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The Topography of Transgression

Non-Jewish Testimonies of Plunder during the Holocaust in the Lithuanian Provinces

Abstract

Transnational campaigns for restitution and the material turn in the humanities have brought the topic of plunder during genocide, and the role of bystanders therein, to the centre of attention. This article analyses the attitudes of non-Jewish witnesses towards the misappropriation of Jewish property and personal belongings during the Holocaust in the provinces of Lithuania, as disclosed in audio-visual recordings from the Lithuania Documentation Project (LDP) that were collected between 1998 and 2010. These interviews, conducted decades after the historical events and choreographed as intimate conversations among individuals of the same culture and language, shed a unique light on the roles and perspectives of social actors engaged in and affected by the process of genocide. While some testimonies are marked by denial, displacement, and dissociation, others manifest an ethical concern with the naming and blaming of perpetrators, together mapping a diverse topography of transgression.

Introduction

Although Raul Hilberg identified *Enteignung* (expropriation) as a key stage of the Jewish genocide, plunder has long been treated as a secondary, derivative aspect of the Holocaust. According to Martin Dean, the "Aryanisation" of property was dismissed as a "byproduct of the destruction process", since the Holocaust "was not seen as having been motivated primarily by material gain".[1] This attitude changed in the 1990s with the success of campaigns to recover billions of dollars of Holocaust-era assets from Swiss banks.[2] The release of confidential financial records of governments in Western Europe, combined with the opening of archives in post-communist Eastern Europe, fuelled a new wave of research into the material dimension of genocide. The adoption of the *Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues* in 2009 marked a deep appreciation for the inextricable entanglement of material loss and restitution, reckoning and remembrance.[3]

While campaigns for restitution culminated with the declaration of 2022 as the year of *Wiedergutmachung* (restitution) by the German government, scholars working in the framework of the material turn have drawn attention to the place of Jewish property in the process of genocide as well as reckoning and remembrance in its after-

1 Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7. Hilberg defined the stages of destruction as follows: definition by decree, expropriation, concentration, mobile killing operations, deportations, and killing centre operations. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), v-viii.

2 Greg Bradsher, "Holocaust-Era Assets Records and Research at the National Archives", *Journal of Israeli History* 18, no. 2–3 (1997): 283–286.

3 U.S. Department of State, "2009 Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues", 30 June 2009, https://www.state.gov/2009-terezin-declaration-on-holocaust-era-assets-and-related-issues/.

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math.[4] Carolin Lange, for example, shows how Germans in Bavaria took to fumigating homes appropriated from Jewish deportees in a social epidemic of displaced guilt,[5] while Shannon Fogg reconstructs the everyday life of Jewish survivors as they struggled through the process of restoring their citizenship and property rights in France.[6]

Behind the Eastern Front, Jews were not deported to death camps but killed "on the spot".[7] Here, the looting of Jewish property by non-German locals was less "orderly", more spontaneous, and more personal. As argued by Omer Bartov, the intimacy of communal violence and the continuous circulation of Jewish property within the community eroded the borderlines between bystander and perpetrator. "What is the meaning of passivity when you move into a home vacated by your neighbours whom you have just heard being executed, when you eat with their silverware, when you tear out their floorboards to look for gold, when you sleep in their beds?"[8] The afterlives of Jewish property are the subject of an adjacent body of literature, including academic studies and popular works of third generation postmemory.[9]

Among Lithuanian historians, Valentinas Brandišauskas was one of the first in the post-communist period to analyse the prevalence and process of plunder at the local level in Lithuania, and the role of key authorities like the Provisional Government, the Vilnius City Council, and the Catholic Church in authorising, organising, and condoning the dispossession of Lithuanian Jews.[10] Christoph Dieckmann would later show how the German occupational authorities were able to leverage the collaboration of many locals through the prospect of self-enrichment. The policy of relying on greed more than ideology to secure local involvement conformed with the pattern established by the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940 and 1941. And while Germans were the primary beneficiaries of the dispossession of Jews, Dieckmann notes that locals responsible for the implementation of German policy appropriated considerable wealth for themselves. In the provinces, moreover, the local population was more directly and deeply involved, with the role of German officials being less prominent.[11]

4 Veronika Duma, "Robbery, Restitution, and Remembrance in Germany", *Eastern European Holocaust Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 19–26; Chandra Mukerji, "The Material Turn", in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, eds. R.A. Scott and S.M. Kosslyn (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015), 1–13; Tim Cole, "The Place of Things in Contemporary History", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, ed. Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison, and Angela Piccini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 66–81.

5 Carolin Dorothée Lange, "After They Left: Looted Jewish Apartments and the Private Perception of the Holocaust", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 34, no. 3 (2020): 431–449.

6 Shannon Fogg, *Stealing Home: Looting, Restitution, and Reconstructing Jewish Lives in France, 1942–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

7 Tim Cole, "Geographies of the Holocaust", in *A Companion to the Holocaust*, ed. Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 331–347; Anika Walke, "Testimony in Place: Witnessing the Holocaust in Belarus", *East European Jewish Affairs* 52, no. 1 (2022): 80–104; Waitman Wade Beorn, "All the Other Neighbors: Communal Genocide in Eastern Europe", in *A Companion to the Holocaust*, ed. Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 153–172.

8 Omer Bartov, "Communal Genocide: Personal Accounts of the Destruction of Buczacz, Eastern Galicia, 1941–1944", in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 404.

9 Zuzanna Dziuban, "Atopic Objects: The Afterlives of Gold Teeth Stolen from Holocaust Dead", *Journal of Material Culture* 25, no. 4 (2020): 408–427; Magdalena Waligórska and Ina Sorkina, "The Second Life of Jewish Belongings – Jewish Personal Objects and Their Afterlives in the Polish and Belarusian Post-Holocaust Shtetls", *Holocaust Studies* 29, no. 3 (2023): 341–362; Menachem Kaiser, *Plunder: A Memoir of Family Property and Nazi Treasure* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021).

