

## **O-11 - COLLECTIVE EROSION OF EMPATHY IN LITHUANIA 1940-1953: PSYCHIATRIC ANALYSIS OF COLLABORATORS, SURVIVORS, AND PATRIOTS**

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The WWII era saw atrocities to unarmed citizens in Eastern Europe, the so called Bloodlands, the likes of which may never have been witnessed before. The Baltic country of Lithuania was among the nations affected as it suffered occupation first by Soviet Russia (1940), then Nazi Germany (1941), then Soviet Russia again (1944) and to continue for almost five decades. In the early years of each of these occupations not insignificant numbers of Lithuanians fell in with the occupiers, and participated in atrocities against fellow citizens in which tens of thousands of people were murdered or deported, and their families and communities ravaged. Lithuania was not unique in this experience, but its smaller size may allow closer scrutiny of the process; which is not adequately explained by political ideology or traditional concepts of psychopathy. This paper explores the evolutionary, biological, and sociological constructs of empathy; and its surprising malleability. It draws from examples of the Lithuanian experience - not only with collaborators, but also survivors, and patriots who have been accused of atrocities. Special emphasis is on the power of the collective to alter empathy in sweeping ways. This has importance at a time when developments in neuroscience assert that lack of empathy is an inherent defect in some mental and personality disordered individuals. It also may be relevant to recent assertions that large scale world wars are no longer as likely. Neither of these assertions should be that comforting.