

The English translation of Rachel Margolis' 2006 Russian memoir, *A Partisan from Vilna*, is an important contribution to studying the history of Lithuanian Jewry and the Holocaust in the German-occupied Soviet Union. The account also plays a crucial part in a harsh and ongoing debate about how to deal with the past in present-day Lithuania.

Margolis' account encompasses much more than one would expect from the title. Major parts are devoted to Margolis' childhood and adolescence in a well-situated bourgeois household in interwar Vilna, including young Rachel's experience of the late 1930s ending with the Soviet annexation of Lithuania and, finally, the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Only the last two parts, "Ghetto" and "Partisans," address what is most frequently evoked in book announcements and media accounts of the "war hero" Rachel Margolis: her survival in the ghetto of Vilna and eventual participation in a Soviet partisan unit. Especially these last two parts are of interest to Holocaust scholars, as memoirs of women surviving the Nazi genocide in the USSR and of Jewish women in partisan units are all too rare.

The initial sections, however, provide a wealth of insight and are of interest for a variety of scholarship. Often fragmentary, as a whole her account suggests the privileged and sheltered life of a Jewish girl in prewar Lithuania. The memoir gravitates around the father, a well-known and respected radiologist, the often problematic relationship with Rachel's mother Emma, and Irka Folkman, the teenager's close friend. All of them and many other relatives died as a result of the Nazi onslaught. The extensive portrayal of daily life, vacations, and intimate conversations are thus a form of memory work, recuperating what is lost yet noting the ways in which these relationships helped make Margolis the person she turned out to be. Finally, the account lends itself to an analysis of how a girl growing up in a well-situated bourgeois household turns toward Marxist theory and, later on, actively engages in the *Komsomol*, the Soviet Communist Party's youth organization.

Eventually, this political engagement led Margolis to participate in the Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsie (United Partisan Organization) in the Vilna Ghetto. The book illuminates the conflicts within the extraordinary alliance of Bund, left and right Zionist, and Communist activists, as in many other ghettos debating whether to work toward an uprising in the ghetto "to die with honor" or a rebellion enabling a mass escape, or to organize escape routes and safe havens outside of the ghetto. Underground movements in Warsaw, Bialystok, and Minsk also faced these questions, each offering different answers. In the end, and this is the tragedy of Vilna's organization, only a few hundred underground activists escaped the ghetto. There was no uprising as in Warsaw. There were no thousands of Jews who left, as in the Minsk ghetto.

Margolis' account touches upon a contentious issue in analyses of Jewish resistance, the tensions between armed struggle and survival and rescue. The memoir generally points out that the difference between 'rescue' and 'resistance' was marginal and often nonexistent in the Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian ghettos. Her vivid descriptions of extreme hunger, lack of privacy, and longing for emotional attachment are a moving contribution to understanding the multiple responses to the Nazi violence: youthful excitement about the ghetto theater is contrasted by withdrawal into nomadic self-defense, or complemented by the desire to avenge.

The book also points to a dilemma experienced often by editors of autobiographies: How much context and explanation do readers need, and what kind? Margolis' memoir is preceded by a fifty-page long Introduction by historian Antony Polonsky. Polonsky's text is peculiar, presenting valuable, yet limited information on Jewish history in Lithuania and German anti-Jewish policy. The account omits significant dimensions of the memoir such as the complexity of history and autobiographical memory, or issues of gender in the history and memory of Jewish life in Lithuania, the Holocaust, and of Jewish resistance.

On the other hand, Polonsky notes how Lithuanian nationalists used a paragraph in Margolis' memoir to accuse her and fellow former partisans of murder and anti-Lithuanian treason. The perception of the memoir thus points to recent attempts within Lithuanian society to offset Jewish partisans' combat, during which Lithuanian civilians were killed, against Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazi regime in murdering 200,000 of the country's Jews, and to portray Jewish resistance as part of Soviet anti-Lithuanian policies. The memoir provides ample context to evaluate the partisan warfare. It also clearly marks the difference between the Nazi genocide and Soviet annexation policies that Lithuanian nationalists would like to portray as genocide as well, a problematic claim that Polonsky supports (49).

The *memoir* is a significant contribution to understanding the personal experiences of young, female, politically active Jews during Nazi occupation and genocide in Eastern Europe. The *book* may have benefited from a more balanced introduction, and the services of a copy editor would have improved the publication, since the translated version suggests Margolis' use of unduly colloquial prose. A German translation of Margolis' 2004 Polish memoir (published in 2008) evokes a very different style. Finally, several pages accounting for Margolis' experience of the war's end, included in the German edition, are conspicuously absent from the current version, creating an abrupt ending that leaves the reader with several unsolved questions that Margolis traces throughout the memoir. *A Partisan from Vilna* and its reception are thus forceful reminders of ongoing challenges to deal with the aftermath of systematic violence, and of the politics of translation and memory.