10 Valentinas Brandišauskas, "Žydų Nuosavybės Bei Turto Konfiskavimas Ir Naikinimas Lietuvoje [The Expropriation of the Jewish Property and Destruction in Lithuania during the Second World War]," in *Holokaustas Lietuvoje 1941–1944 M.*, ed. Arūnas Bubnys (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2011), 499–510.

11 Christoph Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 1045–1046.

While historians have clearly established the involvement of locals in plunder, they have said less about the attitudes of those who took part, and of those who did not. How did non-Jewish Lithuanians view the theft of the property of their murdered neighbours at the time? Were thieves driven by a sense of justice, revenge, or ideology? Or was greed, or envy, the prime motivator? How was plunder viewed by those who did not take part – with approval, indifference, or disdain? And what about those who bought the movable property of their neighbours in make-shift auctions arranged by the local Lithuanian authorities in the town halls or other venues? Decades later, how would those who benefitted directly or indirectly from the mass dispossession of their Jewish neighbours look back and reflect upon these events, if at all?

In some memorial accounts, like the well-known diary of Kazimierz Sakowicz, a Polish journalist who witnessed the mass murder of Jews and others at Ponary, the attitude of the local population is presented in stereotypical terms: "For the Germans, 300 Jews equal 300 enemies of humanity. For the Lithuanians, 300 Jews equal 300 pairs of shoes, and clothes."[12] Less well-known accounts, like the recently discovered diary of Justinas Garbėnas, convey a more nuanced picture. While the village teacher, who worked in several small towns near Vilnius, condemns the greed of those taking part in the "horrific looting" and considers it beneath his station to "rummage through nooks and crannies for property", he nevertheless moved his family into the apartment of a Jew who was confined to the ghetto.[13]

More refined studies of local involvement are essential to understanding the differentiated way in which the Holocaust unfolded across the vast expanse of German-occupied Europe. In this regard, Mary Fulbrook emphasises the need to avoid generalisations about national identity – be they accusatory or exculpatory – and to disaggregate analyses of complicity in a manner that accounts for the specific circumstances which shaped individual reactions:

> Everywhere, local configurations and changing circumstances under Nazi rule shaped the extent and character of complicity in the persecution and extermination of Jews and other victim groups; and everywhere, later conditions shaped the kinds of narratives that were constructed both at an individual level and in wider public discourses.[14]

This article seeks to contribute to Fulbrook's call for a more refined analysis of local variations in involvement in the Holocaust by analysing testimonies of plunder in the provinces of Lithuania, as disclosed in a collection of audiovisual recordings of interviews known as the Lithuania Documentation Project (LDP).[15]

Of the 255 testimonies contained in the LDP, this article focuses on interviews conducted with eyewitnesses to events in the small towns and villages of provincial Lithuania – areas where the role of Germans was markedly less prominent than in larger cities, and where the local, non-Jewish population was inevitably complicit or at least implicated in plunder.[16] These locales, small towns and villages, many of

12 Kazimierz Sakowicz, *Ponary Diary, 1941–1943: A Bystander's Account of a Mass Murder*, ed. Yitzhak Arad (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). For the perspective of a well-known Lithuanian writer, see the chapter on "Gold Fever" in Balys Sruoga, *Forest of the Gods*, trans. Aušrinė Byla (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2005).

13 Justinas Garbėnas, diary manuscript with comments prepared by Vitalija Stravinskienė, to bė published by the Lithuanian Institute of History.

14 Mary Fulbrook, "Complicity and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe", *Jewish Historical Studies* 53 (2021): 115–135.

15 USHMM, Department of Oral History, Collections Division, "Project Description: Lithuania Documentation Project" (USHMM: Washington, D.C., 2007).

16 Interviews in the LDP have accession numbers ranging from RG-50.473.0001 to RG-50.473.0255, and can be accessed at https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508555.

which were *shtetls*, constitute a distinct environment, different from the larger towns of Šiauliai, Kaunas, and Vilnius, where ghettos were established and the dynamics of genocide were different.

Having surveyed the collection and analysed fifty interviews in which the question of plunder is addressed in depth, I seek to chart the contours of the responses of non-Jewish eyewitnesses to the Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces. This article is thus a contribution to a more refined topography of participation and abstention among non-Jewish locals regarding plunder as a key element of genocide.

The Framing of Testimony

In her study of testimonies of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Lithuania, Hannah Pollin-Galay highlights the extent to which their messages are shaped by the language, time, and place in which they are interviewed. Even while they relate the same events, testimonies delivered by Litvak survivors in English in the United States, in Hebrew in Israel, or in Yiddish in Lithuania present the significance of the Holocaust through the lens of worldviews that Pollin-Galay characterises respectively as redemptive, monumental, and forensic. She calls each of these categories a "testimonial group" and organises her analysis through a comparison and contrast of their distinct group features.[17]

The testimonies in the LDP can also be characterised as a testimonial group, whose meaning is shaped by the time, place, and way in which they were collected. The LDP was developed as one national part of the *Witnesses, Collaborators and Perpetrators Initiative* of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), and was launched in 1996 by Joan Ringelheim, then director of the museum's Oral History Department. Nathan Beyrak, an Israeli historian and documentary filmmaker was hired as the project manager. Beyrak travelled with the project teams across several European countries, overseeing the collection of 2,500 interviews, of which 255 were recorded in Lithuania. For Beyrak, whose father was born in Vilnius (Vilna), the Lithuanian component held a special significance, and he emphasised how the proximity of the local population to the killing meant they found an abundance of qualified witnesses.[18]

