly immediately after Vilnius came under Lithuanian control: “Jurkūnas-Šeinius, the director of the Lithuanian Red Cross, pointed out that many Lithuanian officials who moved from Kaunas into the Vilnius region in 1939 lacked any understanding of its multicultural character.”<sup>37</sup> With the Soviet Union taking over, Jews were sitting between chairs: Poles and Lithuanians saw them as profiting from the Soviet rule, but for the Soviet propaganda, at the same time, they were class enemies. Needless to say, Jewish organizations, groups and individuals were affected by the measures of Sovietization as well:

*“All Jewish organisations responsible for different trends in Jewish schools were closed. The traditional Hebrew system of schools was replaced by instruction in Yiddish, and the*

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<sup>33</sup> See Senn, 2007, p. 207f

<sup>34</sup> Senn, 2007, p. 229

<sup>35</sup> Senn, 2007, p. 238

<sup>36</sup> Statiev, 2010, p. 143

<sup>37</sup> Balkelis, 2007, p. 471

*teaching of national and religious values was eliminated from the curricula. The total number of Jewish schools declined markedly. [...] Jewish political parties, public and youth organisations were closed, and most leading members of the organisations were arrested.*”<sup>38</sup>

Other methods of Soviet repression hit the Jewish community of Lithuania: Mass arrests (July 1940: 56 party leaders and heads of Jewish organisations were detained), political persecution and deportations began immediately and made survival difficult. According to Snyder, 17 500 people from Lithuania were deported by the end of June 1941. The Jewish percentage of this number varies a lot. Bubnys states that around 14% of the victims were of Jewish origin as “the ethnic composition of the victims replicated closely the ethnic composition of the inhabitants of Lithuania at that time”<sup>39</sup>, whereas according to Christoph Dieckmann “half of the deportees to the Soviet Union on 15 June 1941 were Jews.”<sup>40</sup>

### 3.3 The Nazi-occupation of Lithuania and the Holocaust

Nazi Germany started “Operation Barbarossa” on 22 June 1941: “Three million German troops, in three Army Groups, crossed over the Molotov-Ribbentrop line and moved into the Baltics, Belarus and Ukraine [...] joined in the invasion by their allies Finland, Romania, Hungary, Italy, and Slovakia, and by a division of Spanish and a regiment of Croatian volunteers.”<sup>41</sup> The Socialist Soviet Republic of Lithuania was taken over within a few days, Kaunas only two days later. As the Soviet administration had fled immediately, the Nazi occupants appointed either themselves or their Lithuanian supporters to important positions – as for example members of the extreme right party of the nationalists<sup>42</sup>. Also, the LAF (Lithuanian Activist Front) was ready to collaborate with the Nazis, although the German administration forbade the organisation very soon.

In general, German soldiers of the Wehrmacht<sup>43</sup> – according to reports and documents of these days – did not have the impression of having invaded an “enemy country”<sup>44</sup>. Lithuanian nationalist and also German propaganda spread the image of the Jews as having collaborated

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<sup>38</sup> Bubnys, 2020, p. 391

<sup>39</sup> Bubnys, 2020, p. 393

<sup>40</sup> Dieckmann, 2011, p. 79

<sup>41</sup> Snyder, 2010, p. 165f

<sup>42</sup> See Dieckmann, 2001, p. 6

<sup>43</sup> In revisionist discourses the wording of “German soldiers” or “German occupation” is used in order to frame Lithuania exclusively as a victim of foreign forces. In order to prevent this, the terms Nazi occupation/soldiers or NS occupation/soldiers are used in this thesis

<sup>44</sup> Tauber, 2015, p. 17

with the Soviet rule – which led to pogroms, shootings and outbursts of anti-Semitism already within the first days of the German occupation. The enemy stereotype of these days (and later years) according to Joachim Tauber had nothing in common with the “emotionless, pseudo-scientific, racist and social-darwinist enmity”<sup>45</sup> which Hitler and the Nazis propagated. The Lithuanian anti-Semitism in June 1941 was based exclusively on the equation of Jews with communists<sup>46</sup>. Until the ghettos were established in August 1941 thousands of Jews had already been murdered. Bubnys describes the first half year of the national-socialist occupation as “the worst and the most tragic period in the history of the Lithuanian Jews”<sup>47</sup>. The systematic murder started in the early days of July 1941 under the order of Karl Jäger in the Seventh Fort of Kaunas. His *Einsatzkommando* was supported by the newly founded National Labour Protection Battalion and the German Gestapo. In Vilnius the German military administration was replaced by a civil commissar in early August, who intensified “political and racial discrimination, and terror against Jews”<sup>48</sup>. Here the Austrian Franz Murer, deputy of the territory commissioner, was responsible for “Jewish Affairs” – he became famous for his sadism and cruelty in- and outside the ghetto and was called “The Mem”, i.e. “the Hebrew letter M, for Murer and Malekhamoves, the Angel of Death”<sup>49</sup>.<sup>50</sup> This was the time when the massacre of Paneriai started:

*“They [Jews] were transported to prison in Lukiškės, and then to Paneriai where they were shot. The arrests and escort of prisoners were carried out by German Gestapo officers, Lithuanian security and police, defence units and members of special units. The mass killings of Jews at Paneriai were mostly carried out by the German security police and SD special units (Sonderkommando).”<sup>51</sup>*

Lithuania was to a certain extent a test field for Nazi Germany: As it turned out even a big Jewish community did not hinder others from turning against it. Besides the already mentioned enemy stereotype looting and plundering were important motives for persecution, as the

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<sup>45</sup> Tauber, 2015, p. 30

<sup>46</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Bubnys, 2020, p. 395

<sup>48</sup> Bubnys, 2020, p. 403

<sup>49</sup> Schoeps, 2008, p. 493

<sup>50</sup> Murer first returned back home after WWII and was later convicted by the Soviet Union for 5 years of labour camp. In 1963 he was in trial again in Graz, Austria, based on an investigation of Simon Wiesenthal, when he got acquitted. His story and trial became the basis of Christian Frosch’s film “Murer – Anatomy of a Trial”, published in 2018.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

possessions of Jews were given to Nazis or their supporters who applied for it<sup>52</sup>. As Karl Jäger declared Lithuania to be nearly “*judenfrei*” in December 1941 already, the country became the “first experimental ‘training area’ where the total extermination of Jews was realized successfully and cheaply”<sup>53</sup>. However, although Jews were by far the largest group killed by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators, it should not be forgotten that war prisoners, Poles, Roma and communists were killed as well in the mass killing sites of Lithuania.

Bubnys divides the extinction of Lithuanian Jews into different stages: The first one concerns the time period of June to mid-July 1941, dominated by “motives of political persecution”<sup>54</sup>. The second stage from the end of July 1941 to November 1941 is described as “the period of racist genocide”<sup>55</sup>, when most of the mass killings were perpetrated and the establishment of ghettos started. The time from December 1941 to March 1943 is described as a time of “relative stabilization”, when “most of the working-age men and women were employed in ghetto workshops, factories, enterprises and special-purpose Jewish labour camps”.<sup>56</sup> The last period began in April 1943 and was characterised by the liquidation of ghettos and labour camps all over Lithuania. Despite having been told that they would be accommodated in the ghettos of Kaunas or Vilnius, Jews from all over the country were brought to Paneriai and shot in the forest<sup>57</sup>. Shootings, mass murders (even the detonation of special places in the ghettos), liquidations of ghettos and manhunts in various towns and cities occurred in all of Lithuania during this last phase. Yitzhak Arad also mentions growing activities and clashes of the Polish *Armija Krajowa* (AK) and Soviet Partisans in the forests of Lithuania in that period.<sup>58</sup> However, the AK did not accept Jews in their rows, because they were seen as “Soviet”; as a result Jews who were able to flee Vilnius could not join the AK but had to build up their own forces and hide from the AK at the same time. According to Bubnys, this period lasted until July 1944.

### 3.3.1 Excursus: Exemplary sources – the *Jäger-Bericht* and the Ponary Diary

The name of Karl Jäger needs to be mentioned in this context not only because of his position as commander of the *Einsatzkommando 3a* and as the man responsible for the Ninth Fort

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<sup>52</sup> Tauber, 2015, p. 328

<sup>53</sup> Knab, 2004, p. 167 (translated by M.G., original quotation in German: “Somit wurde Litauen wie auch Lettland und Estland zum ersten experimentellen „Übungsplatz“, wo die totale Judenvernichtung erfolgreich und billig verwirklicht werden konnte.“

<sup>54</sup> Bubnys, 2020, p. 405

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Bubnys, 2020, p. 406

<sup>57</sup> Bubnys, 2020, p. 409ff

<sup>58</sup> Arad, 2009, p. 311 f



massacre in Kaunas in November 1941 (and several other massacres), but also as the author of the famous *Jäger-Bericht*. Jäger's report does not only list and document shootings and mass killings in Lithuania, it also provides insights into the psychology of the mass murder of the Baltic Jewry. After the war, Jäger returned to Germany and was charged with murder only in the late 1950s. He committed suicide in June 1959 while in imprisonment.

In 2011 the German historian Wolfram Wette published Jäger's biography "*Karl Jäger: Mörder der litauischen Juden*", asking himself how a musician as Jäger could become a mass murderer<sup>59</sup>. In the biography Wette writes not only about Jäger himself but also about his victims to provide an insight into the daily challenges Jews in Lithuania had to face briefly before the genocide. He worked carefully through the *Jäger-Bericht*, comparing numbers and occurrences with other sources in an attempt to differentiate between those murder activities carried out on the order of Nazi officials and those perpetrated by Lithuanian collaborators themselves. According to Jäger, the *Einsatzkommando* killed 137 000 Jews before the end of 1941. Nevertheless, he felt unsatisfied, because if his superior would not have put a stop to his activities, all Lithuanian Jews would have been dead by the end of 1941<sup>60</sup>. As it turned out, "*Arbeitsjuden*" were still needed to keep the German war industry running.

Another important source – with an impressive history on its own – is the Ponary Diary, a diary written by the Polish journalist Karzimierz Sakowicz<sup>61</sup> who lived in the vicinity of the mass killing site of Paneriai. From 11 July 1941 until 6 November 1943 Sakowicz described in detail what he witnessed in the forest: the sound of the shootings and even the approximate number of shots, the crying of families, the escape attempts of those who worked in the pits. He buried the pieces of paper in the ground in front of his house in the ground and his neighbours handed them over to the Jewish Museum, as Sakowicz himself was killed in 1944. The documents were found by Rachel Margolis after Lithuania had gained independence in 1991, herself a Jewish partisan, the only Holocaust survivor of her family and later the head of the Jewish State Museum. The diary was published first in its original language, Polish, then in German and in 2005 with an introductory note by Yitzhak Arad in English. Both Margolis and Arad were severely defamed by Lithuanian nationalist groups, Arad – a Holocaust survivor himself – was even charged with "suspicion of crimes against humanity such as murder of civilians, prisoners

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<sup>59</sup> Wette, 2011

<sup>60</sup> Wette, 2011, p. 21

<sup>61</sup> Sakowicz, 2005

of war, murders of Lithuanian partisans which were allegedly committed during the service of the said person in the Soviet NKVD”<sup>62</sup> by the Lithuanian state in 2007.

These two sources show how much time and persistence were needed in order to make the truth known, and how heated the entire debate continues to be even today. Wette describes his own experience as being seen as a „*Nestbeschmutzer*“, as worse than being the Nazi responsible for so many deaths. For Lithuania, Christoph Dieckmann summarises the difficult circumstances regarding historiography as follows:

*“Zu allererst hat es mit den langen Jahren Besatzung in Litauen zu tun, mit der brutalen und exzessiven Gewalt, die die deutsche, aber auch die zweimalige sowjetische Besatzung – 1940/41 und 1944 bis 1991 – charakterisierte. Es leuchtet unmittelbar ein, dass die auf den verschiedenen Seiten beteiligten Generationen ihr Selbst- und Weltbild nur schwer durch gegenläufige Darstellungen korrigieren lassen. Zu massiv waren die schmerzhaften Erfahrungen, die vor allem die Opfer der Gewaltherrschaft machen mussten, und das waren im Verlauf dieser Jahre sehr viele. Das schiere Ausmaß der Gewalt ist kaum vorstellbar.”*<sup>63</sup>

### 3.3.2 Aktion 1005 and the end of WWII

Already at the beginning of the year 1942, the German Paul Blobel was assigned to the task of “finding all mass graves in the east, marking them, to remove the corpses within them and beyond that obliterating all traces which could lead to conclusions about the crimes at the scene.”<sup>64</sup> The issue concerning the immense number of corpses was not only a question of removing traces but also a hygienic problem for the area surrounding the killing sites. Blobel was already involved in the massacre of Babyn Jar in Ukraine in 1941 and well-known within the Nazi hierarchy. Andrej Andrick outlines a very detailed picture of the operation starting from the first challenges local Nazi officials were facing already in 1941, leading on to the

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<sup>62</sup> Finkel, 2010, p. 64

<sup>63</sup> Dieckmann, 2001, p. 4: English translation by M.G.: “First of all, it is connected to the long years of occupation in Lithuania, to the brutal and excessive violence which characterized the German but also the twofold Soviet occupation – 1940/41 and 1944-1991. It stands to reason that generations which were involved on opposing sides only reluctantly allow their self-image as well as the one of their world to be altered by opposing accounts. The painful experiences of the victims of tyranny were too massive – and through the years too many. The sheer scale of violence hardly imaginable.”

<sup>64</sup> Andrick, 2018, p. 73, quoted from 141 JS 204/60 of the Staatsanwaltschaft Hamburg, Vol. 25, Statement of Julius Bauer on 4 July, 1963, English translation by M.G., German original quotation: “[...]alle Massengräber im Osten ausfindig zu machen, markieren, die darin befindlichen Leichen beseitigen und darüber hinaus alle Spuren, die Rückschlüsse über die Verbrechen am Tatort zuließen, restlos zu verwischen“

assignment of Blobel and the implementation of regional “1005 troops” until the carrying out of the action – which happened almost everywhere with the help of the forced labour of Jewish prisoners who were subsequently murdered. This was also the case in Paneriai:

*“In September 1943, a Sonderkommando 1005 was created in Vilna, composed of local SD-men, German policemen, and 80 Jewish prisoners [...]. They were housed in a deep pit (6-8 m) in Ponary and chained by their feet. Since they guessed what fate awaited them, they decided to escape. For three months they dug a tunnel with their hands and with spoons and finally on 15 April 1944 40 of them escaped. Fifteen succeeded in staying alive, and 11 of them joined the Soviet partisans in the Runiki forest. [...] Altogether 56 000-68 000 bodies were burned in Ponary.”<sup>65</sup>*

When the Red Army took over Vilnius in July 1944, the once flourishing Lithuanian Jewry had de facto been extinguished. Although the number of victims varies a lot, it is usually around 200 000 people (without the Lithuanian victims of other ethnicities or prisoners of war in general). Yitzhak Arad estimates around 196 000 – 200 000 Jewish victims and 9 000 to 10 000 survivors<sup>66</sup>. These numbers seem realistic taking into account that Jäger wrote of 137 000 Jews he had killed already before the end of 1941. In Paneriai itself, according to Spector, 56 000 to 68 000 corpses were burnt, whereas Andrick speaks of about 80 000 to 90 000 people who were killed and their bodies destroyed by fire.<sup>67</sup> Very few Lithuanian Jews survived, in most cases because they had been hidden by Lithuanians (the number of those was very small) or because they had joined the partisans in time. Others – also a tiny number of people – were lucky to survive the concentration camps<sup>68</sup>. Vilnius, once a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city, was nearly empty – as the war had hit the city population harder than other areas in the country by far. Davoliūtė describes the place as “almost completely depopulated of its Jewish and Polish population”, whereas “the new Lithuanian urban elites and the cultural intelligentsia were formed almost from scratch”<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Spector, 1990, p. 167

<sup>66</sup> Arad, 2009, p. 525

<sup>67</sup> Andrick, 2018, p. 733

<sup>68</sup> See Arad, p. 47

<sup>69</sup> Davoliūtė, 2013, p. 8

### 3.4 The second Soviet occupation of Lithuania

After the Red Army had occupied Vilnius in July 1944, the Soviets immediately started with the persecution of Nazi collaborators – mainly Lithuanians and Poles. The clashes between Soviet partisans and the Polish *Armija Krajowa* during the war were not yet forgotten: Whereas Soviet partisans were fighting against the Germans, one of the central aims of the *Armija Krajowa* was to re-establish the independent Polish state. Ethnic cleansings – not mass killings but displacement schemes and expulsion measures – took place in almost all Eastern European countries, and for Poles it meant that they had to leave all territories not belonging to the newly formed Poland. Although being de facto one of the victors of the war, the country lost “almost half (fortyseven percent) of its prewar territory to the Soviet Union”<sup>70</sup>. Stalin preferred “ethnic homogeneity” for the lands between the Soviet Union and the west, which became an “international consensus of victors and victims” of the war<sup>71</sup>. These policies – the persecution and the idea of favouring one homogenetic titular nation – affected the Soviet Lithuanian republic as well: On the one hand Stalin deported 49 331 Lithuanians in Operation Spring in May 1948, a further 31 917 people were deported in Operation Priboi (the following March)<sup>72</sup>. On the other hand, Poles too had to leave their homes in Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus for the new Polish state. This de-Polonisation of Lithuania had far reaching consequences for the capital as well. “Lithuanians were a plurality in Vilnius for the first time in modern history”<sup>73</sup>, as Timothy Snyder points out.

The re-Sovietisation of Lithuania again happened quite quickly – there was no significant political or intellectual elite to oppose it or to lead a fundamental and well organised resistance against it: Persecution and deportation affected not only ethnic Lithuanians but also Jews and war veterans who were accused of collaboration with the Germans: “the number of Soviet citizens in the camps and special settlements increased every year from 1945 until Stalin’s death”<sup>74</sup>. One Lithuanian story which is known from that period are the memories of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė, a doctor who was deported to the Altai mountains during the first Soviet occupation in 1941 with her family. She secretly returned to Kaunas in 1949 but was caught by the KGB in 1950 and deported once again to Omsk in Siberia. Her memories were first published in parts in the United States in 1974 and later in a dissident journal thanks to Andrej

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<sup>70</sup> Snyder, 2010, p. 326

<sup>71</sup> See Snyder, 2010, p. 324

<sup>72</sup> See Snyder, 2010, p. 329

<sup>73</sup> Snyder, 2003, p. 92

<sup>74</sup> Snyder, 2010, p. 328

Sakharov. In 1997 her notes were finally published in Lithuanian, ten years after Grinkevičiūtė's death.

For the Jewish survivors the time until Stalin's death was fraught with difficulties: Although they had good relationships with Soviet authorities immediately after the war, the situation changed in 1948 because of the growing anti-Semitism from the Soviet side. Whereas immediately after the war Jews had even returned to Lithuania from the countries they had been able to flee to before the war and the Holocaust, after 1948 anti-Jewish policies were implemented: Jewish schools and museums were closed, organisations re-founded by survivors were banned and the new Paneriai memorial – remembering the victims of fascism – did not even mention Jews as the largest group of victims of the Nazis<sup>75</sup>. Inter-ethnic relations turned out to be difficult to be restored, as “the image of a Lithuanian as a collaborator and Jew killer took root among the Jews after the Holocaust, while the Lithuanians linked the return of the Jews with the consolidation of the abhorred Soviet rule”<sup>76</sup>. The Jewish Antifascist Committee which had supported the Soviet warfare financially was dissolved by Stalin in 1948, its members were prosecuted and partly killed.

The partisan war against the Soviets was joined not only by nationalists and former Nazi supporters but also others: The centre of the anti-Soviet resistance moved to the countryside as cities like Vilnius and Kaunas were destroyed – though not to the same extent as Warsaw or Minsk. The most violent clashes between Soviet officials and Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance groups seem to have happened in 1945, when the Lithuanian Liberation Army (LLA) and the Supreme Committee for the liberation of Lithuania were operating immediately following the Soviet reoccupation. Most of their members were arrested already in December 1944 already, in the province of Marijampole in October 1945 or in Vilnius in March 1946<sup>77</sup>. However, the fascist influence within the partisan movement was negligible as Statiev points out:

*“Fascists were stronger in Lithuania than in other Baltic states in the interwar period, but they had no support in the countryside. [...] The top leaders of Iron Wolf [i.e. a fascist, paramilitary group, mainly active in the 30s] were arrested or killed in the spring of 1946,*

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<sup>75</sup> Barnai, 2020, p. 433f

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Statiev, 2010, p. 112

*and although the group operated until the end of the resistance, its fascist aspects declined, and it eventually became a unit much like the others.”<sup>78</sup>*

It is hard to say, whether those groups were anti-Semitic owing to the fact that nearly all Jews were killed, especially in the countryside. After all, the turning point in the battle against the anti-Soviet resistance became not only mass deportations but also the massive collectivisation efforts in 1949, “which stood at just 4% at the beginning of 1949, [but] went up to 60% by the end of the year”<sup>79</sup>. Nevertheless, as in many other guerrilla wars, in the anti-Soviet resistance movement the largest share of victims is taken up by civilians. According to Statiev and his research, “deaths of police and soldiers made up only 8 percent of the total in Lithuania”.<sup>80</sup> In order to pacify and stabilise the western borderlands, land reforms were implemented which gained some support also from the peasant population as well. However, the city of Vilnius underwent a rapid urbanisation and modernisation, so that it became more attractive for the youth in the countryside to move to the bigger towns or cities instead of joining the partisan forces in the forests<sup>81</sup>.

### 3.5 The Khrushchev Thaw in the LSSR

After Stalin’s death in 1953 and following the conflict about his succession, the Khrushchev era brought a few moments of relief to Lithuania after the years of violence, genocide, repression and deportation. This was not the case for all nationalities in the Soviet Union, but for the Baltics ones it was. Khrushchev as first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union pushed for extensive reforms, with crucial influences on the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic: Amongst these was the possibility of former deportees being able to return to Lithuania as between 1945 and 1953 “about 120 000 inhabitants of Soviet Lithuania, or 5 percent of the republic’s population, were deported”<sup>82</sup>. This meant not only the return of a high number of traumatised people, but also of a small number of the former Lithuanian intelligentsia. Snyder underlines, that an agreement between Soviet authorities and Lithuanians included the Baltic nation to be part of the Soviet Union and the intelligentsia as party members “in exchange for some freedom to preserve Lithuanian culture”<sup>83</sup>. This went hand in hand with the already mentioned de-Polonisation on one side and with a growing self-confidence of the

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<sup>78</sup> Statiev, 2010, p. 98

<sup>79</sup> Davoliūtė, 2016, p. 53

<sup>80</sup> Statiev, 2010, p. 132

<sup>81</sup> Davoliūtė, 2016, p. 53f

<sup>82</sup> Snyder, 2003, p. 95

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Lithuanian nation on the other side: Not only regarding Lithuanian language, which was being standardised, but also establishment of research institutions like Vilnius university (reopened under Stalinist rule in 1944 already) as important points of cultural orientation<sup>84</sup>, although they were far from being autonomous. However, the uprising in Hungary in 1956 had an influence on students all over the Baltics: In Estonia and Lithuania, especially in Kaunas and Vilnius, they took to the streets demonstrating and singing patriotic songs at the beginning of November:

*“The mass eruptions in Lithuania overshadowed everything else. In well-prepared demonstrations, thousands of students from various institutions in Vilnius showed up at the old Rasos historical cemetery; the KGB estimated that some 30-40 000 people gathered at the Kaunas cemetery on the night of 2 November. The All Souls’ Day tradition of lighting candles quickly turned into mass political demonstrations.”*<sup>85</sup>

Although, Khrushchev carried out a massive campaign against religious institutions and religiosity in general, the Catholic church was able to reach and to influence the Lithuanian society very soon after the beginning of the de-Stalinisation. Stanley Vardis underlined already in the late 70s that this influence was based on the activities of the Soviet Samizdat which included religious publications. This would prove to be a crucial difference between Catholic Lithuania and Protestant Estonia and Latvia, which would also set the country apart as the first nation where uprisings, protests and religious resistance against the Soviet rule gained the necessary strength and support all over society to – finally – achieve independence.

Further relief efforts of the Khrushchev Thaw for the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic was also the ending of deportation and displacement measures in general as a common form of punishment. The Samizdat, the secret underground press, started flourishing all over the Soviet Union and enabled important Lithuanian works to be published at least in secret. Nevertheless, Lithuania was far from being independent: The long-time ruler of Lithuania of that time, Antanas Sniečkus, was not only communist but also Stalinist, and, therefore, became infamous for not allowing certain deportees to return to Lithuania. However, as Theodore Weeks points out that although rulers like Sniečkus were “certainly communist believers (and loyal Stalinists), they were also Lithuanians”<sup>86</sup>:

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Weiner, 2013, p. 332

<sup>86</sup> Weeks, 2008, p. 518

*“[...] at the same time, they also did not shy away from using Lithuanian national symbols – lieux de mémoire – giving them, one might say, a rosy hue. They also attempted to re-define ‘Lithuanian’ by stressing the secular, cultural and linguistic aspects and downplaying the religious.”<sup>87</sup>*

### 3.6 Stagnation – the Brezhnev era

Sniečkus remained in power even after the power shift in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1964 from Khrushchev to Leonid Brezhnev. The so-called period of “stagnation” was, basically, marked by economic and cultural slowing and a revival of totalitarianism after liberalisations and reforms had shaped the previous years.

During the Brezhnev era it became obvious that a new method of dealing with religious institutions was needed, especially regarding the Catholic church, which was obviously not losing influence – on the contrary: “A large number of Lithuanians [...] saw religious involvement as a way of expressing and maintaining their commitment to the nation.”<sup>88</sup> Anderson also describes a developing “dissent movement”, coming to fore in a more organised way in the late 1960s<sup>89</sup>. Samizdat publications reported on the repression of the Catholic church and its priests and defenders, as authors and priests were confronted with massive oppressive efforts and far-reaching defamation campaigns. Religious activities in the Soviet zone of influence gained a new momentum in 1978 with the election of Pope John Paul II. Re-focussing efforts by the Soviet authorities on educational and ideological work bears a strong connection to the Catholic influence within the Soviet Union and its satellite states (e.g. Poland). Nevertheless, “continuing economic difficulties in the USSR” were identified as a social factor regarding why people chose to identify themselves as strongly with their religion<sup>90</sup>.

