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## **A challenge to collective memory: Yitskhok Rudashevski's *Diary of the Vilna Ghetto***

### **Introduction**

In August 2016, a “stumbling stone” (*Stolperstein*) – a cobblestone-size concrete cube bearing a brass plate created by German artist Gunter Demnig – was laid in front of the former Jewish gymnasium at Rūdninkai Street in Vilnius. The *Stolperstein* bore the following inscription: “Here studied Yitskhok Rudashevski. Born in 1927. Imprisoned in the Vilna Ghetto in September 1941. Killed in Ponar in October 1943”. The *Stolperstein* project started in Germany in 1992. With time it developed into a well-known practice embodying Western memory culture of the Holocaust and became especially widespread at the turn of the twenty-first century (A. Assmann, 2013). Almost a quarter of a century later the symbolic *Stolperstein* project reached Lithuania and marked a clear change in the collective memory of the country. At the same time, the laying of the stumbling stone to commemorate Rudashevski revealed the specific local nature of this practice and a distinctive local challenge related to it.

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The stumbling stone in memory of the boy was laid without even knowing his exact former home address in Vilnius. The usual practice is to lay *Stolpersteine* in front of a Holocaust victim's home or work address where they last lived or worked as a free person. However, at that time, despite being one of the best-known children in the world who wrote a Holocaust diary, Rudashevski barely existed in the cultural memory of Lithuania and little was known about his biography. In his diary, the boy gave an expressive description of 6 September 1941 – the day they were expelled from their home and herded to the ghetto. Nonetheless, his exact former home address – 51 Pylimo Street, flat 4, where a stumbling stone could have been laid – was established only at the end of 2017, when the author of this article was working on the translation of Rudashevski's diary from Yiddish and conducting related archival research. A bilingual Yiddish-Lithuanian edition of Rudashevski's diary was published in Vilnius at the beginning of 2018. Uniquely designed by artist Sigutė Chlebinskaitė, the book is richly illustrated with archival photographs. It reconstructs numerous biographical facts and thus extensively describes the life of the boy and his family (Rudashevski, 2018). The publication of the diary received a lot of attention from the Lithuanian mainstream media. Already in 2017 excerpts from the diary were included in a school textbook of Lithuanian literature as a source for Holocaust education, thus supplementing the required reading list of classic Holocaust literature, which already included *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Dzikaitė, Eigminienė, Kuolys, & Martišiūtė-Linartienė, 2017).

Consequently, over the past two years the spot of oblivion that until recently existed in the public domain in Lithuania gave way to an emotionally powerful memory site of the Holocaust – the memory of the world-renowned child who wrote a ghetto diary and was killed in Paneriai (Ponar) at the age of fifteen. In other words, speaking in Jan and Aleida Assmann's terms, Rudashevski as a historic figure was transferred from the domain of historical archives and communicative memory preserved by the small Lithuanian Jewish community into the public domain of collective memory (J. Assmann, 2011). The whole network of memory culture – consisting of public commemoration, testimonies, artefacts from the long-forgotten past, biographical narratives, artistic performances and education – has been formed over a very short period of time and is likely to evolve further owing to the importance of the diary. Indeed, the interpretation of Rudashevski's personality and his diary as a memory site has only just begun and has not yet been fully established. This, however, may result in substantial challenges to collective memory narratives of the Second World War which continue to compete with each other in Lithuania. In my opinion, different interpretations of the diary may either drive these narratives even further apart or, conversely, make them dialogically closer to each other.

This article aims to analyse the diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski (1927–1943), the story of its writing and publication and the existing biographical material about

the author. It attempts to answer the question of what is or could be the significance of this *lieu de mémoire* for the current developments in Holocaust memory culture in Lithuania. The definition of cultural memory adopted here is one proposed by Jan and Aleida Assmann, who view it as a system of retrospective meanings that are passed on by means of various symbolic communication practices. Based on material artefacts, texts, rituals and institutions, such a system supports, stimulates or changes collective identity (A. Assmann, 2013; J. Assmann, 2011). On the other hand, collective memory is perceived as an institutionalised and canonised form of memory that is passed on from generation to generation and is based on authoritative narratives and selected symbols connecting and levelling differences between various individual memories or cultural interpretations (J. Assmann, 2011; Halbwachs, 1992). A site of memory (*lieu de mémoire, Erinnerungsort, mnemotopos*) is viewed as a complex symbol connecting material objects and physical spaces, historical facts, cultural meanings, human emotions and communication (Nora & Kritzman, 1997).

## Changes in Holocaust memory culture in Lithuania

Intensive developments in the field of memory culture of Jewish heritage and the Holocaust started only recently, almost twenty years after breaking free from the Soviet occupation in the 1990s. Previously, almost until 2011, the country was in a gradual transition from the ethnocentric to the multicultural memory narrative, which is characteristic of most post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Himka & Michlic, 2013). This first stage was even compared to the “latent” memory period in Germany that lasted from 1945 to 1968, after which barriers preventing people from talking about the totalitarian experience were broken and a new generation came of age ready to openly analyse and assess the past of its own society (Tauber, 2004). In Poland, intensive developments in the memory culture of the Holocaust and the public entrenchment of related practices and institutions occurred between 2000 and 2014, starting with the publication of the book *Neighbours* by Jan Tomasz Gross on the Jedwabne massacre, including the related debates, and continuing on to the opening of POLIN, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. Even though the political polarisation on the issue of memory narratives in Poland grew stronger again, the imagery of the Holocaust there has already become a subject of research as a peculiar and dense discourse with specific *mnemotopoi* clearly visible (Kurz, Kowalska-Leder, Szpakowska, & Dobrosielski, 2017).