As project director, Beyrak was responsible for managing the process by which eyewitnesses were identified, selected, and interviewed. He notes how his personalised approach to the past was influenced by the Israeli radio programme *Missing Holocaust Relatives*. The programme was aired everyday throughout the 1950s and 1960s, listing the names of those searching for lost relatives and the names of those who were being sought. While his approach evolved over time, Beyrak consistently focused on the effort to make witnesses speak on-screen about atrocities committed against Jews. They had to be "real" witnesses, with direct knowledge and experience of the local process of genocide in their native locale. While the interviews did not follow a formal script, he says, they were tightly focused on what the interviewee personally saw.[19]

The interviews in this collection have a specific choreography. They typically start with a brief inquiry into the background and family of the interlocutor, life before the war ("Were there Jews where you lived before the war?"), the outbreak of war, and then

17 Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).
18 Nathan Beyrak, interview by Violeta Davoliūtė, 22 November 2022.
19 Ibid.

the events of the Holocaust ("What happened to the Jews?"). The bulk of the interview concerns what the witness saw, with the interviewer repeatedly prodding the interviewee to provide additional details. The interview typically concludes with the question "What happened to the Jewish property?" and supplementary questions about the role of the Catholic Church, such as "Did the priest say anything to the locals?"[20]

The interviews were conducted exclusively in the native tongue of the eyewitnesses and the interviewers. Alicija Žukauskaitė or Saulius Beržinis, highly experienced documentary filmmakers and gifted communicators, led the conversations in the presence of a cameraperson, invisible to the viewer. Compared to Žukauskaitė, Beržinis adopted a more candid, folksy, and familiar manner, often referring to the interviewee with affectionate diminutives like *tėvuk* (father) or *močiute* (grandmother). In all cases, the interviews come across as personal, private dialogues, but sometimes also as an interrogation, probing for a confession. Indeed, several of the interviews of the LDP were conducted with actual perpetrators. In at least one case, the interviewer was able to elicit a confession to a crime that the perpetrator had not previously admitted in a judicial process.[21]

The pace of the conversation is rather quick, with a high degree of emotional intensity. In a calm but persistent manner, Beržinis or Žukauskaitė push the interviewee to reveal the meticulous topography of the events in the interviewee's native locale, the distances, the time, the duration of specific processes or actions, the sounds, and so on. They often repeat the same questions several times, not only to extract more details but also to probe the subject position of the interviewee in relation to the events. This interviewing technique occasionally generates visible discomfort or irritation in the interviewee, accompanied by a range of emotions expressed through, for example, tears or silence. Beržinis states that, after some of the conversations, he felt he could not return to the interviewee to ask for any additional information.[22]

The interviews of the LDP are marked by a forensic focus on the ascription of individual accountability for murder and theft to named individuals. For example, in her interview with Bronius Neniškis from the town of Svedasai, Žukauskaitė asks: "Who were those shooters. What were their names? What did you hear from the people, from your father?" To which Neniškis replies: "I do not want to tell their names. They have children, relatives, grandchildren … Besides, none of these people are alive anymore."[23] Similarly, in her interview with Bronius Grižas, Žukauskaitė presses the witness to identify the perpetrators and plunderers by name. "You want to know who plundered Jewish property?", asks Grižas. "Yes, says Žukauskaitė. "Three neighbours, carts fully loaded, were transporting property from Rokiškis," he says after a pause, "mostly clothes." "Tell me the last names of those neighbours", Žukauskaitė asks after a pause. "I won't", he replies. "Their son is still alive – I won't tell his name. It was the father who took the goods, not the son." Žukauskaitė pursues

20 This question is asked in most interviews, including Marcelė Pelakauskienė, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 19 April 2007, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0205, and Juozas Palšauskas, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 15 January 2005, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0114.

21 Violeta Davoliūtė, "The Gaze of the Implicated Subject: Non-Jewish Testimony to Communal Violence during the German Occupation of Lithuania", *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 37, no. 2 (2023): 493–511; Violeta Davoliūtė, "Local Testimony and the (Un)Silencing of Sexual Violence in Lithuania under German Occupation during WWII", *Humanities (Basel)* 10, no. 4 (2021): 129.

22 Violeta Davoliūtė, "Interview with Saulius Beržinis", 8 July 2024.

23 Bronius Neniškis, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 19 April 2007, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0200.

the question of identity further: "Why are you afraid to tell their names? We will not tell anyone", she insists. "No. They will seek revenge", Grižas replies.[24] Žukauskaitė would later explain that she was not willing to let the interviewee escape or evade her questions without an actual answer.[25]

Part of the choreography involved mollifying the fear of the interviewees and the risks they felt that they faced. In several cases, the interviewees agreed to talk after verbal assurances by Beržinis or Žukauskaitė that their stories would not be told in their home country. For example, after describing violence she saw committed against the Jewish people and volunteering the names of several local "activists" who were involved in the perpetration of this, Veronika Krilienė from the town of Krakės implores: "If what I have just told you is shown in Lithuania, it is over for me." To which Beržinis replies: "Madam, trust us, we know how to protect people. This will never be shown in Lithuania."[26]

Similarly, Janina Kaupienė (Valeckaitė) from the town of Kybartai says: "[i]f someone found out in Lithuania, if someone saw it [meaning the interview], my life is over, finished. My girls are already shouting at me: 'Mum, do not talk or else someone will come and kill you, you will see'." "You are afraid even now? You said that all the killers are already dead", Beržinis replies. "You know, there are offsprings, relatives … Grandchildren are still alive, they'll seek revenge."[27] In yet another interview, with Zofija Drukteinienė (Ribokaitė), Beržinis once again asks "[b]ut why are you afraid?". "Because I live next to these Jew-shooters", Drukteinienė explains. "You know, such are the roots of this family. I realise this is a political issue … If someone now finds out what I told you, I will never get out of prison …" "Do not worry, madam, we will not tell anyone", Beržinis says.[28]