Although the measures taken against dissenting intellectuals varied from labour camps to forced hospitalisation in psychiatric institutions, a new generation of the intelligentsia was steadily growing during the years of stagnation: The crackdown on the protests during the Prague spring served to politicise writers and scientists – many of whom had not experienced the most violent years of Stalin’s rule. They organised themselves in secret societies and published Samizdat periodicals, which openly discussed human rights abuses of the Soviet system. This did not only happen in urban centres of the Soviet Union like Moscow, but also in Lithuania and other

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Anderson, 1994, p. 91

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Anderson, 1994, p. 70



republics like Ukraine and Georgia<sup>91</sup>. During the 1970s, human rights organisations with international acknowledgement were founded mainly in Russia – e.g. the Human Rights Committee, which was later accepted by the International League of Human Rights, and the Soviet section of Amnesty International as well as the Moscow Helsinki Group, which started their activities in these very years<sup>92</sup>. The Lithuanian Helsinki Committee was founded in 1976 as well.

Regarding agriculture Brezhnev's rule brought massive changes for Lithuanian farmers: Firstly, drainage projects were started in order to drain the wet soil drained thereby render it more fertile. This went hand in hand with the removal of individual settlements to villages – which allowed about 58 500 ha to be reintegrated into collective and state farms<sup>93</sup>. According to Mincyte, this way up to 150 000 settlements were eradicated all over Lithuania, with farmers losing their homes and having to move to another village – which was an massive interference with daily structure of said farmers and their families<sup>94</sup>. These changes influenced the Lithuanian landscape to a great extent and are still visible to this day, as trees were left where individual settlements had been<sup>95</sup>. Another change implemented by Brezhnev was the integration of semi-private subsidiary farms into the Soviet agricultural system – collective and subsidiary farms were not seen as contradictory anymore (as it had still been the case under Stalin and Khrushchev), but as an “integral part of the ‘organic whole’”<sup>96</sup>. Mincyte lists a broad variety of reasons how the idea of the highly productive subsidiary farm was implemented into the Soviet ideological complex. According to her, “the idea of subsidiary farms served multiple social and educational roles and [...] enabled the efficient use of natural and labour resources [...]”<sup>97</sup>.

The resettlement of farmers and their families as a consequence of the so called “amelioration” (i.e. drainage of the Lithuanian soil) is a painful memory for Lithuanians even today:

*“In local communities, Amelioration continues to occupy an important place in the collective memory of the villages. Many farmers I met had lost their homes to*

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<sup>91</sup> Shlapentokh 1990, p. 192

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> See Mincyte, 2006, p. 105

<sup>94</sup> Mincyte, 2006, p. 106

<sup>95</sup> See ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Mincyte, 2006, p. 108

<sup>97</sup> Mincyte, 2006, p. 110

*Amelioration. Most of them observed their homes destroyed by the Amelioration machines. Some resisted. A woman in her late sixties told about their neighbour's family who refused to leave the house and the Amelioration team started demolishing the house with him and his family in it. Only after the workers took the whole corner of the house and the ceiling started falling in that the family left the home. Even today the farmers can tell exactly who lived where.*"<sup>98</sup>

However, owing to the measures of amelioration connected with the strengthening of subsidiary farms "farmers emerged as one of the richest groups in Lithuania"<sup>99</sup>, which was basically a result of two incomes – one stemming from the collective farm they worked on and one from the subsidiary farm.

Although these reforms effectively improved the situation of Lithuanian farmers, the overall economic conditions in the Soviet Union and in the LSSR deteriorated over the years of Brezhnev's rule. As the Soviet West had always been the space "where new ideas of Sovietness developed, shaped by compromises between local inhabitants and state and Party institutions", Brezhnev's turn towards repression and totalitarianism made it impossible for younger generations to find anything attractive in joining the mentioned institutions. William Risch contrasts the Khrushchev Thaw with the Brezhnev era:

*"During Khrushchev's Thaw, new historical narratives allowed for official acceptance of people and events connected with the bourgeois nationalist past, while the Thaw's end seriously damaged some of these narratives, especially those involving victims of Stalinism. Younger generations attracted to some of Soviet socialism's ideals in the 1950s and 1960s lost faith in those ideals during Brezhnev's stagnation. The fact that Party leaders had the ultimate say over what constituted acceptable historical memory made even visits to cemeteries potential acts of political resistance."*<sup>100</sup>

### 3.7 Glasnost' and Perestrojka: Gorbachev and the collapse of the Soviet Union

After the short interregnums of Andropov and Chernenko, Mikhail Gorbachev became Secretary General of the CPSU in 1985. He began his tenure not only with many reforms and campaigns, but also with the rehabilitation of activists detained in labour camps. In Lithuania

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<sup>98</sup> Mincyte, 2006, p. 106

<sup>99</sup> Mincyte, 2006, p. 111

<sup>100</sup> Risch, 2014, p. 70

the dissident movement was not only supported by Russian activists but also by the growing ecological movement and – maybe as its strongest backers – religious dissidents and members of the clergy. Although at the beginning no change to the Brezhnev doctrine seemed to be in sight, in 1987 Gorbachev allowed the Orthodox Easter liturgy to be broadcasted on national TV in Russia<sup>101</sup>. However, for Lithuania the release of clerical activists in 1988 had more consequences, as the Catholic church increasingly involved itself in the country's affairs based also on the ambitions of the Polish Pope. Furthermore, the free press made it possible for religious groups to speak out<sup>102</sup> and to gain more and more support. Liberalisation efforts affected the Jewish community in Lithuania as well: After the disappearance of Jewish culture in the Soviet era – as Donskis indicates<sup>103</sup> – the Lithuanian Culture Foundation was established in 1987, the Jewish State Museum was reopened and even old Jewish street names in Vilnius were reinstated<sup>104</sup>.

With the liberalisation of the press another national narrative started gaining importance: Lithuanian media were now able to “discuss the illegal incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 and its secret protocols”<sup>105</sup>. In June 1988 the movement *Sajūdis* was officially founded in Vilnius, one year after Ringaudas Songaila became head of the Communist Party of Lithuania. In his memoirs Gorbachev described Songaila as a “man of even temper and integrity, who had spent a lifetime in agrarian work”, but at the same time as “not equipped to cope with such a complex political situation”<sup>106</sup>. Step by step it became increasingly clear that many members of *Sajūdis* were at the same time party members. Furthermore, many communist officials in Lithuania were in favour of decentralisation and more autonomy for the country. However, *Sajūdis* had to outline its own position in contrast with other groups, like the Lithuanian Freedom League, which demanded more rights for the Catholic church and organised mass rallies in Vilnius which – in many cases – ended in violent clashes with Soviet officials (e.g. in September 1988): “A September demonstration protesting the pact's [i.e. the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact's] secret protocols was broken up by special police forces”<sup>107</sup>. As a reaction to the public outcry and ongoing protests Songaila was succeeded by Algirdas Brazauskas.

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<sup>101</sup> See Anderson, 1994, p. 139

<sup>102</sup> See Anderson, 1994, p. 149

<sup>103</sup> Donskis, 2006, p. 21

<sup>104</sup> Sirutavičius, 2020, p. 456f

<sup>105</sup> Lenn, 2000, p. 38

<sup>106</sup> Gorbachev, 1997, p. 571

<sup>107</sup> Brill Olcott, 1990, p. 33f

Vytautas Landsbergis, a professor of music and leader of *Sajūdis* since its official founding in 1988, addressed the Congress of the Lithuanian Jewish Cultural Association (which represented the entire Jewish community of Lithuania at that time) with an exceptional writing in early March 1989:

*“The Sajūdis address recognised the fact of the participation by Lithuanians in massacres of Jews and regretted it. It went on to say: ‘The Lithuanian nation, too, lost large numbers of its sons and daughters, and the victims of the anti-Lithuanian genocide also rest in unknown graves, scattered from the undergrowth in Lithuania to islands in the Arctic Ocean’.”*<sup>108</sup>

In contrast with other forces within the heterogeneous dissident movement *Sajūdis* set out on a path of negotiation with diverse agents which were the Jewish community, aiming for reconciliation, with the communist officials in the country and even with the Soviets in Moscow. Although the already mentioned declaration of *Sajūdis* can be seen as an important conciliatory step in the direction of the Jewish community, the movement was – of course – based on an ethno-nationalist agenda, as Ulfelder analyses it: “The republic’s territory is seen as the domain of Lithuanians, and political reform is linked to the self-determination of Lithuanian people, understood primarily in ethnic terms.”<sup>109</sup>

The close cooperation between the party and *Sajūdis* led to surprising outcomes, which benefitted Lithuanian independence. For example, over the summer of 1989 *Sajūdis* “won Gorbachev’s endorsement of the introduction of economic self-sufficiency”<sup>110</sup>, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was denounced by the Congress of People’s Deputies<sup>111</sup>, where *Sajūdis* had achieved all four of the Lithuanian seats. In August 1989, as an act of defiance against the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, about 2 million people formed a human chain beginning in Vilnius on the highway to Riga and then to Tallinn. The so called “Baltic Way” became a symbol of the peaceful resistance against the Soviet Union in the Baltic States. In February 1990 the first free elections for the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR took place, and *Sajūdis* decided to run against the Communist party in spite of their good cooperation: “both *Sajūdis* and the

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<sup>108</sup> Sirutavičius, 2020, p. 460

<sup>109</sup> Ulfelder, 2004, p. 30

<sup>110</sup> Senn, 1990, p. 252

<sup>111</sup> Senn, 1990, p. 257

Lithuanian Communist Party were in favour of more political and economic sovereignty for Lithuania”.<sup>112</sup> However, *Sąjūdis* won the absolute majority with 91 out of 135 seats and the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR declared the independence of Lithuania on 11 March<sup>113</sup> 1990. Vytautas Landsbergis was elected as its President of the new sovereign state. The answer of the Soviet Union came swiftly in form of a blockade of the supply of raw material, which, however, had no effect on the Lithuanian approach: “For a short period of time, many Lithuanians were so relieved to have won back their desired independence that they were prepared to suffer shortages in their determination to rid themselves once and for all of the USSR.”<sup>114</sup> In January 1991, a last attempt of Soviet Forces was started to keep Lithuania within the Soviet Union: On 10 January Gorbachev demanded of Landsbergis the acceptance the Soviet constitution. Two days later during a putsch against the Lithuanian administration of Landsbergis 14 civilians were killed in Vilnius, with around 800 having been injured by Soviet tanks and weapons. Gorbachev writes in his memoirs:

*“My worst apprehensions about the outcome of the violence in Lithuania were very soon confirmed. It was not only that the effort to avert the secession of Lithuania as well as that of the other Baltic republics from the Union failed after the bloodshed of 13 January. With the exception of some Russian-speaking people in the Baltics, public opinion began to change throughout the Union. People asked themselves: ‘Is it really worthwhile to keep the Balts by force and shed blood? If they really are so anxious to become independent, for God’s sake, let them go.’”*<sup>115</sup>

After the so-called January Killings in Vilnius, the Icelandic government was the first to recognise Lithuanian independence – which gave a street in the centre of Vilnius its name: *Islandijos gatvė*. On 9<sup>th</sup> February 1991, Lithuania held a referendum in which more than 90 percent of the voters chose independence.

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<sup>112</sup> Ramonaitė, 2006, p. 69

<sup>113</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> March became increasingly famous all over Europe because of the massive nationalist and even neo-Nazi demonstrations held in Vilnius on that day. In 2008 it was described as follows: “On 11 March 2008, as part of the celebrations of the declaration to restore independence, several hundred right-wing extremists, including neo-Nazi skinheads, paraded in central Vilnius, shouting racist and anti-Semitic slogans. The government’s response was tepid: the police took no action and the president’s office waited ten days before denouncing the marchers.” (Sužiedėlis/Liekis, 2013, p. 339)

<sup>114</sup> Ashbourne, 1999, p. 26

<sup>115</sup> Gorbachev, 1997, p. 579

Interestingly, all three Baltic countries implemented independence as a successor of their inter-war states. In the case of Lithuania, this was not uncontroversial, as Antanas Smetona's regime was considered as authoritarian in- and outside Lithuania. Nevertheless, the inter-war constitution was re-instated until the new constitution was approved by the referendum in 1991. However, unlike the other Baltic states, Lithuania offered citizenship to everyone living in its territory – no matter the ethnicity they belonged to or their citizenship status in pre-Soviet days.<sup>116</sup> This was presumably because “ethnic problems have played only a limited role in Lithuania – similar to the Western CIS countries”.<sup>117</sup> In Lithuania this fact was not a matter of great attention, because ethnic groups besides Lithuanians were much fewer and tinier than in Estonia or in Latvia. For the Jewish community in Lithuania Gorbachev's “policy of liberalisation created favourable conditions for the rebirth of the public and cultural life of Lithuanian Jews”<sup>118</sup>.

### 3.8 Independent Lithuania

The process of democratisation in Lithuania involved several measures taken in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the first was the establishment of a multi-party-system, which proceeded peacefully. The Lithuanian situation in this regard was special, which Janušauskienė traces back to a few factors: First of all, there was the “pro-reform stance of the Communist Party of Lithuania” described above. Furthermore, “the anti-communist underground and the dissident tradition, a relatively small Russian population, Catholicism and the individualistic value system of the people, as well as a rather large proportion of university graduates within society [...]”<sup>119</sup> were other factors which benefitted the peaceful transformation. Nevertheless, the first year of independence, 1992, was marked by two major defeats for *Sąjūdis*: “first, a constitutional referendum in favor of a presidential constitution failed because of low participation in the spring of 1992. Secondly, in the parliamentary elections in October, *Sąjūdis* lost unexpectedly heavily to the ex-Communist Party, now called the Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party (LDDP) under Brazauskas.”<sup>120</sup> This can be explained partly with the bad economic situation which was deteriorating rapidly – in numbers: by a devastating 39 percent of GDP<sup>121</sup>. The social costs often mentioned in combination with the rapid privatisation processes in Lithuania hit the country very hard in combination with

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<sup>116</sup> See Rindzevičiūtė, 2012, p. 569

<sup>117</sup> Fritz, 2007, p. 244

<sup>118</sup> Sirutavičius, 2020, p. 469

<sup>119</sup> Janušauskienė, 2011, p. 25

<sup>120</sup> Fritz, 2007, p. 245

<sup>121</sup> Vilkas, 1995, p. 168

criminality and corruption in privatisation. Nevertheless, in 1993 the national currency litas was introduced and helped to slow down the inflation “to 1-6% monthly”<sup>122</sup>. On the political level the ongoing economic transformation led to the instability of multiple Lithuanian governments – to a greater extent than even in other CEE countries at that time: Within the first decade after the first free elections in Lithuania, ten governments have been in charge in Lithuania<sup>123</sup>. Generally speaking, democratisation in Lithuania can also be described as decentralisation as Rindzevičiūtė explains by way of the example of cultural policies:

*„In the early 1990s the democratisation of Lithuanian state cultural policy meant first and foremost, decentralisation. [...] Passed in 1990, the regulations of the Culture Congress stated that ‘in order to democratise Lithuania’s cultural policy state dictatorship is rejected’ and the highest authority was vested in ‘parliamentary institutions’, democratic elections and ‘decentralised cultural life’.”<sup>124</sup>*

Furthermore, Kneuer mentions three obstacles in achieving consolidation, pertaining to all three Baltic countries during that period: The already mentioned instability of governments, the question of national identity (which was solved in a much more inclusive way in Lithuania than in Estonia or Latvia) and, finally, the “incorporate-clientelistic mode of inclusion”, which according to Kneuer hindered the development of a horizontal political organisation and encouraged clientelistic networks maintained by oligarchs<sup>125</sup>.

### 3.8.1 Lithuania and the European Union

In 1999 the European Union began negotiations with Lithuania, aiming for the nation to become a member of the EU. One of the preconditions for joining the European Union was the establishment of a historical commission in order to investigate and to evaluate the Nazi and Soviet occupation of the Lithuanian territory, an effort which shall be discussed in the following excursus. In 2008 the world economic crisis hit the Baltics harder than other countries in the European Union, which according to Segert shows a special dependency of the Baltics and

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<sup>122</sup> Vilkas, 1995, p. 170

<sup>123</sup> Kneuer, 2012, p. 86

<sup>124</sup> Rindzevičiūtė, 2012, p. 566

<sup>125</sup> See Kneuer, 2012, p. 86: Original German quotation: “So ist die Instabilität der Regierungen selbst im osteuropäischen Vergleich hoch, was auch mit den ebenfalls vergleichsweise instabilen Parteiensystemen zusammenhängt. Des Weiteren ist die Frage nationale Identität weiterhin prekär und die Frage der Integration der Minderheiten in Estland und dLettland ungelöst. Und schließlich erschwerte auf der gesellschaftlichen Ebene ein ‘incorporative-clientelistic mode of inclusion’ einerseits das Entstehen zivilgesellschaftlicher und horizontaler Formen politischer Organisation und förderte andererseits klientelistische Netzwerke, die vor allem von den Oligarchen gepflegt werden.”

some countries in south-eastern Europe on the global economic situation<sup>126</sup>. The volatility within the party system – which is typical for countries in transition in Eastern Europe – is remarkable in Lithuania as well and corresponds with Olteanu’s description of parties in post-transformative societies in Eastern Europe: The aggregation of interests is not seen as important or relevant at all, neither is a growing number of members or a way of communicating political demands of the grass root members to exponents or other intermediate institutions. Olteanu also describes a “desire for serious parties as they were maybe envisioned in 1989”<sup>127</sup>. Another contrast to Western European parties is the strong influence of parties or party exponents on mass media in exchange for public resources<sup>128</sup>.

Although some younger members of the European Union – such as Hungary and Poland – have lost their status as model students because of fundamental interferences with liberal, democratic rights, this is not the case for the Baltics, where democratic values are not systematically under threat. In 2018 the Bertelsmann Transformation Index in regard to Lithuania underlined:

*“important advancements in the openness of its courts, combatting domestic violence and violence against children [...], combatting corruption [...], improving attitudes toward the LGBT community and finally the first real, grassroots reconciliation efforts at addressing the legacy of the Holocaust in Lithuania.”*<sup>129</sup>

Within the BTI the overall status of Lithuania on the 1-10 scale is at 9.24 and its position out of 129 selected countries ranks at place 4. One aspect, however, that poses a serious challenge for the country is the negative demographic development owing to emigration, low life expectancy and high morbidity rates<sup>130</sup>.

### 3.8.2 Lustration, (attempts at) reconciliation and transitional justice in post-Soviet Lithuania

Just as Estonia and Latvia did, Lithuania too tried to implement lustration legislation as soon as possible. The process, however, was slowed down as a result of the resumption of power by the former communists – but not shut down completely. To explore in detail all legislative measures

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<sup>126</sup> Segert, 2013, p. 209

<sup>127</sup> Olteanu, 2017, p. 223ff

<sup>128</sup> Olteanu, 2017, p. 224

<sup>129</sup> BTI, 2018, p. 3

<sup>130</sup> BTI, 2018, p. 29



taken in this regard would go beyond the possibilities of this thesis. However, this chapter should show at least a few measures taken in order to a) bring events during the Soviet regime into the light of day and b) investigate and evaluate the Nazi-occupation, the Holocaust and Lithuanian involvement in both of them. Although legislative acts (i.e. criminal-judicial acts) are to a certain extent the core element of transitional justice, the political-administrative and the symbolic-representational level needs to be discussed in this context as well, based on the matrix of post-communist truth and justice developed by Pettai and Pettai<sup>131</sup>.

Balkelis and Davoliūtė propose a division of Lithuania's history policies into three parts, which will be used in this and following chapters as well: Initially, there were measures and laws "aimed at the restoration of an independent Lithuania, annulment of the Soviet rule, introduction of a democratic system and mass rehabilitation of victims of the Soviet repression"<sup>132</sup>. In this period the already mentioned condemnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact by the Congress of People's Deputies falls as well, which was one of the fundamental and necessary ideological shifts for becoming independent later. Other laws implemented during this period are listed by Stan and include inter alia the law on rehabilitation of persons repressed for resistance to occupation regime (1990), a decree, "banning KGB employees and informers from government positions" (1991) and the "Law on the restoration of the rights of ownership of citizens to the existing real property" (1991)<sup>133</sup>. The implementation of 13<sup>th</sup> January as "Defenders of Freedom Day" in 1991 in remembrance of the victims of the January Killings needs to be mentioned in connection with the symbolic-representational perspective. It is no surprise that the Nazi occupation, the Holocaust and the involvement of Lithuanians in the atrocities of that time were not the main focus of the discussion at that time. Nevertheless, steps were taken in order to push for reconciliation with the Jewish community: Sirutavičius describes in detail the mainly symbolic steps taken by the government and also by Vytautas Landsbergis in person, their contact with the Israeli government and also their failures – as for example during the special statement of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Lithuania in April 1990 on the occasion of the 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the independence of Israel, when the speaker addressed the suffering of Lithuanian Jews, but "not a word was said about the participation of Lithuanians in the massacres of Jews."<sup>134</sup> In June 1991, the 23<sup>rd</sup> September was

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<sup>131</sup> Pettai/Pettai, 2015, p. 32

<sup>132</sup> Balkelis/ Davoliūtė, 2018, p. 122

<sup>133</sup> Stan, 2018, p. 21-25

<sup>134</sup> Sirutavičius, 2020, p. 464

implemented as day of remembrance of the genocide of the Lithuanian Jews and a monument was unveiled in Paneriai:

*“The event was attended by prisoners of the ghettos, and Israeli and Lithuanian officials, including the speaker of the Knesset, Dov Shilansky. The prime minister of Lithuania, Gediminas Vagnorius (b. 1957), said in his speech: ‘Today we are filled [...] with deep shame, as our nationals were among the people who trampled human dignity and raised their arms against peaceful Jews, I want to apologise for them.’”<sup>135</sup>*

Understandably, the voices from the Jewish community and from Israel were still highly ambivalent in this regard: The rehabilitation procedure of victims of the Soviet regime, implemented very hastily, allowed Nazi war criminals to be rehabilitated, which was criticised internationally. Although mistakes were admitted to have been made later on and a revision by a joint Israeli-Lithuanian commission was proposed, “the mistrust and the tension between Jews and Lithuanians remained.”<sup>136</sup>

The second phase proposed by Balkelis and Davoliūtė started with the implementation of the “Law I-2477 on responsibility for the genocide of the residents of Lithuania” (1992)<sup>137</sup> leading up until the year 2003. It is marked by the beginning of the lustration processes, the already mentioned fiasco of the rehabilitation procedures, the establishment of the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Centre and – in connection with the negotiations with the European Union – the establishment of the so called “International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania” in 1998<sup>138</sup>. Further laws which were implemented are, for example: the “law on state support to families of the fallen participants of the resistance against the 1940-90 occupations” (1998), the “law on compensation of damage resulting from the occupation by the USSR” (2000) and the “law on the assessment of the USSR Committee of State Security (NKVD, NKGB, MGB, KGB (and present activities of the regular employees of this organization” (1998). Davoliūtė underlines that as foreign pressure was growing in these years, the Lithuanian state aimed to “revise and streamline the early restitution by paying closer attention to non-Lithuanian groups of victims” in order to “promote reconciliation with the Jewish community”<sup>139</sup>, which can be seen (owing

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<sup>135</sup> Sirutavičius, 2020, p. 468

<sup>136</sup> Sirutavičius, 2020, p. 465

<sup>137</sup> See also Stan, 2015, p. 25

<sup>138</sup> See Balkelis/Davoliūtė, 2018, p. 125-130

<sup>139</sup> Balkelis/Davoliūtė, 2018, p. 126

to immediate consequences) as part of the political-administrative or the symbolic-representational perspective. Another important result of international pressure was the public apology expressed by president Algirdas Brazauskas during his 1995 trip to Israel, when he spoke about “Lithuanians who mercilessly murdered, shot, deported and robbed Jews”<sup>140</sup>. However, concerning the symbolic-representational component, the establishment of the Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania is arguably the most important step with regard to international attention and consequences. Under the leadership of Emanuelis Zingeris, the only Jewish member of the Seimas at that time, the commission allocated its work to two sub-teams at its first meeting: one relating to the Soviet and one relating to the Nazi occupation of Lithuania. Officially, this was also necessary “in order to draw a distinction between the crimes of the Nazi occupation regime and the Soviet occupation regime”<sup>141</sup>. Saulius Sužiedėlis, chairman of the Nazi sub-commission describes the work of his sub-team as follows:

*The sub-commission on Nazi crimes undertook a number of investigations: anti-Semitism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a ‘precondition of the Holocaust’ (before June 1941); the mass murder of the Jews during the summer and fall of 1941 as well as the role of Lithuanian police battalions in the Holocaust; the genocide in Lithuania’s provinces; the looting of Jewish assets and property; Nazi persecution and murder of non-Jews, including Lithuanians, Poles and Roma; and the fate of Soviet prisoners of war on Lithuanian territory. Further research was to explore the problems of forced labor, the history of the ghettos, and other aspects of the German occupation.”<sup>142</sup>*

Regarding the Nazi occupation three volumes were published under the title “The Crimes of the Totalitarian Regimes. The Nazi Occupation”, additional scientific publications appeared after 2007. As only the first years of the Commission’s work fall in the second phase as described by Balkelis and Davoliūtė, further work and also incidents in connection with the commission will be expanded upon further down below. However, in regard to legislative measures it became obvious that Lithuanian lustration procedures were not very successful: The law adopted in 1999 was based on voluntary self-reporting in order to “filtrate former KGB agents from state services”<sup>143</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Shivaun, Woolfson 2014, p. 203f

<sup>141</sup> See online: [www.komisija.lt/en/about-commission/organizational-structure/](http://www.komisija.lt/en/about-commission/organizational-structure/)

<sup>142</sup> Sužiedėlis, 2018, p. 104f

<sup>143</sup> Balkelis/Davoliūtė, 2018, p. 130

The last phase of Lithuania's process of coming to terms with its own past was started in 2003 and was marked by an overall improvement in the general quality of measures taken:

*“This change was characterized by the expansion of processes that had been started in previous years: restitution of material property, payments of financial compensations, social benefits to the repressed persons and attempts to bring to justice perpetrators of the totalitarian crimes in Lithuania. This period also saw the substantial transformation of public opinion which started to accept more positively state-oriented measures and increasingly participated in different commemoration practices.”<sup>144</sup>*

Successful trials were held against perpetrators of the Soviet era and, as well, against Nazi war criminals – although “Lithuania remained one of the last countries in the European Union where the issue of the restitution of communal Jewish property was still unresolved.”<sup>145</sup> Ultimately, this was only accomplished by a law implemented by the right-wing government of 2011, which regulated the compensation of the Jewish community by the year 2023. According to Stan, the Baltic states are “the only FSU [i.e. Former Soviet Union] states with coherent, comprehensive, long-term transitional justice programs that were widely regarded as essential for their reconstruction and redefinition as independent states belonging to Europe.”<sup>146</sup> She traces back this circumstances to the broad range of measures taken following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which included “lustration, access to secret files, court trials, history commissions, compensation and restitution programs, and public holidays”<sup>147</sup>.

