Holocaust Revisionism and Obfuscation:
The Notion of 'Double-Genocide' and the Lithuanian Government's Instrumentalisation of Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands*

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Is truth nothing more than a convention of power,
or can truthful historical accounts resist the gravity of politics?[1]

History is an anarchist's utopia – its existence as an ever-changing and pervasive discipline makes it impossible to regulate and define. The modern historical discipline reflects the liberalism of the twentieth century through its growing democratisation, as it takes the leap from the exclusive hands of the historian into the experimentalism of the public domain. It is no longer sufficient to classify history as an academic pursuit, and through its escalating politicisation, attributed largely to the evolution of the modern totalitarian state as prescribed by Arendt;[2] it has emerged as a marketable instrument of political power. This irreversible modification to the construction and nature of history now represents a dangerous phenomenon, responsible for plaguing the modern historian's search for historical purity and truth. The true value of history lies in its unrivalled power as a celestial-like authority, serving as the ultimate dictator of survival – on the orders of the historian. On this concern, it is imperative that we analyse the motives of the historian who in truth has the potential to exploit genuine tyrannical power. Objective truth is no longer considered an aim of the historian, or even as a possibility, as history is left susceptible to the distortionist propensity of politics.

Contemporary Eastern European politics, from the onset of Soviet collapse in 1990, has been vigorously dictated by a nationalistic desire for identity and recognition. This attempt by the Baltic States to distance themselves from their horrific and *'inconvenient'[3]* pasts has given birth to a new and insidious form of Holocaust denial – the notion of *Double-Genocide*, which readily facilitates and promotes the state-funded programs of historical whitewashing and distortion currently in operation.

The *Genocide Industry[4]* in Lithuania, thriving despite fierce counterattacks from both Jewish and non-Jewish historians, prominently Yiddish scholar Dovid Katz, is a prime example of the ultranationalism and anti-Semitism underlying contemporary Eastern European politics. American historian and author of Bloodlands, Timothy Snyder, through his unorthodox transnational account of the Soviet and Nazi regimes, has attracted considerable attention, having been accused of *'draining the war of...moral content and inadvertently adopt[ing] the apologists' argument...where everyone is a criminal no one can be blamed'.[5]* This attempt to *'airbrush Jews from history'[6]* represents the fickle and inevitably political nature of the historical profession, where objective truth is no longer a disciplinary ideal but an instrument of political power.

Between 1933-1945, fourteen million people were massacred as a result of Soviet and Nazi policies in the area of Eastern Europe known collectively as the *bloodlands*.[7] However the division of culpability cannot be this simple, as it fails to recognise and hold accountable other key perpetratory groups. Over 95% of Lithuania's Jewry was eliminated by 1945, and prominent holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer horrifically acknowledges that *'most Lithuanian Jews were murdered by Lithuanian collaborators''.[8]* It is this very stain on its national history that Lithuania hopes to erase through its revisionist policies.

The construction of history has progressively evolved from the basic recording of eyewitness accounts into a multidisciplinary approach, but the ultimate objective of the historian has and will always remain

the same – to concretise his own beliefs and ideas. The *Double Genocide* movement is indicative of this approach, as the will of Eastern European governments has propelled history into the legal domain, with the 2008 Prague Declaration bringing legal weight to this attempt to create a *'false symmetry.'*[9] The movement, branded *'anti-Semitism with a democratic face'*,[10] reflects the out-dated belief in post-Soviet European society that *'in order for Europe to be united there has to be one 'true' version of history.'*[11] The *Double Genocide* ideology is at the forefront of the Lithuanian government's manipulation campaign, which through an emphasis on the collective remembrance of both Hitler and Stalin's victims serves to equalise their crimes. The consequent trivialisation of the Holocaust demonstrates the extent of government control over public memory and representation, and thus over history in general. Historical truth to the masses does not extend beyond what we are told by the historians and thus *'public expectations of absolute truth lead to a situation where the boundaries between interpretation, error and 'fabrication' become obscured'*.[12]