The vulnerability of some witnesses to pressure from family members, such as a spouse or grown-up children, is occasionally captured on-screen. We hear, for example, Veronika Krilienė pleading: "Men, lets finish. He is chasing me to work, he is very nervous." After a few minutes, the viewer hears her husband's voice, crudely berating her for wasting so much time. "You have wasted the whole day", he says to the interviewer, "seated with this hag. It's time for us to work now!" "Oh, Jesus, how the old man is raging", she says at the end of her interview, anxiously pleading once again with Beržinis and the film crew to leave.[29]

These cases aside, most of the interviewees were willing to identify the perpetrators within their community and to talk about the plunder of Jewish property. Some did so without any prompting. For example, Jonas Kriaučiūnas from the town of Želva points out that there were ten to twelve men from his town who were involved in violence against the local Jews.[30] Monika Vozbutienė (Toliūnaitė), who was born in 1912 near the town of Žagarė, readily tells the name of the local acquaintance

24 Bronius Grižas, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 19 December 2007, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0199.

25 Violeta Davoliūtė, "Interview with Alicija Žukauskaitė," 14 January 2021.

26 Veronika Krilienė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 23 September 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0034. The interviewees frequently refer to locals who collaborate with the Germans as "activists" or "partisans". German forces distributed white armbands to identify their auxiliaries, leading to the labeling of collaborators as "white armbands".

27 Janina Kaupienė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 23 September 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0035.

28 Zofija Drukteinienė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 20 August 2000, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0072.

29 Krilienė, oral history interview.

30 Jonas Kriaučiūnas, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 7 September 2004, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0101.

whom she saw shooting a Jewish man.[31] In a long interview with Beržinis, Stasys Keidūnas, a native of the town of Merkinė, urges Beržinis to write down the names of all the local men who were involved in the killing or the persecution of the Jews: "Write down their names, each one of them – I will tell you each one I know."[32] The same approach is taken by many more interviewees.

Several point out they felt bad for not having spoken about this earlier, or reproach the LDP team for coming too late because older, now deceased, eyewitnesses would have provided more detailed information. "It is strange that no one thought about this [conducting such interviews] earlier. So many people have already died. For example, my father could recount things unbelievably well. He wanted to write down what he remembered, but did not manage to do so", says Antanas Kmieliauskas, who was born near the town of Butrimonys.[33] In an interview conducted by Beržinis with Kazimieras Kraujelis in 1998, the interviewee leads the filming crew to an unmarked burial place of thirty-nine Jewish residents murdered by local activists, and willingly tells the names of the perpetrators: "I felt so bad that I would grow old without having shown this place to anyone. Zofija Drukteinienė expresses a similar desire to testify:

> Mister, you must … I want the entire world to know, it must know such horrors, it must. And Lithuanians must know. They must know everything about the murder of the Jews here. Everything. The world must know, so that it does not happen again … There must be love. Unity of the people. As God said, we must love each other – this is what God said to us. But do we behave like that? Let's say you have something that I want. I want you to die, so I can take your property. There are such people too, no?[34]

To summarise, the attitudes towards releasing sensitive information regarding local involvement in theft or violence vary from determined disclosure to cautious withholding of names, reflecting a manifest fear of retribution. Interviews conducted in the framework of the LDP were designed and choreographed to elicit a confession from the interviewee, to push the limits of the local, moral economy by filling in silences and sharing local secrets. The viewer becomes deeply immersed in the conversation, as some witnesses struggle to control their emotions, while others withdraw into a silence overflowing with reservations and resentment.[35] On occasion, the viewer can get the impression of eavesdropping into a conversation in which an invisible economy of power relations is being played out.

The forensic tone of the interviews reflects the tenor of contemporary discourse about the past at this stage in the post-Soviet transition of independent Lithuania. Indeed, it was precisely then, after the December 1997 decision of the European Council on enlargement of the European Union (EU), that Lithuania was under pressure to bring its approach to transitional justice in line with the EU's acquis. Lithuanian prosecutors and institutions of transitional justice, like the newly estab-

31 Monika Vozbutienė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 17 August 2000, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0063.

32 Stasys Keidūnas, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 16 April 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0009.

33 Antanas Kmieliauskas, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 19 April 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0020.

34 Drukteinienė, oral history interview.

35 A typical example of such resentment can be found in the interview with Antanas Spulginas; another is the interview with Bronius Gudelis. Antanas Spulginas, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 24 September 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0184; Bronius Gudelis, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 19 December 2007, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0198.

lished presidential commission on the crimes of the Soviet and Nazi occupational regimes, returned to the investigation of crimes committed by, inter alia, Lithuanian collaborators during the German occupation.[36]

The new policy of the mid-1990s also sought to repair the earliest legal blunders of independent Lithuania. One of the first acts of the new parliament was to "rehabilitate" individuals convicted of political crimes in Soviet courts, including by giving them material compensation.[37] Broad amnesties were implemented without adequate reviews, leading to the extension of amnesty to several hundred individuals who had been convicted during the Soviet period for crimes against humanity in collaboration with the German occupational authorities. This prompted an international scandal, which was also recalled by several witnesses of the LDP:

> Now those who were shooting and killing are now rehabilitated political prisoners? Oh! Listen, what is this? They receive financial support and so on. This has been subsiding now but at first it was real madness. What kind of political prisoner is he if he was killing people? But at the beginning, they were all called political prisoners, they got financial support because they suffered, and so on …[38]

The amnesty was adopted in May 1990, but the theoretical extension of its provisions to those who participated in the Holocaust was rescinded with the adoption in 1992 of a law on criminal responsibility for genocide. In 1995, a presidential decree launched a process to correct early mistakes in the rehabilitation measures. As related by Gintarė Malinauskaitė, the courts denied rehabilitation to 718 individuals due to their involvement in genocidal crimes.[39] While the complex history of property restitution as an aspect of post-communist transitional justice is beyond the scope of this paper, the issue was prominent in social and political discourse at the time when the LDP was launched.[40]

The Recollection of Theft

While there are many analyses of audiovisual testimonies to the Holocaust, relatively few focus specifically on the attitudes of non-Jewish eyewitnesses to the plunder of property. Anna Wylegała, for one, has examined the non-Jewish testimonies collected within the framework of the Yahad-In Unum project regarding the theft of property during the Holocaust in the territory of Eastern Galicia. Here, she finds the attitude typical of Polish and Ukrainian testimonies to be one of externalisation, meaning that the speakers attributed transgression to those outside the community, or to marginal elements within the community. "Other people did it: not local people, but Germans; not our own family but the one next door; not Poles but Ukraini-

36 Violeta Davoliūtė, "The Baltic Model of Civic-Patriotic History", *Journal of Genocide Research* 24, no. 2 (2022): 268.