Although at a first glance this last phase of coming to terms with the country's past appears to have been quite peaceful, it is also the period of memory “heating up” all over Europe. One example in this regard is the famous “Arad case” which was strongly connected to the work of the already described historical commission: Yitzhak Arad, former director of Yad Vashem, member of the commission and part of the Soviet resistance against the Nazi regime, was accused of collaboration with the NKVD – formally, the case was opened in 2007<sup>148</sup>. After extensive protest from chairman Zingeris, the directorate of Yad Vashem, Jewish and

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Balkelis/Davoliūtė, 2018, p. 131

<sup>146</sup> Stan, 2018, p. 41

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Sužiedėlis, 2018, p. 107

international organisations, the case was withdrawn in 2008. Sužiedėlis commented on the case as follows:

*“In September 2008, the procurators closed the case in an awkwardly worded press release, bringing the embarrassing episode to an end. At the very least, the case against Arad, a ghetto inmate faced with an existential choice, who had fled to the forests as a teenager to battle the fascists who had murdered his family, revealed an appalling dearth of historical sense, human sensitivity and understanding of the uniquely desperate circumstances of Jews under Nazi occupation.”<sup>149</sup>*

The commission did not meet again, until the case was closed.<sup>150</sup>

Another example in this context is the publication of Rūta Vanagaitė's and Efraim Zuroff's book “Mūsiškiai” (“Our people”) which deals with Lithuanian collaboration in the Holocaust: Vanagaitė, a Lithuanian journalist, and Zuroff, researcher and famous “Nazi hunter” working for the Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, visited mass graves in Lithuania and Belarus and interviewed hundreds of people about their experience during the Holocaust. The consequences of the publication were a public outcry from nationalists in Lithuania, defamation campaigns all over the country and finally, the removal of her book from Lithuanian book shops in 2017. In 2018, however, Vanagaitė was honoured by the Conference of European Rabbis for “significant contributions to European Jewry”<sup>151</sup>. The book has been available in English since mid-March 2020. These two examples show that the debate in Lithuania is far from being over, a common and inclusive narrative is not yet in sight.

Following this brief excursion into Lithuanian history, the following chapter shall outline the methodological approach used for examining and exploring the memorial site of Paneriai and its history. Afterwards, I aim to provide an insight into current theoretical frameworks used for analysing history politics and give an overview of the history of Paneriai.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> The composition of the commission can be consulted online at [www.komisija.lt/en/about-commission/organizational-structure/](http://www.komisija.lt/en/about-commission/organizational-structure/). The last change in the composition was made in 2012 on the basis of a decree approved by president Grybauskaitė. Members of the Commission are inter alia Arūnas Bubnys, Christoph Dieckmann, Šarūnas Liekis, Joachim Tauber and Dina Porat for the Nazi sub-commission and Arvydas Anušauskas, Aleksandr Daniel, Kęstutis Girnius, Janos M. Rainer, Timothy Snyder and Francoise Thom for the Soviet sub-commission.

<sup>151</sup> See online: [www.thejc.com/news/world/lithuanian-author-ruta-vanagaite-holocaust-conference-of-european-rabbis-our-people-1.464735](http://www.thejc.com/news/world/lithuanian-author-ruta-vanagaite-holocaust-conference-of-european-rabbis-our-people-1.464735)



## 4. Methods and research approach

The research approach chosen in order to answer the above-mentioned research questions constitutes a methodological mix, consisting of several steps. The material which shall be analysed comprises publications from the museum of Paneriai, artefacts as well as elements of the memorial site and finally interviews and publications with regard to the social practice of the so-called “march of the living”. This chapter will briefly explain how the analysed material and the chosen methods interact. The perspective taken in this regard starts from today’s condition of the memorial site and goes back all the way to the beginning of Lithuanian independence. This way, I hope to trace and discuss developments and changes on an empirical basis.

### 4.1 Document analysis

First of all, a document analysis of the memorial site shall be done, based on the map provided online by the Jewish museum. Flick (based on Scott, 1990) proposes four elements to be put under due consideration in order to determine the adequacy of the document for further analysis: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and significance<sup>152</sup>. The questions this analysis of the memorial site map shall answer: How is the memorial site structured today? Which elements take up centre stage at the site and which ones are placed more in the periphery? Which role do different elements play in the composition of the memorial site? Where are the boundaries of the memorial site located, what do they include and what do they exclude? How accessible are the different elements from a visitor’s perspective?

To approach these questions three perspectives – as Lueger proposes them – shall be used: First the embedding of the document into the research process will be explained, followed by a short descriptive analysis that shall provide the necessary information about the condition of the plan and its materiality. The third step will be concerned with the content-related analysis of the document itself<sup>153</sup>.

### 4.2 Artefact analysis

Based on the document analysis of the plan of the memorial site of Paneriai three elements of the site will be chosen and analysed in more detail. The selection will be exemplary and based on the three time periods Balkelis and Davoliūtė differentiate between in their work about

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<sup>152</sup> Flick, 2019, p. 325

<sup>153</sup> Lueger, 2010, p. 104: Lueger proposes five different perspectives in order to analyse artefacts.

Lithuania's legislated history (i.e. 1989-1992, 1992-2003 and 2003-2018)<sup>154</sup>. Although this temporal categorisation was originally aimed at providing a framework for the discussion of legislative measures in order to come to terms with the past, the following chapters will find possible parallels and/or contradictions between passed legislation and the development of the memorial site of Paneriai.

As in the case of the document analysis, overlapping methods and questions need to be used: The objects and artefacts at the memorial site of Paneriai are not ordinary objects of utility, but they need to be seen as an expression of a memorial culture at a certain time. Lueger explains the relevance of such artefacts based on their embodiment of physical and cognitive practice, their pre-interpretation as a result of the cultural milieu they are found in and their being embedded in a social context due to specific practices<sup>155</sup>. As the elements of the memorial site of Paneriai have more layers, the focus and the relevant research questions need to be very clear: When, by whom, why and in which context was the element placed or erected at the memorial site? What do material, form, text elements etc. tell? Who or what does the element address?

To answer these questions profoundly for selected objects, a multi-perspective approach based on Lueger is going to be used: In a first descriptive analysis, materiality and conditions of existence will be discussed<sup>156</sup>, which shall include, eventually, the translation of text elements. Following this step, the knowledge gained will be embedded in its social context (*"alltagskontextuelle Sinneinbettung"*)<sup>157</sup>. Thirdly, a more distanced structural analysis will provide necessary information about the function and impact of the object<sup>158</sup>. Finally, an overarching conclusion will summarise the relevant information and research outcome for every object analysed in the process<sup>159</sup>. This way every object will be analysed in a three-step process of analysis, supported by visual material, collected at the memorial site of Paneriai.

#### 4.3 Expert interview

Two experts shall be interviewed for the purposes of this thesis: one with expertise on the memorial site of Paneriai and the other a member of the Jewish community of Lithuania who takes part in the march of the living every year. This event, taking place annually includes a

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<sup>154</sup> Balkelis/Davoliūtė, 2018

<sup>155</sup> See Lueger, 2010, p. 93

<sup>156</sup> See Lueger, 2010, p. 107f

<sup>157</sup> See Lueger, 2010, p. 109f

<sup>158</sup> See Lueger, 2010, p. 112f

<sup>159</sup> See Lueger, 2010, p. 117f



demonstration from Vilnius to the memorial site of Paneriai, remembering the march of the victims of the holocaust from the city (or the ghetto) to the killing site in the forest of Paneriai.

The expert interviews regarding the development of the memorial site since 1991 will be guided interviews with a narrative style but a systematising aim. This means that the interview will provide objective information regarding the research questions – in this case concerning the process of development of the memorial site. As Flick underlines, the interview guideline becomes an even important tool of monitoring, in order to “exclude fruitless topics”<sup>160</sup>. Bogner, Littig and Menz describe the systematising experts interview as “aiming for a systematic acquisition of information, and the function of the experts lies in being an ‘advisor’ [...]”<sup>161</sup>. The guideline will be based on the three time periods described by Balkelis and Davoliūtė shall consist of five blocks altogether: The first deals with general questions regarding Paneriai which cannot be answered in the overview of the site detailed in the next chapters, while the next three blocks aim at delving more deeply into the developing process of the memorial site – starting from the first period (1989-1992), continuing on to the second (1992-2003) until the third and most recent period of time (2004-2018). These three blocks will already include the first results from the artefact analysis, whereas the results of the document analysis will have an impact on the first block. The last block is reserved for questions regarding future plans of the Jewish Museum for the memorial site of Paneriai. Ultimately, the expert interviews shall provide an answer to the questions of how the memorial site of Paneriai has evolved since the independence of Lithuania, who the relevant agents were in this regard (and, eventually, their opponents) and what the plan for the future of the memorial site is. In order to analyse the expert interview adequately, a qualitative and structuralizing content analysis will be done, based on categories.

The interview regarding the march of the living shall be very brief and focus on the organisation of the yearly event. Three blocks of question will focus on organisational details (who is involved, how does the event unfold, how many participants take part), the development of the event over the last decade and the public reaction the organisers have to face every year. Even though this interview may be shorter than the others, the insights gained will be crucial with regard to putting the findings of the text analysis, which shall be described below, in context.

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<sup>160</sup> Flick, 2019, p. 216

<sup>161</sup> Bogner/Littig/Menz, 2014, p. 24: Translated by M.G., original German quotation: “[...] dient der systematischen Informationsgewinnung, und die Funktion des Experten liegt darin, „Ratgeber“ zu sein [...]“

As already in the case of the expert interview before also in this case an qualitative content analysis will provide the answers to the research questions.

#### 4.4 Text analysis

As analysing social practices is challenging, the analysis of the march of the living will be based on two different methods: One concerns the already mentioned expert interview with one of the organisers. Furthermore, as the event takes place every year it is also relevant on an international level, resulting in many news reports both on- and offline. Regarding the former, a text analysis of five selected online reports published in the English language will be attempted based on a comparative content analysis. Ultimately, the analysis will be able to answer questions regarding who the main actors behind the event are, what the general objective is, who participates in it and whether it has affected any significant changes over the last decade. As online news is a rather recent phenomenon, this process analysis needs to be limited to texts published between 2010 and 2019. Nevertheless, changes can be determined in the course of the decade. The material will vary with regard to the publisher (and location) and date.

According to Mayring a qualitative content analysis should first and foremost be based on an adequate selection of material: The corpus needs to be (1) selected, (2) the process of its formation needs to be analysed and (3) formal characteristics of the corpus components need to be explained<sup>162</sup>. The next step is to decide the direction of the analysis. In this case the analysis will go into the content of the texts, as a profound discussion of the background of the publishing website or newspaper would go beyond the scope. Nevertheless, a brief comment on these details will be provided in order to make the sources as transparent as possible. The above-mentioned questions are indicators, also (information) gaps will be mentioned. If possible and necessary, they will be closed later – not with regard to the texts under analysis but with regard to the information needed – by way of the expert interview.

After choosing the fundamental research question, the form of analysis needs to be decided. Mayring differentiates between an explicating, structuralising and summarising content analysis: Whereas the explicating method is concerned with searching for further information regarding one element of the text, a structuralising content analysis means to filter specific information out of the text on the basis of a set of criteria<sup>163</sup>. The summarising type, finally, aims to reduce and abstract the selected material without losing its central content<sup>164</sup>. With

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<sup>162</sup> Mayring, 2010, p. 54

<sup>163</sup> See Mayring, 2010, p. 67

<sup>164</sup> See *ibid.*

regard to the questions under investigation, the structuralising method is expedient in this context: It offers the possibility of attempting an overall comparison between the texts, which in a next step can be for the drafting of a timeline for the development of the event. Lastly, reliability and validity of the extracted data need to be proven as quality criteria. Although Mayring himself raises concerns with the regard to the expediency of the methods he offers for determining the level of objectivity, he recommends the research process to be completed by two different people in order to check if they arrive at the same conclusions (*Intercoderreliabilität*)<sup>165</sup>. As this is not possible in the case of this thesis, maximal transparency with regard to the process and its outcomes will be provided.

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<sup>165</sup> Mayring, 2010, p. 124

## 5. Theoretical background

This chapter will provide an overview of current theoretical approaches regarding memory politics and memorial cultures in Europe. The following chapter will, first of all, embed the memorial site of Paneriai as a *lieux de mémoire* in the necessary theoretical context of memory politics.

### 5.1 The memorial site of Paneriai as a *lieu de mémoire*

The term *lieux de mémoire* is based on Pierre Nora's concept of memorial sites and pertains to places with a material, symbolic and functional meaning.<sup>166</sup> They are

*“created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination. To begin with, there must be a will to remember. If we were to abandon this criterion, we would quickly drift into admitting virtually everything as worthy of remembrance. [...] The lieux we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the lieux de mémoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial [...]”*<sup>167</sup>

Regarding the material component, Nora underlines that a *lieu de mémoire* does not necessarily need to be a static place or site: there are portable *lieux de mémoire*<sup>168</sup>. A material basis is necessary, however. The memorial site of Paneriai is an extremely classic *lieu de mémoire* in the sense of a “monumental memory-site”, which no one “could justify relocating [...] without altering their [its] meaning”<sup>169</sup>. Here, the interplay of history and memory, as mentioned above can be observed: While it is a place with a historical meaning – as it was described in the chapter about the state of the art – it also has a memorial dimension, which is revealed by the memorial events held at the site just as much as by the ongoing heated debate about the Holocaust in Lithuania. This circumstance already bears a connection to the functional component of the memorial site, which – based on Nora's concept – can range “from those dedicated to preserving an incommunicable experience that would disappear along with those who shared it [...] to

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<sup>166</sup> Nora, 1990, p. 26

<sup>167</sup> Nora, 1989, p. 19

<sup>168</sup> Nora, 1989, p. 22

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

those whose purpose is pedagogical, as the manuals dictionaries, testaments and memoranda”<sup>170</sup>. The official folder of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum mentions that “attempts are being made to find the best solution to make the mass killing site in Paneriai operational and to present this complicated period in history to visitors”<sup>171</sup>. Although this is certainly one of the memorial sites’ functions, it has always been a place of memory, mourning and grieving for survivors and different communities too – Makhotina describes the development of the place at the end of the 1980s as “aiming for the emotional handling of the visitors”<sup>172</sup>. In the Lithuanian context this role of the memorial site is highly important and gives the memorial site a key role between private and public forms of remembering for the remaining Jewish community:

*“Die Unmöglichkeit, offiziell zu erinnern und zu trauern, überführte den Erinnerungsort Shoah ins Private, stärkte aber auch die Gruppenidentität der gebliebenen Juden durch die gemeinsame Trauerarbeit. Als sich Ende der 1980er Jahre der Diskurs deutlich liberalisierte, forderte diese Erinnerungsgemeinschaft besonders vehement ihr Recht auf Erinnerung ein.”*<sup>173</sup>

The functional meaning of the memorial site of Paneriai has, therefore, more than one component: It is at the same time a place of science and research, a site with pedagogical meaning (“present the complicated period of history to visitors”) and a place of personal remembrance, mourning and grieving. Of course, the main focus has shifted and changed over time, but since the end of WWII these are the main functions of the memorial site of Paneriai. How these shifts and changes occurred and proceeded will be shown in the empirical part of this thesis. First, however, the symbolic meaning of memorial sites still needs to be explained. In this regard, Nora differs between dominant and dominated *lieux de mémoire*: The first are “spectacular and triumphant, imposing and, generally imposed – either by a national authority or by an established interest, but always from above – and characteristically have the coldness and solemnity of official ceremonies.”<sup>174</sup> Memorial sites of the second type are described as “places of refuge, sanctuaries of spontaneous devotions and silent pilgrimage, where one finds

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<sup>170</sup> Nora, 1989, p. 23

<sup>171</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Flyer

<sup>172</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 237

<sup>173</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 240: Translation by M.G.: “The impossibility to remember and to mourn publicly moved the memorial place of the Shoah into the private sphere, but also strengthened the group identity of the remaining Jews through the shared grief work. When the discourse was liberalised significantly in the late 1980s, this was the group which demanded most vehemently its right to remember.”

<sup>174</sup> Nora, 1989, p. 23

the living heart of memory.”<sup>175</sup> In the case of the memorial site of Paneriai a differentiation between these two types is not easy: At the very beginning place was a site of private remembrance, important especially to survivors of the Holocaust and the Jewish community. Nevertheless, it can be questioned whether the symbolic meaning of the site is the same for different groups in Lithuania: With regard to descendants of Holocaust survivors it is probably still a dominated *lieu de mémoire*, but it could also possibly be understood as dominant – i.e. imposed from above – for ethnic Lithuanians today. This indicates one point of criticism concerning Nora’s conceptualisation of the *lieux de mémoire*, as it was formulated for example by Rothberg:

*“A second strand of criticism reveals the stakes of Nora’s commitment to a linear and binarized account of history and memory. Notwithstanding Nora’s avowed interest in a ‘polyphonic’ approach [...], the collection ultimately puts forward a starkly limited conception of the nation purged of many of its imperial adventures and minoritarian inflections – purged, in short, of phenomena that trouble the linear narrative of historical progress and the stark opposition between history and memory.”*<sup>176</sup>

It is obvious that Nora’s approach does not allow for broader variety of narratives and perspectives for one single *lieu de mémoire* and its components. This can lead to problems especially for the discussion of a place such as Paneriai near the city of Vilnius: a place with a contested history not only during the last but also this century, and a place which has been transformed from a multi-ethnic province towards an almost ethnically homogeneous capital of a young state marked by competing historical narratives and demands. In order to mitigate this issue, the following chapter will show two more theoretical frameworks which make scientific categorisations plausible and possible.

## 5.2 Further concepts of memory culture and memory politics

### 5.2.1 Mnemonic actors and mnemonic regimes

The framework of Bernhard and Kubik (2014) is based on Nora and Halbwachs, keeping in mind the already mentioned “will to remember”. Generally, they mention a “lack of systematic theory and a paucity of systematic comparative studies” in the field of research, whereas there are, on the other hand, “many fragmentary theoretical insights, gripping examples, fascinating

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<sup>175</sup> Nora, 1989, p. 23

<sup>176</sup> Rothberg, 2010, p. 4

descriptions, and often brilliant interpretations”<sup>177</sup>. Although the framework of Bernhard and Kubik is mainly concerned with post-communist politics, it contains general categories and differentiations which can be used in a much broader sense. Also, they point out the role of memory politics within the transformation in Eastern Europe as follows:

*“A radical regime change such as that experienced in Eastern Europe in 1989, is not only about the reconfiguration of economic interests redistribution of political power, and reordering of social relations. It is also about the reformulation of collective identities and the introduction or reinvigoration of the principles of legitimizing power. These two tasks cannot be realized without the re-examination of the group’s past – their historical memory. [...] In other words, the purposive use of selective remembering and forgetting shapes a group’s historical memory.”*<sup>178</sup>

This very general introduction brings into play the often overlooked importance of memory politics in transformation research: The reformulation of collective narratives, which legitimise power in a different way than the “old regime”, is fundamental for a regime change – no matter in which direction. The limits of this model are individual memories, which cannot be taken into account. Bernhard and Kubik underline that the object of their research concerns “the political mechanisms implicated in the formation, transmission and reception of collective memory, particularly via public commemorative ceremonies [...] not to lose sight of social and cultural mechanisms.”<sup>179</sup> They focus, however, on the memory regime and mnemonic actors in order to explore memory cultures. Mnemonic actors can, therefore, be individuals, parties, organisations, etc. Each of them “chooses a particular strategy [...] or engages in specific practices”<sup>180</sup> – considering its impact with regard to their own political aims. Based on these considerations Bernhard and Kubik differentiate between the following types of mnemonic actors: (1) Mnemonic warriors hang on to the “us-versus-them” paradigm of fundamentalism and consider memory as not to be negotiated. They primarily focusing on events of a “mythical past” and carry out the contest of narratives delegitimizing and denying power to alternative perspectives<sup>181</sup>. (2) Mnemonic pluralists are – similar to mnemonic warriors – living the “us versus them”, but they are capable of negotiating “memory issues, [...] within an agreement on

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<sup>177</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 7

<sup>178</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 8

<sup>179</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 10

<sup>180</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 11

<sup>181</sup> See Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 15

the fundamentals of mnemonic politics”<sup>182</sup>. They are well aware that there are different perspectives on and interpretations of the past and tolerating these differing views. Their aim is to assume power in order to make the coexistence of these differences possible within an institutionalised frame. (3) Mnemonic abnegators, in essence, avoid mnemonic contests, as they see them as a “waste of time”. They pragmatically propagate a predominant narrative of the past in order to compare it to the modern-day issues they tackle. However, Bernhard and Kubik describe this attitude as “a politics of convenient or purposive forgetting – chosen, for example, by actors who directly or indirectly [...] may be held responsible for the past social traumas [...]”<sup>183</sup>. (4) Mnemonic prospectives think “that they have solved the riddle of history and thus have the key to a better future”<sup>184</sup>. Bernhard and Kubik describe them as assuming that

*“[...] on the basis of the correct understanding of what is wrong with both past and present, people led by them can transcend the woes of the world by building a desirable post-historical end-state. [...] Once in power, prospectives truck no opposition but try to mobilize the entire population in the ‘struggle’ to achieve their desired end state. In political contest and in establishing their rule, prospectives’ strategy is aggressive, very much like that of the warriors. But their actions are justified not by anchoring them in the past, but by prospects of a ‘better’ future.”*<sup>185</sup>

These four types of mnemonic actors are the basis of Bernhard and Kubik’s framework. However, as is true for any categorisation also the categorisation of actors shows its limits: Mnemonic actors can change their role in regard to different issues. It is possible to be a mnemonic warrior within one mnemonic field and, at the same time, an abnegator in another one. It simply means to consider one mnemonic field as important (without tolerating alternative perspectives towards it) and another one as irrelevant. But how are these changes and shifts connected to each other? Is a warrior more likely to become a prospective (as their methods concerning contest are similar)? Which role does time play in this regard? Any attempted answer to these questions would, of course, be based on examples and assumptions, but nevertheless they would be highly helpful with regard to understanding the shifts of mnemonic actors from one mnemonic field to another.

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<sup>182</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 15

<sup>183</sup> Bernahrd/Kubik, 2014, p. 14

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 14



According to Bernhard and Kubik, mnemonic regimes are based on “(1) an organized way of remembering a specific issue, event or process (2) at a given moment or period”<sup>186</sup>. They differentiate between fractured mnemonic regimes, resulting from a mnemonic warrior who enters the field, unified mnemonic regimes, which are “predicated on agreement over the interpretation of the past und thus [...] largely free of mnemonic conflicts”<sup>187</sup>, and pillarised mnemonic regimes, where “there will be differences between actors over their interpretations of the past, but toleration of differences of opinion or indifference over memory issues will prevent the partisan politization of such interpretations.”<sup>188</sup> These three types of mnemonic regimes are the result of several factors shown in figure 1<sup>189</sup>.

