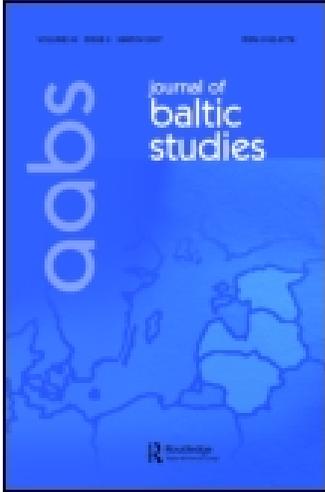


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Vilne: Die Juden aus Vilnius nach dem Holocaust. Eine transnationale Beziehungsgeschichte

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Until the end of the 1850s this issue did not receive much attention in Finnish newspapers; however, from 1859 it became quite a hot topic. Several articles appeared in Finnish newspapers based on information originally appearing in *Literaturbladet*. In those articles it was claimed that, of the 11 million jugs (1 jug \approx 2.6 liters) of alcohol consumed annually in Finland, 4.7 million (over 12 million liters) came illegally from Estonia. Of course, these figures have to be taken critically, but nevertheless it seems that they are not completely far-fetched, because similar numbers are used also in other publications. For example, *Porin Kaupungin Sanomia* wrote in 1861 that ‘according to reliable information the volume of annual import is 4 or 5 million jugs.’ In 1863 the newspaper *Helsingin Uutiset* assumed that, in addition to 6–7 million jugs of alcohol produced in Finland, several million jugs were imported illegally from Estonia.

These numbers aside, the fact that illegally imported Estonian spirits captured a significant part of the Finnish alcohol market is obvious. Finns even had a special name for the Estonian vodka – ‘Viron Jussi’ (‘Estonian John’). Finnish women used to say at that time: ‘There will be a big shortage of vodka if that Viron Jussi cannot get across the sea’. In some places, barrelhouses were called *Viron Jussin mökki*, ‘Estonian John’s hut’.

The majority of Estonian alcohol was distributed in southern Finland, but some also reached more remote areas in the east and west. The Finnish press, along with the state authorities, paid a great deal of attention to the prevention of the illegal alcohol trade, the evidence for which can be found in contemporary newspapers and in files in the Estonian Historical Archives (291-1-14283) and the Russian State Historical Archives (19-3-573).

This active period of alcohol smuggling from Estonia to Finland turned out to be quite short, and began to subside from the mid-1860s. This was because of a new system of alcohol taxation that came into force from 1863. As a result, the price of alcohol produced in the Baltic provinces became higher than the cost of alcohol produced in Finland. Smuggling of vodka from Estonia was not profitable any more. Soon thereafter, significant changes in the patterns of alcohol smuggling occurred. Now, instead of Estonian spirits, cheaper alcohol from Germany – particularly, from Prussia – began flowing illegally into Finland.

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Vilne: Die Juden aus Vilnius nach dem Holocaust. Eine transnationale Beziehungsgeschichte

ANNA LIPPHARDT

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Anna Lipphardt’s book takes the transnational paradigm and explores the transnational culture of remembrance, mourning and commemoration of the post-Holocaust

diaspora of Vilner Jews – the Jews of Vilnius, or *Vilne*, as they called the city. This book is a study of a transnational diaspora, i.e. a globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic group, linking different states and contexts where that group resides. The ‘homeland’ is the place where they came from – in this case Vilne. A special ‘diaspora consciousness’ allows the Vilner Jews to function as a transnational community. It is a group inserted and feeling at ‘home’ in the new context, away from the ‘old’ home, enrooting the present ‘here’, while referring to and remembering the past ‘there’. Lipphardt describes and analyzes the everyday networks created by the Vilner Jews and the patterns of socio-cultural relationships that emerge from and among them.

The transnational group analyzed by Lipphardt is of a special kind, one constituted by a collective trauma: the Holocaust. Of the 57,000 Jews who lived in the city at the time of the German invasion in 1941, only 3,500–5,000 survived the Holocaust, with two-thirds of these born in the interwar period. With their departure from their city after the Holocaust, the Vilner Jews became a double diaspora: a Vilner sub-diaspora within the wider Jewish diaspora, forming a transnational community of Vilner Jews. The survivors scattered in the aftermath of World War II to five continents, although most emigrated to Israel and the United States. Although deeply intertwined with other Jewish communities, the Vilner diasporas developed their own distinct ‘*milieux de mémoire*’.

Such a case enables us to understand mourning, memory, and commemoration as a complex transnational dynamics, integrating the survivors around the globe in their new locations, and practices of the old home with the new home. Lipphardt’s book not only describes the trans-local linkages of the Vilner Jews, but also offers an adequate conceptualization and description of the multi-local and trans-local linkages and socio-cultural transfer.