37 Gintarė Malinauskaitė, *The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials in the Cold War Context* (London: Routledge, 2024), 1–2.

38 Vytautas Račickas, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 22 September 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0032; Justina Kirvelaitytė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 21 August 2000, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0075.

39 Malinauskaitė, *The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials*, 2.

40 Bianca Elena Radu, "Property Restitution in Lithuania, a Reparatory Tool in the Process of Transitional Justice?", *Challenges of the Knowledge Society* 18 (2024): 437–447.

ans; not ordinary folks, but people who joined the police; not decent people, but a mob; not mature people, but kids."[41]

In the LDP interviews, externalisation is not the prevailing feature, though it is certainly present, along with plain denial. On the contrary, many witnesses attest frankly that the killing and plunder of Jews was performed by locals. "I did not see a single German", "it was the locals", and "I knew them all" are frequently encountered phrases. Moreover, few interviewees mentioned politics – as distinct from greed or perceived need – as the driving motive of theft among the general population, even while they highlight the role of local activists, partisans, and "white armbands" as active perpetrators and the organisers of mass plunder. This runs against the grain of a common argument found among some Lithuanian historians; namely, that local collaboration was driven by political motives, specifically, a misguided revenge against the Jews for the crimes of the Soviets.[42] Instead, the witnesses in the LDP tend to reinforce the findings of more recent research, which suggests that while certain groups of activists (such as the "white armbands") were highly politicised, the broader population was not.[43]

Several interviews attest to the social intimacy of perpetrators and bystanders. For example, Elena Šeibokienė (Uselytė) and Adomas Ūselis are the niece and nephew, respectively, of a perpetrator; Anelė Mičiulienė's sister's brother-in-law was involved in the killing of Jews in Anykščiai; Antanas Galvydis' brother was an "activist"; and Ona Naujūnienė's cousin served as a policeman in Varėna. Other interviewees were neighbours, former servants, and co-workers of perpetrators, or socialised with them in some other way. Some had direct contact with the shooters; some received personal items from dead bodies right after the shooting, or later, from those who were recruited to bury the victims.[44] Others talk about plundering abandoned Jewish homes themselves or seeing others plunder, buying misappropriated property in the local auctions, finding hidden property by chance, or buying items second hand after the war.

The recollection of plunder includes accounts of the subsequent circulation of stolen goods in the community: handing it down to relatives, moving with it to other locations, selling and buying. As recalled by one witness, the widespread displacement of populations within Soviet Lithuania after the war granted many impunity for theft and more serious crimes: "[a]fter the war, they moved from our town to another. Many left for Vilnius, for Kaunas or Panevėžys. They built houses. They were all well-off, they lived well, and their children's children will probably live well, because they got something from the Jews."[45] The circulation of property like furniture, clothing, linens, utensils, and personal, precious items contributed to expanding the circle of implication in theft.

41 Anna Wylegala, "Listening to the Different Voices: Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian Narratives on Jewish Property in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Galicia", in *The Holocaust in the Borderlands*, eds. Gaëlle Fisher and Caroline Mezger (Goettingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2019), 171.

42 Arūnas Bubnys, "The Holocaust in the Lithuanian Province in 1941: The Kaunas District", in *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania*, ed. David Gaunt, Paul A. Levine, and Laura Palosuo (Bern: Peter Lang, 2020), 283–312.

43 Benjamin Mishkin, "Mass Violence Without Mass Politics: Political Culture and the Holocaust in Lithuania", in *Politics, Violence, Memory: The New Social Science of the Holocaust*, ed. Jeffrey S. Kopstein, Jelena Subotić, and Susan Welch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023), 124–136.

44 Antanas Spulginas, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 24 September 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0184; Ona Naujūnienė, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 29 August 2006, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0168.

45 Jadvyga Kuodienė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 24 September 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0043.

As concerns attitudes, there is a marked divergence between the empathy expressed by many of the interviewees towards the Jews who suffered physical cruelty and murder, and an apparent indifference towards acts of theft. Many display a startling oblivion to the transgressive nature of theft or the acquisition of personal items which belonged to murdered Jews. For example, Veronika Satkevičienė from the town of Kupiškis, born in 1916, testifies with evident sympathy about how Jewish children passed along the street in front of her house as they were escorted to the nearby killing site:

> [w]hen they were taking children, I could not … I cried and cried. I cannot … I saw when they were escorting the children. It was early. The sun had just risen. We were still sleeping. My husband's father lived nearby so he knocked on our window, and said: "Look" … It would have been better if he did not wake us up, it would have been better not to see … The little children were all undressed, only in their undershirts. Each single one was undressed … Why undress them, who could do such a thing? I cannot … They were already being taken to die, and yet to undress a child early in the morning? To go out only in an undershirt? They were white, white, white… And then the shooting started. I cannot speak … [Satkevičienė cries] When they started shouting, they cried "Mama, mama" – you know, as children do … And where is their mama? There is no mama, she is already dead … That's how it was.

