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## Probing the Limits of Documentation

David Shneer

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# Probing the Limits of Documentation

DAVID SHNEER

*Estoniia: Krovavyi sled natsizma 1941–1945. Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov o prestupleniakh estonskikh kollaboratsionistov v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* [Estonia: The Bloody Legacy of Nazism, 1941–45. A Collection of Archival Documents about the Crimes of Estonian Collaborators in World War II]. 266 pp. Moscow: Svobodnaia Evropa, 2006. ISBN 5973900878.

Frank Grüner, Urs Heftrich, and Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, eds., *“Zerstörer des Schweigens”: Formen künstlerischer Erinnerung an die nationalsozialistische Rassen- und Vernichtungspolitik in Osteuropa* [“Destroyer of Silence”: Forms of Artistic Memory of National-Socialist Racial and Extermination Policy in Eastern Europe]. 552 pp. Cologne: Böhlau, 2006. ISBN-13 978-3412361051. €59.90.

*Latviia pod igom natsizma: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov* [Latvia under the Yoke of Nazism: A Collection of Archival Documents]. 344 pp. Moscow: Svobodnaia Evropa, 2006. ISBN 5973900770.

Aron Shneer and Pavel Polian, eds., *Obrechennye pogibnut’: Sud’ba sovet-skikh voennoplennykh-evreev vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine. Vospominaniia i dokumenty* [Destined to Perish: The Fate of Soviet Jewish POWs in World War II. Recollections and Documents]. 574 pp. Moscow: Novoe izdatel’stvo, 2006. ISBN 5983790692.

*Tragediia Litvy, 1941–1944 gg.: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov o prestupleniakh litovskikh kollaboratsionistov v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* [The Tragedy of Lithuania, 1941–44: A Collection of Archival Documents about the Crimes of Lithuanian Collaborators in World War II]. 398 pp. Moscow: Svobodnaia Evropa, 2006. ISBN 5973900827.

*Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, 1 (Winter 2009): 121–33.

On 5 October 2007, the *New York Times* profiled a French priest named Father Patrick Debois, who has spent the last ten years of his life searching the countryside of Ukraine for the burial sites of Jews murdered by Nazis and their collaborators during World War II.<sup>1</sup> The story was noteworthy not because it was about the Holocaust, since the Holocaust routinely makes it onto the pages of this august newspaper. Rarely, however, has the newspaper's coverage of the Holocaust touched on the former Soviet Union. It seems that it took more than a decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the opening of archives in the former Soviet Union for public discussion about the Holocaust in the East to become mainstream.

Scholars from around the world have been studying how the Holocaust unfolded in the Soviet Union since the late 1990s, including the Russian Holocaust historian Il'ia Al'tman, the German historian Andrej Angrick, the American-Israeli historian Amir Weiner, and the American political scientist Zvi Gitelman. *Kritika* has also devoted considerable attention to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union in the past five years.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the steward of Holocaust Studies in the United States, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), has put the Holocaust in the Soviet Union to the front of its research agenda with two symposia dedicated to the subject in the past four years.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, in Moscow, Al'tman's Holocaust Center, founded in 1992 as a center for education and research about the Holocaust in general and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union in particular, grows each year with training seminars for teachers, new publications, and conferences to bring together teachers and scholars from throughout the former Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> Gennadii Kostyrchenko continues to scour the archives for his important works on Stalin-era antisemitism, some of which relate to the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elaine Sciolino, "A Priest Methodically Reveals Ukrainian Jews' Fate," *New York Times*, 5 October 2007, 2.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Harvey Asher, "The Soviet Union, The Holocaust, and Auschwitz," *Kritika* 4, 4 (2003): 886–912; Jeffrey Herf, "The Nazi Extermination Camps and the Ally to the East: Could the Red Army and Air Force Have Stopped or Slowed the Final Solution?" *Kritika* 4, 4 (2003): 913–30; Karel C. Berkhoff, "The Mass Murder of Soviet Prisoners of War and the Holocaust: How Were They Related?" *Kritika* 6, 4 (2005): 789–96; and Pavel M. Polian, "First Victims of the Holocaust: Soviet-Jewish Prisoners of War in German Captivity," *Kritika* 6, 4 (2005): 763–87, among many others.