The development of Holocaust memory culture in Lithuania was slower owing to several reasons which have been clearly defined in historical and cultural research: (1) far more brutal sovietisation, annihilation of heritage that lasted for half a century, introduction of the Soviet propaganda version of history and systematic repression of

earlier collective memory; (2) particularly large scale of the Holocaust in the country, including the role of Lithuanian collaborators, the recognition and assessment of which was long prevented and to some extent continues to be prevented by preconceived attitudes and traumas of the occupation experienced by Lithuanian society itself; (3) insufficient Holocaust education, persisting anti-Semitic stereotypes, slow changes in social mentality, including the mentality of politicians; (4) “memory wars”, i.e. conflicts or competition between the national memory narrative of the Second World War (emphasising Soviet crimes and the experience of the Lithuanian nation as a victim) and the Western narrative of the Holocaust (emphasising Nazi crimes, Jewish genocide and the guilt of Lithuanian collaborators) (Eidintas, 2002; Nikžentaitis, 2013; Sužiedėlis & Liekis, 2013). This conflict of narratives becomes even more complex as a result of the revival of the Soviet memory of the Second World War in Russia under the current Putin regime and the information war which aims to discredit Lithuanian resistance to Soviet occupation as a pro-Nazi movement (Maliukevičius, 2015). Caught in the middle of this tension, the memory discourse in Lithuania remains resistant in its nature, rather slow to change and reluctant to inner critical revision or pluralism of different versions of memory:

The fact that foreign perspectives and imagery of World War II do not reflect the experience of most Lithuanians encourages a tendency to see the Holocaust as a Western obsession, making it difficult to appreciate the gravity of the Shoah and its centrality to the nation's history. [...] Self-perception as a victim and the stereotype of the *Other* as perpetrator are deeply ingrained within wartime memories. (Sužiedėlis & Liekis, 2013, pp. 326, 333)

Still, the turning point in Holocaust memory in Lithuania came in 2011 and 2012. It was then that the parliament adopted a legislation of major symbolic significance – The Law on Goodwill Compensation for the Immovable Property of Jewish Religious Communities (2011). In this way, the government of Lithuania admitted both moral and material responsibility for the consequences of the Holocaust. This event was followed by a large-scale debate in the media on the uprising of June 1941 and Lithuanian anti-Semitism, including the perception of Lithuanian participation in the massacre of Jews.<sup>1</sup> The same year saw the beginning of grassroots initiatives in the field of Holocaust commemoration. Although taken independently from any state institutions or the Lithuanian Jewish community, they resulted in major developments in the public domain (e.g. a public reading of the names of ghetto victims as part of the project *Names (Vardai)*, which started in 2011). In the same year various museums

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<sup>1</sup> The debate of June 2012 was stirred by the national reburial of the remains of Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis in Kaunas. Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis was former head of the Temporary Government of Lithuania (1941) accused of pro-Nazi policy. The media published open letters (in favour and against paying national honours to this state figure) by two groups of intellectuals which were indicative of the fights over Holocaust memory, and resembled the controversy in Poland over Gross' book.

in Lithuania, including the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius – which for a long time had been surrounded by controversy (even on an international scale) stemming from a lack of balance in its presentation of Soviet crimes and the Holocaust – engaged in intensive preparation of, or changes to, their exhibitions devoted to Jewish history (Jakulytė-Vasil, 2016). The Lithuanian discourse on Holocaust memory was considerably influenced by the publication of a number of important books and their reception, such as the Lithuanian translation of Kazimierz Sakowicz's *Ponary Diary* (2012), the novel *Darkness and Company* (*Tamsa ir partneriai*) by Sigitas Parulskis (2013), the translation of Abraham Sutzkever's collection *Green Aquarium* (2013), the collection of interviews *Gyvenimas turėtų būti skaidrus* (Life Should be Transparent) by Professor Irena Veisaitė (2016), and Rūta Vanagaitė's *Mūsiškiai* (Our People, 2016), a publicist-style study on the topic of Lithuanian collaboration in the mass killings of Jews, which became a bestseller and stirred a major debate, including a number of other historical, documentary and literary publications. In August 2016, the March of the Living was held in the town of Molėtai. The participants walked all the way through the town to the site of a Jewish massacre. The event turned into a symbolic demonstration, which suggests that the perception of the Holocaust is changing: it was the first time ever that a march like that was attended by numerous Lithuanians. They felt encouraged to do so by the famous writer Marius Ivaškevičius, whose writings published in the media persuasively expressed the idea (which is currently among topical ideas dominating the new memory culture) that Jewish victims were *our own* victims, Lithuanian citizens who were part of Lithuanian culture. His words turned remembrance of the Holocaust into commemoration of *our own* people, which amounted to an attempt to overcome civic and cultural amnesia: "What wisdom and talent is buried there, what a great number of people. Today their children and grandchildren would have been building modern Lithuania hand in hand with us all" (Ivaškevičius, 2016).

Five years ago, when analysing the situation concerning the perception of the Holocaust in Lithuania, historians Saulius Sužiedėlis and Šarūnas Liekis observed: "Although perceptions of the Holocaust have changed considerably since the 1990s, the establishment of the Holocaust as a central memory has not yet happened" (Sužiedėlis & Liekis, 2013, p. 319). One cannot but agree with these words as there is still not a single representative memory institution in Lithuania to adequately embody this central status. A reconstructed complex of buildings of the Great Synagogue in Vilnius (work on the project started in 2015) and a modern Holocaust museum in the former building of the Vilna Ghetto library (which is still in a critical state of repair) could be the institutions serving the purpose. Since Holocaust memory culture in Lithuania has already turned into a network of various meanings and practices, the need to establish such a symbolic centre became absolutely evident: "Vilnius without such a museum would remain forever incomplete" (Ivaškevičius, 2017). The issue of harmonising

and combining persistently different memory narratives, whose co-existence causes tension, becomes even more topical when the establishment of a collective memory institution seems to be ever closer. Hence the interpretation of Rudashevski's diary as a special site of memory reveals various problems and opportunities related to the development of the Holocaust narrative in Lithuania.

### **Genesis of a memory site: peculiarities of Yitskhok Rudashevski's diary**

A notebook with Rudashevski's diary was found in July 1944 in the attic of a house at Dysnos Street in the former Vilna Ghetto.<sup>2</sup> The attic had a hideout (known as *maline* in Yiddish slang), where the boy, his parents, his uncle's family and five or six more people had been hiding for two weeks between September and early October 1943 and survived the final liquidation of the ghetto (23–24 September 1943). However, between 5 and 7 October, in the course of checking the area of the liquidated ghetto, the Nazis discovered the hideout. All those found there were taken to the Gestapo headquarters and shot in Paneriai (Shner & Matenko, 1973). The body of the fifteen-year-old boy who wrote the diary also lies in one of the burial pits there.

