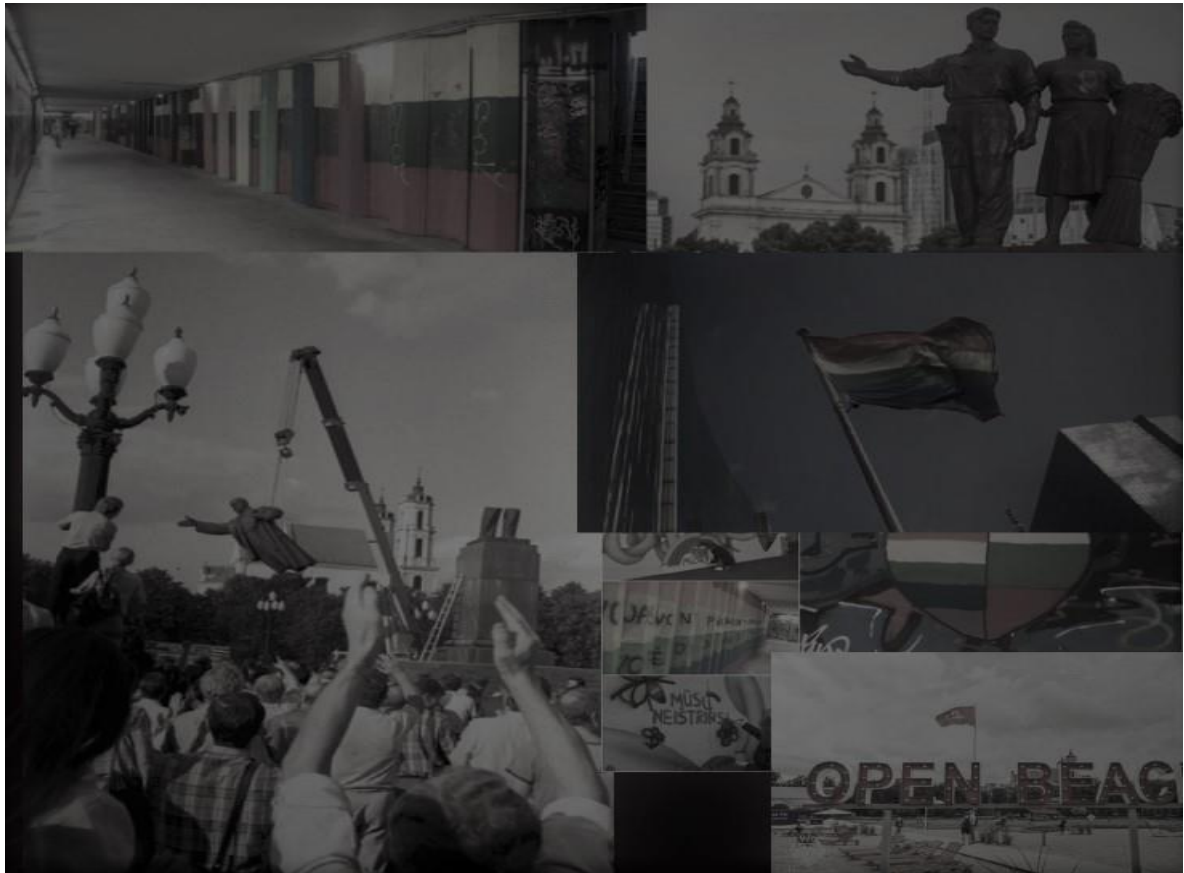


Radboud University

Searching For Collective Post-Communist Trauma Through Spatial Narratives:
The Debates over Sexuality in Lithuania



Bachelor Thesis Arts and Culture

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Introduction

According to paragraph no. 38 in the Lithuanian Constitution, marriage is created upon the free mutual consent between man and woman. Lithuania does not only recognize same-sex marriages but also civil partnerships. The Civil Code (chapter XV, named 'Cohesion without registering matrimony') defines the cohesion property and legal relations only between man and woman. This year (2021) a Liberal Political Party called 'Laisvės Partija' (The Party of Freedom) started preparing a bill that would grant unmarried couples (including same-sex partners) legal rights.