And yet, when asked whether she appropriated any Jewish things at the local auction held afterwards, the interviewee confesses: "I bought a child's bed for five roubles because I had a son. I paid the money and bought it." While relating this, she seems to be oblivious to the connection between the unbearable scene of Jewish children she described and her acquisition of a child's bed for a very low price.[46]

A similar obliviousness regarding the transgression of theft is manifest in the interviews with Regina Prudnikova (Kirvelaitytė), born in 1925 and from the town of Pilviškiai, along with her two sisters, Justina Kirvelaitytė, born in 1931, and Emilija Juškevičienė (Kirvelaitytė), born in 1929. The three sisters, each of whom was interviewed separately, are all keen to identify local perpetrators by name. In fact, the sisters could be considered as local memory activists, insofar as they took an active part in resisting efforts to erect a monument honouring a local anti-Soviet partisan, Antanas Baltūsis-Žvejys (1915–1948). The sisters assert that he was involved in the shooting of the local Jewish population and so should not be commemorated with a monument.[47] Justina gathered the signatures of local witnesses, contacted local politicians, and wrote complaints and articles, to ensure that he would not be treated as a hero. The sisters also point out to their ideological split with their brothers who, according to them, have sided with the "patriots" on this issue.[48]

As conveyed in all three accounts, the sisters come from a family of poor farmers who benefitted from the redistributive policies of the first Soviet occupation in 1940, gaining land that was expropriated from richer farmers. Regina Prudnikova, for ex-

46 Veronika Satkevičienė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 21 May 2001, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0090.

47 Antanas Baltūsis-Žvejys (1915–1948) was a Lithuanian officer and anti-Soviet partisan. During the German occupation, he was briefly the chief of the Pilviškiai rural municipality police station and in 1943 commander of a company in the 252nd Lithuanian police battalion, which provided security services for the Majdanek concentration camp. Genocido aukų muziejus, "Antanas Baltūsis-Žvejys", last modified 30 January 2004, accessed 7 October 2025, https://www.genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/Atmintinos_datos/2015/201504_baltusis_biog.pdf.

48 Kirvelaitytė, oral history interview.

ample, was involved in the activities of the local Komsomol group. She reveals in her testimony that, upon the arrival of the German army, she took part in the plundering of the local Jewish stores, even while their owners were still alive, giving her family's poverty as an excuse. "The locals carried everything from these stores. I also took shoes, unmatching ones, and some textile from the store … and a box of vodka from the Metropolis store. I did this together with Antanas Masaitis …" Later, with the same frank address, Prudnikova describes how she was given a coat with blood stains, which she washed and wore. "You know, we were poor."[49]

Justina Kirvelaitytė, who was ten years old in 1941, notes how the possession and use of stolen Jewish property was known to all, attracting some mockery and shaming, and yet normalised: "[a]ll of us [meaning local children at school] were dressed in Jewish clothes; we were teasing each other 'You are dressed in this Jewish child's or that Jewish child's garment'. You know, what can children do? Whatever their parents dress them in, that's what they wear …"[50] According to Janina Čižauskienė from the town of Kvetkai, born in 1929, "adults tried to hide the fact of theft, but children did not".[51] The appropriation of children's clothing is widely justified by poverty. Elena Čečkauskienė from the town of Kužiai received a coat from a Lithuanian family that was collecting the clothing of dead Jewish people: "[y]ou know, everything we had was burned by fire at the beginning of the war. We had nothing."[52]

Regina Prudnikova relates the subsequent circulation of Jewish belongings in her native town after the war with the same matter-of-fact attitude. After describing how the local Jewish doctor, a man whom she held in the highest esteem, was brutally tortured and killed ("his teeth knocked out by a shovel while he was still alive"), Prudnikova then tells how she herself bought a tooth "for several roubles" and had the gold filling in this tooth recast and implanted in her jaw: she shows where the crown is implanted in her mouth. When Beržinis suggests that she too profited from the murder of the Jews, Prudnikova, apparently startled by his suggestion, retorts that she paid for it.[53]

Excerpts of the interview with Prudnikova were highlighted in the USHMM exhibition *Some Were Neighbors: Choice, Human Behaviour, and the Holocaust*, and have generated considerable discussion.[54] In her analysis, Zuzanna Dziuban interprets her "shocking indifference" as a re-enactment of the antisemitic othering and exclusion that characterised the original act of murder. By showcasing the persistence of Jewish possessions in communities, she conveys the "enduring naturalisation" of genocidal violence at the local level in its ethical and political dimensions.[55] Other scholars have suggested that the "shocking indifference" of the interlocutor should not necessarily be interpreted as an expression of antisemitism. They note how the recycling of virtually everything is characteristic of peasant societies, reflecting a

49 Regina Prudnikova, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 21 August 2000, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0071.

50 Kirvelaitytė, oral history interview.

51 Janina Čižauskienė, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 23 December 2007, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0210.

52 Elena Čečkauskienė, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 18 March 2009, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0232.

53 Prudnikova, oral history interview.

54 "Oral History of Regina Prudnikova," in *Some Were Neighbors: Choice, Human Behavior, and the Holocaust*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed 7 October 2025, https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/some-were-neighbors/neighbors/oral-history-regina-prudnikova.