<sup>3</sup> "The Holocaust in the Soviet Union," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) symposium, November 2003, and "The Holocaust in Ukraine," a USHMM joint symposium with the Sorbonne and Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris: Centre de documentation juive contemporaine, October 2007. It was at the second symposium that Father Patrick Debois presented his research on burial sites.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the Moscow-based Holocaust Center (Tsentr kholokosta), see [www.holocf.ru](http://www.holocf.ru).

<sup>5</sup> See Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2001).

Why the new interest in the Holocaust in the Soviet Union? The simple and not completely satisfying answer is that the archives are open and the Soviet Union has fallen. The opening of archives has allowed people to research the subject in more depth; the end of communism means that Russian scholars can now put the Holocaust on their research agendas. A secondary effect of the fall of the Soviet Union was the migration of dozens of talented Russian, and often Jewish, scholars, who now make their homes in universities across the world and are bringing their research agendas and methodologies with them. First, they put Russia at the center of their research on Jewish history, not at the margins. Second, when it comes to World War II, they bring their post-Soviet understanding of the war and the Holocaust to their scholarship. They tend not to see such strict boundaries between a war narrative and the Holocaust as do most American, Israeli, and other historians. This is a legacy of both the way the Soviet Union muted particular Jewish suffering in its war remembrance and a function of the historical fact that the Holocaust took place on such a substantial scale on Soviet soil.

Finally, the globalization that brought post-Soviet scholarship to the rest of the world also means that Jews and others, like Father Debois, now travel to and study killing sites throughout the former Soviet Union. Their presence raises challenging questions about memory, representation, and even culpability as post-Soviet nations try to figure out their own memories of World War II and the Holocaust, and as Jews and others attempt to claim historical roots to these places that were off-limits for so long.

Because this is a new area of research on the Holocaust, the drive to document what happened has been at the forefront of the research agenda. Most of the new works about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union approach the subject from a documentary standpoint. The need to document, to prove “what happened,” has long driven Holocaust Studies as both a defense against Holocaust deniers and for legal and moral reasons—to identify culpability and responsibility. Scholars of the Holocaust in Russia are using archives and survivors’ testimonies to describe what happened to groups whose stories (and histories) have not been told to date.

Aron Shneer (no known relation to the author of this essay)—research associate at Yad Vashem, Israel’s national Holocaust memorial, museum, and research center—and his colleague Pavel Polian are excellent examples of scholars pursuing this new trend in Holocaust history. A Russian émigré born in Riga, Latvia, who now calls Israel home, Shneer has built his career documenting the stories of a group he calls the first victims of the Holocaust, Soviet-Jewish prisoners of war. Shneer’s first book, called simply *Plen* (Prisoner or Imprisoned) told the stories of Soviet POWs more generally.<sup>6</sup> His new book, *Obrechennyye*

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<sup>6</sup> On Aron Shneer’s *Plen: Sovetskie voennoplennyye v Germanii, 1941–1945* (Moscow: Mosty kul’tury; Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2005), see the review by Mark Edele in *Kritika* 8, 1 (2007): 209–14.

*pogibnut'*, moves the historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union in a new direction by collecting the voices of surviving Soviet-Jewish POWs. Although collecting Holocaust survivors' narratives has been central to the way the public has understood the Holocaust for years, especially through the voices of the canonical survivors Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, Soviet Holocaust survivors did not have their stories told as widely.

Placing survivors' narratives at the center of Holocaust scholarship is something new in Soviet-Jewish scholarship, which, before the fall of the Soviet Union, had only limited political space to tell this personal and very Jewish story. It was told sporadically, in books like Vasilii Grossman's fictionalized *Life and Fate* or in the diary of Masha Rolnikaite, the Anne Frank of the Soviet Union. Shneer wants to put Soviet-Jewish survivors at the center of the Holocaust map by collecting and publicizing their stories, which were often left out of other collections of survivors' testimony. Perhaps most important, he argues that these are the voices of the Holocaust's first survivors, who tell a unique and particularly Soviet story about the war and the Holocaust. In the end, Shneer is both incorporating the survivor paradigm into Soviet Holocaust studies and incorporating the voices of Soviet survivors into the wider Holocaust narrative.

His co-editor Pavel Polian, also an émigré who is an associate of the Cologne Center for Documenting National Socialism and is affiliated with the Institute of Geography at the Russian Academy of Sciences, wrote the long introductory essay that puts the POWs into historical context. Polian starts by showing why the Nazis treated Jewish, Soviet, and Polish POWs differently, and worse, from Western POWs. A combination of international law and racial ideology meant that Soviet-Jewish POWs were at the bottom of the Nazi racial hierarchy—enemies by any measurement.

