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ANTAGONISTIC, COSMOPOLITAN AND AGONISTIC MEMORY MODES IN POSTMEMORIAL THIRD-GENERATION HOLOCAUST NARRATIVES OF LITHUANIAN DIASPORA WRITERS[1]

ABSTRACT   This article examines the challenges of coming to terms with Holocaust perpetratorship as depicted in postmemorial third-generation Holocaust literature by Lithuanian diaspora writers Rita Gabis, Julija Šukys, and Silvia Foti. It also outlines the mnemonic strategies used to reconcile contradictory historical narratives from the perspectives of both the victims and the perpetrators. The analysis demonstrates the authors' approaches to portraying victims and perpetrators, their choices in framing conflicting historical accounts, and their exploration of individual actions within the context of collective national identities. The main variations observed in the structuring of conflict stem from differences in writing styles, levels of personal connection to familial history, and collective experiences of suffering. These variations are also intertwined with the deliberate silence surrounding the individual-historical narrative which the collective voluntarily retreated into.

Keywords: Holocaust in Lithuania, postmemory, conflict memory, third-generation narratives, perpetratorship memory

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[1]   Added after publication: This article does not reference Violeta Davoliūtė's article "Agonistic Homecomings: Holocaust Postmemory, Perspective and Locality," of which the author was unaware during the writing and reviewing of this article. Davoliūtė approaches Gabis's and Šukys's texts through the relationship between place and perspective and this article concentrates on the modes of memory in relation to conflict. Reference: Davoliūtė V., "Agonistic Homecomings: Holocaust Postmemory, Perspective and Locality," *Memory Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2022), pp. 539-550, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980221085524.

INTRODUCTION

Over the 80-year period following the Holocaust, the initial silence surrounding what was considered *one in an almost endless list of Nazi crimes*[2] has been gradually replaced, particularly in the West, by an extensive body of interdisciplinary research. In the Soviet Union, which reoccupied Lithuania in 1944, memory processes were tightly controlled by the Soviet regime, but Lithuanians who managed to escape to the West cultivated their own, extremely ethnocentric memory culture. The Lithuanian diaspora saw themselves only as victims of the Soviet regime, ignoring the fact that some Lithuanians living in exile had actually been involved in the Holocaust as perpetrators. As noted by historian Saulius Sužiedėlis, within the Lithuanian diaspora, [s]*elf-perception as victim and the stereotype of the Other as perpetrator are deeply ingrained within wartime memories*.[3]

This article investigates the difficulties of coming to terms with Holocaust perpetratorship expressed in the postmemorial third-generation Holocaust literature authored by Rita Gabis (*A Guest at the Shooters' Banquet: My Grandfather's SS Past, My Jewish Family, A Search for the Truth*[4]), Julija Šukys (*Siberian Exile: Blood, War, and a Granddaughter's Reckoning*[5]), and Silvia Foti (*The Nazi's Granddaughter: How I Discovered my Grandfather Was a War Criminal*[6]). All three authors are third-generation Lithuanians who grew up in North America surrounded by family histories that portrayed their Lithuanian heritage as heroic tales of survival and victimhood. However, upon further investigation, the authors learn that these narratives have kept silent about the involvement of their grandparents in Nazi administration or the Lithuanian security police during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania from 1941 to 1944. Since their relatives were never convicted for any crimes they may have committed, the granddaughters seek to uncover their grandparents' guilt, documenting the literal and metaphorical journey they embark on. All three autobiographical books reflect on familial history and attempt to reconstruct it using scarce remnants such as stories, documents, pictures, and witness accounts. Despite similarities in their narratives, the books employ distinct approaches to conflict and offer diverse perspectives on perpetratorship and its representation in the postmemorial landscape.

[2]   D. Levy, N. Sznaider, "Memory Unbound. The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2001), p. 94.

[3]   S. Sužiedėlis, Š. Liekis, "Conflicting Memories: The Reception of the Holocaust in Lithuania," in J.-P. Himka, J.B. Michlic (eds), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, Lincoln–London 2013, p. 333.

[4]   R. Gabis, *A Guest at the Shooter's Banquet: My Grandfather's SS Past, My Jewish Family, A Search for the Truth*, New York 2015.

[5]   J. Šukys, *Siberian Exile: Blood, War, and a Granddaughter's Reckoning*, Lincoln–London 2017.

