Ekaterina Makhotina, *Erinnerungen an den Krieg – Krieg der Erinnerungen: Litauen und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co, 2017, 478 S. ISBN 978-3-525-30090-9

When we look at recent discussions in Lithuania about the Second World War, it can be said that the polemic has shifted from writings to streets and squares. Street and town square names, plaques and monuments have become a battlefield, where not only historians, intellectuals and social organisations, but also politicians, have become involved. This change is due to the actions of some Lithuanian politicians, diplomats and officials during the Second World War that should be viewed not just as acts of resistance, but in numerous cases, as acts of collaboration, especially in the context of the Holocaust. As a result, historical research into individual memorial sites has become especially relevant and necessary. It is precisely the material side of the historic memory, museums, memorials and monuments, that are the subject of research in Ekaterina Makhotina's book (p. 13). The book consists of seven chapters, which are quite different in terms of the themes and issues covered. The author gives a brief introduction and conclusion at the beginning and the end of each chapter, giving readers the opportunity both to familiarise themselves with the whole study, and to look at separate parts that might be of particular interest.

In the first chapter, the author turns her attention to the Soviet narrative about the Second World War, and the formation of the myth of the 'Great Patriotic War' and its integration in postwar Lithuania. The main parts of this narrative are presented in the book, such as complete resistance to the Nazi occupation and heroism, personified in the example of Marija Melnikaitė, hiding the fact of occupation under the veil of 'liberation', and the accentuation of heroic Red Army soldiers and partisans who fell victim to Nazi violence. In seeking to entrench this narrative in occupied Lithuania, the Communist Party of Lithuania relied not just on the press and other forms of communication, but also used historians, who had to follow the Marxist canon in their interpretations, and if necessary, to adapt separate historical storylines to the political realities of the day. One example, according

to the author, was the commemoration of the 550th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald in 1960, which not only gave Khrushchev another chance to highlight the 'struggle and unity of brotherly nations', but to also condemn the 'eternal militarism of the Germans and Western imperialism' (p. 113), thereby making the event relevant, and adapting it to the political and ideological realities. It could be said that the interpretation that the author gives in the first chapter is not so new, but essentially repeats the conclusions that are already established in historiography, and which have been thoroughly studied in works by both Lithuanian and foreign authors.¹

All of these elements of the Second World War narrative were realised and adopted in museum exhibition spaces, which are analysed in the second chapter of the book, taking the examples of the Museum of the Revolution, the Ninth Fort in Kaunas, and the monument called the Mother of Pirčiupiai. According to Makhotina, stories and narratives of partisans and soldiers of the 16th Lithuanian Division were used in order to show the heroism and the widespread opposition to Nazi Germany, highlighting and comparing Lithuanian 'bourgeois nationalists' with 'Hitlerites' and 'fascists' (p. 189). Meanwhile, all other aspects of the Second World War and the German occupation in Lithuania that were not in line with the official narrative were ignored, and left on the margins of Soviet history. As a result, it is no surprise that in places like the Ninth Fort in Kaunas and Paneriai, the actual identity of the people killed there was never revealed, being veiled by the concept 'victims of the fascist terror' (pp. 175, 193).

The scale of the Holocaust in Lithuania, and the local population's involvement in the mass murders, proved to be a problem that did not comply with the official Soviet narrative, which is why it had to be hidden and manipulated. The author devotes the whole of the third chapter to this issue. As she correctly notes, the Soviet position regarding victims of the Holocaust was never uniform or officially established; therefore, the history of the mass murder of the Jews was often adapted and exploited according to the political requirements of the times (p. 194). In order to mobilise society and form a positive opinion among the Allies, the first news about the mass murders that took place appeared in the Soviet press in the early years of the war, and gradually declined

¹ Cf. A. Švedas, *Matricos nelaisvėje: sovietmečio lietuvių istoriografija (1944–1985)* (Vilnius, 2009); V. Klumbyš, *Lietuvos kultūrinio elito elgsenos modeliai sovietmečiu*, doctoral dissertation (Vilnius, 2009); V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (London, New York, 2013).

once a breakthrough had been achieved in the war and the Battle of Stalingrad had been won. The Soviet narrative started to grow relatively liberal once again in the 1950s and 1960s, with the series *Faktai kaltina* (Facts Accuse), and the document anthologies 'Documents Accuse' and *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* (Mass Murder in Lithuania); however, as the author correctly notes, these changes were related more to the propaganda campaign against Lithuanian political groups in the West, seeking to compromise them and expose them as collaborators with Nazi Germany (p. 199). According to Makhotina, the manipulation of victims of the mass murders, and their non-identification, in effect programmed a conflict between Holocaust survivors and the local population, when on the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of Lithuania's independence, the question of historic accountability served as a kind of litmus paper, both in terms of cooperation with Lithuania's Jewish community and world Jewish organisations, and in terms of achieving integration into the West (pp. 239–240).