Polian makes explicit the editors' historiographical agenda when he complains that scholars mark January 1942 or September 1941 as the beginning date of the Holocaust, ignoring the Soviet killing fields that began in June 1941 (12). Polian and Shneer, however, are a bit behind the historiography, which now investigates the earliest mass murders in Poland after the Nazi occupation in 1939.<sup>7</sup> The two historians argue that Soviet-Jewish POWs were the first victims of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and, more significantly and more problematically, that the Holocaust began with the murder of these Jewish POWs (13).

The tone of the book shifts suddenly from dry description in the first introduction to emotion and pathos in the second, co-authored introduction,

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<sup>7</sup> The historian Jochen Böhrer has shown that the German army was already carrying out major shooting campaigns in Poland in 1939–41, complicating the timeline of the Holocaust. See his *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006). See also Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

entitled "Voices of the Victims." Leaving behind the detachment of the social historian, the two become emotive when they turn to memory: "This is a book of unattenuated pain and memory. The real authors of the book are those who defeated death in the Nazi camps, and then survived the suppression and discrimination in Soviet camps, who were forced to be silent for decades, since the state for which they were soldiers had no need for the shocking truth, which was uncomfortable for the Soviet system" (71).

The sources for much of the material in the book are interviews with survivors, some previously published, others taken by the authors themselves, and documents found in the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense (TsAMO) in Podol'sk, near Moscow. The survivors' stories are compelling firsthand accounts of the Holocaust on Soviet soil, specifically against Jewish POWs. There are moving biographies of each writer included in the book, but the authors drop the detached historian's voice entirely in presenting the survivor testimony. If the historiographic introduction is heavily laden with references, the rest of the book has few footnotes and no analysis of the testimony. The reader needs familiarity with Soviet military terminology and a willingness not to get bogged down in the storytellers' details, since none of those details are explained. Nor is the reader told which events are more or less significant in the lives of Soviet-Jewish POWs or what common themes link their narratives.

One of the most compelling themes that comes up regularly in the survivor testimony is how one's physical appearance affected one's survival. Nearly all the voices in the book talk about how their "non-Jewish appearance" helped them survive. They talk about possessing (or not) "typical Jewish noses," "Jewish hair," or the dreaded "circumcized penis." Since it is a book about POWs, the male Jewish body looms large, larger than in other survivor testimony accounts I have read, and becomes one of the dominant motifs in the book. The centrality of the Jewish body in the memoirs of these POWs makes sense in a Soviet context, in which Jewishness was de-coupled from religion and from many Jewish cultural practices, leaving it deeply connected to physiognomy and biological ethnicity. Shneer and Polian unwittingly highlight how central Jewish bodies became to Soviet-Jewish identity.

This is but one example of how the survivors' testimony begs for more critical reading. The survivors' testimony also has great material on the social history of Soviet Jewry, such as the story of Iosef Gurevich, who was a POW in Finland during the war. He describes how the local Helsinki Jewish community took care of him during his imprisonment and how shocked Gurevich was that an ally of Nazi Germany like Finland could have an active Jewish community during the war (504).

It is the voices, more than the analysis of Shneer and Polian, that make this book important and compelling. The need to document is clear, but the editors of the book could have written a second essay interpreting the survivors'

testimony. Moreover, the historically inaccurate claim that Soviet-Jewish POWs are the first victims of the Holocaust belies an insecurity voiced in the introduction: we Russian Jews are important too! Instead, the authors would have done better to give a close analysis of the treasure trove of Soviet survivor testimony they have collected. The book is ripe material for future scholars who want to use some of the methods scholars have been using for years in dealing with survivor testimony on this newly documented segment of Holocaust survivors.<sup>8</sup>

Shneer and Polian are not the only Russophone scholars of the Holocaust who are content with documenting “what happened” by mining “secret archives” (as Polian states in the introduction), often at the expense of serious historical analysis. In 2006, the publishing house Svobodnaia Evropa (Free Europe) began putting out a book series titled “Collections of Archival Documents” on the Holocaust in the Baltic states. Western scholars have been researching and writing about the Holocaust in the Baltics, especially in Lithuania, for years. The Lithuanian scholar Alfonsas Eidintas published *Jews, Lithuanians, and the Holocaust* in Lithuanian in 2002 and in English in 2003. The popular American writer Richard Rhodes put out a book called *Masters of Death* about the Holocaust in Lithuania that sold widely on the U.S. book market.<sup>9</sup>