[6]   S. Foti, *The Nazi's Granddaughter: How I Discovered my Grandfather Was a War Criminal*, Washington, D.C. 2021.

The analysis will demonstrate how antagonistic, cosmopolitan, and agonistic modes of memory, as defined by Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen,[7] can be used to reflect on postmemorial approaches to Holocaust perpetratorship within the Lithuanian diaspora and society at large. When identifying modes of memory in relation to conflict, three main aspects of its representation will be considered: the nature of the conflict, the perspectives of the victims and the perpetrators, and the historical context. Through this theoretical framework, individual narratives will be examined to identify factors that determine the utilization of different modes of memory. This analysis aims to enhance our understanding of the culturally available modes of remembering Holocaust perpetratorship in Lithuania.

The aforementioned works have already been analyzed by Violeta Davoliūtė,[8] who emphasizes the similarities between genealogical writings within the Lithuanian diaspora and German *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane*. While this type of generational approach can be valuable in situating this literature within a broader context of world literature, overlooking the specific historical and societal circumstances that gave rise to *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane* can result in an oversimplification of these terms by equating them with *critical* and *reconciliatory* literature, respectively. Focusing on postmemorial structures and memory modes as generators of meaning, irrespective of a specific timeframe, allows us to overcome this issue. Such an outlook serves as a foundation for a more universal comprehension of how subsequent generations can address Holocaust perpetratorship through narrative forms.

ANTAGONISTIC, COSMOPOLITAN, AND AGONISTIC MODES OF MEMORY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF POSTMEMORY

Marianne Hirsch, in her development of a theory of generational memory, introduces the term 'postmemory,' which she defines as the *relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up*.[9] Hirsch conceptualizes postmemory not only as a later, post-temporal experience but also as an additional layer, like a post-it note[10] placed on top. The concept of postmemory has gained significant popularity in recent years due to its efforts to explain and legitimize the generational transmission of memory. This approach acknowledges the validity of internal and external conflicts experienced by the descendants of traumatic events, recognizing their personal and cultural significance. It

[7]   A.C. Bull, H.L. Hansen, "On Agonistic Memory," *Memory Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2016), pp. 390-404.

[8]   V. Davoliūtė, "Genealogical Writing and Memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 51, no. 1 (2021), pp. 70-85.

[9]   M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York 2012, p. 5.

[10]   Ibid.

provides a structural framework for understanding how ancestral experiences impact later generations. In the case of third-generation autobiographical narratives by Lithuanian diaspora writers, it can help identify conflicts that operate on three levels: personal, familial, and societal. While the primary conflict occurs at the personal and familial levels, larger societal conflicts arise regarding the representations of past conflicts within different communities when authors encounter new sources of information that contradict the familial narrative.

Examining the modes of representing the past and their specific uses enables a better understanding of the motivations behind these representations and allows us to perceive historical events as constructed through narratives rather than fixed truths. The chosen model for analyzing conflicts incorporates three different modes of memory, each emphasizing distinct aspects of remembrance and dialogue: antagonistic, cosmopolitan, and agonistic. While all three modes emphasize conflict, the antagonistic mode is the most simplistic, rigidly dividing conflicting sides into 'us' (the virtuous victims) and 'them' (the evil perpetrators).[11] Astrid Erll similarly defines a narrower antagonistic representation mode as [l]*iterary forms that help to maintain one version of the past and reject another*,[12] highlighting the imbalanced perspectives inherent in this mode. With the recent shift in memory studies towards acknowledging different memories as productive rather than exclusive, the antagonistic memory mode is now considered outdated and associated with the first modernity, imperialism, and the dominance of the territorial nation-state.[13] The persistence of the antagonistic mode within the broader historical narrative, including the Holocaust and the acknowledgment of Lithuanians as perpetrators, within the early Lithuanian diaspora and the first decades after independence, could be linked to (albeit not justified by) the loss of Lithuanian sovereignty and territory during World War II. Its effects endure due to the ongoing threat of Russian imperialism manifested through the occupation of parts of former Soviet republics, such as Georgian territory in 2008 and the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, culminating in an attempted occupation of the entire territory of Ukraine in 2022.