The only person among those hiding in the attic who survived was Yitskhok's fourteen-year-old cousin Sore Voloshin (born in 1928; after the war, in Israel – Sarah Kalivatsch). Sore managed to escape the execution; she joined a group of Jewish partisans, where she stayed until the frontline approached and the Soviet army entered Vilnius on 13 July 1944. According to her account, she returned to the hideout in the evening of that same day to look for the traces of her family. In one of the corners of the attic she found a dirty notebook which appeared to be the diary of her cousin Yitskhok, who had carried it with him everywhere he went and hid it carefully from outsiders' eyes; "On each and every page I saw before me what had happened to us, all that had taken place and the great suffering" (Voloshin, 1973, pp. 147–149). Sore told the famous poets Avrom Sutzkever and Shmerke Kacherginski, survivors of the Vilna Ghetto who later joined a group of Jewish partisans, about her discovery. In July 1944, they established a Jewish Museum in Vilnius aiming to collect the surviving valuables of Jewish cultural heritage and document the history of the Holocaust. The two poets knew Yitskhok from his involvement in the ghetto's cultural activity for young people

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<sup>2</sup> The census of the Vilna Ghetto of 27–29 May 1942 shows that Yitskhok Rudashevski and his family were recorded among the residents of houses no. 4, 5 and 6 at Dysnos Street. During our interview held in Jerusalem on 14 May 2018, his cousin Sarah Voloshin-Kalivatsch could not indicate the exact house number; she hesitated between the house no. 4 and no. 5. The researchers' guess is that Rudashevski lived in the house which today bears number 4 (Guzenberg, 1996; Sedova & Rozina, 2012).

and were referred to in his diary, where the boy even quoted by heart a number of poems by Sutzkever which he wrote in the ghetto. Sutzkever and Kacherginski took special care of Yitskhok's notebook, entrusted to them by fifteen-year-old Sore, and considered it to be one of the most valuable relics. They did not leave it at the Jewish museum (which was closed by the Soviets in 1949), but took it out of Lithuania in 1946, when working on a secret mission of saving key Jewish valuables (Fishman, 2017). A year later, Sutzkever managed to reach Israel. In 1953 he published the first edition of the diary in his journal of Yiddish literature *Di Goldene Keyt* (The Golden Chain) (Rudashevski, 1953). Later he handed the diary over to YIVO Archives in New York, where it has been kept since.<sup>3</sup> Three translations of the diary – Hebrew, English and French – were published on the basis on the original manuscript (Rudashevski, 1968, 1973, 2016). However, a textually exact transcript of Rudashevski's diary has not been prepared or published as yet. As a result, there are differences between its translations and none of the published versions are complete.

Yitskhok Rudashevski started writing his diary in June 1941, when he was fourteen years old. It was in the ghetto that he turned fifteen on 10 December 1942. However, he did not live to see his sixteenth birthday. Yitskhok's notebook covers the period from the eve of the war in June 1941 until 7 April 1943, which marked the beginning of the final liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto, a terrible shock to the boy and all those around him. Historians refer to it as the third period of the Vilna Ghetto, when mass killings in Paneriai started again. The diary ends with almost illegible and rubbed-off letters. The final pages of the manuscript (pp. 140–141) suffered the most damage: they are dirty and look as if something spilled over them. The very last phrase, which can only be approximately reconstructed, sounds like a foreboding: *Dos ergste kon yeder rege pasirn mit undz* – “Any moment the worst may happen to us”. It is not quite clear whether or not Yitskhok continued to write his diary between early April and early October 1943, when he was killed. His cousin Sore Voloshin doubts the existence of any further diary and says that during the final months of the ghetto Yitskhok did not write at all because of extremely harsh living conditions and apathy.<sup>4</sup>

Until recently, information about Yitskhok's family and their life before the war was very scarce, but the archival research conducted in the process of translating

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<sup>3</sup> Yitzkhok Rudashevski, *Togbuch*, YIVO Archives, Sutzkever Abraham-Kaczerginsky Szmerke Collection, Part 1: Vilna Ghetto 1939–c.1950 (Bulk dates 1939–c.1944), Folder No. 10, Record group No. 223, Microfilm No. MK 545.

<sup>4</sup> In the foreword to the English edition of Rudashevski's diary published in 1973 Voloshin is quoted to have said the following: “Toward the end, conditions in the ghetto were grim. Raids and liquidations went on all the time; day in, day out, week after week, groups of people perished in Ponar and this grieved him deeply. Furthermore, we intensified our efforts to hide during these months and in the hideout conditions were certainly not conducive to writing. He reached a state of apathy and I do not recall his participating in any discussion during the period of the liquidation...” (Shner & Matenko, 1973).



the diary into Lithuanian helped to fill some important gaps (Kvietkauskas, 2018). Yitskhok was the only child in the family of Elye Rudashevski (1892–1943) and Roze Rokhl Rudashevski (née Voloshin, 1897–1943). Yitskhok’s father was a typesetter who came from the town of Molėtai.<sup>5</sup> In 1921, he moved to Vilnius and settled down at 51 Pylimo Street together with his brother Moyshe. The Rudashevskis lived in that same house until the Second World War. The boy’s mother, Roze (in official Polish documents she is referred to as Ruchla or Rochla, i.e. Rachel),<sup>6</sup> was a dressmaker and was born much further away from Vilnius – in Kishinev, in the territory of former Bessarabia. In 1923, encouraged by her brother Aron, she and the entire Voloshin family moved to Vilnius and settled down at 4 Bazilijonų Street (flat no. 4), just round the corner from Elye’s home. Some documents from 1940 indicate the exact address of the Rudashevski family: 51 Pylimo Street, flat no. 4.<sup>7</sup> This was also the address of Yitskhok’s native home. The boy grew up in the oldest building of the housing block located between Pylimo and Sodų streets, dating back to the second half of the seventeenth century (the Baroque period). Judging from the diary, Yitskhok was looking out of the window of this particular house when he first noticed Jews in Pylimo Street wearing the humiliating yellow patches on their shoulders. On 6 September 1941 almost all residents were driven to the ghetto though the gate of Yitskhok’s home. The house still bears the same number. Thus, in the process of translating the diary the exact topographical location of the events it describes was identified. As a result, history was *localised* and Rudashevski’s story was supplemented with the element of space, which is extremely important in terms of collective memory (J. Assmann, 2011).