This new series of Russian-language books from Svobodnaia Evropa, however, aims to do something new. It brings to light hundreds of archival documents, tucked away in Russian state archives for decades, which paint a very dark picture of the extent of collaboration in the Baltics. Like Shneer and Polian’s book, the focus of these documents is on the voices of those who experienced the Holocaust themselves, including survivors, primarily but not exclusively Jewish, as well as perpetrators—in this case, Baltic collaborators.

The first book, *Estonia: Krovavyi sled natsizma*, is a collection of documents found in the Russian State Archive (GARF) that not only describe the Holocaust in Estonia but also document the extent of Estonian collaboration, a story that has not been widely told. One Jewish survivor, Liubova Shapiro, talks about her experience surviving the Estonian/Nazi concentration camp Klooga. Most damningly, she definitively identifies Estonians as the ones who ran the camp (90–92). The pained testimony of Mendel Baberevski describes how Estonian guards were the ones who dragged Jews out into the forest to shoot and kill them (100).

Beyond the issue of collaboration, the collection shows the brutality of the Nazi occupation, ending with the mass murder of professors at Tartu University

<sup>8</sup> See Berel Lang, *Post-Holocaust: Interpretation, Misinterpretation, and the Claims of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); and Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Alfonsas Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians, and the Holocaust* (Vilnius: Verseus Aureus, 2003); Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 2002). See also Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941–1944* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996).

in Estonia, many of whom were Jewish and had come to Tartu in 1939–40, the year Estonia was under Soviet rule (220). Finally, the book documents the Nazi mass murder of Soviet POWs, a story similar to that of Shneer but told exclusively from the perspective of documents created during the war.

The books on Latvia and Lithuania give a similar account of Baltic collaboration with the Nazis through the voices of survivors and perpetrators. They also criticize how Soviet historiography enforced an amnesia about Baltic collaboration in order to bring in these newly incorporated Western regions of the empire more smoothly. During the Soviet era, reminding the Lithuanians about their role in the mass murder of Jews and others would not have endeared the Lithuanian population to Soviet (read: ethnic Russian) rule.

But with independence, the amnesia quickly wore off. Scholars outside Eastern Europe began telling Lithuanians, Latvians, and others of their complicity, just as something similar was happening in places like France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. No country in Europe seemed immune to the painful conversations about World War II that took place after the fall of communism. In Eastern Europe, however, the picture seemed more ambivalent than, say, in France, where the myth of complete resistance gave way to a more nuanced picture of collaboration.

Poland had rightful claims to the status of victim during the war, but the historian Jan Gross has made sure not to let the Poles off too easily. He documents Polish collaboration in several regions in Poland and continuing Polish antisemitism after the war.<sup>10</sup> In the former Soviet Union, admitting complicity in Nazi genocide was even more complicated, for at least two reasons. First, the Nazi occupation of these areas was so brutal compared to its occupation of Western Europe that they were all rightly considered victims of Nazi war crimes. Second, most of Eastern Europe saw Soviet “liberation” as a second round of occupation, one that would last 50 years instead of 3. One should also not forget that the three-year Nazi occupation targeted one segment of these countries’ populations in particular, Jews, whereas Soviet occupation policies often targeted the majority ethnic group. A number of newly independent countries refigured the word “genocide” to signify that which the Russians did to them under Soviet rule and elided World War II history entirely.

If the fall of communism opened up space for the Baltics and Ukraine to talk about Russian oppression after the period of Soviet amnesia, Russia also has a new discursive space to talk about wartime legacies. In the case of Russia, there is a vested interest in reminding the former Soviet states, which drift ever closer to Western Europe and away from Russia, of their wartime complicity, to take “genocide” back from the nationalists and return it to its wartime context.

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<sup>10</sup> Jan Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin, 2002); and Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007).

Ironically, then, Jewish advocates who call for more memory of the Holocaust and more reckoning with wartime collaboration in Eastern Europe have a common interest with Putin's government in presenting the story of Baltic collaboration during World War II.