On a larger scale, the re-emergence of antagonistic memory modes in Europe is associated with the failure of the cosmopolitan mode to address tensions in present-day society that are partially a result of transnationalism and a globalist perspective. The cosmopolitan mode of memory, as theorized by Levy and Sznaider, arises from the fact that an increasing number of individuals no longer solely identify with their nationality or belonging to a particular group but rather as part of a transnational collective. However, cosmopolitanism does not imply the disappearance of national memory; instead, it adds complexity through a variety of identities.[14] Rather than positioning 'us' versus 'them' based on categories of good and evil, cosmopolitan memory assigns such categories to

[11] A.C. Bull, H.L. Hansen, "On Agonistic…," p. 11.

[12] A. Erll, "Wars We Have Seen: Literature as A Medium of Collective Memory in the 'Age of Extremes,'" in E. Lamberti, V. Fortunati (eds), *Memories and Representations of War. The Case of World War I and World War II*, Amsterdam–New York 2009, p. 41.

[13] A.C. Bull, H.L. Hansen, "On Agonistic…," p. 11.

[14] D. Levy, N. Sznaider, "Memory Unbound…," p. 92.

totalitarianism or democracy, providing perspectives of victims from all sides.[15] However, this mode of memory tends to overlook the mechanics of perpetratorship and the underlying reasons, thereby stripping the victims' suffering of its historical context. Ignoring perpetratorship is equivalent to ignoring conflicts between different national, political, and ethnic groups, which is not considered a productive mnemonic device.

Drawing on the critique of cosmopolitanism in the political sphere by Chantal Mouffe.[16] Bull and Hansen[17] identify the agonistic memory mode as a preferable alternative to the antagonistic mode. The agonistic memory mode involves understanding and reconstructing historical context, incorporating the perspectives of various groups (victims, perpetrators, bystanders), rejecting oversimplifications of 'good' and 'evil' devoid of socio-political context, and acknowledging the role of emotions in memory production. In any literary work not consciously crafted to adhere to a specific mode, a mixture of these modes can be expected.[18] To discern the particularities of the postmemory landscape and gain a better understanding of the culturally available modes of remembering within society, these three mnemonic modes will be identified within the structure, themes, and representation of relationships between victims, perpetrators, and their descendants in the examined works.

PERSONAL ACCOUNTS ON THE LEGACY OF THE PERPETRATORSHIP IN THE THIRD GENERATION OF LITHUANIAN DIASPORA

Each of the three books by Lithuanian diaspora writers exhibits a tendency towards a specific mode of memory, as reflected in their structure, themes, and portrayal of relationships between victims, perpetrators, and perpetratorship itself. Rita Gabis, in her book *A Guest at the Shooters' Banquet: My Grandfather's SS Past, My Jewish Family, A Search for the Truth*, exhibits a leaning towards the agonistic mode of memory. As an American of Lithuanian and Litvak descent, Gabis explores the crimes of her grandfather, who served as the chief of the Security Police during the Nazi occupation of Švenčionys. She focuses on individual stories of Holocaust victims and witnesses, as well as the complexities of perpetratorship and her own relationship with her grandfather. An argument could be made that Gabis's identity – *Jewish, not Jewish, Lithuanian-American, American*[19] – puts her in a unique position of a descendant of both the victims and the perpetrators, and this gives her the grounding needed to examine this complicated relationship. Despite her conflicting identities, Gabis maintains what could be described as an agonistic perspective on Lithuania: *One truth about Lithuania is that, as a country, it is*

[15]   A.C. Bull, H.L. Hansen, "On Agonistic...," p. 11.

[16]   C. Mouffe, *On the Political*, London–New York 2005.

[17]   A.C. Bull, H.L. Hansen, "On Agonistic...," p. 10.

[18]   Ibid.

[19]   R. Gabis, *A Guest at the Shooters' Banquet*..., p. 118.

indistinguishable from the invaders, collaborators, ghosts, heroines, thieves, defenders, and healers it contains. It's the raped woman and the father and the child. It's those who know nothing about what went on behind closed doors and those who stood by and watched, those who shrugged and walked away. Those who hid strangers, who carried messages, who didn't betray the hunted. It's the hunted themselves.[20] This also reflects Gabis' poetic approach very well, which uniquely incorporates elements of documentary style, unavoidable in narratives investigating historical facts, into her poetic work.