The doctrine of *Double Genocide* represents an incarnation of modern day anti-Semitism and ultranationalism, branded by prominent Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt as *'soft-core denial'*.[13] An ultimately political movement, it is reflective of government preoccupations with history and memory, and instrumentalises academia and politics interdependently to facilitate its implementation. The movement in Lithuania is driven by The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, known informally as the Red-Brown Commission.[14] In its motives the Commission represents an ironic contradiction to its true aims and achievements; *'formed due to the repressive legacy of Soviet rule…issues had never been subjected to uncensored public discussion… [where the] search for historical truth is the main goal'*.[15] But this 'historical truth' that the Commission so idealistically pursues is an impotent objective, as history is inevitably flawed, much like the historians who construct it. The work of the Commission, in cooperation with other agencies of the Lithuanian government, facilitates the nationalist rewriting of history through the criminalisation of the rejection of the *Double Genocide* doctrine, introduction of local legislation, glorification of Lithuanian perpetrators and other joint commemorative methods. It is the lack of regulation in history and its growing democratisation that provides the Lithuanian

government with the power to manipulate history to such an extent. As an accessible and permissive discipline, the construction of history is not a task bound by academic accreditations, and governments have fully exploited this disciplinary freedom.

Katz, a leading figure in the *Double Genocide* debate, was born into a traditional Lithuanian Jewish (Litvak) family. His racial and ethnic background cannot be overlooked as a key influence in the determination of his ideas, and his close cultural connection to the many Jews who were massacred during World War II poses a risk to his academic credibility. Katz stages his opposition to the *Double Genocide* doctrine online through his publication DefendingHistory.com, which essentially operates as an extensive digital library and forum for historical debate. The medium that Katz utilises in his construction of history is critical to understanding the historical discipline's changing nature, as appropriately explained by American historian Roy Rosenzweig, *'historians need to be thinking about [writing]… in a world of unheard-of historical abundance'*.[16] The digital revolution in the late twentieth century has refashioned the way in which history is constructed, and in partnership with the profession's democratisation and consequent politicisation, the question of public versus academic history arises.

The digital revolution and democratisation of the historical discipline has witnessed the emergence of law and technology as mechanisms for historical construction and revision, and this is particularly relevant in Katz's struggle to 'defend history'. As a renowned writer and expert in Jewish and Lithuanian history and culture, he brings great credit to his arguments through personal accreditations and the support of other prominent historians. Through his digitalised construction of history and utilisation of legal agencies, namely the European Parliament, Katz epitomises the modern historian. The *Seventy Years Declaration*, co-authored by Katz and Australian-Jewish historian Danny Ben-Moshe, is a prime example of the increasingly multi-disciplinary nature of history. Through signatories and recognition by members of the Parliament the Declaration disproves the *Double Genocide* doctrine through a reassertion of the definition of *genocide*, a term that serves as yet another source of dispute and controversy in what has been branded the *'black hole of history'*.[17] The ambiguity of the concept of genocide[18] allows for historical experimentalism, and exemplifies the role of linguistics as a barrier to

objective historical study and truth. This is recognised by American post-modernist Hayden White who articulates that *'linguistic conventions are not laws that hold for all times and all places; they are assumptions that are held (consciously or unconsciously) in common by a group and are subject to change'*.[19]

The relativity associated with language eradicates any chance of complete certainty as the equalisation of Hitler and Stalin's crimes, as promoted by the *Double Genocide* doctrine, is dependent on a number of factors; the motives of the historian, their personal interpretation of events and their understanding of concepts and ideas, namely the notion of genocide. Whilst the majority of relevant scholarship recognises the uniqueness of the Holocaust, the '*element of interpretation [that] enters into every fact of history'*[20] ensures that historical debate is imminent. Bauer is among many who stress that the Holocaust *'is a unique genocide, with unprecedented – and, so far, unrepeated – characteristics'*.[21] In his acclaimed book Rethinking the Holocaust Bauer also addresses the need to look at the Holocaust from a *'wide angle'*, drawing on comparisons with other genocides. American historian Timothy Snyder has diligently and successfully risen to this challenge with his extensive study Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin.