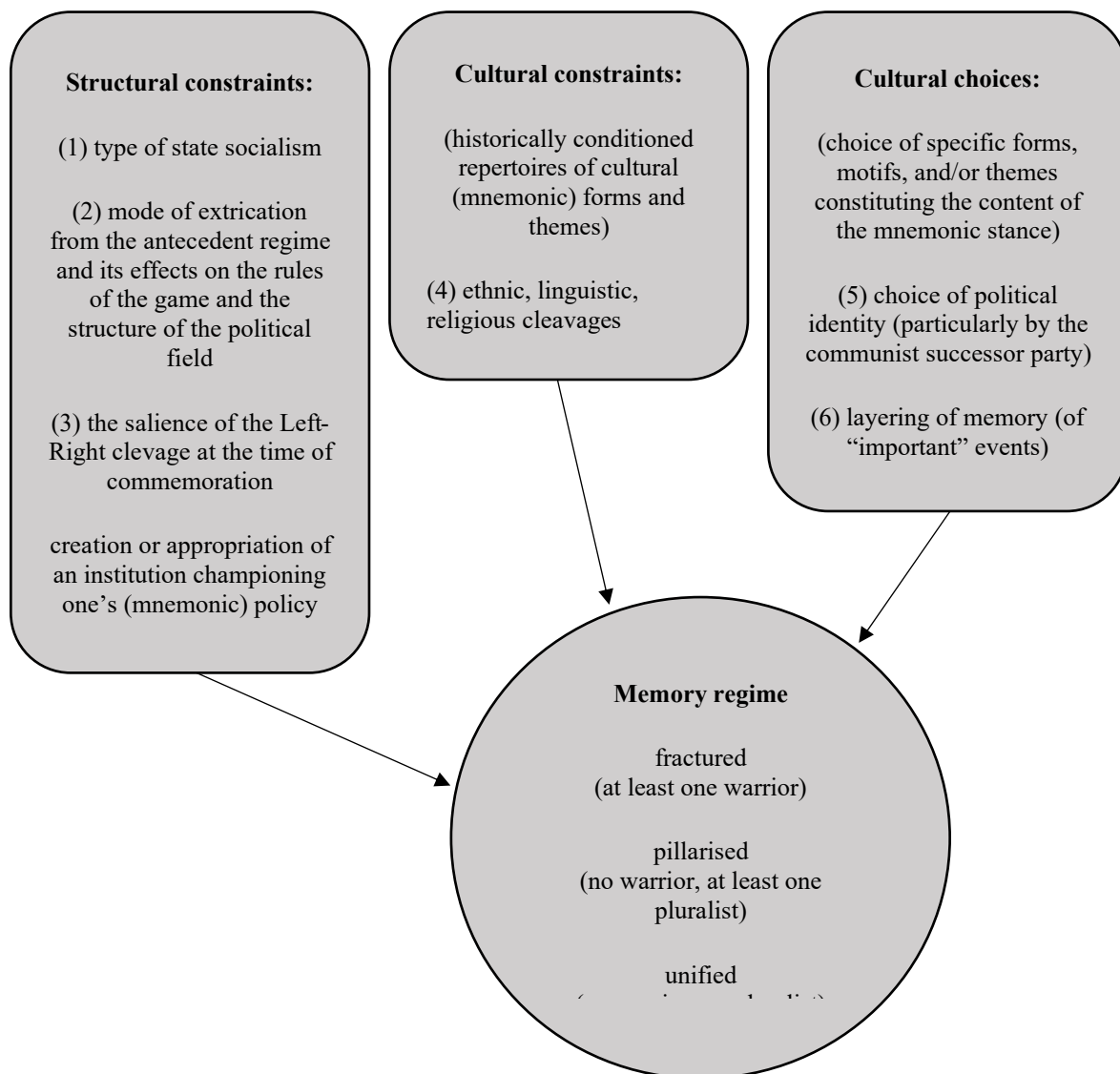


Figure 1

<sup>186</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 18

<sup>187</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 17

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Based on Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 20

### 5.2.2 The SANE concept of analysing memory politics

Björkdahl et al. developed the so-called SANE framework in 2017. In contrast with Bernhard and Kubik's concept, its focus lies more generally on the transitioning of societies out of conflict. The basic assumption of the research group is that memory politics and peace are linked to one another: "[...] we argue that a key realm for negotiations of the quality of the peace under formation is the politics of memory."<sup>190</sup> The acronym SANE stands for the four elements the concept consists of: sites, agents, narratives and events. This multi-level approach "provides a micro-level analysis to shed light on macro-level processes of memory politics"<sup>191</sup>. Also, it makes visible "interconnections and frictional encounters between e.g. global, national, and informal mnemonic agents."<sup>192</sup>

Sites are understood in this context as the locality where memory politics takes place: "Where memory is narrated and performed [...] has a strong influence on the ways in which it is politicised, who can access it and how it is politically perceived."<sup>193</sup> Examples are museums and memorials, in many cases killing sites or even rape camps. They are at the same time important places for official remembrance and for silent and personal mourning. However, such places can, of course, be controversial as Björkdahl et al. show on the example of Potočari in Srebrenica, which "is seen as a central place mainly for Bosniaks to mourn their victims, whilst many Bosnian Serbs from the surrounding areas tend to avoid the site as they feel accused of being perpetrators."<sup>194</sup>

Agents are defined as the drivers of memory politics and very diverse: They "may be formal or informal, elite or grassroots, individual or collective, local or global."<sup>195</sup> To understand them and their opportunities in the field of memory politics, Björkdahl et al. provide a definition of agency, which is based on Giddens and Ahearn: It "has to do with the making of the world we inhabit. It is always about power relations, to exercise agency is to bring about effect of some sort on the world. It is not exercised in a vacuum but in a social world that shapes the opportunities and resources available, in a constant interplay of practices and discourses."<sup>196</sup> And further:

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<sup>190</sup> Björkdahl et al. 2017, p. 3

<sup>191</sup> Björkdahl et al. 2017, p. 13

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Björkdahl et al. 2017, p. 6

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Björkdahl et al. 2017, p. 7

<sup>196</sup> Björkdahl et al. 2017, p. 8

*“The presence of agents also stretches out horizontally in sometimes overlapping social and political communities, e.g. civil society, religious communities, political parties, media, and the arts. Agency can also be non-organised and exercised through fleeting action in hidden and obscure spaces by agents that struggle in the margins to change existing power relations.”<sup>197</sup>*

In contrast with Bernhard and Kubik’s conceptualisation of actors, Björkdahl et al. provide a description of identities and qualities an agent can have, as opposed to a categorisation based on the methods or choices taken by the agent. This makes it more flexible in regard to different stands agents take concerning different issues. The concept, however, relies much more on descriptive processes rather than on an analysis, leading to an obvious result and categorisation. Narratives are “what links individuals to a political and cultural context, and thus story-telling is central to the way politics operate.”<sup>198</sup> Although narratives are maybe the most abstract component of the SANE concept, their importance is very clear: It is traced back to the role of narratives in reconciliation and peace-building processes:

*“Peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives are based on a particular ordering of the past, present and future in which interventions draw a sharp line between the violent past and the present, which brings hopes of a peaceful and better future [...]. Such narratives are often confronted with counter-narratives with a very different understanding of how to make the past, present and future morally coherent.”<sup>199</sup>*

Björkdahl et al. also underline that there is a contest of narratives: There are “loud voices” on the one hand and those “that choose to be silent or muted”. From a researcher’s perspective it is dangerous to leave the silent voices out of consideration, as they also have “meaning and potential power”<sup>200</sup>. This understanding of the contest of narratives is strongly evocative of the strategies mentioned Bernhard and Kubik’s conceptualisation which are chosen by mnemonic actors within a mnemonic contest. In essence it can be seen as equivalent, equivalent, but in the SANE concept, narratives are understood as a separate component with a certain autonomy, whereas Bernhard and Kubik see them as a product of the mnemonic actors within the mnemonic regime.

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<sup>197</sup> Björkdahl et al., 2017, p. 8

<sup>198</sup> Björkdahl et al. 2017, p. 9

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

Events, finally, are “meaning-making performative practices” which offer “the opportunity for participation, for mass enrolment, for emotional purchase and they can be transmitted [...]” through different media<sup>201</sup>. Björkdahl et al. show that events can follow certain rituals and include symbols of the narrative that is joined. Furthermore, the authors point out that events tend to become politicised and, in many cases, loaded with conflict. At the same time they have a “high potential of mobilizing large numbers of people” and can, therefore, also “foster expression of solidarity and belonging.”<sup>202</sup>

The research process of the SANE concept starts with identifying a specific “key issue of the past”. Based on this key issue, the mnemonic formation consisting of sites, agents, narratives and events can first be identified and then analysed. In this context, Björkdahl et al. point out that memory gaps are important as well: “The work of erasing topics from collective memory, to unsee, and unhear, as well as the labour of bringing the forgotten into public attention, are important processes of relevance for peace.”<sup>203</sup> A concluding analysis of the so specified and investigated mnemonic formation can happen within-case and cross-case: This way “the depth of single cases are captured”, while “at the same time it is possible to find common factors and generate theory from qualitative research.”<sup>204</sup>

Finally, the SANE concept has another aim which is different to the conceptualisation of Bernhard and Kubik: Whereas Björkdahl et al. conduct research on the quality of peace after conflict and the necessary process into a peaceful future, Bernhard and Kubik try to “sketch a set of observations on the impact that various memory regimes may have on the quality of democracy.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Björkdahl et al., 2017, p. 10

<sup>202</sup> Björkdahl et al., 2017, p. 11

<sup>203</sup> Björkdahl et al., 2017, p. 11f

<sup>204</sup> Björkdahl et al. 2017, p. 13

<sup>205</sup> Bernhard/Kubik, 2014, p. 11

## 6. Empirical study

This chapter focuses on the empirical research, carried out on the basis of the methods as detailed above. Firstly, there will be an introduction into the development of the memorial site of Paneriai based on official publications of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum and relevant secondary literature. This will be necessary for categorising and understanding findings and conclusions at a later point.

### 6.1 The memorial site of Paneriai – a historical overview

What makes the memorial site of Paneriai different from many others – not only in Lithuania but throughout Europe – is the fact that it began its existence as a memorial site very soon after WWII, which is well documented by the Yad Vashem picture archive<sup>206</sup>. The first monument in Paneriai forest was sponsored by the Jewish community of Vilnius and built in 1948<sup>207</sup>. As it had nothing “Soviet” on it, it was completely destroyed in 1952 and later replaced by an obelisk<sup>208</sup>: The obelisk and its inscription changed the official meaning of the site as a place of remembrance – instead of addressing the complete extinction of the Jewish community, it became dedicated to the victims of fascism, using the Lithuanian and Russian language (i.e. not Hebrew and Yiddish). The official folder of the memorial site of Paneriai summarises its history as follows:

*“In 1960, the Memorial Museum of Paneriai was established at the site of the mass killings. It was a subsidiary of Vilnius Regional Research Museum. In 1962, the museum became a subsidiary of the LSSR History and Revolution Museum. In 1977, the memorial park was officially renamed as the Paneriai Memorial. In 1985, the territory was rearranged based on a project by architect Jaunutis Makariūnas and gained the current shape.”*<sup>209</sup>

These are also the conclusions Elena Makhotina arrives at in her research published in 2017. She underlines the unclear date of the building of the obelisk: Whereas some sources refer to the 1960s, others assume it to have been built during the 1970s<sup>210</sup>. Recent research, however,

<sup>206</sup> e.g. Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 2074/37

<sup>207</sup> There are very few pictures of this first memorial. However, one is available at the project-specific website of the Paneriai memorial site: <https://www.paneriumemorialas.lt/en/sovietinis-obeliskas-m10/>

<sup>208</sup> See Makhotina, 2017, p. 210f

<sup>209</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Flyer

<sup>210</sup> See Makhotina, 2017, p. 212

shows that it must have been earlier, as in the Yad Vashem picture archive the obelisk can be seen already on photos from 1954 already.<sup>211</sup> According to Makhotina, in 1966 simple information panels, listing and elucidating on the different groups of victims and their numbers, were erected in Lithuanian and Russian.<sup>212</sup> This could, however, have happened in autumn of 1965 already, as the picture archive of Yad Vashem dates photos of such information boards back to October 1965<sup>213</sup>.

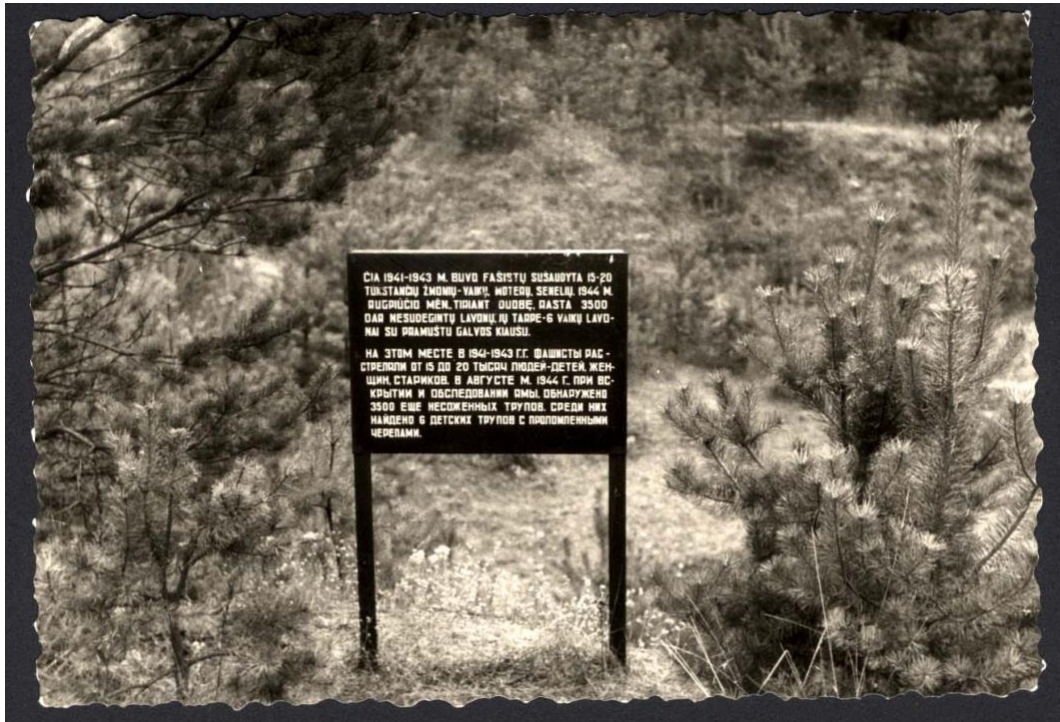


Figure 2: Yad Vashem, photo archive, 1965

Based on the yearly report of the director of the Revolution Museum, Makhotina comes to the conclusion that survivors from the United States and Israel coming back to Paneriai in the late 1970s were disappointed by the condition of the memorial site<sup>214</sup>. This circumstance, ultimately, led to the rearrangement by the architect Janutis Makariūnas in 1985 mentioned above. The famous lettering at the entrance, “*Panerių memorialas*” (Paneriai memorial), was a result of this alteration as well.

The monument to the victims killed at Paneriai, located at the entrance near the lettering, was changed only subsequently: As the typically Soviet inscription typically only mentioned the

<sup>211</sup> See Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 4620/469

<sup>212</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 236

<sup>213</sup> E.g. Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 987/11

<sup>214</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 237

“more than 100 000 Soviet people”<sup>215</sup> as victims, the Lithuanian Jewish Cultural Association (the predecessor organisation of the Lithuanian Jewish Community) asked for an amendment which would reference the “70 000 Jews among the victims”<sup>216</sup>. This matter was addressed only in June 1991 on the occasion of the anniversary of the start of the Holocaust in Lithuania. In addition, inscription in Yiddish and Hebrew were added. In 2004 the monument was changed again by adding black marble plaques over the inscription. The comments on the marble plaque was different from the original wording as it changed the “Soviet citizen”. Also, it shows also a significant change in the way the Holocaust is seen in general in Lithuania: instead only referring to the “Hitlerite occupants” as the perpetrators, their local supporters or collaborators are explicitly mentioned as well. It can be assumed, that it was no coincidence that this change happened in exactly the year Lithuania became part of the European Union. The memorial site belonged to the city administration until 2013, when it was handed over to the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum<sup>217</sup>. Mantas Šikšnianas speaks about current rearrangements which have been ongoing since 2018 and are going to be completed in 2024<sup>218</sup>.

The example of the entrance memorial shows the significant changes the memorial site underwent starting from the late 1980s/early 1990s until the present day. Further examples shall be explored over the course of the following sections.

## 6.2 Document analysis

As already mentioned in the part of this thesis dealing with the methodology used, the document analysis of the plan of the memorial site of Paneriai will not only provide an overview of the composition of the site but also answer questions regarding predominant and less dominant elements, limitations and accessibility. As the Yad Vashem photo archive includes one picture with a similar plan of the memorial site from 1995<sup>219</sup>, the last part of the chapter will be concerned with comparing the two plans to another.

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<sup>215</sup> The former inscription can be seen in Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 2776/8, whereas today’s version is available e.g. in Makhotina, 2017, p. 361 (Abb. 15)

<sup>216</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 360: Translated by M.G., original German quotation: “[Die Tafel] sollte um eine weitere ergänzt werden, die auf die 70.000 Juden unter den Opfern hinweisen sollte.“

<sup>217</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 380 (foot note 172)

<sup>218</sup> See chapter 6.4.1

<sup>219</sup> Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 4620/468

### 6.2.1 The document

The document (an official folder) with the file name “*vadinis laukostendas*” (i.e. “so-called outdoor stand”) is available on the website of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum<sup>220</sup>. Furthermore, the map contained in the folder can be found near every monument at the memorial site – combined with a short explanation of the monument.

Paneriai is one exposition of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. The document containing the site’s plan can be found at the very bottom of the sub-page of the Paneriai exposition. It includes the site’s map, in which the individual monuments are marked with numbers 1-19 and^^ explained below in Lithuanian, English, Polish and Hebrew. On the opposite side of the folder the history of the memorial site is explained in brief in the same four languages. The title is located upon the short historical introduction (“Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum Paneriai Memorial” in each of the four languages), the document does not include any information on the publisher or the date of publication. However, as the memorial site has belonged to the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum since 2013, the flyer most likely stems from the early days of the owner change (but from after 2015, as the youngest monument, the monument to the Roma, is also visible). With regard to the information panels near the monuments at the memorial site, Mantas Šikšnianas dates them back to 2018<sup>221</sup>. Regarding the *authenticity* of the document, it can be noted that it is a secondary source, designed to present a certain place or territory. As the plan was published on the museum’s website, it is obviously an official document and can be considered as authentic. It aims to be a source of information and orientation for visitors of the website and for those coming to see the memorial site. The map itself is identical to the map on the information panels at the memorial site. With reference to the *credibility* of the document, it is obvious that the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum is an established scientific institution in Vilnius which has been in charge of the memorial site since 2013. Although the Lithuanian debate on the Holocaust is – as it has been pointed out several times – still far from being closed, the museum can be seen as an institution not only with the necessary resources to provide adequate documentation, but also with a wide-ranging and international experience and knowledge on the subject. Nevertheless, it should be noted out that besides the already mentioned subpage on the museum’s website (where the document can be found) there is a project-specific website about the memorial site of Paneriai ([paneriumemorialas.lt](http://paneriumemorialas.lt)) which is more up to date. On both websites the logo of the museum can be found, but the folder, however, can only be found on the museum’s subpage, not on the project-specific website. This does not

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<sup>220</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, official flyer, online

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Mantas Šikšnianas on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020



necessarily mean, that the map is not credible or authentic, differences will, nevertheless, be discussed in the next subchapter.

Furthermore, with regard to the *representativeness* it can be said that the plan is not only a reflection of the territory of the memorial site but rather an insight of the conception of the museum and those (scientists, historians, museum employees,...) who are involved in this process. As an official document it is, of course, a representation of the publisher's self-image and can be treated as a primary resource only with regard to this self-understanding. When it comes to the *significance* of such a document, Flick differentiates between three levels<sup>222</sup>: First of all, there is the intended significance to the author of the document. In essence, this has been detailed above already: The document aims to provide an overview and orientation for visitors of the website, the memorial site and maybe the museum as well. It provides visitors with helpful, practical information (e.g. the parking lot and the train tracks are both visible on the plan) and in different languages. Secondly, there is the significance to other readers, i.e. the visitors of the site, the museum or the website. For them, the receiving of information and gaining a first overview of the memorial site and its composition is important. Thirdly, the social meaning for those who are object to the document<sup>223</sup>, as Flick describes it, is much more difficult to define – as the object to the document is a memorial site not a specific person. The document makes explicit reference to different victim groups of the mass killings and goes to great lengths in order to detail which element of the memorial site is dedicated to which victim group. The attempt at providing an inclusive and broad narration of history could be one such factor of social significance. As the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum itself represents one victim group (the largest, of course), a non-excluding narration is necessary in order to involve other groups in the memorial practices as well. The following analysis will focus on the map as shown on the left side for figure 3 and not go into further detail regarding the description on the right side. Thus, it is my aim to focus on the composition of the memorial site.

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<sup>222</sup> Flick, 2019, p. 326

<sup>223</sup> See *ibid.*

### 6.2.2 Description<sup>224</sup>

The map of the memorial site on the folder does not feature any boundaries or limits – only the part of the document which contains the plan of the memorial site is visually divided into two parts: whereas the upper part, which takes up around two thirds of the page, shows the plan of the site, the lower part is filled with a detailed description of the individual monuments in Lithuanian, English, Polish and Hebrew. No title of the plan can be found at the top of the page. The plan itself has two different colours – a greyish brown for the paths and means of transportation (i.e. parking lot and railway line) and a yellowish green for the icons of the different monuments, accompanied by numbers. The icons of the different memorial elements

<sup>224</sup> Generally, in order to avoid confusion, I will make use of the names of the monuments according to the plan of the memorial site.



Figure 3: Folder with an informational plan of the memorial site

already give an idea of the outline of the monuments, taken together, six pits can be found at the memorial site which are marked by double circles and white numbers on the map. Altogether there are 13 icons (not including the train icon) and 6 pits spread across the plan. Size-wise, they are all about the same measures, none is especially big or small. The plan only includes monuments, not smaller stone tablets donated by foreign governments (e.g. Austria). Thanks to the icons, the different monuments are easy to recognise from their appearance, partly even without the description below. In essence, this description adds information regarding the specific victim group to whom the monument is dedicated. The plan is north-south aligned, but south is at the top of the page. The industrial surroundings are not mentioned or visible at all on the plan. Generally, there is no information on the plan with regard to reaching the memorial site by car or by public transport.

The entrance and the parking lot are located in the northern part of the memorial site, two monuments seem to stand a bit apart, as they can be found even further north near the railway tracks: the monument to the Poles and the monument to Enzis Jagomastas and his family<sup>225</sup>. The numbering of the objects starts backwards from the most northern ones (19, 18) on to the entrance monument (17), then to the west to the first accumulation of monuments (16, 15, 14, 13, 12), subsequently leading on to the first two pits (11, 10). The visitor can then proceed to the south to the next two pits (8 and 9) and then join the path which leads back to the northern part of the site, but to another grouping of monuments (7, 6, 5, 4, 3) and another two pits (2 and 1). By the way of passing the building number 13 the visitor finally returns to the entrance. The six pits are visually not distinguishable from one another on the plan for the site. It is, however, obvious that there are always two pits next to each other: 1 and 2, 8 and 9, 10 and 11. The pits 1 and 2 are nearest to the groupings of monuments, whereas 8 and 9 are the most distant not only from the other monuments, but also from the entrance.

It can be said that there are two accumulations of monuments, both near to the entrance: One at the very beginning of the path which includes the monuments to the Soviet prisoners of war, to the Lithuanians, to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Forces, the information centre and also the “remaining part of a trench”<sup>226</sup>. The second accumulation is very near to the entrance as well, but forms part of the end of the suggested visitor walk. It includes the monuments to the inmates of the Kailis and HKP Nazi forced labour camps and Jewish doctors

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<sup>225</sup> Enzis Jagomastas was an underground printer who was killed at Paneriai in 1941. His monument is one of the few individual monuments e.g. besides the one for the medical doctor Hilaris Feigus.

<sup>226</sup> See Makhotina, 2017, p. 237: Makhotina mentions one board which describes the opening of a trench in 1944, where 3500 non-burnt corpses were found among which were 6 corpses of children with shattered skulls. Other trenches were used to better control the moving of inmates to the pits.

from the Military Hospital in Vilnius, to the medical doctor Hilaris Feigus<sup>227</sup>, the Soviet obelisk, the monument to the killed Jews and the symbolic circle of stones in memory of the Roma killed in Paneriai. Interestingly, the only monument which has its history is mentioned on the plan is the Soviet obelisk.

How the above-mentioned facts can be interpreted and which voids can be identified will be discussed in the next subchapter. Nevertheless, a look at the project-specific memorial sites' website shows that the plan does by far not include all elements or objects which can be seen at and around the memorial site of Paneriai: The website describes 11 different pits, the plan only shows six of them. Other elements not explicitly mentioned on the plan are mainly trenches, paths, roads and sites which were used to bring inmates from one place to another, or sites which can be seen only on old photos in their former condition or were not renovated. The monuments included in the plan on the official folder are all described on the website, although the naming is not always the same. The missing pits on the map can easily be explained by younger discoveries: In 2017 five more pits and further insights into the path network were discovered at Paneriai<sup>228</sup>, which gained Paneriai international attention, as the memorial site occupies an area of 19ha. The discoveries in 2016/2017 came to the conclusion that an area of around 65ha belongs to the mass killing site actually<sup>229</sup>. Obviously, the project-specific website which is funded by the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad is newer than the folder.

### 6.2.3 Interpretation

The description above shows that there are several remarkable details included in the plan which need further interpretation in order to be embedded into a broader picture. This sub-chapter is a try to interpret the most important details mentioned above.

#### *Missing boundaries on the map*

First of all, as has already been mentioned that the plan does not show any boundaries to the memorial site. A visitor to the place will quickly realise that the area is actually much larger than the part with the monuments shown on the map and that there are furthermore no walls,

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<sup>227</sup> Feigus, according to the information of the VGSJ Museum, was a doctor in the ghetto of Vilnius and got a grace stone dedicated to him by the partisan and subsequent director of the Jewish Museum Rachel Margolis in 2000. His wife had been Margolis' music teacher in the 30s.

<sup>228</sup> Der Standard, 2017, Online.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

fences or other barriers at the site, which could possibly signalise an end. On the memorial sites' website, users can switch between an old photo from above and an up to date map (embedded with google maps). Both, picture and map, show that the areal reaches not until the railway tracks but far more towards east, where the Paneriai tunnel is located.

Although victims were usually brought to Paneriai on foot, on 5 April 1943 "a set of 60 railway cars bringing several thousand prisoners from the 'small' ghettos of Eastern Lithuania [...] to Paneriai"<sup>230</sup> crossed that tunnel. Kazimierz Sakowicz calls that day "judgement day" as for one of the first times victims of the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators tried to escape in bigger groups. The diary entry is a terrific eyewitness report of shootings, beatings, all kinds of abuses and methods of humiliations. He writes that "in less than four hours, about 2 500 people were murdered, – actually even more"<sup>231</sup>. Then a second train arrived:

*"It is not yet the end. A new train arrived with victims. Apparently, the new arrivals immediately understood which 'Kovno' <sup>232</sup> they had been taken to and what awaited them shortly. Consequently, they changed their escape tactics, which generally yielded better results than with the first train. When the railroad cars were opened and the condemned pushed out onto the tracks in front of the cars and arranged in groups, they immediately (practically all) rushed to escape in different directions. Chaos erupts, shooting, the shouts of the escapees and the trackers. The majority escapes across the tracks in the direction of the road, etc. The Lithuanians shoot."*<sup>233</sup>

The next day, according to Sakowicz, Jewish men from the Vilnius ghetto were brought to Paneriai in order to collect the corpses and to clean up the place.