In 2019, 11th of January, the Supreme Court of Lithuania ruled that a constitutional family, differently from a constitutional marriage, is neutral to sex. However no political decisions were made regarding the matter. The question of the partnership was pending in Lithuanian politics for 20 years with no legal resolution. Since the Party of Freedom was elected to the New Parliament (October 2020), they started preparing the partnership law for the Parliament's spring session. The Party of Freedom has been vocal about their ambition to solve the issue of partnership since their electoral campaign. On 25 May 2021 the new Partnership law/bill, which would legalize partnership regardless of one's sex or gender, was first read and voted on: 63 politicians voted for, 58 against and 7 abstained. The bill lacked 2 votes to proceed further. Now it will be sent for corrections and hopefully proposed and read again in September 2021.

Together with these plans in Parliament, there is rising opposition towards the Freedom Party, the proposal, and the LGBTQ+ community, which has resulted in growing homophobia, hate speech, far-right politics, and protests. The head of the Human rights committee, Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius, is experiencing verbal threats and hate attacks, as an openly gay politician, and the main leader in the preparation of the bill. Some members of

the political opposition, at the end of February 2021, initiated a petition that called for Raskevičius's removal the position as committee head, stating that he mixes personal and public interests, as well as is ignoring the opinion of the majority and defends only the rights and/or interests of the small group of society. On 15 May 2021 organization, called 'Family Movement' ('*Šeimų Sąjūdis*') organized a march, 'The big march of Family Defence' ('*Didysis šeimos gynimo maršas*', my trans¹). The program of the protest stated the following: "due to aggressive gendered propaganda that is being enforced in ideological war methods, and ruling political majority that is preparing laws that contradict the Constitution of Lithuanian Republic – We unite!" ('*Šeimų Sąjūdis*).

The far-right states that LGBTQ+ is a threat to Lithuanian 'traditional' family, especially children, the group spreads demagoguery on the very nature of gender and sexuality; uses nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric to appeal to masses; and calls the 'West' as an ideological threat for Lithuanian values, state, and members. Moreover, the LGBTQ+ is being referred to as an 'ideology' in their speeches. These, and similar types of rhetoric that are mixed with religious narratives, are being used to perpetuate gender and sexual politics and power. The LGBTQ+ identity as such is being viewed almost as a new phenomenon brought to Lithuania by the 'Western' politics and ideas. However, it is important to say that only the conservative 'traditionalist' group of society is actively engaged in these discourses; to claim that the vast majority of Lithuanian society is 'traditionalist' would be wrong. Thus, this paper will focus on this group of people who I will be calling 'traditionalists.'

At the moment, the two camps (those who support the partnership law and those who do not) are 'fighting' over who gets to belong to the national discourse. Often in

¹ All of the sources written in original (Lithuanian) language were translated by me. Thus, further on I will not use the 'my trans.' indications.

the rhetoric of the far-right, there is a reoccurring argument, such as: “before Moscow used to tell us what to do and how to live, and now Brussels is doing the same, with its distorted ideologies” (Piščikaitė). Precisely because of this rhetoric, as a Lithuanian myself, I began to think of the possible reasons behind the aggressive resistance and/or fear of accepting the partnership law. These statements that were constantly referring to the past events and the attempts to link Soviet authorities with Brussels, made me think of the history that is still possibly haunting Lithuanian nation, memory and identities. Therefore, with this thesis, I aim to analyse the possibility of post-communist/colonial trauma in the Lithuanian society, which is surfacing in the context of partnership law.

It is important to say that it is not in this paper’s interest to analyse the LGBTQ+ community as such or its formation in Lithuanian Society, as other Eastern and Central European scholars offer a great number of texts (though still not enough) on histories of LGBTQ+ communities in Soviet and Post-soviet nations (Juškaitė, Čičelis, Buyantueva, Shevtsova, Vārdiņš, Ozoliņš, etc.). Nor do I want to fall into Western attempts of wrongfully representing or victimizing LGBTQ+ identities of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and frame Lithuania as ‘backwarded’. Scholars Neufeld and Wiedlack write that Western media tends to frame post-soviet nations as ‘needing to catch up with the Western equivalent to modernity’ and imposes a typical Western ‘model of visibility upon the ‘suffering’ subject’, even though that subject of CEE’s LGBTQ+ does not necessarily want that visibility, and it would not benefit them (52). Thus, this paper will focus on analysing the reasons for the ‘othering’ of queer identities in Lithuanian society and what is behind the fear of ‘them’, proposing that resistance, paranoia and fear is surfacing due to the broken and fragmented past, collective remembering and identity.