This conflict, which emerged during the Sąjūdis period and the first years of newly independent Lithuania, is discussed in the book's fourth chapter. According to Makhotina, this period was noted for its ethnocentric historical narrative, which left no space for the history and culture of local national minorities in the general picture of Lithuania's history. Historians and society concentrated their attention primarily on the myths that were instilled during the Soviet period about the exposure of Lithuanian history, especially when evaluating the events of the 20th century. For this reason, historians have mostly aimed their research at three stages in 20th-century Lithuanian history: interwar Lithuania and the rule of Antanas Smetona, the occupation of Lithuania in 1940 and Sovietisation, and the partisan war that unfolded in the postwar years (pp. 247–250).²

Makhotina discusses the conflict between the memories of victims of the Holocaust and Stalinist crimes in greater detail in the fifth and sixth chapters of her book, where she analyses the contents of two

² This comment by the author has been noted by a number of Lithuanian and foreign historians as well. Cf. D. Staliūnas, 'Žydų istorija lietuviškos historiografijos kontekstuose', in: *Abipusis pažinimas: lietuvių ir žydų kultūriniai saitai*, ed. J. Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (Vilnius, 2010), pp. 119–133; J.P. Himka, 'Obstacles to the Integration of the Holocaust into Post-communist East European Historical Narratives', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 50, Nos 3–4 (September–December, 2011), pp. 209–243; S. Sužiedėlis, Š. Liekis, 'Conflicting Memories: The Reception of the Holocaust in Lithuania', in: *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-communist Europe*, eds. J.P. Himka, J.B. Michlic (Lincoln, London, 2013), pp. 319–351.

museum exhibitions: the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (GRRCL), and the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum (VGSJM). According to her, despite the critical position taken by historians who compare Stalin's crimes to genocide, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre has become the key promoter of the ethnocentric approach towards crimes committed by the totalitarian regime in Lithuania by first exposing crimes and victims' experiences of the Stalinist regime (pp. 331–332). Meanwhile, the Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum and its branches has become an institution that has created a pluralist memory of the Second World War in Lithuanian society, raising the issue of Holocaust victims and the responsibility of Lithuanians who participated in the mass murders, which the regime wanted to keep quiet, and to avoid revealing the real identities of victims and perpetrators (p. 333).

The author ends her book with a controversial question, the commemoration of VE Day, or Victory in Europe Day, which poses contradictions between different memory traditions of the Second World War. The Western tradition, which is also the Lithuanian one, has 8 May as the day of the victory over the Nazis; whereas Russia marks it on 9 May. This conflict is especially evident between the Russian national minority in Lithuania and the Lithuanians, which grew even more heated when Russia began its acts of aggression against Ukraine, and revived the exploitation of the memory of the 'Great Patriotic War' for propaganda purposes and the war of information. According to Makhotina, the conflict not only spans today's political realities, expressed symbolically in the wearing of the St George ribbon at commemorative events on 9 May, but also has deeper historical reasons, which are not completely understood in Lithuania. One is the unifying function, which provides a feeling of community for the Russian national minority in Lithuania. Another is the protest against the ethnocentric position that highlights only the suffering of the Lithuanians during the Second World War. A third performs a political function, expressing dissatisfaction or a protest against the current Lithuanian government and its stance in relation to Russia. Finally, as the author notes, the commemoration of VE Day at Antakalnis Cemetery has both a clear political aspect and a personal one, expressed through the participation of surviving Second World War veterans or members of their families, who come to honour those who died in service (pp. 432–433).

We can agree with the claim that some participants in the 9 May commemorative events have a personal connection with this day. Nonetheless, the author also points out that in relation to the Second World

War, Soviet soldiers and Victory Day are still not part of the general narrative of Lithuanian history (pp. 422, 437–439), and in doing so, she seems to imply that they should be, thereby demonstrating her own position on this matter, rather than an academic viewpoint.

Having reviewed the monograph by Ekaterina Makhotina, it is evident that we need to return to the statement about the relevance of research mentioned at the beginning of this review, and ask, what makes this study new? First of all, the book gives an overview of a great deal of Second World War memorials, monuments and museums in Lithuania, whose establishment, history and exploitation for political or ideological aims demands much broader research.³ Second, Makhotina's monograph covers not just memorials, museums and monuments in Lithuania, and their content, it also presents a much wider issue concerning the historic memory of the Second World War in Lithuania. This allows us to become familiar with separate aspects of the traumatic experience of the Holocaust, the war, the Nazi and Soviet occupations, and the underlying reasons, which is why the study could serve as an excellent introduction to foreign researchers who might be less familiar with Second World War issues and historic memory conflicts in Lithuania.

This stronger aspect of the monograph might also be considered one of its weaknesses. In presenting the issue of the historic memory of the Second World War in Lithuania, and its manipulation during the Soviet occupation, the author has based her findings on rich stores of archival documentary material, and also sometimes on studies conducted by Lithuanian historians. This has allowed her to systematise research that has already been conducted, and to add supplementary material, but it has also led to a degree of repetition of claims and conclusions that already exist in historiography. Besides the Lithuanian and Yad Vashem archives, the author could also have explored the collections of the YIVO and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington for her research, which would have allowed her to expand on the circumstances behind the establishment of the Ninth Fort in Kaunas and the Paneriai memorials, and the Jewish Museum in postwar Vilnius, relations with

³ Note that there has been an increasing number of such studies in recent years. Cf: Kariai. Betonai. Mitas. *Antrojo pasaulinio karo Sovietų Sąjungos karių palaidojimo vietas Lietuvoje*, eds. I. Arlauskaitė-Zakšauskienė, N. Černiauskas, S. Kulevičius, A. Jakubčionis (Vilnius, 2016); N. Latvytė-Gustaitienė, 'Žydų muziejus Vilniuje: pirmieji bandymai įprasmingi trauminę patirtį ir skatinti tvarią atmintį', *Knygotyra*, 71 (Vilnius, 2018), pp. 130–160; Z. Vitkus, *Memorialas atminimo politikoje: Panerių atvejo tyrimas (1944–2016)*. *Doctoral dissertation* (Klaipėda, 2019).

the Soviet administration, issues concerning the preservation of exhibits and their removal from Lithuania, etc. As such, even though this monograph does not add significantly to the conclusions already existing in historiography, it may serve as an excellent initial point of reference for broader research on Second World War memorials, monuments and museums in Lithuania.

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