This example shows one important event which took place near the Paneriai tunnel and which demonstrates that the victims at that moment were not only victims. For one moment the inmates of these trains (mainly Jews) took back their agency to save their lives – some of them successfully. Although the railway tunnel and the railway station are not on the official map of the memorial site, the map has no obvious boundaries. However, the events which took place outside the groupings of monuments are relevant and important for a developing narrative.

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<sup>230</sup> Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum, online, Paneriai railway tunnel

<sup>231</sup> Sakowicz, 2005, p. 75

<sup>232</sup> The victims were told that they were brought to the ghetto of Kaunas. Instead the train brought them directly to the mass killing site of Paneriai.

<sup>233</sup> Sakowicz, 2005, p. 76

Another example besides the railway tunnel is the house of Sakowicz: Just as with the railway station, it is not visible on the plan, however, the building is located nearby and cannot be underestimated in its importance, as the document found there it is one of the most detailed and specific sources for the mass killings.

Boundaries to the memorial site are not included on the map presumably because of the huge importance of other places nearby, which are not officially part of the site. It leaves the understanding of the killing site more open and suggests that it was not a closed space but embedded in an environment with a complex logistic.

### *Selection of languages*

The map of the memorial site provides information in Lithuanian, English, Polish and Hebrew – which is the same as the project-specific website, whereas the website of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum is only available in Lithuanian and English. It appears a foregone conclusion that this selection is mainly based on the largest groups of victims killed, buried, partly exhumed and burnt in Paneriai, and on the groups of visitors expected nowadays. This would, however, ignore Russian completely, which on the contrary is a very dominant language all over the memorial site: many inscriptions are translated into Russian. Also, the information panels from 1965 (see Fig. 2) were in Lithuanian and Russian.

The non-selection of Russian as one of the languages on the map may have different reasons – not all of them warrant a deeper interpretation, some of them are very practical: (1) Although Russian is very dominant on the monuments at the memorial site, the Russian minority in Lithuania is the smallest in the Baltic States. Hogan-Brun et al. pointed out in 2005 already, that “many (mainly Russian) members of the minority communities consider a good command of Lithuanian as a necessary precondition for pursuing a career.”<sup>234</sup> Regarding Vilnius “only 1 percent of the resident population in the capital claims to have no knowledge of Lithuanian.”<sup>235</sup> As it was pointed out already in previous chapters, Lithuania followed a much more liberal path regarding the law of citizenship than Estonia and Latvia, which led to a much more positive attitude towards the Lithuanian language<sup>236</sup>. This means Russian speakers in Lithuania are generally able to understand Lithuanian. (2) At the same time, Russian has, of course, a historic connotation, which is still negatively influenced by the Soviet experiences of the country. Equating the Russian language with the Soviet past is a common narrative even today, not only

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<sup>234</sup> Hogan-Brun/Ramonienė/Grumadienė, 2005, p. 357

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> This can be well observed in the studies of Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė and Grumadienė.

in the Baltic states but also in other former Soviet republics. Possibly, a memorial site does not want to be part of these difficult and heated debates.

One more point needs to be addressed with regard to the selection of languages: If the selection of languages is based on the victim groups, Romani, the language of the Romani people, is conspicuously missing as well. This may be owing to the relatively young tradition of remembrance: According to the memorial sites' project website, the Romani memorial, a symbolic circle of stones, was erected only in August 2015<sup>237</sup>.

### *Variety of monuments depicted*

A first view on the map already makes it clear that the memorial site of Paneriai is constituted of a broad variety of monuments: Some of them address certain groups of victims or even a specific person or family. Victim groups are identified with regard to their ethnicity, their Jewishness (according to the assessment of the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators) or with regard to their actions (as is for instance the case with the monument to the soldiers of the Soviet Army). Controversial and undisputed monuments stand close to each other without any suggestion of hierarchy or a specific emphasis. One example in this regard is the monument to soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force. This Force was created in 1944 and staffed by Lithuanians as "previous attempts by the German forces to create an SS unit or other armed force from the local population had been unsuccessful and mobilisations boycotted"<sup>238</sup>. It fought the Polish *Armija Krajowa* and Soviet Partisans in the forests, although the force was completely understaffed and underequipped and bound to the Nazi forces. Its commander general, however, Povilas Pechavičius, prevented the force from being used within the Wehrmacht. After heavy defeats the force was disbanded in May 1944. According to Šutinienė, „its leaders were arrested and deported to prison camps, and many of its members were executed by the Nazis"<sup>239</sup> i.e. at the killing site in the Paneriai forest. Others were able to escape into the forests or also "drafted into Nazi auxiliary services"<sup>240</sup>. Competing narratives see the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force as Lithuanian collaborator of the Nazis, as they fought against Soviet partisans and the Polish *AK*<sup>241</sup>, - or as patriotic heroes defending the independence of Lithuania. The narrative about the Force becomes even more complicated, as the Vilnius region was

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<sup>237</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, online, The memorial symbol for the Roma

<sup>238</sup> Šutinienė, 2016, p. 174

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Of course, the role of the *Armija Krajowa* is highly controversial as well. The conflict with the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Forces is described by Šutinienė, who compares the narratives of veterans who participated actively in the fights.

understood as Polish territory by the *AK*. Povilas Pechavičius was posthumously awarded with the Supreme Award of the Republic of Lithuania in 2004, the same year the monument at the memorial site of Paneriai was erected.

This example demonstrates the openness of the memorial site to controversial narratives and the therefore associated flexibility of the idea of who was a victim and who was not. While it is true that members of the Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force were killed at Paneriai, they first were subordinate to the Nazi occupiers and cooperating with them in the fight against the Soviets. A further contradiction in this regard appears to be the position of the monument, which stands in the direct vicinity of the one for the Soviet prisoners of war.

The map shows a broad variety of monuments which can be visited at Paneriai. Origin, development and other specific background information are not provided (the only exception is the Soviet obelisk which will be elaborated on in one of the next subchapters), nor is there any hierarchy or remarkable difference in the size of the icons. This can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the different groups of victims which were murdered at Paneriai for different reasons. It can be seen not only as an attempt of reconciliation, but as a very open approach towards competing and initially incompatible narratives in order to – using Bernhard's and Kubik's terminology – support the development of a pillarized instead of a fractured mnemonic regime.

### *The inversion of north and south*

The inversion of north and south (south on the upper side, north below) on the map might have, above all, practical or optical reasons: As the description of the icons are placed below the plan, the whole plan is easier to read (suggested track starting from below as well). The paths which cross near the monument to the killed Jews and the obelisk are right in the golden cut both with regard to the whole flyer and to the map. The reader's eye will, therefore, first be caught on this specific part of the memorial site.

Thus, a certain emphasis is placed on this part of the memorial site, which is understandable: This is the place where the first monument of the memorial site was erected in 1948 and where it was demolished in the early 1950s. For a long time, the obelisk was the only monument at Paneriai. Also, the new monument to the killed Jews, which is by far the largest group of victims; is placed near that crossing.



### *History of the obelisk*

The descriptions regarding the different monuments are, generally speaking, very short and clear. The only exception with regard to detailing origin and developmental history of a monument is the obelisk, which was erected in the 1950s, as a substitute to the former Jewish monument. The description in the folder reads as follows:

*“Soviet obelisk bearing the inscription ‘In memory of the victims of Fascism’ erected at the beginning of the 1950s; this replaced the monument for Jewish victims killed in Paneriai, which was demolished.”<sup>242</sup>*

The destruction of the monument falls in the period of the Stalinist anti-Semitic campaigns in the early 1950s. It is so far the only monument at the memorial site of Paneriai which has been destroyed – with the obelisk being the only monument at the site until the 1980s, when the small museum was built. However, the act of demolishing a memorial monument has to be seen as an act of interference with or even an assault against the Jewish community of Vilnius, who had funded the original monument in the first place. The inscription on the obelisk did not address the Jewish victims at all as it was dedicated to the “victims of the fascist terror. 1941-1944”<sup>243</sup>. The languages chosen for the inscription were Lithuanian and Russian, there is no inscription in Hebrew or Yiddish. The obelisk is not only a monument like the others, it is built on the ruins of a cautious but growing self-awareness of the surviving Jewish community of Vilnius who tried to regain its dignity by – at least – remembering their victims after the terrible experience of the Shoa.

It is, therefore, not surprising at all that the Soviet obelisk was given special attention by the Jewish Museum on the map of the memorial site of Paneriai and in general. According to the Paneriai project website, the new monument to the killed Jews was erected in 1991 – on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

### *Empty spaces*

The map of the memorial site of Paneriai includes most of the important information for visitors. First of all, there is no description with regard to how the memorial site can be reached. This information, however, is available on the project’s website in detail. Furthermore, the plan does

<sup>242</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, official flyer, online

<sup>243</sup> In Lithuanian: „Fašistinio teroro aukoms“ and in Russian “Жертвам фашистского террора“.

not provide any details on the origin or development of the different monuments (except the Soviet obelisk), which is possibly owed to a lack of space. Also, no conclusions can be drawn from the map regarding the size of the objects, which makes them all – at least theoretically – equally important and demonstrates the attempts of the publisher to provide an inclusive narrative in this regard. Another omission is obviously the lack of mention of the discoveries from 2016/17 are not mentioned at all – maybe because the map is not up to date, owing to a lack of cooperation between the museum and the specific project. However, the folder makes explicit mention of the symbolic circle for the Roma (set up in 2015) but not of the 2016/17 discoveries.

#### 6.2.4 Excursus: Comparison to another photograph

The Yad Vashem photo archive provides one further photo<sup>244</sup> of a panel showing a plan of the memorial site. The photo was added to the picture archive in February 1995 but appears to be older. It is the only available graph which shows how the site was constituted earlier on.

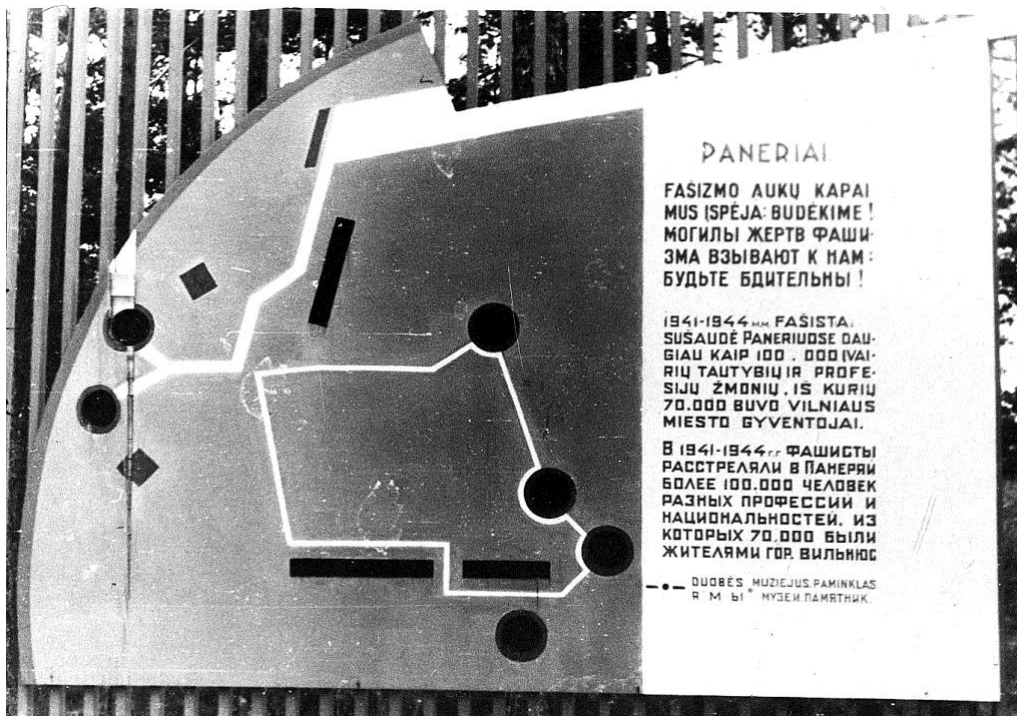


Figure 4: Map of Paneriai, in the museum

The inscription in Lithuanian and Russian reads: “The graves of the victims of fascism call out to you: Watch out!” and then: “Between 1941 and 1944 fascists shot more than 100 000 people of different professions and nationalities at Paneriai. Among them were 70 000 inhabitants of

<sup>244</sup> Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 4620/468

Vilnius.” The inscription is by the “Pit Monument Museum”. In contrast with the plan analysed above, the older version did not inverse north and south, which means north is on the upper side and south below. Interestingly enough, the parking lot in the north was already visible on the old map, which, however, did not include any details on the different monuments. Only the six pits are recognisable (which are the same ones which can be found in the new plan), as they are symbolised by round circles. Other elements or objects are hinted at with long rectangles or trapezoids. The first, smaller rectangle near the parking lot may refer to the lettering at the entrance, while the second one, most likely, refers to the trench, marked by the number 12 on the new map. The two trapezoids near the first two pits in the west show the small building of the museum (north) and the Soviet obelisk (south). The two rectangles in the north have no corresponding objects on the other plan, they could be other trenches or paths.

The map on the picture most likely stems from the 1960s, when the memorial site was a part of the Revolution Museum. The selection of languages, their chronological order (first Lithuanian, then Russian) and the objects the memorial site is composed by leads to the conclusion that it the map on the Yad Vashem picture was made during Soviet times. The Paneriai memorial site’s project website declares the museum of Paneriai as having been part of the Revolution Museum in the 1960s:

*“Once the museum was established, the information infrastructure was arranged: metal information stands in Lithuanian and Russian were erected at the entrance to the territory and the pits of the mass killing, and other pits were trimmed. [...] The first exposition of the Museum of Paneriai was in a typical wooden pavilion which also housed the director’s apartment.”<sup>245</sup>*

As the picture shows a wooden background, it is very likely that the photo can be dated back to the 1960s, when the museum was established.

#### 6.2.5 Findings

The basic structure of the memorial site of Paneriai has not changed since the moment it became a mass killing site: The formerly six – and now eleven – pits beginning near the railway tracks in the north and reaching towards south, frame the site. However, at the centre there are two accumulations of monuments, one more to the north and the other more to the south-west. Emanating from its ambiguous history, the Soviet obelisk has a specific role in the composition

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<sup>245</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, online, Museum of Paneriai

of the memorial site. This is emphasised by its position at the centre, right within the second accumulation of monuments which consists of the symbolic circle of stones in memory of the Roma, the monument to the Jews, the monument to the medical doctor Hilaris Feigus and the monument to the inmates of the Kailis and HKP Nazi forced labour camps and Jewish doctors from the military hospital in Vilnius. The other accumulation of monuments to the north consists of the monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force, the monument to the Lithuanians and the monument to the Soviet prisoners of war. Whereas the second accumulation to the south-west includes monuments dedicated to those who became victims of the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators mainly because of their ethnicity or religion, the other accumulation of monuments is dedicated mainly to those who were killed because of their actions of resistance at a certain moment in time. The only exception to this rule is the Soviet obelisk (which is not dedicated to any specific group or person) standing right near the monument to the killed Jews and the symbolic circle of stones in memory of the Roma. The objects not included in these two accumulations are the monument to the Poles and the monument to Enzis Jagomastas and his family, which are located in the very north near the railway tracks. Furthermore, the entrance monument near the parking lot does not belong to any of the two mentioned groupings. This is valid as well for the small building of the information centre which is a bit aside.

There are no boundaries to the memorial site, neither on the map nor in reality by trenches, fences or similar barriers. It opens up to the forest of Paneriai, where more and more objects and elements belonging to the former mass killing site have been discovered in the course of recent years.

### 6.3 Artefact Analysis

The following artefact analysis goes into detail of the single monuments at the memorial site of Paneriai. In order to gain a more profound insight, they will be categorised according to the periods suggested by Davoliūtė and Balkelis with regard to legislated history. Naturally, a time categorisation of legislation is not the same as a categorisation of monuments. Nevertheless, as it was shown above, Balkelis' and Davoliūtė's concept makes general shifts and changes in the overall discourse visible as well, just as it does with and the approach to the Holocaust and its remembrance. An analysis can, therefore, show, whether those shifts can be observed with regard to the memorial site and its development as well. It will include a first descriptive analysis, a context analysis investigating the social meaning of the monument, and, finally, an analysis of impact and function of the object. In the last part of the chapter I will come to the

overarching conclusions which can be drawn. As the descriptions include the exact position of the monuments, the naming of the map which was analysed above will be used. The Soviet obelisk will not play a relevant role at this stage of analysis, as its background has been discussed already and this thesis focuses on those monuments and elements of the memorial site which were built or discovered between 1989 and 2018. The artefact analysis grants important insights into the development of the *lieu de mémoire* or of the site in general according to the the SANE concept. Additionally, however, it also touches on agents and narratives, as described in the chapter before, and will therefore serve as a basis for further conclusions and findings.

### 6.3.1 First phase: 1989-1992

This first part of the analysis focuses on the first period of development, i.e. the monuments erected or discovered between 1989 and 1992. This period includes the declaration of Lithuania as an independent nation as well as the first year of the country's existence as a sovereign state.

#### *Monument to the victims of Paneriai erected at the entrance to the memorial*

This monument has a longer history than the others, as it was built in the mid 1980s already when the memorial site was rearranged. As it was changed significantly in 1989, it is categorised in this group of monuments. Today, the entrance monument is composed of three plaques: Two of them consist of white stone, carrying black marble slabs with inscriptions in Lithuanian and Russian explaining that "Here, in the Paneriai forest, between July 1941 and July 1944, Hitler's occupants and their local accomplices extinguished 100 000 people. To hide their crimes from December 1943 on they burnt the corpses of the shot." In the middle of those two bright stone slabs, a dark vertical stone slab was erected, clarifying the monument's meaning in Hebrew, Yiddish, Lithuanian and Russian: "Among the killed in Paneriai forest there were 70 000 Jews: men, women, children."



Figure 5: Monument to the victims of Paneriai

Several transformation processes can still be observed through this specific monument: The first version in 1985 consisted only of the two white stone slabs left and right of the monument (without the added black marble plaques) and can (at least in parts) still be seen on old pictures in the Yad Vashem photo archive<sup>246</sup>. In 1989, following the initiative of the Lithuanian Jewish community, the plaque at the centre of this monument was added, clarifying the number of Jewish victims in even more languages. Furthermore, the old inscriptions on the white stone slabs mentioning the Soviet victims killed at Paneriai were hidden from the view by black marble plaques only in 2004: They do not refer to Soviet citizens anymore; additionally, local supporters and collaborators of the regime are mentioned<sup>247</sup>.

The monument stands at the entrance of the memorial site and is, therefore, the first one a visitor can see when visiting the site – with the notable exception of the huge lettering. The inscription makes the memorial site's purpose clear. Furthermore, it includes a first description of the largest group of victims murdered at that place. As the other examples show, other monuments dedicated to other victim groups were erected during this first period – but not one of them is mentioned at the entrance monument. This can be explained both by taking into account the proportion of victims but also by considering the interested party regarding the memorial site

<sup>246</sup> Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 2776/8 (only partial perspective on the half with the Russian inscription)

<sup>247</sup> Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 7198/170 (from 1992) or 7198/62 (from 1994)



which for decades has been the Jewish community in Lithuania and the descendants of the victims.

### *Monument to the Poles*

The monument to the Poles lies on the periphery of the other monuments. Today it is made up of a rounded medium-high wall, which is higher in the back and lower near the open entrance. Within the rounded wall a metal cross (replacement for the former wooden one) and original tombstone can be found. Furthermore, four threes grow within the walls. Inscriptions can be found on the outside right and left of the entrance (“*Polska Kwatera 1941-1944*” in Polish and “*Lenkų Kapavietė 1941-1944*” in Lithuanian), and inside on the tombstone and on the inner walls: On the left and right side of the tombstone, the names of the Polish victims are listed, while in the middle (directly behind the tombstone altar) the sponsor of the rearranged monument has been immortalised in Polish (left) and Lithuanian (right) on both sides of the figure of a holy Mary (see figure 5): “To the soldiers of the *Armija Krajowa*, the Polish underground, the Polish intelligentsia and youth, who gave their life for the freedom of their homeland, respect to their memory. The government of the Republic of Poland”.



Figure 6: Inscription inside the monument to the Poles

The Polish inscription on the tombstone reads: “In memory of several thousand Poles killed in Paneriai, countrymen from Vilnius. Oh Lord, grant them eternal rest and may eternal light shine upon them”<sup>248</sup>. The equivalent Lithuanian inscription is visible in smaller lettering below<sup>249</sup>.



Figure 7: Monument to the Poles

Similarly to the monument at the entrance, also the monument to the Poles underwent significant changes as well: according to the description of the monument on the information panel, the original version was erected in 1990 on the initiative of Helena Pasierbska, who was part of the Polish *Armija Krajowa* during WWII. This version consisted of a high wooden cross and an altar-like tombstone and was remodeled into its current appearance on the initiative of the Polish government in 2000. Older pictures of the original version of the monument consisting only of the tombstone altar and a wooden cross, can be viewed at the Yad Vashem picture archive<sup>250</sup>. The cobblestones were added later as well.

Compared with other parts of the memorial site, the monument to the Poles is a vibrant place, owing to the manifold candles, flags and flowers, which are laid down there all throughout the year. The importance of the place to the remaining Polish community is connected with the Polish past of the city of Vilnius. Poles were killed at Paneriai by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators owing to their active role in the resistance movement, but also because it was a general aim of the Nazis to destroy the Polish nation. The Polish intelligentsia living in Vilnius

<sup>248</sup> Original Polish inscription (translated above by M.G.): “1941-1944/ Pamięci wielu tysięcy polaków zamordowanych w Ponarach w holdzie – rodacy ziemi wileńskiej/Wieczmy odpoczynek racz im dać panie, a światłość wiekuista niechaj im świeci. Amen”

<sup>249</sup> Original Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): “Nužudytu Paneriuose Lenku atminimui Vilniaus krašto tautiečiai/Amžinai atils duok mirusiems, viešpatie, ir amžinoji šviesa jiems tešvečia.”

<sup>250</sup> Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 7198/189 or 7198/190 (both from 1992)



was no exception in this regard, although the number of victims varies a lot: official data from the museum allows for an estimate of around 1500-2000 Polish victims which were killed in Paneriai<sup>251</sup>.

Nowadays, there are several organisations settled in Vilnius which try to address and to organise the Polish minority in Lithuania, such as the *Związek Polaków na Litwie* ("Association of Poles in Lithuania") and the party *Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie* ("Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania"). For these and similar groups a *lieu de mémoire* such as the monument to the Poles at the memorial site of Paneriai plays a unifying role within the community. At the same time, however, difficulties for individuals arise regarding the inclusion of different perspectives on the monument as the tendency towards a unified regime (as defined by Bernhard and Kubik) is much stronger within a small minority group than within larger, more diverse groups.

### *Monument to the killed Jews*

The monument to the killed Jews is located at one of the most central places of the memorial site. It was erected on a stone platform, surrounded by cobblestones. The monument can be accessed by climbing four relatively flat steps. Furthermore, it consists of a lower part of bright stone with a metal menorah and an upper part with a high panel of dark stone and inscriptions in Yiddish (above) and Hebrew (below) and above a star of David. At the back of the monument another menorah is carved into a dark plate of granite. Above the menorah inscriptions in Lithuanian, English and Russian can be seen, with the same text as the Yiddish and Hebrew inscriptions at the front side: "Eternal memory of 70 000 Jews of Vilnius and its environs who were murdered and burnt here, in Paneriai, by Nazi executioners and their accomplices."<sup>252</sup> To the sides of the monument a small inscription reading "Donated by the family Sh. Epstein, Tel Aviv, 1991" in English and Hebrew and a metal board remembering the first state visit of the Israeli president Moshe Katsav in 1995 can be found. Several parts of the monument seem to have served as targets of attacks: Close to the menorah near the front, traces of colour or other liquids are visible, a crack runs through the stone slab carrying the Hebrew and Yiddish inscriptions and there is a visible rupture in the Hebrew translation of the text elaborating on the donation. Even if the crack on the front stone slab and the liquid-like traces left on the menorah should be consequences of the weather or humidity, at least the rupture must have been done on purpose.

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<sup>251</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, online, Monument to commemorate the Poles

<sup>252</sup> Only the Hebrew part includes the acronym customary for memorial monuments meaning "May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life."



Figure 8: Donation inscription at the monument to the Jews

The monument is the successor to the original Jewish monument erected in 1948 which was destroyed by the Soviets soon afterwards and replaced by the obelisk. According to the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, the monument to the Jews erected in 1991 was inspired by the original monument<sup>253</sup> destroyed in 1952 and co-funded by the Jewish Community of Lithuania and the Lithuanian state on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The artist hired at the time was Jaunutis Makariūnas, who is also responsible for rearranging the entire memorial site in 1985.



Figure 9: Monument to the killed Jews (front view)

Although erected in 1991, the monument has the longest history of all the monuments in Paneriai, as the original version was erected in 1948. As a result, it is exactly the history of this

<sup>253</sup> As already mentioned, there are very few pictures of the 1948 original monument to the killed Jews. One of them can be viewed on the project website of the memorial site: [www.paneriumemorialas.lt/en/sovietinis-obeliskas-m10/](http://www.paneriumemorialas.lt/en/sovietinis-obeliskas-m10/)

monument which shows that the “will to remember”, as described by Nora, was not respected in the way the surviving Jewish community had expected it – ending in the destruction of the original monument. The fact that members of the Jewish community were the largest victim group could ultimately only be made visible because of the significant liberalisation measures taken during the Gorbachev period – this can be seen at the site of the monument to the victims of Paneriai. The new monument to the killed Jews, was donated by a mnemonic actor not living in Lithuania – the family of a holocaust survivor from Israel. This underlines the international significance of the monument as well, resulting in a visit by the Israeli president himself. As the attacks demonstrate, one has to speak of a fractured memorial regime rather than a pillarised one: Such acts of vandalism have to be interpreted as attempts of delegitimising a certain perspective and/or narrative.