It appears that Yitskhok’s parents led a rather modest life. Nonetheless, an intelligent, secular and liberal atmosphere prevailed in the Rudashevski family, and the context of Jewish public life in Vilnius was present in their home. All this was mainly thanks to the occupation of the boy’s father, a typesetter at the *Vilner Tog* (Vilnius Day), one of the biggest and most influential Yiddish dailies in the city. Yitskhok’s uncle on his mother’s side, Aron Voloshin (Sore Voloshin’s father), was

<sup>5</sup> Eljasz Rudaszewski, Podanie [Application to register a place of residence in Vilnius], 31 October 1921, Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCVA), F. 53, ap. 10, b. 2146, p. 1; Eljasz Rudaszewski, Podanie [Application for Polish citizenship], 9 March 1924, LCVA F. 53, ap. 24, b. 496, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> On Yitskhok’s birth certificate issued in 1927 his mother’s first name appears as Rachel: “Matka Ruchla z domu Wołosin córka Icka i Doby”, Lithuanian State Historical Archives (LVIA), F. 1817, ap. 1, b. 388, p. 271. The same name appears in other official documents, such as her temporary identity certificate of 1923 with her picture: “Rochla Wołosin”, LCVA, F. 53, ap. 24, b. 496, p. 221. However, according to her niece Sore Voloshin, her name was Roza. On the list of ghetto inmates she was registered as Roza Rudaševskienė (Guzenberg, 1996). It seems that Yitskhok’s mother had two first names, one of which was used in official documents and the other – in her family.

<sup>7</sup> Eljasz Rudaševskis, Application addressed to the Principal of Vilnius City, 15 February 1940, LCVA, F. 53, ap. 24, b. 496, p. 220; Housing Nationalisation Deed No. 775, 23 December 1940, Vilnius Regional State Archives (VRVA), F. 761, ap. 15, b. 1619, p. 12.



the administrator of the same daily and was also an active member of the Society for the Protection of Jewish Health in Poland (Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce, TOZ). Issued throughout the interwar period, the leftist-liberal *Vilner Tog* was edited by the famous intellectual, literary critic and linguist Zalmen Reyzen, one of the founders of the YIVO institute (Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut, Jewish Scientific Institute, 1925). The newspaper published works by the most prominent Jewish writers of Vilnius. It was in the *Vilner Tog* that the group of modernist artists and writers known as Yung Vilne (Young Vilnius) made their debut and published their manifesto in 1929. Thus, Yitskhok's father and uncle worked in a literary, political and journalistic environment which was to a large extent connected with the left political wing (especially Bund, the Jewish socialist party). To some extent, this explains certain peculiarities of the boy's mentality, such as his secular approach, socialist orientation and, at the same time, his robust involvement in Jewish culture, books and the Yiddish language – the so-called Jewish nationalism or Yiddishism characteristic of the Litvak Diaspora (Katz, 2004). Already as a child Yitskhok demonstrated his literary inclination and even kept in contact with some famous Yiddish writers of the time. In 1938–1939 he corresponded with poet Mani Leib,<sup>8</sup> who lived in New York. In the ghetto Yitskhok met poets Avrom Sutzkever and Shmerke Kacherginski, members of Yung Vilne, and cooperated with them in cultural youth activities. Later they very carefully looked after his diary. Yitskhok's biographical background, his worldview and early personal connections with literary circles make it possible to see him as a follower of Yiddish culture that flourished in Vilnius in the interwar period. This makes Rudashevski's diary extremely important as a *representation of annihilated tradition*. Rudashevski emerges as a fledging member of the youngest cultural generation of the Jews of Vilnius, which was tragically annihilated together with its aspirations and maturing talents.

As a child, Yitskhok attended a secular Jewish school, where he studied for six years before moving on to the prestigious Jewish gymnasium at 8 Rūdninkų Street with Yiddish as the language of instruction and modern democratic trends prevailing. In spring 1942, he enrolled at the re-established Jewish gymnasium in the ghetto, which continued to teach the same pre-war curriculum under inhumane circumstances. This was mostly possible thanks to the teachers of that same gymnasium who were also kept prisoners in the Vilna Ghetto. In his diary Yitskhok wrote that the school gave meaning to his life, that it provided an opportunity of self-expression and gave him a sense of “being busy”, which meant hope of life and connection with the lost normal world. The diary includes several episodes where meaningful time spent at

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<sup>8</sup> Three letters from Rudashevski addressed to poet Mani Leib survived and were published in the New York journal *Nusakh Vilne* (The Rite of Vilne), no. 10, 1968–1969, p. 33–42.

school is presented in contrast with the dull, depressing and wasted time outside school. The most prominent gymnasium teachers were personal authority figures and an ideal example for the boy. Mira Bernshtein (1908–1943), who taught Yiddish and Hebrew and later became a legend of cultural resistance in the Vilna Ghetto, and Yakov Gershtein (1904–1943), a music teacher and head of the children's choir, were presented as exceptional personalities among them all. Yitskhok identified himself emotionally with Gershtein because of his wonderful personality and his natural way of instilling in children such values as national dignity, love for their mother tongue, music and poetry. Gershtein's death of hunger became a particularly difficult emotional experience for the boy. On 27 October 1942, a special evening to pay tribute to Gershtein was held in the ghetto; Yitskhok stood on the stage of the legendary Vilna Ghetto Theatre and read an essay devoted to his dead teacher. This symbolic moment turned into his first public confession and even a psychological initiation ritual (Rudashevski, 2018). The boy was a passionate reader. In his notebook he listed the books that he borrowed from the Vilna Ghetto library and wrote comments on them. All this makes Rudashevski's diary a separate chapter in the history of cultural life in the Vilna Ghetto, thus confirming the *meaningfulness of unarmed resistance* that is extremely important in terms of collective memory of the ghetto.

Nonetheless, probably the most important reason for the diary to become a site of memory is that it reveals the undoubted literary and intellectual talent of the young writer, including his artistic approach to extreme reality. Sometimes the fourteen-year-old boy demonstrates exceptional maturity as if mentally he was beyond his years. Some entries in Yitskhok's diary describe images, atmosphere and inner states rather than events or situations from the life of the ghetto, including certain details which, although seemingly of secondary importance, were presented with extreme eloquence. Here is an illustration of that, describing a moment when Jews were herded to the ghetto: "People are harnessed to bundles which they drag across the pavement. People fall, bundles scatter. Before me a woman bends under her bundle. From the bundle a thin string of rice keeps pouring over the street" (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 32). A child's eye naturally spots things that remain unnoticed by grown-ups. The author highlights a particular detail in an extremely laconic way and focuses on it as if in a film shot, thus giving it a multiple meaning: a thin string of rice that keeps pouring from the heavy bundle carried by a Jewish woman who is being herded to the ghetto becomes a metaphor. In other episodes the author focuses more on the local atmosphere and on all that lingers in the destroyed spaces of the ghetto in an attempt to hear its speechless talk. He does it, for example, when wandering among the ruins in Mésinių Street: "I crawl between the bricks, pieces of wallpaper, tiles, and it seems to me a lamentation ascends from the black crevices, from the stale holes. It seems to me that the ruins are weeping and importuning as though lives were hidden here" (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 64). This kind of perception of the atmosphere of the place by

a fourteen-year-old seems to be phenomenal and proves his exceptional empathy. Similarly, it is not a concrete situation but a strange, ghost-like flare of a lamp in a dark little ghetto street and figures of poor vendors crowding around a lit-up corner that catch the boy's eye:

Like flies around a little lamp poor ghetto vendors, mostly children, cling to the light. The bluish, dull light illuminates the rags of the children or women, illuminates the little hands red from cold which are counting money and giving change. Frozen, carrying the little stands on their backs, they push toward the tiny corner that is lit up. They stand thus until they hear the whistle and then they disappear with their trays into the black little ghetto streets. Next day you see them again at the sad light, how they knock one foot against the other and breathe into their frozen hands. (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 91)

This description resembles a modern expressive painting: the lighting, colouring and composition of the scene, including certain symbolic associations, gain special importance in the eyes of the viewer. The boy presents the scene through his own eyes and achieves an unexpected effect of artistic distance. In the ghetto the boy habitually engages in artistic observation of the environment and the people that surround him. He listens to what they have to say and conveys his experience using the literary code. In spite of all cultural differences, this makes Rudashevski's diary similar to that of Anne Frank's and endows it with the potential to find its place in the literary canon. In other words, owing to its *literary quality* the diary may successfully pass the process of critical selection (when compared to other testimonies, which only have documentary value) and remain relevant to contemporary imagination. This is what makes Rudashevski's diary important in terms of Holocaust education and artistic interpretation. Indeed, the aesthetic value of an artefact greatly strengthens its position in the canon of cultural memory (A. Assmann, 2013).

Moreover, Rudashevski's diary gains special significance as a testimony of a murdered child, which endows it with a certain *sacral* meaning. It represents the most innocent and absolute victims of the Holocaust. Psychoanalytically, this attitude is related to the archetype of a child in the collective subconscious: it is one of the archetypes that evoke exceptionally strong psychological reactions, the feeling of breaching an ultimate taboo, including deep emotional empathy (Jung & Kerenyi, 1973). The iconography of child suffering has become one of the central axes in the Holocaust discourse. It is related to the process of endowing Holocaust memory with a sacral dimension. One such icon, which gave rise to numerous interpretations and legends, is the photograph of a nameless boy from the Warsaw ghetto holding his hands up in a gesture of surrender, taken in May 1943. Anne Frank has also become a mythologised icon of a Holocaust child (Kurz et al., 2017). This combination of mythological and historical narratives is viewed as a symptomatic phenomenon in memory culture: "Through memory, history becomes a myth. This does not make it unreal – on the contrary: this is what makes it real, in the sense that it becomes

a lasting, normative, and formative power” (J. Assmann, 2011, p. 38). There is no doubt that the figure of Yitskhok Rudashevski – an exceptionally talented boy from Vilnius who was killed in Paneriai – also has such power, including the potential to become an icon in the cultural memory of Lithuania.

### Challenges of the diary: a collision of narratives

Apart from all the factors that lead to the emergence of Rudashevski’s diary as a memory site, there are several major challenges that need to be dealt with in the process. These challenges are related to the above mentioned collision of narratives, which complicates the process of creating a Western type of Holocaust memory culture in Lithuania. In the Lithuanian context, the diary has the effect of a delayed-action explosive device: on the one hand, for a number of reasons the text is extremely important in terms of memory culture and could become one of the central *loci memoriae*; on the other hand, however, it may provoke strong conflicts between different narratives of the Second World War and evoke stereotypical reactions, which provides a convenient excuse to avoid the diary as overly “risky”. According to Professor Markas Petuchauskas, a former Vilna Ghetto inmate and famous cultural figure, twenty years ago he suggested publishing two ghetto diaries – those of Herman Kruk and Yitskhok Rudashevski – in the Lithuanian language. In 2004, Kruk’s *Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania* was translated and published by the main national Holocaust research institution – the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Centre – which, however, did not decide to publish Rudashevski’s diary.<sup>9</sup> In 2017, its translation and publication was initiated and financed by the Lithuanian Jewish (Litvak) Community. In anticipation of mixed reactions, including anti-Semitic ones, the leaders of the organisation held numerous discussions on the challenges involved and on the suitability of the diary for educational purposes and popularisation. Finally, the Community decided to translate the version published by Sutzkever in 1953, in which certain passages clearly showing the author’s overly enthusiastic pro-Soviet attitude were omitted. However, the decisive argument in favour of this version was that no textually exact transcript of Rudashevski’s original diary had been prepared and published in the Yiddish language. The 2017 version of a literature textbook for schools includes excerpts from Rudashevski’s diary and related comments addressed to Lithuanian pupils. However, the textbook does not include the most problematic passages from the diary either, and the pro-communist views of the author are not revealed (Dzikaitė et al., 2017). Thus, the introduction of Rudashevski’s diary into the canon, including its usage for educational purposes, is performed very cautiously by carefully filtering the text or by

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<sup>9</sup> Personal interview of the author with Markas Petuchauskas, 7 March 2018.

making only some of its meanings topical so as not to provoke any conflicts between different memory narratives.