Astrid Erll says that cultural memory studies are not restricted to the narrative, identity, intentional remembering and more; but it is rather open for the exploration field (2,3). Thus, I will seek to explore. I will not use 'trauma' in the psychological sense, but I will use the concept of trauma as a cultural metaphor. Leela Gandhi, writes, how "colonial aftermath calls for an ameliorative and therapeutic theory"; "it is important to remember...in order to [recover]", and it is "vital in understanding what has occurred" (qtd. in Ward 172). Therefore, I rather aim to pinpoint and propose a hypothesis that post-communistic trauma haunts the Lithuanian present, still strongly constructs Lithuanian identity(ies), and is related to homophobia and resistance towards LGBTQ+ and the partnership law in today's Lithuanian society.

In order to link today's events to the concept of trauma and to stress out the reasons of 'resistance', I will have to talk about ideological tools that were used during the Soviet occupation to oppress Lithuanian identity. Although to achieve the proposition of my hypothesis, I will have to be exclusive in many regards. It is important to mention that Soviet propaganda and 'building' of a socialist citizen was spread through all domains of society. The Lithuanian nation, as many other countries occupied by Soviets', experienced cultural, political, economic, religious etc. oppression. Any sort of individualistic activity or sympathies to the 'Western' ideas or freedom of speech were repressed, often with repercussions of execution and/or exile, especially in the early (Stalinist) period of occupation. The Christian Church and religious communities played a huge role in the movements of resistance from the Soviet colonial power, as they were centres of dissident activity (mokslai.lietuviuzodynas.lt). Therefore, it might be for this reason that the religious community and its authority have a strong influence and image in Lithuanian collective consciousness, which strongly plays out in today's battle of the partnership law in rhetoric of 'traditional', 'Christian', 'family' values and 'God made us that way.' Nevertheless, this

paper will not include all political and ideological dimensions that took place in times of occupation, but it was crucial to mention the multidisciplinary of the political propaganda and means of constructing Soviet identity, before I start and stress out my analysis.

My paper will focus on spatial narratives and analyse how identity was/is constructed and/or contested through space. I will be making linkages with the early period of Soviet occupation, period after Independence and today. I will 'expose' the Lithuanian collective trauma and contemplate on its effects on society today, all in relation to architecture and space in general.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will do a historical analysis to present the politics of identity building in Soviet Lithuania through architecture, as it is a typical trope of colonial power, and its effects on Lithuanian identity. Though I will only focus on the urban spaces. In this chapter, I will conduct a discourse analysis on political propaganda and 'hidden' ideology in the architecture of Soviet Lithuania. Therefore, I will also do spatial, textual and visual analysis to exhibit the discoveries of socialist propaganda and its implications on Lithuanian identity.

In my second chapter I will use trauma theories to analyse/present the possible collective trauma and how it manifests itself through space. By analysing texts and images, as well as spaces, I will talk about the dismantling of Soviet architecture and objects in the years of independence. And I will discuss the phenomenon of Lukiškių square to demonstrate the paradoxes of collective trauma and memory that is still haunting Lithuanian society today.

And lastly, I will show how urban space is used as a battlefield to define, defend and contest one's identity and/or right to 'belonging' to the city and citizenship. I will discuss this through the centre-periphery relation, the politics of contestation or 'reclaiming

one's right to the city,' and the concept of sexual nationalism. I will analyze comments on social media to indicate the opposition's arguments and will do visual analysis to show how far-right's protests and resistance are articulated through spatial narratives. My analysis in general will mostly focus on urban theories and on theories of collective trauma and memory.