55 Dziuban, "Atopic Objects," 408–427.

coarse material pragmatism that seems brutal and indecent from the viewer's perspective today.[56]

While the indifference of Prudnikova and others is shocking, it does not seem to be universal. Other witnesses demonstrate varying degrees of awareness of the transgressive nature of plunder or even secondary distribution and acquisition. While the theft of Jewish property was removed from criminal or administrative sanction, stolen items circulating in plain sight were a focal point for intersubjective discourse. A degree of social condemnation, or at least dissonance, can be seen in the mockery of poor neighbours who dressed themselves in clothes or jewellery that had clearly exceeded their station in life. Janina Birutė Čižauskienė, born in 1929 in Kvetkai, recalls:

> I was friends with a certain Pavilonytė. And Pavilonytė's mother was friends with Kleopas Mickevičius. I visited them sometimes, and I saw they had dishes and pots like nobody else in the village had. I asked them, "where did you get such things"? They said, "oh, our aunt who lived near the town of Utena gave them to us." Later, I noticed that a classmate of mine started wearing a certain dress – woollen, the colour of coffee, with some white. Now, the mother of my classmate Sarah, the wife of Krečmeraitis, used to come to school for parent-teacher meetings dressed in exactly this dress, although it had since been remade to fit the girl's height. So, it was clear where those beautiful pots, forks, and knives came from. And that dress as well.[57]

Other interviews suggest that the shame of transgression was masked or relieved through mechanisms of dissociation. Vytautas Račickas, for example, who was born in 1923, notes how locals would invent euphemisms to refer to the theft of Jewish property in an oblique manner: "[w]hen Lithuania was independent, people would have called this theft. They would have called the thief a horrible person. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with a thief. But when people started taking Jewish property, they invented the following phrase: to go mushroom picking, to collect mushrooms."[58] When asked to reflect upon the attitude of those who plundered towards the Jewish victims, Račickas responds: "who can say today what they felt? I think people felt sympathy for those who were killed, but as for their property … I think they thought that by the time they got to the Jewish house, it was already all over. If not you, then a German or somebody else would take what was lying there."[59]

The dissociation between the appropriation of belongings and genocidal violence would take the most extreme form in the interview with Antanas Galvydis. Born in 1911 and living in the town of Zarasai at the onset of the German occupation, Galvydis was the brother of a collaborator, a "white armband".[60] He was summoned by the leader of the German collaborators and told to shoot his Jewish girlfriend (whom he sometimes calls his wife) or be taken along with her to be shot. At first, Galvydis demonstrates determination to share his fate with his wife, if necessary ("one dies one time only … I will not beat her and will not shoot her"). Arrested together with

56 See the responses of Sendyka and Posłuszny to Dziuban's thesis in Aleksandra Szczepan, "Sites of Violence and Their Communities: Critical Memory Studies in the Post-Human Era (Kraków, 24–25 September 2019)", *International Journal of Heritage, Memory and Conflict* 1, no. 1–2 (2021): 95–111.

57 Čižauskienė, oral history interview.

58 Račickas, "Oral History Interview with Vytautas Račickas". The same trope of "mushroom picking" is repeated by Valerija Krilienė, born in 1929, who notes that children looting the abandoned Jewish houses also used this expression.

59 Račickas, oral history interview.

60 Antanas Galvydis, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 21 September 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0028.

her and marched in a column to the Vencava forest where they were to be killed, they were taken aside and imprisoned in a basement for the night. "What did you do?", asks Beržinis. "What can one do? We cried all night. She cried and I cried." In the morning, Antanas was told that his brother had asked to spare Antanas' life. Antanas was given the choice to leave his wife or to stay with her and die with the Jews:

> [a]nd so, after some time they took me out and brought me to the prison, so to say, where they were killing Jews. They put a white armband on my arm and said "now, walk peacefully, nobody will touch you". I walked to the place where they were undressing them. I walked from one group of Jews to another, and nobody did anything to me. I thought I might find my wife's clothing and take it home. I found nothing; everything was mixed up. Then they started taking Jews to where they were shot. They did not touch me.

At this point, the incredulous interviewer asks the witness to clarify some points. Why did he not leave when the shooting began? Why was he walking around at the place of the shooting? Galvydis answers after a pause, seemingly calmly: "I was looking for my wife's clothes. I thought I would still find them somewhere." "Why were you looking for your wife's clothes?", Beržinis asks. After a short pause, the witness answers: "I thought I would take them home. After all, I bought them."[61]

The LDP interviews also include instances in which speakers attest to the ethical connection between theft and genocide. For example, Ona Jačiunskienė (Pranckevičiūtė), who was a young worker at the brewery in the town of Prienai, a famous enterprise developed and owned by local Jewish entrepreneurs, describes two instances in which she was pressured into participating in the plunder but stubbornly refused. The first instance, she relates, took place immediately after the arrival of German forces in Prienai:

> [i]t was a day off, Sunday, and I saw that people were gathered in the square. The windows of our house faced the square. I saw that something was happening, and I ran out to see. It turns out, German soldiers opened the doors [of the Jewish houses] with rifle butts and were prompting local people to go and take whatever they wanted. Some went in, while others didn't and just stood and watched. I stood further aback and watched what would happen next … One German noticed me. I was a young girl, standing there, dressed very poorly, wearing a blouse of homemade linen and a black skirt. He came to me and brought a brand-new pillow, a down pillow. "Take it", he prompted me. I studied German at school, so I understood his words. "Girl, take it." "No", I said, "I will not take it." Meanwhile, some people stretched out their hands to grab the pillow. He pulled out a pistol saying "[s]tep back or I will shoot!" They stepped back and he prompted me again: "[t]ake it." "No, I will not", I said. So, he pulled out a knife and cut through that pillow, the down falling on all those people … [the witness laughs]. I left the crowd and ran home to tell what was happening".