While the perpetrators are not as clearly defined as the victims, Gabis's close relationship with her grandfather allows for a nuanced exploration of perpetratorship. Even though the author ultimately discovers evidence of her grandfather's presence at the killing site during the extermination of Jews and condemns his actions, his character is presented throughout the book in a way that reconciles his positive and negative actions, providing contextualization: *especially in the borderland things weren't that cut and dried. Yes, there were many subtle and brutal ways my grandfather could have been 'encouraged' to cooperate or collaborate or participate. In my search for details, for elusive facts about him, I was slowly compiling examples of risk and compassion, small as a potato or large as life.*[21] The grandfather is portrayed as human, despite his inhumane actions. This quest for nuance in understanding the causes of perpetratorship evokes feelings of guilt in the author: *The more I read about the history of Lithuania, so I could place my grandfather in some kind of context, the more I felt complicit in something – as if trying to understand a place where the Poligons of this world exist was in itself a way of looking for rationalizations.*[22] This demonstrates that, even though in theory cosmopolitan or agonistic modes of memory are viewed as superior to antagonistic ones, they present their own set of challenges, particularly when considering the portrayal of perpetrators of the Holocaust as humans who had loving personal relationships.

Julija Šukys, a Lithuanian diaspora writer from Canada, initially embarked on writing her family history with a focus on on her grandmother's experiences during her exile to Siberia. However, she soon uncovered a different part of her family history, revealing that her grandfather served as the chief of police in the small border town of Kudirkos Naumiestis during the Nazi occupation. In her book, *Siberian Exile: Blood, War, and a Granddaughter's Reckoning*, Šukys attempts to reconcile the untold story with the narrative that had been relayed to younger generations. She places great emphasis on victimhood, considering it a crucial identity forming element for the Lithuanian diaspora, Lithuania as well as herself: *For forty years, it seems, I have overvalued my origins. All my life, I have put so much stock in where I "came from" that when it turned out that the past looked different from what I'd imagined, a crisis of identity resulted. Who am I now that I've rewritten my family's history?*[23] Even though Šukys reflects on perpetratorship and its relation to victimhood throughout the book, the title and cover,

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[20]   Ibid., p. 9.

[21]   Ibid., p. 257.

[22]   Ibid., p. 218.

[23]   J. Šukys, *Siberian Exile*…, p. 163.

featuring Šukys's grandmother, clearly indicate that victimhood remains the primary theme. While employing a cosmopolitan mode of memory in by remembering and re-counting the stories of victims of both the Soviet and Nazi regimes, the book implies a hierarchy of suffering. When describing the Soviet-organised expulsions of Lithuani-ans to Siberia in 1941, Šukys emphasizes that the *aim of the action was not genocidal*,[24] contrasting it with the unequivocally genocidal intentions of the Nazis in their exter-mination of Jews. The book also states that *special settlers had a good chance of survival*,[25] unlike those herded into ghettos or facing execution.

In addition to the antagonistic hierarchy, perpetrators are depicted as evil, mon-strous beings: *beyond Newtown's edge once lurked the cruelest creatures of all, men with guns*.[26] The grandfather, with whom the author did not have a close personal relation-ship and who was involved in organising the shootings, is portrayed as soulless: *Per-haps, in the end, only his body survived. Maybe his soul did not*.[27] An example is also given of a man who warned the victims prior to a massacre, but later turned against them, which, in the author's words, *strikes and troubles*[28] her: the idea that a perpetrator can perform a seemingly good act does not fit in with the antagonistic mode of memory.

While the revelation of the true story does not alter Šukys's grandmother's victim status, it challenges the concept of the alleged collective Lithuanian victimhood. While victims and their stories serve as the focal point of the book, some of the tactics em-ployed to explain the situation can be interpreted as antagonistic. The antagonism could be seen as an attempt to correct what the author considers wrong: Lithuanian's self-identification solely as victims in their historical consciousness, neglecting the re-flection of their participation in the Holocaust, both on a personal and a societal level.

Another example of a third-generation autobiography by a diaspora writer that leans towards an antagonistic mode of memory is Silvia Foti's *The Nazi's Granddaugh-ter: How I Discovered my Grandfather Was a War Criminal*. Her grandfather Jonas Noreika, who had been executed by the Soviet government for anti-Soviet resistance long before her birth. She does not have any memories of him. Her family and the Lithuanian diaspora community revered him, only for Foti to discover later that he had served in the government apparatus during the Nazi occupation and had been involved in organising the Žagarė ghetto.