The Svobodnaia Evropa publishing house is a venture of Gleb Pavlovskii, a close ally of the Kremlin and erstwhile spin doctor.<sup>11</sup> Over the past two years, Svobodnaia Evropa, in conjunction with GARF, has put out the books under review in order to document Baltic collaboration during the Holocaust. More important, however, the books put Holocaust documentation in the service of contemporary politics by pointing out what they call a contemporary resurgence in fascist and Nazi rhetoric in the post-Soviet Baltic republics. The books are long on documentation and short on analysis and lack any acknowledgment of authorship. Apparently, the unnamed editors assume that the documents are so damning about the collaboration of the Balts that all analysis is left up to the reader.

Most of the material comes from the files of the Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the Fascist German Invaders, a body constituted in late 1942 to investigate and document Nazi war crimes. Local commissions under its aegis began their work in earnest in the spring of 1943, once the front lines began moving from east to west, rather than vice versa and, according to the historian Marina Sorokina, after the Katyn' affair uncovered uncomfortable evidence of Soviet crimes that needed to be blamed on the Germans.<sup>12</sup> In town after town, Soviet soldiers, journalists, photographers, and others exposed the depths of Nazi crimes on Soviet soil. In most regions and cities, the local commission was overseen by the NKVD. From information on the exhumations of burial pits to the taking of survivor and bystander testimony, the commission's vast archives at GARF contain an unparalleled amount of information about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

That said, although they were ostensibly scientific in their approach, the commissions were as much about gathering evidence to use in trials against Nazis and local collaborators as they were about establishing historical truth. Sorokina has shown that the state recognized the propaganda potential in collecting this kind of information to shore up international support for the war and to shift the world's critical eye away from the Soviet Union and firmly toward Germany.<sup>13</sup> She argues that in using commission documents, scholars cannot ignore the context in which they were created. Thus the sources are valuable to researchers who are trained to use such materials, and if one is sensitive to the

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the Kremlin's own website, [www.kreml.org/opinions/164261609](http://www.kreml.org/opinions/164261609), last accessed 15 October 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Marina Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the Soviet Union," *Kritika* 6, 4 (2005): 797–831, here 824.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 803–6.

role they played in Soviet propaganda efforts.<sup>14</sup> The anonymous editors of these three books, however, lack any such sensitivity. The three collections on the Baltics do not even mention the sources from which they draw their documents, let alone talk about the complexities of the Extraordinary State Commission.

The problem with these books is that the political motivations for producing them, as expressed in the brief introductions to each book examined below, taint the very documents they present. Each book has a short introduction that outlines the political lens through which one should read these books. Each introduction describes contemporary nationalist politics in the Baltics. They suggest that each Baltic republic is not only denying its World War II collaborationist past but is in fact honoring the wartime collaborators as anti-Soviet national freedom fighters. As the unattributed introduction continues: “The claims [celebrating wartime collaborators] are made not only by the Estonian combatants and young neo-Nazis, who proclaim propagandistic slogans that appear shocking for a country recently accepted to the European Union, but also by high-ranking officials including the former president of Estonia Arnold Rutel. According to the official position of Estonian politicians, the Estonians wearing German uniforms were fighting for Estonia’s freedom in their own territory and only against the Soviets and did all they could to lay the foundation for continued resistance that brought about the restoration of Estonian independence dozens of years later. Lies can sometimes be more refined, but this is a crude lie that is refuted by the documents collected in this book, *documents that speak for themselves and need no commentary* [italics added]” (*Estoniia*, 1–2). The idea that documents speak for themselves, something that Shneer and Polian more or less admit as well, pervades all these collections on the Holocaust.

It is true that attempts to create a national liberationist history in the post-Soviet world have led to praise for anti-Soviet forces from the war period who collaborated with the Nazis and murdered Jews. It is also true that most post-Soviet states do not want to highlight the collaborationist past of their “national heroes.” But if all historical narratives have some kind of political agenda, some, like Shneer’s, seem to have scholarship rather than politics primarily in mind. His goal is to put Soviet Jews on the map of the Holocaust. In the attempt to use history to damn contemporary governments, however, the three document collections put out in Moscow abuse Holocaust history for overt political gains. The collection on Estonia is the most blatant about its political agenda. It ties the document collection to the 2006 incident in which the Estonian government removed the Soviet-era war memorial from the grounds of a museum in

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<sup>14</sup> Sorokina laments that most scholars who use the archives of the Extraordinary State Commission do not approach the documents critically but rather use them as simple reflections of historical fact, glossing over the context in which commission documents were produced. See *ibid.*, 806. Among those she critiques is Pavel Polian in his earlier work on Soviet POWs (806 n. 27).