After the Jews had been shot, Jačiunskienė (Pranckevičiūtė) relates another episode which she witnessed, when the Jewish property was distributed in a more orderly manner by the local authorities. This episode is related as part of a response to Alicija Žukauskaitė's question about how the mood of the locals was affected by the shooting. To this, Jačiunskienė (Pranckevičiūtė) replies:

> [i]t was bad, everyone was very upset. But there were those who were happy that they got some rags. All the factory workers were told: "we're giving you

61 Ibid.

> the day off, go to the Jewish synagogue, they will give you Jewish clothes, bedding." Well, we went to the synagogue. And they were handing it out there, to everyone who came in. "What do you want? A coat, a pillow, bedding …" I was standing in the back. I looked, looked, and thought: "I will not take anything." We were poor then, but I thought, I won't take anything, one cannot take advantage of such a tragedy. I stood and watched as people were carrying things. The majority did. But there were also some who just glanced at all this and walked away. There were others who were upset and talked among themselves that one cannot take advantage of people who have been shot … But when we returned to the factory, we did not reveal that we hadn't taken anything.[62]

The interviewees in the LDP who articulate a discursive moral stance against the plundering of Jewish property frequently point out that they had close social relations with Jews, such as the family of Petronėlė Karasevičienė from the town of Semeliškės. She was interviewed by Saulius Beržinis in the forest at the mass grave where the Jewish community was murdered. Karasevičienė tells how she grew up together with Jews, how they would visit each other's homes, and how she worked for a Jewish family as a nanny. "I loved the kids, and they loved me. It was part of my life." When the Jews were incarcerated, she went to visit them:

> I went there to see Reisele, a little girl of three years, very beautiful, with beautiful hair, she was very wise. She would hug me and say 'Petronėle, you are so beautiful, don't go yet, stay with me'. And I replied, 'I can't stay any longer, I am afraid, I have to go'. And she would respond '[d]on't be afraid, I am with you …' Back at home, my mother scolded me for taking this risk, that I went there, but I wanted very much to see them, I missed them …[63]

Karasevičienė draws a direct connection between the killing and the looting of Jewish property and insists that the close relations between Jews and Gentiles in her hometown of Semeliškės precluded the participation of her local townspeople in this crime. She insists that the killers came from the surrounding rural areas and that the looters were not long-time Semeliškės residents but poor farmers from the surrounding areas:

> When they shot the Jews, their houses were left intact. Not a single resident of our town went to live in them. Can you imagine such a thing? Those from the villages, not from our town, went to live in their [the Jewish] houses. No way. How could we? They [the Jews] were our friends. Of the same blood, so to speak. We all greeted each other, visited each other, we herded cows together. At Easter, they would give us matzos. The town was small. Nobody from the town took part in the catching or shooting of the Jews. White armbands were recruited from some other town.[64]

While it is impossible to judge whether Karasevičienė's testimony is truthful, sincere, and/or an example of externalisation, she maintains her stance under persistent questioning by Beržinis. "So there was nobody from the town who participated in the shooting?", Beržinis asks. "No, no, no", Karasevičienė replies. "How long did the houses remain vacant?" "I don't know … Some tramps, some vagrants arrived and moved into these houses. Not a single person from the town … Our house was old,

62 Ona Jačiunskienė, oral history interview by Alicija Žukauskaitė, 17 March 2009, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0228.

63 Petronėlė Karasevičienė, oral history interview by Saulius Beržinis, 15 April 1998, Oral History, Lithuania Documentation Project, USHMM Collection, RG-50.473.0007.

64 Ibid.

and my mother had a poor life, she was a widow. But there was no way that we would move into a Jewish home, not even if it was decorated in gold."[65]

Ultimately, testimony regarding the theft of Jewish property is conveyed with a broad variety of attitudes – from seemingly shameless openness to secrecy, from the total dismissal of moral responsibility to a clear sense of shameful ethical transgression, like sexual assault or murder. Some personal items figure as totems of Jewish particularity, and thus of broken taboos and a violation of communal integrity. In the memories of the interviewees decades after the events, Jewish personal items seem to trigger a split consciousness.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the nuanced and varied dimensions of non-Jewish testimonies concerning the plunder of Jewish property during the Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces. Focused on testimonies collected by the LDP, the analysis has uncovered the varied subject positions adopted by the witnesses who might typically if inadequately be characterised as bystanders, revealing the complexity of their moral, emotional, and social involvement in the destruction and dispossession of the local Jewish communities.

It is not possible to draw firm historical conclusions about the motivations for theft based on the recollections analysed in this article alone. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that very few interviewees suggested that ordinary Lithuanians participated in plunder as some kind of "revenge" for the "crimes" that Nazi propaganda blamed on "the Jews". Instead, the interviewees overwhelmingly attest that theft and misappropriation were motivated by greed, perceptions of material need, and social deprivation, and the opportunity afforded by the conditions of extreme violence against Jews.

The testimonies reflect a broad spectrum of reactions to the plunder, ranging from overt denial and externalisation to unsettling displays of indifference or oblivion, as well as instances of moral indignation and genuine empathy. These attitudes relate to the subject position of the witness, social relations, and structures of power, as well as the social intimacy of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. The testimonies show how the looted objects often figure prominently in memory, a psychological centre of gravity, something that triggers a range of emotions, serving as an object of discomfort, shame, and denial.

Most strikingly, perhaps, the interviews reveal a persistent dissociation between empathy for the victims of mass murder and indifference to the transgressive nature of the appropriation of their belongings. This duality is often articulated through linguistic constructs or rationalised by the socioeconomic realities of the time, such as widespread poverty. Nonetheless, some witnesses exhibit a profound moral stance, refusing – at least in their narration of events – to participate in or condone plunder despite societal pressures, while others externalise blame or recount acts of involvement without overt remorse.

The forensic emphasis of the LDP interviews was shaped by the intentionality of the programme director, Nathan Beyrak, the skilled technique of the interviewers, and the contemporary discourse of transitional justice. Having been collected in this manner, the testimonies can now be utilised as a unique resource for broader discus-

65 Ibid.

sions of the material dimensions of genocide and the role of local communities in the processes of historical reckoning. They also provides insight into why this uncomfortable historical past raises such strong passions to this day.

Ultimately, this article has sought to contribute to a richer understanding of the local specificities of participation and abstention in the provinces of Lithuania. The topography of transgression mapped above underscores the enduring ethical and political challenges posed by the material and moral afterlives of plunder, compelling subsequent generations to confront the uncomfortable legacy of local involvement in communal violence.

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