#### *Monument to the Lithuanians*<sup>254</sup>

The monument to the Lithuanians is located a few metres from the path near the entrance to the memorial site and consists of a high, red-brown stone plinth with a relatively small cross on top. The plinth carries an inscription in only one language – the first of its kind<sup>255</sup>. This reads: “To the Lithuanians murdered by the occupants. 1941”<sup>256</sup>. The simple monument was erected in 1992, the information panel near the monument at the memorial site suggests that it was originally built to remember the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Forces, the family Jagomastas (before their specific monuments were built) and the Lithuanian communists who were killed at Paneriai. The monument was built on the initiative of the long-term responsible of the memorial site, Algis Karosas, who was a military historian and saw himself (according to Elena Makhotina) as the only responsible for the memorial site (contradicting the fact, that the it was earlier part of the Revolution Museum and later of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum)<sup>257</sup>. Makhotina also describes the tensions resulting from the different views on the memorial site of Karosas and the Jewish State Museum: Whereas Karosas tried to underline the various origins of the victims of WWII, the Jewish State Museum understood the place specifically as a “Holocaust Memorial”<sup>258</sup>.

<sup>254</sup> Of course, the differentiation between Jews and Lithuanians is highly problematic, as Jews have been Lithuanian citizens as well. Regarding this monument the term monument to the Lithuanians is used because of the indication in the museum’s material (map and online).

<sup>255</sup> All other inscriptions of that first phase were translated into at least one more language: Soviet inscriptions were mostly translated in Lithuanian and Russian, younger ones vary a lot, but they were usually translated at least into Lithuanian.

<sup>256</sup> The original, Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): “*Lietuviams nužudytiems okupantų 1941*”

<sup>257</sup> See Makhotina, 2017, p. 379

<sup>258</sup> Ibid. p. 379f



*Figure 10: Monument to the Lithuanians*

The different view of Karosas may be the origin of the already mentioned tendency towards an inclusive narrative at Paneriai, which can generally be observed at the memorial site. The monument to the Lithuanians is – besides being the first monument with a monolingual inscription – not specific at all: The dedication of the monument to the Lithuanians as victim of the occupying forces without providing further information on their role during WWII is supportive of the narrative that Lithuanians were victims of the Nazis to a similar extent as other groups for whom monuments were built at the memorial site.

### *Summary*

In keeping with the legislative measures taken following the collapse of the Soviet Union as mentioned above, the first period of Paneriai's existence as a memorial site after Lithuania had gained independence appears strongly connected to the narrative of an independent Lithuania which had suffered at the hands of two regimes. This narrative has, however, been corrected and changed over the years – one example is the changes that were made to the black plaque at the monument to the victims of Paneriai (which only in 2004 specified that Lithuanians were involved in the mass killings as well).

Important actors in this period were the Jewish Community, the Vilna Gaon State Jewish museum, the state of Lithuania, the Polish minority, the state of Poland and individual donors or initiators of monuments mentioned above such as Helena Pasierbska, Algis Karosas or the

family Epstein. Furthermore, already this first period shows a high interest in the site coming from abroad – maybe even higher than the interest in Lithuania itself: except for the monument to the Lithuanians all monuments bear connections with foreign communities or institutions<sup>259</sup>. Additionally, what appears to be visible at this point already is a certain tendency towards an inclusive narrative. The decision to erect monuments to the Poles and the Lithuanians could have turned out as a contested decision, however, it was done in order to include those groups. The conclusion could be that at least Algis Karosas understood the place not only as a memorial site for victims of the war, but also as a site to which he tried to attract as many different groups as possible. And this decision – irrespective of his views on the matter – has been supported since then by the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum.

In summary the findings of this first section of the artefact analysis appear to point the following conclusions: (1) significant changes directly on specific monuments were carried out not only as Lithuania became independent but also after – which shows an ongoing process of development of the memorial regime around the memorial site. (2) Based on the activities of different actors with different interests in the memorial site, Paneriai quickly became relatively open for different perspectives and even competing narratives within the memorial regime. (3) Generally, the interest in the place from abroad has always been high – as not only Jewish or Israeli institutions<sup>260</sup> were involved in its construction but also the Republic of Poland and individuals such as the Epstein family, who partly sponsored the monument to the Jews.

### 6.3.2 Second phase: 1993-2003

As mentioned above, the second phase in the development of legislating history identified by Balkelis and Davoliūtė was marked by the implementation of various legislative processes, which in many cases equated the Holocaust with the repression of the Soviet Union – or in the case of the rehabilitation processes did not even take the Holocaust into account at all, at least at first. Furthermore, the “International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania” was established in 1998. This chapter will analyse the monuments erected between 1993 and 2003 and also touch briefly on the changes made to monuments which were put up earlier.

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<sup>259</sup> It could be called into question whether the monument to the victims of Paneriai at the entrance of the memorial site really has this international connection. However, as it is the first monument at Paneriai to formulate an alternative narrative to the official Soviet one, it can hardly be ignored that this can be attributed to Lithuania gaining its independence. The international approach in this example is not visible by its attribution towards another community or group, but rather by the contradiction to the Soviet narrative in general.

<sup>260</sup> e.g. the photo archive at Yad Vashem shows in many pictures how the memorial site of Paneriai developed from featuring only the Soviet obelisk to the mutli-perspective place it is today.

*Monument to the Soviet prisoners of war*

Algis Karosas, who was mentioned in the last section already, was also responsible for the erection of the monument to the Soviet prisoners of war. Generally, it is assumed that Soviet POWs were the second largest victim group in Paneriai – just as in Lithuania as a whole<sup>261</sup>.

Essentially, the monument is a modest and almost round stone on a low base of rough cement near one of the pits. The stone carries a darker panel with a Lithuanian inscription on it – which is the second monolingual inscription so far. The inscription reads: “In this trench iun 1941, 7 514 Red Army prisoners of war of various nationalities died of disease and hunger”<sup>262</sup>, which clearly refers to the pits and trenches nearby. The monument addresses the killing of the Red Army prisoners of war, who were murdered by the Nazis at Paneriai. This excludes partisans, but by building this monument Algis Karosas added the narrative of another specific group to the place. The monument, erected in 1996, still seems to be important to specific groups in Lithuania, chiefly for the Russian minority: On Victory Day wreaths and flowers and Russian flags can be found at this place. As the panel is explicitly mentions the various nationalities of the victims, it is even more surprising that the inscription is only in Lithuanian and not at least also in Russian. It can be interpreted as an attempt at underlining the predominant language or a way of distancing the monument from the old Soviet monuments whose inscriptions were in Lithuanian and Russian. However, the monument has not been changed since it was erected in 1996.

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<sup>261</sup> Makhotina, 2017, p. 69 quotes a Soviet publication of 1945, where the number of victims of the Nazi-occupation in Lithuania was published surprisingly precisely – the number of Jewish victims in Lithuania is estimated at 220 000 people, whereas there were approximately 170 000 killed prisoners of war. According to the inscriptions on the monuments, out of the roughly 100 000 victims killed at Paneriai around 70 000 were Jewish.

<sup>262</sup> Original Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): “Šiuose apkasuose 1941 metais nuo ligų ir bado mirė 7514 ivairių tautų Raudonos Armijos karių karo belaisviu.”



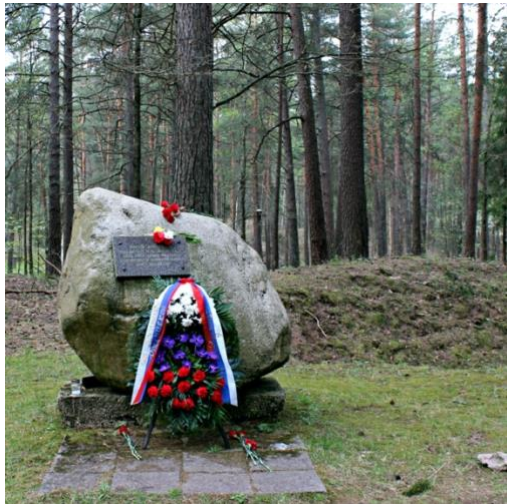


Figure 11: Monument to the Soviet prisoners of war



Figure 12: Inscription on the monument to the Soviet prisoners of war

### *Monument to Enzis Jagomastas and his family*

One more monument was built in 1996 – the monument to Enzis Jagomastas and his family, which is the one standing furthest away from the other monuments on the other side of the railway tracks. The monument is more than a simple commemoration stone – it has a large stone base with two steps to climb to the commemoration stone and a fenced flower bed around it. A paved path runs around the whole monument and two trees are located behind it. The visitor's gaze can directly follow the railway tracks. The entire constellation is very idyllic, even tulips are planted in the flower bed. The inscription which is engraved directly on the commemoration stone placed on the base reads: "In memory of Enzis Jagomastas, publisher and distributor of the Lithuanian Minority Press, and his family, killed on August 23, 1941."<sup>263</sup> The inscription is monolingual in Lithuanian. Near the opening of the rectangular path around the monument, there is one of the museum's information panels, explaining the history and background of the monument.

<sup>263</sup> Original Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): „Mažosios Lietuvos spaudos leidejo ir platin tojo Endzio Jagomasto ir jo seimos, nužudytos 1941.08.23 atminimui.“



Figure 113: Monument to Enzis Jagomastas and his family    Figure 14: Inscription

As mentioned, the monument was built in 1996 on the initiative of Algis Karosas. According to the information panel at the monument, Jagomastas was an important public figure and a publisher from Lithuania Minor (historic region in the south-west, which was part of Prussia until 1945) who was “defending the rights of Lithuanians before being finally exiled together with his family”. And further: “From March 1941 he lived in Vilnius where he was caught by Gestapo and killed at Paneriai”<sup>264</sup>. The monument is the first one dedicated to one single person or family – and demonstrates once more Karosas’ ambition to combine as many stories of victims as possible. Nevertheless, the story of the Jagomastas family is different from the ones of other victims or victim groups: First of all, he was not involved in the war, nor was he part of a group of victims persecuted because of their ethnicity or their being identified as Jewish by the Nazis. In fact, he was a Lithuanian living abroad during the war. According to the narrative, he became a victim of the Nazi regime owed to his commitment to the Lithuanian language and culture. His story is competing with the much more uncomfortable one of Lithuanians as collaborators of the Nazis.

*Monument to the inmates of the Kailis and HKP Nazi forced labour camps and Jewish doctors from the military hospital in Vilnius*

The monument to the inmates of the Kailis and HKP Nazi forced labour camps and Jewish doctors from the military hospital in Vilnius is a simple stone board, similar to a gravestone. On the narrow base are lie several small stones, which is keeping with the Jewish tradition. The speckled dark stone carries a star of David. The engraved inscription in Lithuanian, Hebrew and Yiddish reads: “In this ravine there are the remains of the Nazi prisoners of the Kailis Factory, the HKP and the military hospital of Vilnius, who were imprisoned and killed here on

<sup>264</sup> Information panel at the monument in Paneriai



5 July 1944.”<sup>265</sup> In contrast to the Lithuanian inscription, the Hebrew and Yiddish one also contain the number of victims, i.e. 1000. The monument is the most southern monument besides a few of the pits and is located on the other side of the path near the Soviet obelisk.



*Figure 15: Monument to the inmates of the Kailis and HKP Nazi forced labour camps and Jewish doctors from the Military Hospital in Vilnius*

The monument was donated and dedicated to the mentioned groups of victims by Rachel Margolis (1921-2015): she was a holocaust survivor and partisan who had lived in the ghetto of Vilnius and became the director of the Jewish Museum later. She also discovered the Ponary Diary of the Polish journalist Kazimierz Sakowicz and published it together with Yitzhak Arad. Rachel Margolis dedicated the monument to three different groups whose stories, as a result, have become part of the memorial site. Among these, first of all, is the group of victims with regard to the Kailis forced labour camps: The Kailis factory in Vilnius was a leather and fur factory which produced winter clothes for the war. Prisoners of war, Jews and Polish forced labourers lived in the camp nearby and were not killed as long as the production was needed for warfare. The HKP (*Heereskraftfahrzeugpark*), similarly to the Kailis factory, was important for the war. The head of the company, Karl Plagge, employed as many people as possible. When it became clear in 1944 that the camp of the HKP was going to be liquidated and its inmates killed, he warned them in advance – and they tried to hide themselves. The following day all inmates were brought to Paneriai and killed there. Although the houses of the camps were

<sup>265</sup> Original Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): „Šioje dauboje Kailio Fabriko, HKP ir karo ligoninės stovyklose nacistų kalintų ir 1944.07.05 čia nužudytų Vilniaus žydų palaikai.“

searched afterwards, around 150-200 people survived<sup>266</sup>. Plagge was given the honorary title of “Righteous among the Nations” by Yad Vashem in 2004. The Kailis factory was liquidated the same day, and the inmates brought to Paneriai and killed there. A group of Jewish doctors who were employed by the military hospital of Vilnius was also killed at the beginning of July 1944 in Paneriai. Among them was Rachel Margolis’ father.<sup>267</sup>

The monument was built in 1999 and is located beside the monument to Enzis Jagomastas and his family. It is the second one which has been dedicated to such a specific group. Interestingly, the information panel near the monument does not mention Karl Plagge at all but instead focuses on the victims killed in July 1944. The monument, therefore, on the one hand has the function of narrating the story of three very specific groups (among them one that is very personal, i.e. the story of Margolis’ father) and on the other hand it does not give any room to perpetrators or potential saviours. It is one more addition in the vein of Karosas’ philosophy, giving room to many and different perspectives and stories of that time. More than others, this monument is connected to the war itself, as the Kailis factory and the HKP were relevant for the war and were therefore liquidated much later than the ghetto in general, not to speak of the relevance of the military hospital. In any case, the stories also shows chances of escaping the Holocaust were almost non-existent, although there were attempts at saving the workers and in spite of the fact that they were relevant for warfare.

#### *Monument to the medical doctor Hilaris Feigus*

The monument to the medical doctor Hilaris Feigus consists of a simple gravestone near the Monument to the inmates of the Kailis and HKP Nazi forced labour camps and Jewish doctors from the Military Hospital in Vilnius. The inscription is, again, in Lithuanian, Hebrew and Yiddish and reads: “Here is resting Doctor Hilaris Feigus (1888-1944), who is the only one of the 100 000 victims of Paneriai who has his own grave.”<sup>268</sup> The gravestone has a rectangular, long form and is built on a stone base. The base and the gravestone itself consist of dark, smooth, speckled granite stone. Stones are lying on the base near the inclined gravestone. The monument is situated a few metres away from the path under a tree and is, therefore, not easy to see or to find. All the same, an information panel made by the museum addresses the visitors. So far it is the only monument dedicated to a single person: Hilaris Feigus was one of the Jewish doctors at the military hospital of Vilnius who was killed at the beginning of July 1944. According to

<sup>266</sup> See Yad Vashem, online: [www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/plagge.html](http://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/plagge.html)

<sup>267</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, online: monument to inmates of the Kailis and HKP forced labour camps

<sup>268</sup> Original Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): “Čia ilsisi d-ras hilaris feigus (1888-1944) vienintelis iš 100.000 panerių aukų turintis savo kapa.”

the project website, his wife was Rachel Margolis' music teacher. One escapee of the so-called "burning-brigade" (forced labourers who had to burn the corpses) recognised Hilaris Feigus in the mass of dead bodies<sup>269</sup>. It was Rachel Margolis who donated and dedicated the monument to Hilaris Feigus in 2000.



*Figure 16: Monument to the medical doctor Hilaris Feigus*

The monument to Hilaris Feigus is very unique in the context of the memorial site of Paneriai: It is, in fact, the only real gravestone dedicated to a single person. Hilaris Feigus would be also part of the Jewish doctors from the military hospital in Vilnius – to whom the neighbouring monument is dedicated. Nevertheless it appears to be the ambition of Margolis to point out at least one individual destiny in connection with the Holocaust.

### *Summary*

This second phase from 1993 to 2003 is marked by an opening up views regarding the victims killed at Paneriai: The monuments erected during this time are not only about the Jewish population who was murdered in this place anymore, but are also concerned with the Soviet prisoners of war, the Jagomastas family and, with regard to Hilarius Feigus, even an individual person. The changes made to the monument to the Poles carried out in 2000 fall in this phase. The period shows that the development of the memorial site proceeded in phases: No monuments or significant changes were made between 1992 and 1996 or between 1999 and

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<sup>269</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Monument in memory of medical doctor Hilaris Feigus

2003 (except the changes at the monument to the Poles). It can hardly be denied that Algis Karosas and Rachel Margolis contributed to a vast extent to the memorial site of Paneriai, as they were both involved in research and memorial practices. The only additional agent during this time was the Polish government which initiated the changes to the monument to the Poles. In any case, the period was far from being calm, as it was described by Balkelis and Davoliūtė. To summarise in brief the findings of this period, it should be noted that (1) the image of the victims of Paneriai was broadened during this period based on the erection of new monuments on the one hand and driven by the individual initiatives of Algis Karosas and Rachel Margolis on the other hand. (2) This was the only period which saw the erection of a monument dedicated to a specific family (the Jagomastas) and to an individual person were built. (3) Finally, the period lacked the same high international interest in the site from the first period – at least in regard to the monuments and the mentioned agents.

### 6.3.3 Third phase: 2004-2018

Professionalisation and an increase in quality are characteristics of the third phase of legislated history, according to Balkelis and Davoliūtė. However, as indicated earlier, this was and remains a period of heated conflicts and debates with regard to Lithuania's handling of the past as well.

#### *Monument to the Soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force*

The monument to the Soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force consists of an oval, octagonal base, with four steps leading to the centre of the monument. On both sides of the steps there are massive, black granite slabs, bearing the names of the victims killed at Paneriai. The centre of the monument is marked by a dark stone cross featuring the Lithuanian inscription „Here, between 17-21 May 1944 German SS units shot 86 soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Unit.”<sup>270</sup> Above the stone two massive inclined stone cubes are crossed in the form of two rifles. The cross was erected on a low stone base which leads on towards the steps, ending in a step ornament featuring a helmet with a cross and a twig. The place in front of the monument is paved with stone around a tree.

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<sup>270</sup> Original Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): “Šioje vietoje 1944 M. Gegužės mėn. 17-21 D. vokiečių kariuomenės SS daliniai sušaudė 86 Lietuvos vietinės rinktinės karius savanorius.”



*Figure 17: Monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force*

The controversial history of the Territorial Defence Force was mentioned as one example for competing narratives at the memorial site of Paneriai. However, the monument has an interesting history by itself: the inscription is monolingual and, according to the museum, the monument was designed and built by the architect Algis Mikėnas and the sculptor Juozas Šlivinskas in 2004, i.e. on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the killing of those 86 soldiers commemorated<sup>271</sup>. The initiator of this monument was the Lithuanian ministry of defence, which to this date is the only ministry having contributed to this site as specific initiator to the memorial site of Paneriai.

With regard to the story the monument supposedly tells, it needs to be mentioned that although the Territorial Defence Force was certainly not a partisan group, fighting the Nazis or even their collaborators, they were indeed killed by them. In keeping with the approach of Algis Karosas it follows that such a group should be remembered as having been victims of WWII as well. At the same time, however, this monument shines a light on the missing discrimination between opposition to the Holocaust and victims on one hand and more ambiguous narratives like those of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force, which does not easily present itself as a victim story without certain limitations. Nevertheless, this is what happened at the memorial. It was only the information panel which was added much later that mentioned the unit as having instituted “with the permission of the Nazi Germany SS and police headquarters” in order to “fight Soviet and Polish partisans”<sup>272</sup>.

<sup>271</sup> Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force

<sup>272</sup> See informational panel no. 14 at the memorial site of Paneriai



*Bunker-pit where members of the 'burning brigade' (Sonderkommando 1005B) were kept prisoner*

The bunker-pit is not a monument in the classical sense. However, it needs to be mentioned in the context of this thesis as an example of overlaying spheres of memory: On the one hand for the Nazis and their collaborators this place served as an artefact of utility – the place where those prisoners were kept, who had to burn the mass of corpses. On the other hand, the bunker-pit is part of the *lieu de mémoire* today and thus charged not only with the obvious material and former functional significance, but also with symbolic significance. The bunker pit consists of a hole in the ground rounded by a half-high stone wall, which is partly embedded into the wood around it. A small path leads from the main path to the pit and around the wall. In the middle of the pit a wooden fixture can be seen, which has been rebuilt recently: This structure was used to build the pyramids of corpses which would be burnt. The bunker-pit lies more central than most of the other pits. Furthermore, an information panel was added containing the basic information about what happened in this place. Interestingly, whereas the project's website makes reference to the *Sonderkommando 1005A*, the map of the memorial site and the information panel at the site itself only make mention of the *Sonderkommando 1005B*. The reason for this may lie in the fact, that the different special units operated at different moments at different places.

At the crossroads of the main path and the one leading to the bunker-pit, a stone board carries the following inscription in Lithuanian and Russian: "In this 8m-wide pit the Hitlerian occupying forces kept prisoners, who they forced to dig out corpses and to crush their bones."<sup>273</sup> First of all, the language selection of the stone board indicates that the board still stems from Soviet times, – an assumption which appears strengthened by the fact that the Lithuanian collaboration is not mentioned at all (similar to the first version of the monument to the victims of Paneriai at the entrance). Secondly, the inscription refers to prisoners who were forced to crush the bones of the victims instead of burning their corpses. The writing has a very similar appearance to the original writing on the monument to the victims of Paneriai, which was erected in 1985<sup>274</sup>. Therefore, it appears that the pit itself and its function were known and integrated in the memorial site from the beginning.

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<sup>273</sup> Original Lithuanian inscription (translated above by M.G.): "*Šioje 8-ių metrų gylio duobėje Hitleriniai okupantai laikė kalinius ir vertė juos kasti iš žuodynų vietų lavonus, deginti ir trupinti jų kaulus.*" And in Russian: "*В этой восьмиметровой яме гитлеровские оккупанты держали заключенных, которых заставляли выкапывать трупы и дробить их кости.*"

<sup>274</sup> Yad Vashem photo archive, archival signature 2776/8

On the contrary to other monuments at the memorial site, the bunker pit had its function already before it became a *lieu de mémoire*. This also means, that there was no specific donor who funded the building. The integration into the memorial site was done step by step during the development of the place from the former killing site towards its current state. The bunker-pit was assigned to this phase because of the relatively late discoveries made at this spot: The place first gained international attention in 2004 when the entrance to an escape tunnel dug by the members of the burning brigade was found, and later in 2016 when the whole tunnel was discovered by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from Lithuania, Israel and the US. In April 1944 15 prisoners had successfully escaped through the tunnel and survived. Most of them joined the Soviet partisans in the forests<sup>275</sup>. The discovery of the whole tunnel in 2016



Figure 18: Inscription at the bunker-pit was



Figure 19: The bunker-pit

discussed in international media throughout Europe and the world. Its importance influenced the narration of the place's history to a similar extent as the railway track had done, as this place shows the victims of the mass killings not just as victims anymore, but as using their agency to change the circumstances of their lives. Richard Freund, one of the researchers involved, describes the surprisingly high world-wide interest in the discovery as follows:

*“An escape tunnel in a far-flung forest of Lithuania did not seem to be one of the great discoveries of the year, yet it was obvious from the many interviews that I gave that it fascinated people in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Australia and North and South America. I received many notes and letters, and I started to wonder whether I had missed something that others saw in the project. It was not necessarily the story of the Jews, or Jewish history, or even the Holocaust that drew people’s interest; I think it was the possibility of being able to escape from the most horrific conditions imaginable to*

<sup>275</sup> See also chapter 3.3.2 “Aktion 1005 and the end of WWII”

*freedom that most captured the imagination. It was the idea that there can – and should be – hope against all odds. It was the idea of hope itself.”<sup>276</sup>*

This quote shows in brief not only the surprise of the researcher, but also his consciousness of the importance of the discovery – which changed the narration connected to the place, or at least added one more perspective: the perspective of those who actively tried to escape and partly succeeded.

*Symbolic circle of stones in memory of the Roma killed at Paneriai (2015)*

The symbolic circle of stones in memory of the Roma is the youngest monument at the memorial site of Paneriai. Although it is very small, it is included on the plan of the memorial site and has its own information panel in the vicinity. As the name already suggests, the symbolic circle consists of a larger outer stone circle and a smaller inner one. These two circles are connected by four lines. The symbol is evocative of the red cartwheel of the Roma, the traditional symbol, and is located near the Soviet obelisk on the west-facing hillside.



Figure 20: Symbolic circle of stones in memory of the Roma killed at Paneriai

The symbolic circle of stones was built in 2015 as the last monument at Paneriai. According to the information panel, it was laid down by the children of the Vilnius Roma community together with the staff of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum<sup>277</sup>. General estimates claim that at least

<sup>276</sup> Freund, 2019, p. 213

<sup>277</sup> See information panel no. 3 at the memorial site of Paneriai



one third of the Lithuanian Roma community was killed during the Holocaust throughout the country<sup>278</sup>. Getting concrete data, however, still proves to be an enormous challenge, as Vytautas Toleikis emphasises in his study, which served as starting point of the work of the International commission: “The issue is even more complex in view of the fact that prior to the war only a small proportion of Roma people led a settled way of life and therefore could not be covered by the 1923 population census in Lithuania.”<sup>279</sup> Toleikis, too, assumes that before WWII there were at least 1 500 Roma in Lithuania and that “approximately every third Roma perished”<sup>280</sup>. Since 2009 a remembrance ceremony has been organised every year on 2<sup>nd</sup> August at the memorial site of Paneriai – on the day of the Roma and Sinti Genocide Remembrance Day.<sup>281</sup>

### *Summary*

This last phase is the longest and at the same time the calmest period concerning to the construction of new monuments. It is possible to doubt the adequacy of the categorisation. One important detail which also falls in this period is the last change at the monument to the victims of Paneriai at the entrance: In 2004 two black marble slabs were added, which changed the focus from the Hitlerite occupying forces as the only perpetrators to zoom in on the local supporters and collaborators of the regime.<sup>282</sup> By erecting the monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force, in the same year one more controversial perspective was added to the memorial site. Furthermore, this period has shone a light on new scientific insights: The significance of the memorial site is no longer only symbolic, but it has also taken on a scientific relevance – not only in Lithuania but on also internationally. The most recent monument which has been added to the site is the symbolic circle in memory of the killed Roma which is no coincidence: During this period scientific and political interest in the history and future of Roma and Sinti grew. In Lithuania, specifically, this interest was boosted by the activities of the International Commission and its members. As central findings concerning this phase, therefore, (1) the termination of the former animated building activity needs to be mentioned. As shown above, this does not mean that the debates in Lithuania were calm in general. (2) The changes made to the entrance memorial can be seen as a step towards a more

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<sup>278</sup> Estimates claiming that around 500 Roma out of 1500 were killed throughout Lithuania were done by the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and the Lithuanian Romų Platforma.