This book concentrates on migrant transnational practices of memory, following the Vilner survivors of the Holocaust in their migrations. By emphasizing the importance of locality as well as that of transnational, cross-border interaction, Lipphardt questions in this way the coherent narrative of the nation-state. Focusing on Jewish Vilne is a challenging choice, because Jewish Vilne occupies an iconic place in the Jewish memory and an important place in shaping traditional Jewish orthodoxy as well as modern, secular, Judaism. It was called popularly *Yerushalaim de-Lite* (‘Lithuanian Jerusalem’), linking it to the Holy Land and holiness, and simultaneously also ‘the capital of Yiddishland’, alluding to modern, secular Yiddish Vilne and its promotion of scholarship in Yiddish. In Vilne there developed a specific Jewish culture reflecting and simultaneously reshaping a strong and at times mythical local Jewish consciousness. Nevertheless, Lipphardt’s historical narrative takes into account both the mystification process, which began in Vilne before World War II and occupies an important place in the survivors’ memory, and the ‘real’ heterogeneous Jewish society in its mundane, daily life.

The book follows the dynamic changing of Vilne’s *lieux de mémoire* through different Jewish *milieux de mémoire*. Indeed, the history told in this book is tied to one place, Vilne, always referring to that place, but not always taking place there. It takes place simultaneously in New York, Israel, and Soviet and post-Soviet Vilnius. The Vilner collective memories and their communicative network were based on their

collective cultural practices. They worked against oblivion, re-elaborating values of their old city and simultaneously creating new substitutes.

To present the local and trans-local perspectives, Lipphardt moves from pre-war Vilne to the contemporary life of the survivors in their new diasporic homes, and back to contemporary Vilnius. She begins focusing on the life experiences of the young generation born in Vilne during the 1920s and early 1930s. Because the overwhelming majority of the survivors belong to that generation it is mainly that group the research follows during the Holocaust and the immediate post-war period.

In general, the perception of the history of east European Jews ends with the Holocaust and its aftermath. The present study, however, looks at the Holocaust as a starting point, focusing on the multi-faceted post-war experience, presenting the different choices and vicissitudes of the survivors and their circumstances, looking for their transnational net, understanding the function of 'Vilne' outside Vilnius, and how Vilne persists and changes. It enables us to expand the notion of 'east European Jews' beyond the traditional geographical conceptualization of eastern Europe, thereby also reinterpreting the notion of 'locality'.

The book opens with a well established theoretical and conceptual chapter, offering a wide perspective for the exploration of a well-structured historical review of Jewish Vilne. Chapter 2 presents a historical introduction focusing mainly on the interwar and wartime periods. Chapters 3 to 9 follow the Vilner survivors. The narrative begins in postwar Vilne and the Vilner's diasporization. It follows the survivors on their way from Soviet Vilnius on their transit stations in Poland and the displaced persons camps (Chapter 3) to two destinies: New York and Israel. It follows also what happened in Soviet and post-Soviet Vilnius, where only a few remained (Chapter 8). Lipphardt describes in detail the history and activities of the Vilner survivors, focusing on two coordinates: the practices of memory of that milieu and the transnational characteristics of those *milieux de mémoire*.

Lipphardt emphasizes that for many years in the aforementioned countries (USA, Israel, and Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania) the survivors had to perform their cultural work and practices of memory by resisting the trends of the majority society. Lipphardt stresses this, but also points out that this resistance was, of course, of a different nature in each of the three locations. In the Soviet Union, the commemoration was totally banned by the state, whereas in the USA, until the 1960s, the broad society was 'simply' uninterested in the Holocaust and the fate of the east European Jewish culture. In Israel until the Eichmann trial the memory of the Holocaust was focused on stories of Jewish fighters and heroic resistance. There was no room there for the Yiddish or Jewish diasporic culture so characteristic of Vilne's Jewry. Lipphardt follows the transformations in each country and the concomitant changes of the practices.

Lipphardt describes the Vilners' survivor organizations that for decades engaged in memorial work. In Chapter 6 she focuses on the work of *Nusach Vilne*, the main organization of the Vilner survivors in New York. The author underlines its deep engagement to the memory of the Yiddish secular dimension of Vilne. She follows the *Nusach Vilne's* high-quality and sophisticated characteristics of its Vilne-related memorial and cultural activities. However, those sophisticated practices of memory were directed mainly to a narrow Yiddishit circle. In Chapter 7 Lipphardt focuses on

projects carried out by different institutions in Israel, focusing on the organization of the Vilne's survivors, especially the *Igud* (not Irgud, as misspelled) *yotze' vilna ve-ha-svivah*; the work done by the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum and various other public school projects. The Vilners in Israel produced belated memory projects (mainly during the 1960s and 1970s), less elitist but more focused on the communicability to the broad society.