Tallinn. The “Russian side” of the story is told in this introduction, but without references and without authorship.

The volume on Lithuania opens with a more subtle introduction that questions how one grievance, the Soviet treatment of Lithuanians in 1940, could have justified such seemingly irrational bloodlust against so many groups of people in the years of Nazi occupation: “What happened in Lithuania does not have a clear logic. It was not only the hated Soviet and party workers and military officers who were exterminated—the ‘guilty’ who worked in the Soviet government in Lithuania, not only Jews, who are always ‘guilty’ if only because they are Jews, but also Poles, representatives of the Church, mental patients, the elderly, breastfeeding children.... Lithuania became a factory of death” (*Tragediia Litvy*, 4). The unnamed author reminds the reader of the broad array of people killed by Lithuanian collaborators, emphasizing that this is not just a “Jewish” story.

Most important for the purposes of Svobodnaia Evropa and Pavlovskii, the introduction attempts to connect the politics and policies of Nazi Germany with those of contemporary Lithuanian nationalism by showing the “suffering and pain the previous generation endured because of the fanatic desire of the leaders in charge to pay any price to create a racially and nationally pure state” (*Tragediia Litvy*, 5). The point is to use the Holocaust to shape contemporary opinion about politics in the Baltics, at least among Russian readers.

It is, of course, a very fine line between use and abuse of the Holocaust. Outing the former Austrian president, Kurt Waldheim, as a Wehrmacht officer and member of the SA, for example, had direct implications for Austrian politics; and Jan Gross hopes that his books will help Poles become more nuanced and self-critical in their understanding of World War II. But the Svobodnaia Evropa publishing house, with its overt ties to the Kremlin, has pushed political abuse of the Holocaust to new extremes. The biggest problem is that the potential for these terrible stories to be used in the Baltic countries’ own *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—their national attempts to wrestle with the past—is undermined by the lack of footnotes and analysis, not to mention the fact that the compilers are kept anonymous. With the history of World War II so politicized in the former USSR, it is becoming harder, not easier, to write the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

With unlimited resources and access at its disposal, Svobodnaia Evropa has put its books in full text online, making them some of the most accessible books in Russian about the Holocaust in the USSR. As with the Shneer and Polian collection, one hopes that someone can use the documents put out by GARF and the Putin government in a real study of wartime Baltic collaboration, keeping in mind Sorokina’s warning about a critical approach to these politicized documents, and can give the history the serious attention it deserves. It is not surprising that the four new Russian-language document collections coming

out about the Holocaust all lack an interpretive framework that would make them important historical studies in their own right. Although it is unfair to put Shneer and Polian in the same category as the Svobodnaia Evropa books, all these studies presume that documents speak for themselves. By contrast, issues of representation and memory have long been central to the study of the Holocaust with well-known works by historians like Saul Friedländer, Charles Maier, and Jeffrey Herf, which shaped the field of memory studies.<sup>15</sup> One could argue that it was the attempt to historicize the Holocaust that forced historians to engage in theoretical questions about history, memory, and representation, a historical problem that launched the journal *History and Memory* in the 1980s. Friedländer's book, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, famously posited the Holocaust as an historical event that resisted representation.<sup>16</sup> But scholars of the Holocaust in Russia force us to ask about the limits of *documentation*, as they presume that the mere collection of documents or survivors' testimony actually tells the history of the Holocaust. They generally sidestep the question Friedländer posed in the 1990s by avoiding questions of representation entirely.

A group of German scholars has pushed the conversation further by finally asking about Holocaust representation in the postcommunist world in their *Zerstörer des Schweigens*. The editors, all German scholars who work on Soviet Jewry, suggest that questions of memory and representation are more complicated in Soviet and post-Soviet society than in the West for the same reasons that the historiography is more complicated. First, the legacy of communist silence about the Holocaust favored a heroic memory of the Great Patriotic War, not a somber self-exploration of Nazi atrocities. Second, because the Nazi occupation of the communist world was so much more brutal than that in the rest of Europe, there are questions of competing suffering in most postcommunist countries, which means that the politics of memory plays out in very challenging ways (xiv, xv). The editors argue that art, in the form of literature, sculpture, film, and other forms, had the power to break the official silence of the communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe.