While the previously discussed works subtly incorporate antagonistic elements and combine different modes of memory, Foti's antagonistic stance is overt. She openly as-serts the primacy of Jewish victimhood: *On the spectrum of victimhood, I would contend that the Jews were the greatest victims in Lithuania*.[29] This claim is based on the fact that, while Lithuanians suffered expulsions to Siberia, arrests and incarceration, the Soviet

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[24]   Ibid., p. 25.

[25]   Ibid., p. 27.

[26]   Ibid., p. 8.

[27]   Ibid., p. 31.

[28]   Ibid., p. 40.

[29]   S. Foti, *The Nazi's Granddaughter...*, p. 327.

actions were not genocidal, as they did not entail mass extermination.[30] The comparison of suffering is a prevalent theme, also echoed in the author's personal history: *My family's tragedy, I thought, was grander, more epic than most.*[31]

Another characteristic of the antagonistic mode of memory is the clear distinction between 'good' (us) and 'evil' (them). In Foti's book, every conflict seems to rely on these categories to the extreme, with enmity as the driving force. Lithuanian attitudes towards Jewish people before the Second World War are described as resentful, envious and antisemitic, with Jews being viewed as the enemy.[32] The victim-perpetrator relationship is claimed to be rooted in hatred: *Jews, whom the peasants referred to as 'Litvaks' – to distinguish them from the 'true' Lithuanians – owned many of the country's small businesses. They were envied and fiercely resented.*[33] Antisemitism is presented as the prevailing view among Lithuanians and is cited as the primary motive for violence against Jews. Perpetratorship, in turn, is portrayed in black and white terms: *How could he be a Jew-killer if he had been in a Nazi concentration camp? Didn't that alone prove his innocence?*[34] However, such questions are posed without even a slightest attempt to answer them or employ any other logical approach beyond an 'either or' perspective. While there is no doubt that antisemitism played a significant role in both the organisation and implementation of the Holocaust, to cite it as the sole reason for the atrocities committed oversimlifidies the complex dynamics involved.

Just like Šukys's, Foti's antagonism seems to stem from a combination of family and community silence, as well as a personality-defining emphasis of origin: *I felt like a princess, growing up as the granddaughter of a hero who had bravely resisted the Communists and been tortured by the KGB.* [...] *The aura of heroism seemed to have been transferred magically to me, to inform my very essence.*[35] Additionally, Foti's occupation as a journalist contributes to the intensification of antagonism, driven by the understanding of what constitutes a 'good' story.[36]

CONCLUSIONS

The remembrance of perpetratorship is challenging because there is an argument to be made that it is morally wrong to remember perpetratorship in any other way than through critique. At the same time, it is crucial to put in the necessary effort to demonstrate the complexity of the issue and avoid employing antagonistic tactics that may result in a one-sided narrative lacking meaningful ways to remember difficult historical

[30]　Ibid., p. 225.

[31]　Ibid., p. 33.

[32]　Ibid., pp. 204, 216.

[33]　Ibid., p. 57.

[34]　Ibid., p. 75.

[35]　Ibid., p. 22.

[36]　Ibid., p. 69.

events. The analysis shows that in third-generation postmemory narratives concerning the Holocaust in Lithuania, antagonism is employed to challenge and provoke change in memory cultures that were shaped by the second-generation's deliberate ignorance of Lithuanians' involvement in the Holocaust. On the other hand, cosmopolitanism and agonism arise either from the author's personal reflection or dual-identity. Narratives and parts of narratives that are more densely saturated with postmemorial structures of remembering lean towards cosmopolitanism or agonism, while journalistic work exhibits a more antagonistic approach. Antagonism becomes more pronounced when the focus is placed on a single event rather than an extended period of time, as it becomes easier to assign the labels of the victim and the perpetrator in the absence of simultaneous events or differing perspectives. Antagonism presupposes a closer relationship between identity and origin and emerges as a response to silence or false narratives surrounding familial or national history. Furthermore, views on perpetratorship are complicated by the personal relationship with one's grandfather, demanding a more nuanced understanding of perpetratorship. What is more, the fact that prolonged periods of silence elicit extreme responses once information about perpetratorship is uncovered serves as a clear indication that there are tangible benefits in addressing uncomfortable questions of perpetratorship rather than concealing them.

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