<sup>279</sup> Toleikis, 2016, p. 5

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>281</sup> OSCE, 2015, p. 60

<sup>282</sup> The comparison can be made with the picture in this chapter and the photo in the Yad Vashem photo archive (archival signature: 2776/8).

self-critical point of view – i.e. that the Holocaust was not just the result of a foreign occupation, but that there was a high level of collaboration and cooperation by the Lithuanian population. Finally, (3) the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum did not appear to be wary of including contested or possibly controversial narratives in the memorial site in that period still. The openness which had been practiced by Algis Karosas already was still prevalent in this period.

#### 6.3.4 Findings

This chapter shall summarise the findings of the artefact analysis and structure them in order to get a fuller picture of the development of the memorial site of Paneriai. The selected time categorisation based on Balkelis and Davoliūtė turned out to be helpful on the one hand, but also arbitrary in parts on the other: e.g. it is difficult to find a reasoning as to why the two monuments constructed and discovered in 2004 are part of the last phase. One more example: whereas in the monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force a certain thriving for prestige and acknowledgement is visible, the only discovery (not erecting or building) of the bunker-pit and the very modest symbolic stone circle in memory of the Roma are clearly coming from another approach.

Information regarding the individual monuments is provided transparently on the information panels near the monuments and include not only the history of the victim groups the monuments commemorate but also on the people or institution that initiated or carried out the concrete construction of the monuments. This fact makes it plain for visitors that the aim of the memorial site and the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum is not to judge the roles of the various agents during the national-socialist occupation, but to allow room for different perspectives and their narratives, which are in some cases overlapping or even competing with one another. This shows the importance of the memorial site as a place for personal grieving and mourning. Additionally, the information panels support the pedagogical function of the place as well.

The mentioned variety of narratives results in a variety of languages on the monuments as well. To a certain extent the languages are symptomatic of the time the monuments were built: Monuments with Lithuanian and Russian inscriptions stem – at least originally – from Soviet times, while monuments that were erected after Lithuania had gained its independence also include Hebrew and/or Yiddish translations. Only a few of the monuments from the first, second or the third phase are monolingual (i.e. Lithuanian) – most of them refer directly to victims killed in the Paneriai forest who were of ethnic Lithuanian origin. Further languages featured on the monuments are Polish and English, while the symbolic circle of stones to commemorate

the Roma – the only exception in this regards – does not have any inscription. There is a strong connection between the people, groups or institutions who initiated or donated the different monuments to the language chosen. Apart from the state of Lithuania, foreign governments are featured in this regard as well, most notably the Israeli and the Polish one. No indication could be found with regard to Russia having been involved in the construction of the monument to the Soviet Prisoners of war; the inscription is only in Lithuanian – regardless of the Russian flags visible on the pictures above; Russia as the legal successor state of the Soviet Union could however, be interpreted as having been involved in the construction of the Soviet obelisk which has not been discussed in this artefact analysis. By way of the monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force, the Lithuanian ministry of Defense erected its own monument – and not an uncontested one. Furthermore, ethnic groups, families and individuals could donate or/and built their own monuments, as the examples of Rachel Margolis, Helena Pasierbska and Algis Karosas show, even if their individual intentions may have been very different. Generally speaking, the groups of victims the monuments are refer to became more specific over time. The most individual one is the monument to Hilaris Feigus, who is – as indicated on the gravestone – the only person to have his own gravestone at Paneriai. One exception in this development is the Roma minority – which may come from the late recognition as a victim group: all other ethnic groups were well-known already during the time of the Soviet Union, whereas the history of the Roma is a younger research topic. In Lithuania it has been the focus of research only thanks to the Historic Commission which started its work in 1998. Moreover, a decline in the construction activity could be observed: whereas during the first two phases monuments were built out of stone (using granite and marble), the last one of this kind to be erected was the monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Forces in 2004. By contrast the discovery of the bunker-pit was mainly a reconstruction of a historical artefact while the symbolic circle of stones to commemorate the Roma can hardly be described as a monument at all.

This analysis shows, that the development of the memorial site of Paneriai did not join and promote a single and simple narrative: The openness of the museum and its staff towards different perspectives has resulted in a multi-dimensional memorial site which has, however, not found a sort of common thread for one inclusive narrative – which does not, however, necessarily have to be the aim of the site. If and how this multi-perspectival approach contributed to the mnemonic regime around the former mass killing site, is one of the main questions to be discussed in the expert interviewed in the next chapter.

## 6.4 Expert Interview

The expert interview with Mantas Šikšnianas, a guide working at the memorial site of Paneriai, was conducted online on 8th June 2020. Šikšnianas works part-time for the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and is also a student at the same time. The interview guideline was provided to him in advance in order to give him the possibility of preparing himself for the more detailed questions. In keeping with the already mentioned research questions, the interview touched on three main categories, which were the development of the memorial site, agents (initiators and oppositions) and future plans for the site. These three categories were used in order to systematise the key statements of the interview. The following subchapters will elaborate more concretely on Šikšnianas' point of view and his expertise. However, this chapter will not go into detail regarding every monument, but rather explore the development over time. The following sub-chapters are the result of a qualitative content analysis of the interview transcript based on three categories, which result from the mentioned research questions: the development of the memorial site, involved agents (including initiators and opposition) and future plans for the memorial site.

### 6.4.1 The interview

The interview was divided into different sections: the first one was dedicated to general questions about the current situation and the mission of the memorial site of Paneriai according to Šikšnianas' understanding of its role. It was followed by questions about the three mentioned periods (1989-1992, 1993-2003, 2003-2018), followed by a last section about current plans and the future. Informed consent of the interviewed person was issued on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2020.

#### *The development of the memorial site*

According to Šikšnianas the development of the memorial site since 1989 has only been possible because of Lithuanian independence. The most important effect for the memorial site with regard to Lithuanian independence was that it became possible “to build new monuments”<sup>283</sup>. This was important, first of all, for specific groups like the Jewish and the Polish community. However, Šikšnianas also mentions that during the first period 1989-1992 it was still difficult to talk about Lithuanian collaboration in general: “It is clear, at that time, speaking about the Holocaust was much more difficult, [...] people talked about it, but compared with this time now it is much better [...]. Because people are more aware, and speak

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<sup>283</sup> Interview with Mantas Šikšnianas on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020

about this topic more loudly, more boldly.” However, he also mentions the need and attempt of various agents “to build [an] own monument”<sup>284</sup>. In the second period between 1992 and 2003, referring to significant changes, Šikšnianas mentions first of all the opening up of the memorial site towards different and even competing narratives. Although the first individual initiative was Helena Pasierbska’s monument to the Poles (belonging to the first phase), the second phase stands out with two very active individual sponsors, Algis Karosas and Rachel Margolis, whose role will be discussed as category of agents as well. The first competing narrative started with the monument to the Lithuanians, which provoked opposition also between of relevant agents. According to Šikšnianas, the last phase from 2003 until 2018 was marked by the fact, that most of the victim groups were finally commemorated with a monument, which explains the low building activity at this time. However, he underlines the importance of private initiatives at the memorial site, as the symbolic stone circle to commemorate the killed Roma was a joint initiative with the local Roma community. What became an ongoing question in this phase – and what is still unresolved according to Šikšnianas – is the situation of the information centre or museum, i.e. the building visible on the map, which stands at the centre of the memorial site. With regard to 2013, when the memorial site became part of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Šikšnianas does not mention any significant changes. However, according to him, the previous exhibition had “no emphasis on Jewish victims”<sup>285</sup>, as he describes it. “It is difficult to create the perfect exhibition”, he says and “it is impossible to please everyone.” Generally speaking, Šikšnianas sees the mission of the memorial site in “commemorating them [the victims] in a proper way”<sup>286</sup>.

#### *Agents – initiators and opposition*

According to Mantas Šikšnianas, with the independence of Lithuania the building of new monuments (besides the Soviet obelisk) first became possible. At the same time, this historic event made it possible for different groups to bring their perspective to the site or to express their opposition. Between 1989 and 1992 the most important actors were the Jewish and the Polish community, but not only – they stand in connection with the family Epstein from Israel and Helena Pasierbska from the Polish community<sup>287</sup>. Šikšnianas reveals that during the 1990s mainly the memorial site – which is on an open territory and not closed off at any side – was also the aim of attacks in the form of swastikas sprayed on monuments. The time between 1993

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

and 2003 was marked by initiatives coming from individuals such as Algis Karosas and Rachel Margolis. Šikšnianas describes this period as the moment when the competition of narratives represented by the monuments started. He quotes Helena Pasierbska, who was the initiator of the Polish monument, and asked, referring to the monument to the Lithuanians, “if we [meaning: Lithuanians] want to become a victim, like others”<sup>288</sup>. Furthermore, according to Šikšnianas, the director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum said in this context that the memorial site of Paneriai has too many monuments. Since 2003, as most of the victim groups already had a monument dedicated to them, the international interest has decreased. Interestingly, Šikšnianas does not mention any interest on the part of the state of Israel, but only the interest of the Polish community (in Lithuania and Poland itself). Nevertheless, in financial regards he mentions that initially the Jewish community was the main sponsor of the entire memorial site.

#### *Future plans for the memorial site of Paneriai*

The memorial site of Paneriai has been part of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum since 2013. Šikšnianas elaborates on the most important future projects of the memorial site of Paneriai in this context: First of all, they need to “choose a place for the informational centre” or “another forum”<sup>289</sup>, which according to him could also be outside around the monuments. Furthermore, a book about the memorial site is currently underway and will be published in 2020 or in 2021. Also, website adjustments are permanently ongoing. The current situation is, that the youngest rearrangement of the memorial site is still ongoing and will be completed by 2024 at the latest.

#### 6.4.2 Findings

The interview with the guide Mantas Šikšnianas provided a better overview of the ongoing changes and developments rather than providing selective insights at specific moments. It is necessary in order to categorise the findings drawn out of the artefact and document analyses.

The development of the memorial site of Paneriai – as it is known today – could only start its vivid activities following the independence of Lithuania, although some minor adjustments and the beginning of the mainly Jewish tries to push it forward were done before this time on the basis of Gorbachev’s liberalisations. After that and in the following years the vivid activity at the memorial site did not only lead to new monuments but also to the mentioned earlier variety

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

of narratives. As the first two phases (1989-1992 and 1993-2003) were marked by the active construction of monuments, the last period (2004-2018) was more a time of research and scientific interest and discoveries in the memorial site and its former function – which seems to contradict Šikšnianas’ view of the mission of the memorial site: He still see the significance of the site in “commemorating them in a proper way”.<sup>290</sup>

After independence, the territory belonged to the municipality of Vilnius and then became part of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum in 2013. Although the municipality did not oppose (at least not successfully) the building of new monuments, the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum followed a different approach, which could be described as more “museum-like” – Šikšnianas speaks about doing “something more” and the change of the “idea”<sup>291</sup>. However, the Museum was familiar with the territory of Paneriai already, as the informational centre was already part of it before 2013.

Relevant agents in the field did not significantly change over the years: They can, generally, be categorised into (1) individuals and families, (2) (ethnic) groups and communities, (3) official institutions and (4) international agents from abroad. All of them are present and have specific interests in the memorial site of Paneriai. One agent which was not mentioned earlier but is referenced by Šikšnianas is the Ukrainian government, who sponsored part of the path stones of the memorial site. Initial steps at the early stage of the memorial site were taken by the Jewish community; however, other agents subsequently became interested in the place very soon afterwards. Šikšnianas, first of all, underlines the role of the Polish community in this regard. Nevertheless, the interview was also the first opportunity to get a better look at oppositional agents in this context: Šikšnianas mentions tensions with the Polish community (mainly Helena Pasierbska as their leader) when the monument to the Lithuanians was built. Also, the critique from the director of Auschwitz (“too many monuments”<sup>292</sup>) can be seen as a manifestation of discontent with the variety and diversity of narratives competing with each other at Paneriai. Šikšnianas himself, however, states that it’s impossible to “avoid Lithuanian victims”.<sup>293</sup> Interestingly, attacks or attempts at defamation from nationalist or right-wing groups don’t seem to be a current problem at the memorial site itself – although the previous chapters showed the Lithuanian discourse regarding the approach towards the holocaust is still very heated.

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

Regarding the future plans for the memorial site, it can be stated that the current rearrangement seems to be aiming at providing more information also about the more recent research outcomes at the site. However, the variety of monuments and narratives will be kept. Further projects mentioned include the publication of a book, which would contribute to international interest as well.

## 6.5 Text Analysis

This chapter analyses the so-called march of the living as a social practice in Lithuania, which contains the text analysis of five English texts published on newspaper websites. The following brief interview with Faina Kukliansky, chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, is also discusses this topic, and is part of this chapter as an excursus. As mentioned, the text analysis aimed at, overall, answering the questions of important agents and participants over the time of existence of this tradition. In this context the publications will not be seen without a context: Every analysis contains a brief introduction about the media it was published in. However, first of all, a general insight will be given, what the march of the living is. The selection of the publications followed the requirement of a broad variety of online media, relevant on a national and international level. Also, it can be seen, that the dates of publication differ – which can show the development over times.

### 6.5.1 The march of the living<sup>294</sup> – general information

The march of the living is a classical event, as defined by Björkdahl et al.: It is strongly connected to the memorial site of Paneriai and at the same time a yearly tradition. The gathering of people for the march of the living starts at Paneriai railway station and goes to the memorial site, where people are then spreading near different monuments. Different national and international media are reporting about the event since its very beginning. In this context, however, the focus will lie on the more recent events, as online reports are available only from around the last ten years. Each text will be analysed regarding its provenience (which medium) its context, general characteristics such as length etc. and the main questions discussed in this chapter (which are the explicitly mentioned agents and participants of the event). Basically, different kinds of marches are taking place on different dates as in Paneriai – such as the march of the living on Yom HaShoa or on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, which is the official Lithuanian Holocaust

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<sup>294</sup> In the analyzed texts the march of the living is written in capital letters mainly. The decision not to do so is based on the fact that there are different traditions of such marches also in Poland and other countries. Although all of them are connected to the Holocaust the variety of evolved traditions is broad and taking places on different days of the year.



Remembrance day (based on the day, when in 1943 the Ghetto of Vilnius was destroyed and its last inhabitants brought to Paneriai).

#### 6.5.2 Text 1: Holocaust victims honored in March of Living in Vilnius<sup>295</sup>

The first text comes from the online platform of the free newspaper 15min. It was founded in 2005, the English website in 2012. The platform belongs to the Estonian Eesti Media, all content is free. The text itself is based on the BNS<sup>296</sup> (Baltic News Service) report.

The nearly 300 words long article was published on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2013 (the day after the event took place – which was in this case the day after Yom HaShoa, the Jewish day of remembrance to the victims of the Shoa), and is divided in seven paragraphs, which contain no more than one or two sentences. The publication starts with the event at Paneriai forest and the description of the participants. Following this, the minister of foreign affairs and the chair of the Lithuanian Jewish Community are quoted. The last quotation comes from a descendant of Lithuanian Holocaust survivors, who traveled to Lithuania to get to know the place where some of her family were killed (“My aunt and her family was killed here, in the Holocaust. If you don’t have the past, you don’t have a future.”<sup>297</sup>). The closure of the text is the information that “more than 90 percent of Lithuania’s pre-war Jewish population of over 200 000 were murdered during the Nazi occupation.”<sup>298</sup> The article is divided into a lead part, an informational introduction, three quotations and a conclusion. The three quotations are in the order of their importance. The minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania Linas Linkevičius mentions the Holocaust as a „big sore which is also an integral part of our history“.<sup>299</sup> More interesting is, however, that according to his quotation the March of the Living and its tradition is „a reminder of our common history that it should never happen again“.<sup>300</sup> The quotation shows, (a) that already nine years after the first march of the living this social practice is understood as a tradition and (b) it seems still not do be common to discuss Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazi occupants in 2013. Faina Kukliansky, however, chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, underlines the importance of the march of the living mentioning several groups participating in it: “A group of people has been coming from Israel for the last five years”, “Vilnius residents, residents of Vilnius Region, war victims or their relatives”<sup>301</sup>. A clear focus of the article lies on the wide

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<sup>295</sup> 15min.lt, 2013, online

<sup>296</sup> BNS is a Baltic News Agency, active in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and founded already in 1990.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

range of people coming together for the occasion – already the lead part speaks of “several hundred people holding flags of Israel and flowers”. The three quotations stand for three different groups coming to the event: the minister as the official representative of Lithuania (but however, not the president or the prime minister), the representative of the Jewish community for the Lithuanian Jews, and the descendant of the Holocaust survivor as an moral authority and a last possibility to connect with those who died. What is not represented, is the Lithuanian civil society, today’s inhabitants of Vilnius: They are neither described as participants nor mentioned at all. Also, it remains unclear, who organised the event in that specific year. Generally, there is no organising agent in the description – only participants and speakers. This takes away any possible responsibility connected to the event.

#### 6.5.3 Text 2: Participants of march of living in Lithuania honour Holocaust Victims, Righteous among Nations<sup>302</sup>

The second text is an exception in this row as it is not a media publication but a PR article coming from the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania to the State of Israel. It was published in April 2014 and deals with the sixth march of the living, which according to the press statement was held on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2014; the statement was published one day later. The text consists of ten paragraphs (approximately 500 words) which, basically, list important guests and participants to the ceremony. The context of the publication is a very contested one: In 2014 Israel opened its embassy in Lithuania – economic ties became closer at that time. Also, Lithuania supported Israel during the 50 days conflict in Gaza in front of the United Nations. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian approach towards the Holocaust was still criticised: The call on Israel to investigate on Holocaust survivors (e.g. Yitzhak Arad) because of their cooperation with Soviet partisans in WWII was still not long ago<sup>303</sup>, the same is valid for the disastrous rehabilitation commission. In that context it is obvious, that the Lithuanian ministry was looking for reconciliation and a de-escalation of the heated debates and therefore, to mention all possible ties and common understandings which existed – as, e.g., the honoring of the Holocaust victims and righteous among nations. This may be why the ministry of foreign affairs is providing information about the topic, not any other responsible ministry. Furthermore, the text underlines, that the memorial ceremony was held on Yom HaShoah, the Jewish Holocaust Remembrance Day. As important participants the article mentions first the “Jewish Community of Lithuania” and “Litvaks from other countries”, then it goes into details with important

<sup>302</sup> Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania to the State of Israel, 2014, online

<sup>303</sup> See Winer, 2014, The Times of Israel, online

national and international representatives: “Israel’s Ambassador to Lithuania Hagit BenYaakov”, “the Chancellor of the Government of Lithuania Alminas Maciulis”. After that more general terms are used: “Lithuanian politicians, diplomats, representatives of the society, youth.” For their speeches “the Chancellor of the Government of Lithuania Alminas Maciulis, Israel’s Ambassador to Lithuania Hagit Ben-Yaakov, the Chair fo the Jewish Community of Lithuania Faina Kukliansky, the former Vilna Ghetto prisoner Fania Brancovskaja, the representative of the Lithuanian Union of Jewish Students Amit Belaite” are mentioned. However, in the centre of attention is not only the ceremony of the march of the living, but also the honorary ceremony of honouring the Righteous Among Nations – which were, in this case, eleven families, who were honoured not at the memorial but at the “Governmental building”. In congratulating the honoured families, also “Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Neris Germanas, the Chair of the Jewish Community of Lithuania Faina Kukliansky, the granddaughter of the Rightous Among the Nations Rasa Kubiliene, also the writer and Director of the Vilna Gaon State Jewis Museum Markas Zingeris, the painter Leonardas Gutasukas” were attending. Also, the participation of contemporary witnesses is mentioned as well as the handing over of a picture by a former inhabitant of the Ghetto of Vilnius who was rescued as a baby.

The listing of so many names – partly politically important partly important in civic society partly completely unknown – shows the aim of the Embassy to present Lithuania as an ally of Israel, although in this period the memorial conflict between Israel and Lithuania about handling the Lithuanian past was heating up.

The march of the living was accompanied by other public side-events such as the honouring of eleven families and the speeches of public figures. This makes the event official and the gives the participation of those people a political significance. However, although it is generally well known the article does not mention the Lithuanian Jewish Community as an organiser of the event – on the contrary: It says “Lithuania hosted the 6<sup>th</sup> March of the Living” at the very beginning, which is understandable from the PR perspective, but on the other side might be understood as an act of appropriation by the community itself.

#### 6.5.4 Text 3: Lithuanian officials ‘need history lessons’, says Jewish community leader<sup>304</sup>

The text comes from the Lithuanian English news portal Delfi EN, which is operating in the Baltic states in Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Russian, English and Polish. The English section

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<sup>304</sup> Delfi EN, 2016, online

was opened in 2013. However, the mentioned article is based again on BNS (Baltic News Service), which is visible in the text.

The text is nearly 500 words long and has 14 paragraphs, including the lead part. It starts with a brief explanation of the provocative title, which is a quotation from Faina Kuklinsky, the chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, who criticised Lithuanian authorities harshly. First of all, the article explains the occasion of Kuklinsky's speech, which was the March of the Living in 2016 – carried out as usually at the memorial site of Paneriai from the Paneriai railway station to the memorial site. The text was published two days after Yom HaShoah on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2016. It stands in a strong opposition to the two articles before, as it does not mention any other Lithuanian officials or speeches. The issue, Kuklinsky's quote is referring to, is explained in the article: According to Lithuanian law, citizenship can be restored for people who left Lithuania for "political reasons, resistance to occupation regimes or persecution by the regime"<sup>305</sup> and their descendants before the restoration of the country's independence. This, according to officials, does not include those, who left the country already during the interwar period, as "Jews were not persecuted in the independent Lithuania of the interwar years."<sup>306</sup> However, from Kuklinsky's point of view, for that reason, history lessons are needed because "we (Jews) never gave them (Lithuanian passports) away voluntarily, but the officials now tell us that perhaps there was no need to flee Lithuania, that everything was fine and perhaps you wouldn't have died, no matter that only 5% of those who stayed survived".<sup>307</sup> After this explanation the article passes on to a brief quotation of an Israeli business man, who underlines the importance of the event. After that, general information about the persecution of the Jewish population are provided – the first mentioned fact is, however, the collaboration of Lithuanians in the massacres. Also, the number of those who saved their lives fleeing to the Soviet Union is mentioned (8000 Lithuanian Jews). The last two paragraphs speak about the 800 Lithuanians honored as Righteous Among Nations by Yad Vashem and the 3 000 Jews living in Lithuania today (based on the 2011 census).

The context of this article seems much more heated than the two very conciliant articles before, which is connected to the harsh critique from Ms. Kuklinsky, but also to the fact, that no Lithuanian officials is mentioned in the article at all. This can be interpreted as a general change of mood in connection with the memorial site of Paneriai: It seems not to be a dialogue anymore, also thoughtful words from the side of the official Lithuania are not described. If Lithuanian officials participated in the ceremony they are not mentioned, which shows the conflict and the

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

critique from the Jewish community are in the foreground. Moreover, Ms. Kukliansky and her approach can hardly be described similar to a mnemonic warrior. It is much more the approach of a mnemonic pluralist who sees the earlier mentioned “agreement of fundamentals” as broken. This is underlined by the fact, that as participants only Kukliansky, the Israeli businessman, the Jewish community and – more general – participants who “carried Lithuanian and Israeli flags”<sup>308</sup> are mentioned.

#### 6.5.5 Text 4: Paneriai Memorial holds 10<sup>th</sup> March of the Living<sup>309</sup>

The brief article from the Lithuania Tribune is, as well based on BNS resources. The English news portal itself has as its main target groups foreigners living in Lithuania and the Lithuanian diaspora. However, between 2013 and 2019 (so also when the discussed article was published) it was in a joint partnership with delfi.

This text is barely more than 100 words long text and is divided into three paragraphs, one of them is the lead. It starts again with the brief explanation of the event, which is the walk from the Paneriai railway station to the massacre site as the way, the victims had to cover. Further the article quotes a press release from the Jewish Community of Lithuania, which says, that “we, Jews, are alive, we, as children of the victims stand strong against hatred, violence and atrocities, as well as that the Nazis and their accomplices failed to annihilate all Jews”<sup>310</sup>. It seems, that neither the Lithuania Tribune nor BNS sent their own journalist to the location – as there are no numbers of participants or specific comments about speeches. The last paragraph mentions the number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust in one sentence without any further details. However, the embedded picture shows a choir and what appears to be a few hundred people gathered at the memorial site near the monument to the Jews. Also, public officials in uniform are there, wreaths with different flags (i.a. Lithuanian, Israeli and Russian) are standing in front of the monument – it is not clear where this picture comes from and if it was made at exactly this event. The text was published on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017, so again, two days after Yom HaShoah.

The mentioned words of the Jewish Community are more combative than in the first two texts from 2013 and 2014 and is more like the clear stand of Faina Kukliansky in 2016. Nevertheless, they are not mentioning the conflict on citizenship the year before. It is not anymore about being victims or about so many being killed at Paneriai forest – it is moreover about having survived, about fighting tendencies in the society which could become dangerous, and about the, after

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> The Lithuania Tribune, 2017, online

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

all, fail of the Nazis and their accomplices to kill all Lithuanian Jews. As mentioned earlier, in 2016 the whole escape tunnel in the bunker-pit was discovered, only a few months after the ceremony at the memorial site. The article does not lead to the conclusion that the general topic of the ceremony has a special significance or importance at that moment. Furthermore, no agents or participants besides the Jewish Community of Lithuania are mentioned in the article.