Snyder's objective, *'to test the proposition that deliberate and direct mass murder by these two regimes in the bloodlands is a distinct phenomenon worthy of separate treatment,'*[22] is evidenced in his transnational approach to the history of the bloodlands. Through a comparative analysis of this brutal period in human history, Snyder, contrary to the many accusations made by historians, does not equalise the crimes but instead places them in perspective of one another. In accounting for the undeniable interconnectedness of the two regimes, Snyder stresses that *'only an unabashed acceptance of the similarities between the Nazi and Soviet systems permits an understanding of their differences.'*[23] As an American non-Jewish scholar, Snyder's unorthodox transnational history and his affiliation with Lithuania's Red-Brown Commission, has attracted criticism from his contemporaries, who accuse him of giving local perpetrators an *'inexplicable free(ish) pass'*.[24] Applying White's post-modernist critique of language where *'the historian is unaware of the extent to which his very language determines not only the manner, but also the matter and meaning of his discourse'*,[25] Snyder's Bloodlands has unknowingly become a valuable instrument of political power in Lithuania. The

democratisation of the historical profession has paved the way for the emergence of a new historical trend: political-history. This modern approach does not reflect only the propagandistic attitude of nineteenth century historians of the Rankean 'Great Men' tradition, but is indicative of a new interdependent relationship where history is used as political fuel, and politics has become engraved into the very nature of history.

Snyder's entrapment in the *Double Genocide* debate reasserts the claim that *'no author is safe from misappropriation'*.[26] The political nature of history and its anarchic flexibility in terms of historical thought and construction, licenses the deliberate misappropriation of otherwise commendable historical works like Bloodlands. Katz and other contemporaries have spoken out in opposition to the Lithuanian government's instrumentalisation of Snyder's Bloodlands, and Snyder's controversial complicity to his work emerging as the *'bible of the Holocaust distorters in post-Communist Eastern Europe'*.[27] Snyder continues to serve as a member of the Red-Brown Commission and has neither publicly endorsed or denounced the *Double Genocide* movement.

Consensus does exist among historians and the Lithuanian government, including both Katz and Snyder, as to the quantitative details concerning victims and to some extent the role of local perpetrators.[28] Where conflict arises is in the classification and nature of these crimes, and Snyder is aware of the linguistic complications described by White as he states, *'I prefer mass killing to genocide for a number of reasons… the term genocide gives rise to inevitable and intractable controversies'*.[29] His newly attained epithet as an *'unprotesting accessory'*[30] alludes to his failure to sufficiently address the role of local perpetrators, and his continuing alliance with Lithuania's Red-Brown Commission. The instrumentalisation of Bloodlands represents not only a deliberate mis-appropriation on behalf of the Lithuanian government, but a mis-narration by Snyder himself.[31]

The *Double Genocide* movement reflects a critical development in the nature of historical revisionism, obfuscation and construction. Snyder demonstrates an acute understanding of the power a historian holds; *'memory is mine and I have the right to do with it as I please; numbers are objective and you must accept my counts whether you like them or not'*.[32]The democratisation of history and its consequent

deregulation has emancipated the profession from the professional, where the historian, and anarchists alike, can roam free in individual thought and expression. Out of this creative autonomy has emerged political-history, where objective truth is deliberately exploited as a means of advancing or consolidating political power. The *Double Genocide* movement exemplifies the politicised nature of the modern historical discipline, and how easily the history of the past can be distorted through revisionism and the manipulation of public memory.

Endnotes

1. Snyder, Timothy Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin, Vintage Books, London, 2011, Preface: Europe, pg. xviii.

2. Arendt, Hannah The Origins of Totalitarianism, Harcourt Books, United States, 1968.

    Arendt explores the dynamics of the modern totalitarian state, using Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union as the basis of her theories. Her definition of totalitarianism as absolute control over every aspect of society is explained in light of the differences and similarities between traditional autocratic regimes and the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

3. Ben-Moshe, Danny & Karp, Daryl Rewriting History, Identity Films and Tattooed Media Production, September 2012, Australia.

4. Heni, Clemens The Prague Declaration, Holocaust Obfuscation and Anti-Semitism, as published on DefendingHistory.com, 15th November 2013.

5. Bartov, Omer Review of Bloodlands, Slavic Review, Vol. 71, No. 4, Winter 2012.

6. As quoted by Montreal founder of the Litvak Studies Institute Mikhail Iossel, Lazerus, David West must address Lithuanian revisionism, The Canadian Jewish News, February 3rd 2011, as viewed online at www.cjnews.com/node/87176 on 09/03/14.