The first challenge that the Lithuanian reader faces already at the beginning of the text is Yitskhok's political views and an open declaration of his pro-communist and pro-Soviet worldview. In the description of his studies at the Jewish gymnasium in Vilnius before the war, he appears overly enthusiastic about his participation in the activities of Soviet pioneers. Yitskhok was the leader of a pioneer team of ten students and organised their meetings. He wore a little red star on the lapel of his jacket, but had to put it away in grievance when the Nazis arrived. During the first days of the war, in June 1941, Yitskhok hoped for a quick victory of the Red Army and burned with idealistic desire to contribute to the struggle: "I think that we, pioneers, will not remain aloof in the struggle. I think that we shall be useful" (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 24). He saw the uprising of Lithuanians against the Soviet government as a betrayal: "They shot the Red Army soldiers in the back. [...] The Red Army will return, and you will pay dearly, traitor. We shall live to see your end" (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 26). Watching the German army's entry into Vilnius, Yitskhok writes: "I recall how last year almost at the same time I met the Red Army in a small Lithuanian town where we ran several kilometres to meet the first Soviet tank which had stopped there" (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 26). This particular episode is especially problematic when it comes to its reception, as it matches one of the most powerful stereotypes in the context of Lithuanian anti-Semitism, according to which in 1940 Jews enthusiastically greeted the tanks of Soviet occupants with flowers in their hands and thus "deserved" their fate (Eidintas, 2002). For Yitskhok, the days before the Nazi invasion in June 1941 were a period of absolute happiness: "Never did life possess such joy and freedom from care as in the Soviet summer of 1941" (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 23). Again, this is in sharp contrast to the Lithuanian (or Lithuanian Polish) memory of the same period: mid-June 1941 was the time of the greatest tragedy – the beginning of mass deportations to Siberia. However, in the boy's diary there is no mention of, or reflection on, any Soviet deportations or repressions, as if all this was happening outside his real life.

It is obvious that Yitskhok's views on the communist system and the Soviet Union were full of idealistic beliefs and hopes for a new and just world and happiness. He was not yet reflecting; rather, he was being overly emotional, like an adolescent experiencing a higher form of infatuation. One can assume that the political creed of the fourteen-year-old can be attributed to two factors. First, a leftist and secular atmosphere prevailed, and radical socialist ideas were perceived as acceptable, both at the gymnasium where he studied and in his family home. Second, the threat of the approaching Nazi army further strengthened pro-Soviet sympathies among part of the Lithuanian Jewish community, because back in 1939–1940 Lithuania was still a small neutral island caught between two totalitarian powers: "Memoirs, notes and diaries of many Jews testify that the approaching Red Army was perceived as their

saviour and liberator” (Eidintas, 2002). Yitskhok’s diary also includes entries about the situation on the frontline that he tried to follow as much as he could even when imprisoned in the ghetto. Those entries testify that the Soviet Union was identified with hopes for freedom and liberation. Moreover, joy over Soviet victories against the Nazis on the frontline appeared to be a mass emotion:

The ghetto is in a cheerful mood and so are the children. The ghetto resounds with good news, the ghetto radiates with hope: we almost begin to imagine that presently... we shall leave our jail. [...] The most important thing: the German army suffered a defeat at Stalingrad. [...] The Soviets are strongly attacking the central front: the ghetto feels with all its senses that the end is approaching or, rather, that our beginning is near. (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 97)

Entries in the diary were made about a number of episodes where authentic childish hope and naive indoctrination seemed to be inseparably intertwined. For example, having found a Soviet proclamation which was smuggled into the ghetto, Yitskhok reads it and believes every single word of the propaganda message that it contains, as if it was a promise of survival which made him stronger: “It seems to me that the writing warms me” (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 79). The entry dated 27 February 1943 – about a secret celebration which was held in the ghetto to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Red Army – serves as yet another testimony of this inseparable tangle: in absolute secrecy, Stalin’s portrait was placed on the table and treats were arranged to form the shape of a star, essays about the Red Army and its commanders were read out, and teacher Leib Opeskin recited his own poem dedicated “To the Red Tankman”. “The mood is an exalted one. I feel ourselves uniting with the life from which we are temporarily severed” (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 132). The fifteen-year-old projects his existential hopes onto images of Soviet ideology, which seems to be supported by adult authority figures. Both this particular passage from Rudashevski’s diary and several others testifying that Yitskhok invested too much trust in the Soviet ideology were removed from the version of the diary which was published by Sutzkever in 1953. Apparently, the initiator of the first publication of the diary also found it difficult to put up with the author’s political views, as by that time he had already experienced Stalinist repressions against Jewish culture. For contemporary Lithuanian readers, Yitskhok’s rhetoric and some of his imagery (such as the ritual with Stalin’s portrait) are *alien* signs that create a conflict of memories and a gap between the reader and the text, which can only be reduced by getting to know the historical context and by active interpretation, or else it will evolve into a stereotypical and even aggressive rejection.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For example, this gap is referred to by a priest and writer Julius Sasnauskas, who precisely indicated that when reading Rudashevski’s diary he felt “slightly disturbed by his adulation of the Soviet system,



Further entries in the diary highlight the other most significant challenge to the Lithuanian collective memory. Rudashevski records and steadfastly reveals the role of Lithuanian Jew killers who collaborated with the Nazis. In this case the boy's testimony appears to be exceptionally authentic and painful. The participation of Lithuanians in the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis is recorded in the diary from the beginning of the horrific events. They were, as Yitskhok put it, the "catchers" who at the end of June 1941 started knocking on people's doors in search of Jews and arresting them; they were the guards who herded Jews to the ghetto along the streets of Vilnius in September 1941; they were the stormtroopers of the Special Squad,<sup>11</sup> who would burst into the ghetto to arrest and herd thousands of people to Paneriai for mass killings and rob them of their belongings, who would search for hideouts and accept ransoms for a person's life; they were the guards at the ghetto gates who together with Nazi officers exerted control over ghetto inmates during numerous actions. The child's heart began to stomp at the mere sight of a squad of Lithuanian executioners surrounding the area of the ghetto where they were about to get hold of his poor grandmother. The entry describing Lithuanian Jew killers searching for the hideout where Yitskhok, his family and a group of other people almost suffocated in a tightly cramped space, is particularly vivid and dramatic:

Broken locks snap, doors creak, axes, saws. I feel the enemy under the boards on which I am standing. The light of an electric bulb seeps through the cracks. They pound, tear, break. Soon the attack is heard from another side. Suddenly, somewhere upstairs, a child bursts into tears. A desperate groan breaks forth from everyone's lips. We are lost. A desperate attempt to shove sugar into the child's mouth is of no avail. They stop up the child's mouth with pillows. The mother of the child is weeping. People shout in wild terror that the child should be strangled. The child is shouting more loudly, the Lithuanians are pounding more strongly against the walls. However, slowly everything calmed down of itself. We understand that they have left. Later we heard a voice from the other side of the hideout. You are liberated. My heart beat with such joy! I have remained alive! (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 39)

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his zealous membership in the pioneer organisation, and his hope for the arrival of Russian tanks, not to mention the accusations addressed against Lithuanians" (Interview questions by Julius Sasnauskas addressed to Mindaugas Kvietkauskas for radio broadcast *Mažoji Studija*, 26 April 2018). The famous Lithuanian intellectual defined the problem in a very subtle way. However, the reaction of a wider audience to the publication of Rudashevski's diary included aggressive rejection and stereotypical anti-Semitism, which were obviously expressed in related comments published after the information about the publication of the diary appeared on Lithuania's leading Internet news portal *delfi.lt* on 3 March 2018: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vaiko-liudijimas-issaugotas-per-stebukla-atrodo-zodziai-ant-popieriaus-dega-krauju.d?id=77281683>.