#### 6.5.6 Text 5: Holocaust victims commemorated in Vilnius on Remembrance Day<sup>311</sup>

The last article on LRT English, the Lithuanian semi-public news broadcaster, was published on 2<sup>nd</sup> May in 2019 and is the newest article in this row. LRT provides news via radio, television and online, mainly in Lithuanian, partly in English and it has also programs for minority languages. As a national public news broadcaster LRT goes back to the interwar period and the LRT radio station. LRT is operating from Vilnius and is the only Lithuanian member of the European Broadcasting Union.

The text counts 260 words and contains seven paragraphs. Again, originally, it comes from BNS. It starts with the mentioning of the participants – Israel’s ambassador Amir Maimon, “members of the Jewish community and ghetto survivors”<sup>312</sup>, who prayed at the gravesites, so the article quotes Faina Kukliansky. Which gravesites she meant is not mentioned: As the corpses were burnt, there is no gravesite at Paneriai but only the mentioned monuments. The text then goes into details and explains, why there is no march of the living taking place in 2019: Kukliansky refers to official anniversaries in Šiaulai and one more “on the 23<sup>rd</sup>”<sup>313</sup>. Although it is not quite clear what is meant, it is most likely the official Lithuanian Holocaust Remembrance Day on 23<sup>rd</sup> September – the day marks the day when the ghetto of Vilnius was liquidated. However, this is the cause “we chose to forgo speeches and to be on our own”.<sup>314</sup> Lithuanian officials, therefore, were, most probably, not invited. The last three paragraphs provide information about the Holocaust in Lithuania: The number of Jewish victims all over Lithuania and, specifically, in Paneriai, the number of Lithuanians honored as Righteous among Nations by Yad Vashem and the number of Jews living in Lithuania today (which is the same as quoted earlier based on the 2011 census, 3000).

The article was published in that one year, when on the occasion of Yom HaShoah, no march of the living took place. However, the ceremony on 23<sup>rd</sup> September got an international echo and was received also by international news like for example the Jerusalem Post which reported

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<sup>311</sup> LRT English, 2019, online

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

about 1000 participants<sup>315</sup>. It seems, that a closer cooperation between Lithuanian officials and the Jewish Community of Lithuania started in 2019 with the common commitment for the event taking place in September.

However, Kukliansky's speech at the ceremony, mentioned in the article, is clearly referring to the memorial site as a place for personal remembrance and grieving. 2019 was also the year when the controversy around Jonas Noreika started: Noreika collaborated with the Nazis and was an anti-Soviet partisan executed in 1947 by the Soviets. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance criticised "the decision of the Center for the Study of the Genocide and Resistance of Lithuania to justify the wartime actions taken by Jonas Noreika in relation to the Jews of that country".<sup>316</sup> Only a few months later, in July, the mayor of Vilnius Remigijus Šimašius removed the plaque honouring Noreika because of the upcoming controversy, which was commented positively by the IHRA<sup>317</sup>. The main agent in the article is the Jewish Community of Lithuania with its chairwoman Faina Kukliansky, with the ambassador Israel officially takes part in it, the official Lithuania plays a part in it although it is not present – as partner in organising remembrance activities taking place later.

#### 6.5.7 Excursus: Short expert interview

Faina Kukliansky has been chairwoman of the Jewish Community of Lithuania since 2013. She is not only well known internationally, but also the head of a very active Jewish community. The interview with Faina Kukliansky was done on a written basis because of the detailed questions and the language barrier. Her answers are the basis for the following qualitative content analysis. The hereby chosen categories are two: the development of the tradition of the march of the living and the role of agents in the event. The informed consent from her was issued on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2020.

First of all, she explains the different dates of the march of the living: It seems that there are different occasions, one is Yom HaShoah and another one is the 23<sup>rd</sup> September: "It started perhaps 5-8 years ago, and it was connected to the group of Vilnius Jews from Israel, who wanted to commemorate the victims of Vilnius Ghetto"<sup>318</sup>. However, this shows, that although the practice of the march of the living is not happening only once every year, but more on different occasions – connected to specific groups such as the victims of the Ghetto of Vilnius.

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<sup>315</sup> Jerusalem Post, 2019, online

<sup>316</sup> IHRA, April 2019, online

<sup>317</sup> IHRA, August 2019, online

<sup>318</sup> Written interview with Faina Kukliansky, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020

This explanation is supported by other media reports referring to the march of the living on 23<sup>rd</sup> September already in 2011<sup>319</sup>.

Furthermore, Kukliansky states that the march of the living now receives a “very welcome” reception by the public. She describes the relationship to Lithuanian officials as “good enough” without referring to the tensions described in the analysed articles. Also, the cooperation seems to work “quite good [sic]” according to her.

#### 6.5.8 Findings

The march of the living as a social practice goes back for decades in Lithuania. It is, therefore, not surprising that already now it seems to be forgotten when the first march of the living took place at the memorial site of Paneriai. It seems understandable that the numbers are contradictory in this regard. Whereas one of the texts traces its origin back to 2008, Faina Kukliansky speaks about the beginning 5-8 years ago. Obviously there are more occasions during the year, when such an event is taking place: One is Yom HaShoa, the Jewish Day of Remembrance to the victims of the Holocaust, whereas the second one is the 23<sup>rd</sup> September, the Lithuanian Day of Remembrance to the victims of the Ghetto of Vilnius, which was liquidated that day in 1943.

Generally, the articles show a not always easy relationship between Lithuanian officials and the Jewish community of Lithuania, whereas Faina Kukliansky denies any tension and describes the relations as “good enough”<sup>320</sup>. However, her sharp critique in 2016 (see above) followed tensions with Israel in 2015, when researchers and scientific institutions openly criticised the Lithuanian approach to the Holocaust and the associated legislation. The question which could not be answered in this regard is, how do such incidents impact the relationship between the Jewish Community of Lithuania and Lithuanian officials.

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<sup>319</sup> IHRA, September 2011, online

<sup>320</sup> Written interview with Faina Kukliansky, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020



## 7. Conclusion and Findings

The memorial site of Paneriai has several functions in today's Lithuanian memorial culture. It is, first of all, a place of commemoration of the victims killed at the site, a place of private and personal remembrance for descendants, relatives and families. Secondly, the site has a pedagogical mission: With the information provided to visitors the site aims to show killings, cruelty and war crimes in order to prevent them from happening again. Further, the place is still the object of science and research not only in Lithuania but also internationally. Interdisciplinary teams of researchers from different countries have been involved in several projects connected to the memorial site recently. They are, of course, mainly interested in the original function of the place as a killing site but are at the same time contributing to the public discourse. Paneriai was, therefore, well represented in international media coverages during the last few years.

Today, it can be stated that the memorial site of Paneriai handles its variety, and any potential ambiguity, very transparently. With the last rearrangement informational plans were added to the memorial site, informing visitors about every single monument. Visitors can, therefore, comprehend the background of the monuments including the initiator, the date of construction and also the story of the victims the monument is dedicated to. However, the high number of monuments and the connected variety of perspectives – each considered as equally valid – does not lead to one simple and coherent narrative but to a mixed picture. Generally, the composition of the memorial site developed over decades and is based on the former arrangement of the place as a mass killing site, e.g. the pits, the railway track etc.. However, the elements on the territory can be divided into (1) commemorative monuments and (2) rearranged objects/elements which were in use when the place was still a mass killing site. The first category includes everything which was built (not renovated or rearranged) after 1945, the second category builds on earlier elements or objects, e.g. the described bunker-pit of the burning brigade and the mass-killing pits in general: Although, they were contextualised as Paneriai became a memorial site, its fundament was built during WWII.

What makes the memorial site of Paneriai special among many memorial sites is its history as *lieux de mémoire* which can be traced back to the late 1940s. Thanks to the very active role the Jewish community took in this, the first remembrance practices started with the first monument built in 1948 and destroyed in the 1950s by the Soviets, who built the Soviet obelisk

commemorating very generally all victims of the Nazi-terror – yet still leaving out the nearly complete extermination of the Jewish population of Lithuania and the Lithuanian collaboration in this regard. Significant changes of this approach became only possible because of the liberalisations and later the independence of Lithuania. The Jewish community turned out to be a thriving force in establishing a memorial culture and commemorative practices at and around the memorial site. Agents and actors can be categorised into 1) individuals and families, (2) (ethnic) groups and communities, (3) official institutions and (4) international agents from abroad. Similar to the monuments also the mentioned agents seem to be considered as equal, no matter which narrative they followed. Immediately after Lithuania became independent, the international interest in the place was high because of the interest amongst Jewish diaspora in Israel and Poland— which was also a former Polish province. This changed later, when individual agents became active, namely Rachel Margolis and Algis Karosas. In this period – from 1993-2003 – the memorial site also opened up for more distinguished and specific groups of victims and also more controversial narratives. New perspectives were brought to the memorial site. As the difficult topic of Lithuanian collaboration could hardly be denied, it was even added to the monument to the victims of Paneriai at the entrance of the memorial site in 2004. However, the focus on different victim groups (including Lithuanian victims) could also be seen as a counter reaction on the growing discourse about Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazi-occupation. Although, in the field of legislative history Balkelis and Davoliūtė notice a higher quality after 2003, this does not mean that the approach towards other and even competing perspectives at the memorial site ended. With the monument to the soldiers of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force the Lithuanian ministry of defense (as official institution) built up its own monument, regardless of the initial collaboration of the squad with the Nazi-occupants. However, this fact is explicitly mentioned in the informational board at the monument. Also, in this last period (2004-2018) private and personal initiatives remained important, as the symbolic circle of stones to commemorate the Roma victims was built only in 2015, after the territory became part of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. As the building of the informational centre was already part of the Museum, the change of ownership in 2013 affected only the territory. Nevertheless, in the following years the memorial site of Paneriai regained international attention triggered by the scientific discoveries by of international teams of researchers, such as locating the rest of the Paneriai escape tunnel in 2016. As most of the victim groups now had a monument, none were built after 2015. However, this did not lead to the development of one coherent narrative.

The March of the Living is a social practice taking place each year at the memorial site of Paneriai. Reports and news articles about it are at the same time an indicator about the relationship between the Jewish Community and Lithuanian officials. The analysed articles show mutual understanding and a quite constructive exchange until 2015, but more tensions and heated debates afterwards. They were connected to concrete happenings and steps taken by Lithuanian officials in the field of memory politics, although, the chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, Faina Kukliansky, denies any tensions at all. The first incident mentioned in the analysed texts refers to the Lithuanian migration policy, which sees Jews who left Lithuania before the Nazi-occupation not as refugees although only 5% of the community survived in the country. This was interpreted according to Kukliansky's quotes in the article as ignorance ("need history lesson"). Further tensions emerged with the honorary plaque of Jonas Noreika and its removal in 2019. However, the impact of these tensions on the general relations can hardly be understood, as the same chairwoman, Faina Kukliansky, describes the relationship with Lithuanian officials as "good enough"<sup>321</sup>.

To describe the memorial regime around the memorial site of Paneriai in the theoretical framework of Bernhard and Kubik, a broader look is necessary. From the given descriptions and – first of all – the interview with Mantas Šikšnianas it becomes clear that although there are different opinions on monuments, the open approach of the memorial site towards different victim groups and many other questions, the competition of narratives – although there are many and various – is happening based on principles and without defamation and delegitimisation. This fact matches with the criteria for a pillarized regime with different actors. The memorial site or the museum in general seem to be capable of limiting the influence of memorial warriors, so that its inclusiveness is not in question. On the other hand, it is exactly this inclusiveness which – from a historical point of view – could be questioned as comparing different narratives and possibly end up in simplifying or trivialising specific details. This, again, leads to the question of the function of the memorial site: As Mantas Šikšnianas points out, the main mission (or function) of the *lieux de mémoire* is the proper commemoration of the victims. If this is connected with the pacification of the memorial conflicts (which are obviously still ongoing in Lithuania in general, as many examples showed), the openness towards more contested or controversial narratives does make sense and seems to be successful. This can be

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<sup>321</sup>Written interview with Faina Kukliansky, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020

seen as typical for a pillarized mnemonic regime and pluralist mnemonic actors as the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum.

Generally speaking, the open approach of a memorial site should result in a “disarmament of history” based on mutual understanding if not consent in all questions – this could be the basis for a fundamental discourse beyond accusations and injuries and a further mission for the memorial site in general. However, the field of tension between inclusiveness and understanding on one hand, and banalisation and equalisation of different kinds of social mechanisms on the other hand, will always be part of the challenge memorial sites face not only in Lithuania but in all countries, which experienced this extent of violence. To offer reconciliation to different groups in this context needs to be seen as one more function, the memorial site of Paneriai is fulfilling.

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## 8.2 Images and Figures

Figure 1: Bernhard, Michael/Kubik, Jan (2014): A Theory of the Politics of Memory. In Bernhard, Michael/Kubik, Jan (Ed.): Twenty Years After Communism. The Politics of Memory and Commemoration, New York: Oxford University Press. p. 7-34.

Figure 2: Yossi, Govrin (1965): Ponary, Poland, October 1965, A sign at a mass murder site of Jews. Yad Vashem photo archive: Archival signature: 987/11 (Online: [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=33290&ind=28](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=33290&ind=28), accessed 19/09/2020)

Figure 3: Informational plan of the memorial site (Online: <http://www.jmuseum.lt/en/exposition/i/198/memorial-museum-of-paneriai/>, accessed 19/09/2020)

Figure 4: Yad Vashem Archives (Date of Accession: 19/02/1995), Yad Vashem photo archive: Archival signature 4620/468 (Online: [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=18862&ind=10](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=18862&ind=10), accessed 19/09/2020)

Figure 5: Beržanskis, Lukas/Kasiulynaitė, Indrė (2020)

Figure 6-7: Daniele, Morgana (2020)

Figure 8-17: Beržanskis, Lukas/Kasiulynaitė, Indrė (2020)

Figure 18: Daniele, Morgana (2020)

Figure 19-20: Beržanskis, Lukas/Kasiulynaitė, Indrė (2020)

Figure 21-25: Screenshots, original links can be found in the bibliography above



## 9. Annex

Analysed in chapter 6.5 texts can be found here as screenshots

### 9.1 Text 1

#### Holocaust victims honored in March of Living in Vilnius



Kęstučio Vanago/BFL nuotr. / Paneriai Memorial

Source: BNS



Several hundred people holding flags of Israel and flowers took part in a March of the Living on Monday. They walked from Paneriai railway station to the Paneriai Memorial – part of the route covered by prisoners of the Vilnius ghetto to their deaths in Paneriai forest.

A memorial event later took place at the Paneriai Memorial.

Attending the event, Lithuania's Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius said that the tradition of Marches of the Living is "a reminder of our common history that it should never happen again."

"Unfortunately, Paneriai is not the lightest spot on the map. It's a painful topic in the history of the Holocaust. We have to know this. It's a big sore which is also an integral part of our history," the minister told journalists in Paneriai.

"A group of people has been coming from Israel for the last five years, there are also Vilnius residents, residents of Vilnius Region, war victims or their relatives. The March of the Living means that we don't forget either victims or those who fought the Nazi regime, and we hope that this will never happen again," Faina Kuklyansky, acting chairwoman of the Jewish Community of Lithuania, told journalists.

Former prisoners of Vilnius ghetto and their descendants, members of Vilnius Jewish community were organizers and participants of the march.

"I come here every year. My parents and grandparents are from Lithuania, but I'm from Israel. Our family lived in Vilnius. My aunt with her family was killed here, in the Holocaust. If you don't have the past, you don't have a future. So it is important to know about your roots," march participant Lea from Israel told BNS.

More than 90 percent of Lithuania's pre-war Jewish population of over 200,000 were murdered during the Nazi occupation.



Naujienų agentūros BNS informaciją atgaminti visuomenės informavimo priemonėse bei interneto tinklalapiuose be raštinio UAB „BNS“ sutikimo draudžiama.

## 9.2 Text 2

[Photo gallery](#)
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## PARTICIPANTS OF MARCH OF LIVING IN LITHUANIA HONOUR HOLOCAUST VICTIMS, RIGHTEOUS AMONG NATIONS

Created: 2014.04.29 / Updated: 2014.04.29 13:34

Vilnius, April 28 (ELTA) - Lithuania hosted the 6th March of the Living, which is dedicated to Yom HaShoah - the Holocaust Remembrance Day - in Israel and in many other countries, and commemorates the tragedy of the whole of humanity, honours the victims of the Holocaust and Righteous Among the Nations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informs.

The ceremony, which was held as part of the March of the Living to honour Holocaust victims in Paneriai, was attended by members of the Jewish Community of Lithuania, Litvaks from other countries, Israel's Ambassador to Lithuania Hagit Ben-Yaakov, as well as the Chancellor of the Government of Lithuania Alminas Maciulis, Lithuanian politicians, diplomats, representatives of the society, youth.

Just like every year, the procession marched between the Paneriai railway station and the Paneriai Memorial, retracing the route of the Vilna Ghetto prisoners who walked to their death and massacre in the Paneriai forest.

At the Paneriai Memorial, the Chancellor of the Government of Lithuania Alminas Maciulis, Israel's Ambassador to Lithuania Hagit Ben-Yaakov, the Chair of the Jewish Community of Lithuania Faina Kukliansky, the former Vilna Ghetto prisoner Fania Brancovskaja, the representative of the Lithuanian Union of Jewish Students Amit Belaite gave speeches paying tribute to Holocaust victims.

At a solemn ceremony at the Government building, the Israeli Ambassador Hagit Ben-Yaakov awarded representatives of eleven families of Righteous Among the Nations, members of which saved Jews during the Second World War in Lithuania.

The Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Neris Germanas, the Chair of the Jewish Community of Lithuania Faina Kukliansky, the granddaughter of the Righteous Among the Nations Rasa Kubiliene, also the writer and Director of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum Markas Zingeris, the painter Leonardas Gutasukas welcomed and congratulated the Righteous Among the Nations.

Juliana Zarchi and Alexander Kaplan (brother of the rescued Anita Kupric), who came from Paris especially for this ceremony, shared their memories about the atrocities of the Holocaust.

At the ceremony, the Lithuanian Foreign Vice-Minister Neris Germanas noted that at the Government building on that day one could see quite a few people, whose works and life bore witness of the significance of the promotion and protection of fundamental human values.

The Lithuanian Foreign Vice-Minister presented a keepsake gift from the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevicius to Danute Selcinskaja, Head of the Righteous Gentiles Department of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, for many years of work collecting stories of Jewish rescue and for carrying out historical research.

Sergey Korablikov-Kovarsky, a guest from Israel, who was born in the Vilna Ghetto and rescued by the town's women, presented to the Vilnius St. Christopher's Gymnasium a picture by Leonardas Gutasukas, portraying a rescue of a baby.

## 9.3 Text 3

DELFI EN > Culture

### Lithuanian officials 'need history lessons', says Jewish community leader

BNS  
Friday, May 6, 2016

f t in e p a

The Lithuanian **Jewish** community criticized Lithuania's migration officials for refusing citizenship to Litvaks, **Jews** of Lithuanian descent, who left the country in the interwar period.



Faina Kuklinsky

© DELFI / Kiri Čachovskij

Faina Kuklinsky, leader of the community, told several hundred people who gathered in Paneriai, a suburb of Vilnius, for a traditional march on **Holocaust** Remembrance Day, that Lithuanian officials "need history lessons".

Participants of the March of the Living carried Lithuanian and Israeli flags as they marched from the Paneriai railway station to the Paneriai Memorial, where a memorial ceremony was held.

The march follows the route that prisoners from the Vilnius Ghetto were forced to take to the Paneriai forest where they were massacred.

Speaking at the ceremony, Kuklinsky criticized the Lithuanian **Migration Department** which has been rejecting applications for restoration of citizenship rights from Jews and their descendants who live in Israel and South Africa.

#### RELATED ARTICLES

- March of the Living to honour victims of Holocaust in Lithuania
- The realization your grandfather may have murdered thousands of Jews (1)

"We (Jews) never gave them (Lithuanian passports) away voluntarily, but the officials now tell us that perhaps there was no need to flee Lithuania, that everything was fine and perhaps you wouldn't have died, no matter that only 5% of those who stayed survived," she said.

The Lithuanian Citizenship Law allows granting citizenship to people who left Lithuania before March 11, 1990, and acquired citizenship of another country, as well as their descendants. About 1,000 Jews living in South Africa have taken advantage of this legal provision. However, the

process of restoring citizenship rights was suspended for some of the people in mid-2015.

In rejecting applications for citizenship, migration specialists refer to case law that says that citizenship can be restored only to persons who left Lithuania before restoration of independence in 1990 for political reasons, resistance to occupation regimes or persecution by the regime. Lithuanian officials underline that Jews were not persecuted in the independent Lithuania of the interwar years.

Among the participants of the March of the Living was Nachum Purman, a 67-year-old businessman from Israel, who introduced himself as a second-generation **Litvak**. Part of his family now lives in Siauliai.

"Our mission is to transfer the statement to our children - remember and never forget. I am doing this by myself, as well as a previous generation did it for me," he said.

The Nazis, often assisted by Lithuanian collaborators, massacred over 90% of Lithuania's pre-war Jewish population of 200,000 during **World War Two**. Some 70,000 of them were killed in Paneriai.

About 8,000 Lithuanian Jews were rescued and about the same number of Jews survived by fleeing to the Soviet Union.

The Israel-based Yad Vashem centre of Holocaust studies has recognized more than 800 Lithuanians as **Righteous Among the Nations** for risking their lives to rescue Jews from the genocide.

Some 3,000 Jews currently live in Lithuania, according to the latest census from 2011.

BNS



## 9.4 Text 4

HOME > POLITICS > Paneriai Memorial holds 10th March of the Living

## Paneriai Memorial holds 10th March of the Living

🕒 April 26, 2017 👤 BNS EN 📁 Politics 💬 0



The March of the Living, a walk from the Paneriai railway station to the Paneriai Memorial marks a part of the distance Vilnius ghetto prisoners had to cover to the massacre site in the Paneriai forest.

To the Jewish Community of Lithuania, the March of the Living means that “we, Jews, are alive, we, as children of the victims, stand strong against hatred, violence and atrocities, as well as that the Nazis and their accomplices failed to annihilate all Jews,” the community said in a press release.

More than 90 percent of Lithuania’s pre-war **Jewish community** of 220,000 people perished during the Nazi rule of Lithuania.



## 9.5 Text 5

News 2019.05.02 16:01

## Holocaust victims commemorated in Vilnius on Remembrance Day

BNS, Ignas Jačauskas  
2019.05.02 16:01

Paneriuose pagerbtas Holokausto aukų atminimas / BNS nuotr.

A commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust was held at the Paneriai Memorial in Vilnius on Thursday.



Israel's ambassador, Amir Maimon, members of the Jewish community and ghetto survivors said prayers and laid pebbles at the mass gravesites, Faina Kukliansky, chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community (LŽB), told BNS.

This year, the community chose not hold the March of the Living, a traditional walk from the Paneriai railway station to the massacre site in the Paneriai forest, and not to invite Lithuania's top officials to the event as they wanted to mark the Holocaust Remembrance Day in a more modest way ahead of upcoming high-profile commemorations in Kaunas and Siauliai, according to Kukliansky.

"We do not want a very big event, because we are in for the Kaunas ghetto liquidation anniversary on June 14. The anniversary will be marked in Siauliai on the 15th day, and the state will mark the day on the 23rd. We chose to forgo speeches and to be on our own," she said.

More than 90 percent of Lithuania's total pre-war Jewish population of over 200,000 were killed by the Nazis and their local collaborators. Between 50,000 and 70,000 people, mostly Jews, could be massacred in Paneriai, based on the latest historical research.

Some 8,000 Lithuanian Jews were saved during the war and a similar number survived after moving farther into the Soviet Union.

Around 900 Lithuanians have been named Righteous Among the Nations by the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, for saving Jews.

Currently, around 3,000 Jews live in Lithuania.

## 10. Abstract

The forest of Paneriai not far from the city of Vilnius in Lithuania became one of the main mass shooting sites during the Nazi-occupation of the country. Around 100 000 people were shot at the site between 1941 and 1944. During the last months of WWII forced labourers dug out masses of corpses and burnt them in order to destroy the traces of the mass murder and genocide. Only five percent of the once flourishing Lithuanian Jewry survived the Holocaust. Paneriai became, however, a *lieu de mémoire* immediately after WWII. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the development of a more diverse memorial regime was possible: Different actors initiated the building of monuments, connected to different and not uncontroversial narratives. This research answers the question how the memorial site of Paneriai changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which actors were involved in those changes and which elements and narratives are predominant today. And further: How can the development of a memorial culture be seen at a memorial site like Paneriai?

Der Wald von Paneriai, nicht weit entfernt von Vilnius in Litauen, wurde während der Nazi-Okkupation des Landes eine Massenerschießungsstätte. Etwa 100 000 Menschen wurden zwischen 1941 und 1944 erschossen. Während der letzten Monate des Zweiten Weltkriegs gruben Zwangsarbeiter zahllose Leichen aus und verbrannten sie, um so die Spuren des Holocaust und des Genozids zu zerstören. Lediglich 5 Prozent der einst florierenden jüdischen Gemeinde überlebte den Holocaust. Paneriai aber wurde sehr bald nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg zu einem *lieux de mémoire*. Mit dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion war außerdem die Entstehung eines diverseren *mnemonic regime* möglich: Verschiedene Akteur\*innen initiierten die Errichtung vielfältiger Denkmäler, die oft mit durchaus kontroversen Narrativen verbunden waren. Diese Masterarbeit beantwortet die Frage, wie sich die Gedenkstätte von Paneriai seit dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion verändert hat, welche Akteur\*innen in diese Veränderungen involviert waren und welche Elemente und Narrative heute vorherrschend sind. Weiters: Wie lässt sich die Entwicklung einer Erinnerungskultur an einer Gedenkstätte wie Paneriai nachvollziehen?