The book illustrates how each organization elaborated Vilne's memory, assigning different meanings to Vilne's legacy, comparing, synchronically and diachronically, the different path taken by each of the Vilne's diaspora in their practices of memory, how they interacted and how they confront their new realities and contexts. It underlines the difficulties such milieus confront when trying to rebuild their cultural legacy, when wanting to remember their past or simply when they mourn their losses.

On the one hand Lipphardt emphasizes the importance of the different political, historical, and cultural contexts; on the other hand, she underlines the intertwined character of the Vilner diaspora and the deep transnational contacts. Such perspective is important because it locates the survivors as the center of the research first and foremost.

Lipphardt reconstructs their practices of collective memory, remembrance, and mourning. She underlines the distance between the strategies of the surviving milieu and those created by the state. This is one of the main theoretical contributions of this research. It is a crucial theoretical point, since most of the research on collective memory and *lieux de memoire*, following Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Jan Assman, takes a national point of view with a top-down perspective. Far less attention is paid to memory detached from the national establishment, examining the grassroots. In our context, much research is done on how the states remember the Holocaust, far less research regarding how the survivors remember it. This book follows such a survivor's inner perspective.

The third section of the book (Chapters 10–14) analyzes Vilner *lieux de memoire*. The *lieux de memoire* that Lipphardt studies are not coded from the beginning, but instead elaborated through the cultural practices after the War. She focuses on *topoi* that are of particular importance to the Vilner in the way they are remembered. The 'Places' selected were chosen because of their plasticity. Lipphardt is not interested in the symbol as such, as an old, archaic, and fossilized relic, but in the process of creation of the symbol by active memory.

Lipphardt analyzes three *lieux de memoire*, their creation and their performative dimensions. The first *lieu de memoire* Lipphardt analyzes is the famous 'Partisans Hymn', written in the Vilnius Ghetto by the young poet Hirsh Glik (Chapter 11). Lipphardt traces the history of this song, which has acquired an iconic status in the Jewish world, awakening time and time again the memory of the Holocaust. She contextualizes it in Vilne, showing how closely linked it was to the world of Vilner Jews' ideas. Its chorus, for instance, recalls by the zsong, she follows the creation of the song in the Ghetto and its adoption by the Jews during the Holocaust and especially afterwards and how it is now used for memorial ceremonies and practices. She analyzes its simultaneous de-contextualization, shedding light on a dialectic process of remembering, hiding and misremembering.

In Chapter 12, she examines the Vilner burial, funeral, and cemetery practices in New York. Lipphardt analyzes Vilner burial spaces and the way they developed, linking local burial practices with that of the old home, and the way their tombstones function as a substitute for the nonexistent tombstones of their beloved murdered in the Holocaust. Because they have no cemetery where they could mourn their dead and no tombstone to commemorate the *Hazkore*, the traditional annual commemoration for the death, a ceremony on 23 September (the day on which the Vilnius Ghetto was dissolved) was established and functioned as a collective substitute. In the burial practices, Lipphardt affirms, ‘imagined and real, materially existing topography come together’ with Jerusalem and Vilnius, the massacre site of Ponar (Lith. Paneriai), and New York overlapping each other.

In Chapter 13 Lipphardt analyzes two- and three-dimensional representations of the former Vilne, as a reconstruction of ‘place’ or locality. She analyzes a well known pictorial city history; three-dimensional models of Vilne created in the Ghetto; the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum in Israel; and the restoration project of the Jewish Quarter in the Old Town of Vilnius as part of a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage project. She decodes the contested characters of such projects among the survivors and the significance of the representations to the contradictory commemoration projects of Vilne, thereby highlighting the contradictory picture of Lithuanian Jewry they evoke.

Because the survivors are at the epicenter of this research, the last two chapters analyze the life stories of survivors and of the second generation, and the place of Vilne’s memory in their lives. Both chapters reconstruct the voice of the survivors, emphasizing, again, their own experiences.

To sum up, Lipphardt’s book brings a ‘multi-sited ethnography’, so important to the study of transnationalism. It traces cultural practices across and within multiple sites of activity, following chains, paths and juxtapositions of locations. She follows the survivors, their artifacts of memory, the metaphors they use (including signs, symbols, and images); their narratives of memory; their life and biography; their conflicts and contested issues in public space.

By connecting east European Jewish history, migration studies, and cultural memory, the book brings us close to a complex life world of the east European Jewry. While most of east European Jewish historiography begins and ends within more or less strict geographical boundaries, this book follows east European Jewish history in a complex transnational and trans-local way, redefining the boundaries of east European Jewish history and local history. Lipphardt’s wide-ranging analysis and deep insights draw, on the one hand, on a huge and impressive variety of sources in several languages (mainly in Yiddish, English, Lithuanian, and German) and, on the other, on an impressive mastery of different methodologies, from classical methods of historical research to qualitative methods of social research. The combination makes this book ground-breaking research in the field of memory, as well as in the field of eastern European Jewish history.