<sup>11</sup> Special Squad – *Ypatingasis būrys*, special SD and Nazi Security Police squad made up of Lithuanian volunteers who performed persecutions and mass killings in Vilnius and the Vilnius Region, mostly the killings of Jews in Paneriai.



A very sensitive problem in terms of cultural memory is the fact that in Yitskhok's diary the concept "Lithuanians" is almost always used in the meaning of enemies and killers. When the boy writes about Germans, he mentions both the Nazi criminals and several figures of "good Germans". For example, he writes about an officer who interceded for a violently beaten Jewish boy, or about a German woman who doled out some essential products to Yitskhok's mother and showed empathy towards her. Writing about the locals who helped and rescued Jews, Yitskhok refers to them as Christians without specifying their ethnicity. However, in his diary the ethnonym "Lithuanians" is almost solely used to refer to Nazi helpers (with the exception of an entry in which he writes about Lithuanian resistance against the announced mobilisation to the SS legion in March 1943 and the beginning of arrests of Lithuanian intelligentsia). Thus, the diary reveals objective truth about the role of Lithuanian Jew killers. Yet, on the other hand, it also conveys a negative national stereotype. There are several factors that explain the position of the author. First, there was a linguistic and cultural estrangement between the Lithuanians and the Jews of interwar Vilnius, who had much stronger ties with the Polish environment. Second, the majority of Lithuanians were clearly anti-Soviet, which contradicted the expectations of the majority of Jews at the time. Third, in 1940–1941 the anti-Semitic sentiment of the Lithuanian population became ever stronger and was publicly voiced by the Lithuanian Activist Front. However, by far the most important factor was the trauma experienced by the child. In cruel, liminal situations the role of the perpetrator became deeply entrenched in Yitskhok's consciousness and became inseparable from the image of the whole nation. The boy's diary helps to understand how and why the image of Lithuanians as the nation of Jew killers began to emerge. It still hurts Lithuanian feelings and is dissonant with the narrative of Lithuanians themselves as victims of numerous occupations, which prevents us from perceiving Holocaust memory as our own discourse. It has been proven and publicly admitted that Lithuanian perpetrators took part in the killings of Jews, which resulted in numerous official steps, such as the official apology of the President of Lithuania, Algirdas Brazauskas, during his visit to the Israeli Knesset in 1995. Nonetheless, the child's testimony breaks the conventional "calm" of academic research and official confessions and requires a different reaction in terms of cultural memory. The negative collective image in the eyes of a child serves as an extremely strong incentive to make a critical review of our own memory narrative. The diary once again requires giving it an intensive additional interpretation.

Yitskhok's testimony provokes questions about yet another aspect of cultural memory: it does not heroicise the Jewish community in the ghetto and is extremely critical towards it. With aching heart, the author describes the passiveness, conformance, indecision and the narrow mindset of the masses in the ghetto even in the context of collective tragedy: "To save one's life at any price, even at the price of our brothers who are leaving us. To save one's own life and not attempt to defend it... the point of view

of our dying passively like sheep, unconsciousness of our tragic fragmentation, our helplessness” (Rudashevski, 1973, pp. 39–40). Just like a prison or a camp, the ghetto has its own system of castes and its own “ghetto elite”. The boy finds this very painful to look at and reacts with disgust. In the harsh conditions of everyday life, ghetto inmates feel divided into social classes, including the protected and the favoured. Some of those queuing in the meat shop for their miserable rations only get bones (and keep silent): “The crowd of frozen women stands in ‘line’, hushed, wrathful, devouring the meat table with their eyes. They remain silent as they watch one person receive the fat and the second bones. People are already used to it” (Rudashevski, 1973, pp. 118–119). The same hierarchy prevails even in the ghetto hideouts, the *malinas*, where Yitskhok spends long hours suffocating in a tightly crammed space, where it is cold and the berths are so rigid: “There are ‘aristocrats’ in the hideout, who managed to make soft berths for themselves there” (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 42). One may think that this “class inequality” is given such emphasis in the diary due to the socialist views of the author, but similar testimonies of segregation between the elite and the masses were also recorded by other teenage authors of ghetto diaries, such as Ilya Gerber from the Kaunas Ghetto or David Sierakowiak from the Łódź Ghetto (Vice, 2004; Zapruder, 2015). Yitskhok is extremely relentless and resolute when speaking about the role of the Jewish ghetto police. According to the boy, they were collaborators who worked hand in hand with the Holocaust executioners, who formed a special caste of the chosen in the ghetto, who lived a good life and even lined their own pockets by helping to torture and kill their own people. His moral fury would erupt in certain specific situations and when watching the behaviour of the ghetto police or even minor details related to them:

Our police dressed up in their new hats. Here one of them is passing – my blood boils – in a leather overcoat, with an insolent air, his officer’s hat askew. Its peak shines in the sun. The cord of his hat dropped over his chin, he clicks his shiny little boots. Satiated, gorged with food, he struts proudly like an officer, delights – the snake – in such a life, and plays his comedy. This is the source of all my anger against them, that they are playing a comedy with their own tragedy. (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 80)

According to Yitskhok, the darkest moment of crisis in his own community was when the Jewish police wearing their brand new uniforms left on a mission to conduct a bloody “selection” in the Ašmena Ghetto: “Insult and misfortune have reached their climax. Jews will dip their hands in the dirtiest and bloodiest work. They wish simply to replace the Lithuanians. [...] Jews help the Germans in their organized, terrible work of extermination!” (Rudashevski, 1973, pp. 70–71) Thus, the diary reveals yet another paradox which is difficult to accept in the context of a cultural memory that sacralises Holocaust victims. The reality was that victims had to “fight for their life” among themselves, the community often lacked inner solidarity and, in addition to

that, there was also moral degradation of those who chose to collaborate with the killers of their own people in the hope of surviving at the cost of others. In Yitskhok's diary Jewish policemen are compared to the Lithuanian police who collaborated with the Nazis. This is an especially controversial passage in the diary as in extreme cases it can provoke revisionist considerations. On the other hand, it encourages searching for a more complex memory narrative of life in the ghetto instead of an overly heroic one.