The articles in the collection refreshingly start from the assumption that no piece of art speaks for itself. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, of the two dozen articles in the book the ones that deal with the Soviet Union—regardless of whether the author is Russian, German, American, or from another country

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Saul Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

of origin—are the *least* interpretive and most descriptive. The opening article, written by Il'ia Al'tman, is a great example of how even scholarship about art and representation turns to the descriptive rather than the analytic and belies the editors' claims to move beyond documentation. Al'tman's essay traces the ebbs and flows of public discussion about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. He starts with the 1941 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee rally that put the voices of Soviet Jews into the Soviet campaign against Germany and includes the publication histories of such important works as the *Black Book* and Anatolii Kuznetsov's *Heavy Sand*. The essay does an excellent job of excavating these histories but does not go the next step to show what these circumstances say about aesthetics, memory, or representation.

Two of the German editors focus on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, and both of their articles remain at the level of description, and not always good description at that. Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, an important scholar of Russian-Jewish history, makes the bold statement that there were no reports on the persecution of Jews in the Soviet press, which as Al'tman points out in the article preceding Löwe's, was simply not true. Löwe covers similar ground to Al'tman and comes to the opposite conclusion. If Al'tman shows *how* the Soviet Union talked about the Holocaust, Löwe bends over backwards to silence what his sources are saying. As Karel Berkhoff shows in this issue of *Kritika*, despite the persisting idea that the Soviet Union never discussed the Nazi war against the Jews, the Soviet press sporadically but consistently talked about the Holocaust throughout the war.

Grüner, another editor of the book, takes a more interesting approach by asking how Babi Yar functioned in Soviet collective memory, arguing that it functioned as a symbolic site of resistance to the regime by writers and intellectuals (81–82). Grüner tells the history of attempts to memorialize Babi Yar in bricks and mortar at the site and in literature, art, and music. Edith Clowes's essay also looks at Babi Yar but primarily through the lens of Anatolii Kuznetsov's censored book by that name. Clowes compares the original with the censored version to expose what was cut.

The other articles on the Holocaust in Russian literature, music, and art all examine how the Holocaust was talked about in an environment in which the word "Jew" was anathema. They expose how Soviet, primarily Jewish, intellectuals used the Jewish experience of the war as a way of critiquing the regime and of reflecting on their own identity as Jews. But none of the articles about the Soviet Union moves much beyond the level of description, nor do they deeply engage questions of representation, aesthetics, and art. A notable exception is Brigitte Flickinger's essay on Soviet anti-Nazi films, in which she theorizes questions of memory in a Soviet context and argues, *contra* Löwe, that "films before, during, and after the war all openly discuss the mass murder of Jews" (285).

For the most part, however, to see how the vast body of theoretical literature about memory and representation plays out in a communist context, one has to leave scholarship on the Soviet Union and look at those scholars writing about the rest of Eastern Europe. Even the titles of the articles about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe reflect a different scholarly approach to Holocaust representation. Bettina Kaibach writes about Nietzschean references in a Czech film *Mendelssohn Is on the Roof*; Wolfgang Schlott does a close reading of two Polish films about Jews and the Holocaust. Taken as a whole, those scholars studying Holocaust representation in Eastern Europe approach the works as cultural documents to be analyzed, not as historical artifacts meant to be discovered. In fact, if the scholars of the Soviet Union included in this collection are still at the stage of discovery, those working on Eastern Europe seem to have discovered little new. There are few archival references in the essays on Eastern Europe, which instead focus on an analysis of the cultural artifact itself—the film, literary character, or poem.

Whether this is good or bad is not the point. Rather, the scholars in this volume who write about the Soviet Union show that the documentary impulse—the need to discover, to unearth, and to describe—still holds sway over Soviet studies, even (or especially) when it comes to the Holocaust. Shneer and Polian discover survivors' testimony in their book, the Russian government unearths documents showing Baltic collaboration, and most of the scholars of the Soviet Union in the German collection on representation unearth new sources. The materials in all these books help correct the false impression scholars have had that the Holocaust was a black hole in the Soviet Union. Even the Svobodnaia Evropa collections, which put the Holocaust in service of contemporary Russian politics, bring to light important information with which Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians should wrestle. But it is time for those studying the Holocaust in the Soviet Union to move beyond documentation and to stop presuming that documents speak for themselves.

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