7. Term coined by Snyder, Op. cit., pg. viii.

8. Bauer, Yehuda Rethinking the Holocaust, Yale University Press, USA, 2001, pg. 50.

9. Whewell, Tim Reopening Lithuania's old wounds, BBC News, 21st July 2008, as viewed online at http://new.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing-comments/7508375.stm on 26/04/2014.

10. Op. cit. Heni, Clemens.

11. Katz, Dovid 'Prague Process' Crowd, with Lithuanian Jewish politician for cover (as usual), now proceeding with plans to 'overhaul European history textbooks' for Double Genocide and Holocaust Obfuscation, as published on DefendingHistory.com, 22nd May 2011.

12. Curthoys, Ann & Docker, John Is History Fiction? (Second Edition) University of New South Wales Press, Australia, 2010, pg. 4.

13. Cited in Heni, Clemens, Op. cit.

14. The Commission is a government-run body established in 1998. It works in partnership with Lithuanian and international universities, the Lithuanian Genocide Centre, Lithuania's Foreign and Defense Ministries and several other government and non-government agencies. There are several historians who sit on the Committee as experts, Snyder included, and assist in the revision of the history of the Second World War in Lithuania.

15. The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, http://www.komisija.lt/en/, as viewed on 26/04/2014.

16. Rosenzweig, Roy, 'Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past', in Roy Rosenzweig, Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age, Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 3-27, as cited in Fickers, Andreas Towards a New Digital Historicism? Doing History in the Age of Abundance, Journal of European History & Culture, Vol. 1, 1, 2012.

17. Term coined by Elie Wiesel in reference to the Holocaust in Wiesel, Elie All Rivers Run to the Sea, HarperCollins, London, 1996, pg. 79, as cited in Eaglestone, Robert Postmodern Encounters: Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial, Icon Books Ltd., United Kingdom, 2001, pg. 6.

18. Genocide as defined in Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948): "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group…" However this definition is not enforceable, and although it is widely accepted it has not yet obtained universal recognition.

19. White, Hayden Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism, John Hopkins University Press, United States, 1978, pg. 13.

20. Carr, E.H. What is History? Penguin Group, Australia, 2008, pg. 13.

21. Op. cit., Bauer, pg. xi.

22. Op. cit., Snyder, pg. 411.

23. Ibid, pg. 389.

24. Katz, Dovid Review Article: Detonation of the Holocaust in 1941: A Tale of Two Books, as published on DefendingHistory.com, December 2011.

25. White, Hayden Historicism, History and the Figurative Imagination, History and Theory, Vol. 14, No. 4, Beiheft 14: Essays on Historicism (Dec., 1975), pg. 48-67.

26. Kühne, Thomas Great Men and Large Numbers: Undertheorizing a History of Mass Killing, Contemporary European History 21, 2 (2012), Cambridge University Press, pg. 133-143.

27. Zuroff, Efraim The Equivalency Canard: An innovative historical approach lumps Nazi and Soviet murder campaigns together, ignoring the implacable ideological roots behind the Shoah and giving Holocaust collaborators a free ride, Haaretz, 11th may 2011, as viewed online at www.haaretz.com/culture/books/the-equivalency-canard-1.361051 on 30/03/2014.

28. The number of Lithuanian Jews murdered in the Second

World War is not a contested detail, and the figures are the same in all counts. The Lithuanian government has also formally recognised that non-Jewish Lithuanians participated in the mass murder of Jews in the early days of Nazi occupation in 1941. The debate between the Lithuanian government and revisionist historians, namely Katz and Zuroff, revolves around the basis of these killings. Katz holds that the mass murder was conducted on the grounds of ethnicity, whilst the Lithuanian government argues that the killings were carried out on a political basis (this was due to the social classification of Jews as Communists).

29. Op. cit., Snyder, pg. 412-413.
30. Kaiser, Menachem Unshared Histories: Timothy Snyder's "Bloodlands" Los Angeles Review of Books, 16th October 2012, as viewed online at http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/unshared-histories-timothy-snyders-bloodlands# on 30/03/2014.
31. Ibid.
32. Op. cit., Snyder, pg. 402.

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