## Conclusions

Yitskhok Rudashevski's diary is a significant challenge for modern Lithuanian Holocaust memory culture, which is currently experiencing a period of intensive development. On the one hand, the text written by a child in the Vilna Ghetto is of major documentary, moral and aesthetic significance and stimulates individual empathy. Under the influence of the canonical example of Anne Frank's diary, Rudashevski's text became part of Holocaust education in Lithuania right after it was translated into Lithuanian, with an ambition to make it part of the local canon of World War II texts. The consolidation of Rudashevski's diary as a memory site started with the implementation of the German-born *Stolpersteine* initiative in Vilnius. On the other hand, the text of the diary raises acute issues reflecting a conflict between different memory narratives and interpretations of history. Pro-Soviet views of the author, negative imagery of Lithuanians and certain deheroisation of the ghetto community make the text a "problematic" memory site, which may stimulate rejection or negative stereotypical reactions and result in an empathy gap between the text and the contemporary Lithuanian reader. There are two ways to overcome this gap: either by filtering the text and omitting certain parts in order to avoid certain implications (this was the tactic that the publishers of the first version of the diary in Yiddish followed back in 1953), or by intensively interpreting the text with the view to explaining the historical context and the different nature of a child's experience, including connections with the modern consciousness of a Lithuanian recipient. Nonetheless, such interpretation faces the key question of how to solve the conflict of World War II memory narratives in Lithuania.

According to Aleida Assmann, the central aim of memory policy across Europe should be a dialogical memory culture which is open to all kinds of experiences, but at the same time supported with common narratives (A. Assmann, 2012). Yitskhok's "inconvenient" diary, as well as his commemoration and open reflection on differences, may promote the formation of a dialogical Holocaust memory culture in Lithuania. It seems that as a result of certain differences highlighted by Rudashevski's text one simply must admit the *non-commensurability of memory narratives*, which is impossible to eliminate and is characteristic of the opposing views of Lithuanians and Jews on

the Soviets in 1940–1941. Other differences call for a more critical *supervision of own narrative*, for example, when dealing with the cases of Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis. There are also other types of memory narratives which still *require integration* to make sure that reticence about them does not turn into denial of the Holocaust or a source of “conspiracy theories”, which is the case of the controversial role of the Jewish police. At the same time, all that Yitskhok referred to as the strongest offset to various forms of humiliation and inner degradation in the Vilna Ghetto community could be used to support a common narrative. It all comes down to the phenomenon of cultural resistance in the ghetto: the gymnasium, the library, the theatre, exhibitions, poetry and music evenings, not to forget the personalities whom Yitskhok considered his authority figures, that is his teachers, artists and intellectuals. It was their activity that enabled Yitskhok to keep faith: “Ponar is passive death, the word contains the tragedy of our helplessness. No! We shall not go to Ponar” (Rudashevski, 1973, p. 41). This reveals a much more universal meaning of the diary which is not limited to historical circumstances alone. The diary is a text that demonstrates the child’s personal cultural resistance. His work was more mature than his age and heroic without any embellishment. It was his way to demonstrate his double resistance: against the brutality of the killers and against the helplessness of his own people. It is the main childishly unchildish challenge of the diary that will show whether contemporary memory culture of Lithuania is already mature enough to accept it.

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## A challenge to collective memory: Yitskhok Rudashevski's *Diary of the Vilna Ghetto*

### Abstract

This article aims to analyse the diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski (1927–1943), the story of its writing and publication and the existing biographical material about the author. It attempts to answer the question of what is or could be the significance of this *lieu de mémoire* for the current developments in Holocaust memory culture in Lithuania. The adopted definitions of cultural and collective memory and sites of memory are based on the concepts proposed by Jan and Aleida Assmann and Pierre Nora. On the one hand, the diary written by a child in the Vilnius ghetto is of major documentary, moral and aesthetic significance and stimulates individual empathy. On the other hand, the text raises acute issues reflecting a conflict between different memory narratives and interpretations of history. Pro-Soviet sympathies of the author, negative imagery of Lithuanians and certain deheroisation of the ghetto community make the text a “problematic” memory site. These challenges of the diary are interpreted as indicators showing whether contemporary Holocaust narrative in Lithuania is already mature enough to accept the dialogical forms of cultural memory.

**Keywords:** Holocaust; child's diary; memory culture; site of memory; conflict of memories; Vilnius ghetto; Yitskhok Rudashevski

## Wyzwanie dla pamięci zbiorowej: *Pamiętnik z wileńskiego getta Icchaka Rudaszewskiego*

### Streszczenie

Tematem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza dziennika napisanego w getcie przez czternastoletniego Icchaka Rudaszewskiego (1927–1943), historia jego powstania, publikacji i zachowania dla przyszłych pokoleń, a także materiał biograficzny dotyczący postaci autora. Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie, jakie jest i jakie mogłoby być znaczenie tego miejsca pamięci (*lieu de mémoire*) w kształtującej się obecnie na Litwie kulturze pamięci Holocaustu. Badania pamięci kulturowej i zbiorowej, a także miejsc pamięci, zostały oparte na koncepcjach badawczych Jana i Aleidy Assmanów oraz Pierre'a Nory. Z jednej strony, napisany przez dziecko

w getcie wileńskim pamiętnik ma dla pamięci kulturowej Litwy ogromne znaczenie symboliczne, etyczne i estetyczne, wzmacnione przez silne uczucie empatii wobec autora. Z drugiej strony, tekst pamiętnika stawia wysokie wymagania badawcze wynikające z konfliktu różnych interpretacji historii II wojny światowej i narracji pamięci. Socjalistyczne i proradzieckie poglądy autora, negatywny obraz Litwinów i swoista deheroizacja społeczności getta przekształca ten tekst w „problematyczne” miejsce pamięci. Powyższe wyzwania badawcze są interpretowane w artykule jako znaki, które mogą opisać stan współczesnej litewskiej narracji Holocaustu i odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy jest ona na tyle dojrzała, by w drodze dialogu zintegrować różne warianty pamięci kulturowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Holocaust; pamiętniki dzieci; kultura pamięci; miejsca pamięci; konflikt pamięci; getto wileńskie; Icchak Rudaszewski

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