Literature Review

Augustas Čičelis says that the Soviet state politics made sure that other identities than the heterosexual, did not exist; and if it was publicly acknowledged, it was through narratives of ‘abnormality’, ‘illness’, etc. (Čičelis). In his Master Thesis *Reading Between The Lines: Spatial Communities of Men With Same-Sex Attractions in Late 20th Century Lithuania*, echoing Gessen, he writes that “sex between men was considered a political crime by Soviet authorities...it was perceived as a danger to the state and the system” (12). Since Soviet identity was supposed to be ‘clean’, it framed anyone outside the ‘normative’ discourse as an undesirable subject, and in this way silencing homosexual communities (Čičelis). It is very likely that because of this ‘absence’ of homosexual subjects in the past, the supposed ‘newness’ of the homosexual discourses is causing Lithuanian society to resist, seeing ‘LGBTQ+ ideologies’ as a ‘Western’ phenomenon.

Rytis Buluta in *Soviet Lithuania: A Failed Conservative Experiment* writes that “already in the 1930s, Stalin promoted a return to extremely conservative values. Moreover, this moral discourse is uncomfortably similar to that of a conservative traditionalist in Lithuania today” (4). Though Buluta’s ‘today’ was in 2010, some of his points are extremely relevant to the 2021 dynamics; thus “the current situation, and the search for someone to blame for it leads to the usual scapegoat- the Soviet past” (Buluta 4). However, I am searching for ‘why’, and not for the agendas of/to blame; but for the ‘why’ I think it is crucial to look at the past.

Even though CEE countries have experienced different colonialism than that defined by most post-colonial theorists and scholars, it did experience structural and ideological oppression. Therefore, when talking about trauma it is crucial to analyze

Lithuanian identity in relation to the colonial context. Nezar AlSayyad in the chapter “The Islamic City as a Colonial Enterprise” of the book *Forms of Dominance* writes, “when the natives...were eventually restricted in their ability to express their culture, their wealth, and at times their religion, one cannot help but wonder if this dominance had turned into outright colonialism” (41). The Soviet occupation posed colonial power over its subjects by employing tools of ‘erasure’, oppression, censorship and politics of identity building. And “while the capitalist West was able to accommodate the values of the 1968 sexual revolution and the further spread of various rights, the Soviet Union clung to a version of Victorian morals in USSR...the famous bon mot to the effect that ‘there is no sex in the USSR’ sums up the situation rather neatly” (Bulota 3). Thus, the publicity of today’s LGBTQ+ question in public discourses evoke some people to react in words such as “I don’t understand why do you need this publicly... if you’re laying, then lay silently. We normal ones are laying [implying sex] but we do not scream to the world... asking for nation’s approval” (Inčienė). This comment illustrates Bulota’s recollection of the past, in terms of ‘silence of sex’ and soviet morality, which still heavily defines the social reality of today.

Soviet morality and ideology were implemented through spatial rearrangements and constructions too. In *Identity, Memory and Countermemory: The Archaeology of an Urban Landscape*, Martin Hall, says that “urban landscapes are both expressions of identity, and means of shaping the relationships between those who inhabit them. They are palimpsests in which buildings, street layouts, and monumental structures are interpreted and reinterpreted as changing expressions of relations of power” (189). Active reconstruction of the urban landscape in the Soviet Union was part of the politics of identity building and soviet imagination/illusion. Jiň Šubrt et al. in *Identity Building: A Complex Phenomenon*, recalling Mead, says that identity “is not ‘initially there, at birth, but arises in the processes of social experience and activity’”; hence “the self, as that which can be an object to itself, is

essentially a social structure, and it arises in the social experience” (84). Therefore, to contextualize the possibility of collective trauma of Lithuanian identity, I must give a historic account on the socialist identity ‘project’, since today’s far-right political agendas are recycling refrains of the socialist past.

The Soviet national identity’s building ‘project’ was “national in form and socialist in content,” but surprisingly national in its content as well”, especially in the postwar period (Davoliūtė 59). Violeta Davoliūtė in *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*, unfolds Soviet-nationalistic ideological tools in different periods of occupation. She writes that “the theme of Vilnius as the ancient cradle of Lithuanian identity was blended seamlessly into the communist narrative of reconstruction and the creation of new identities” (Davoliūtė 67). However, even within one small nation there is a multiplicity of identities, and any sort of generalization is dangerous, but for the reasons of the size of this paper, I must limit myself to more general accounts.

As Lefebvre “inveighs against any treatment of space as... a kind of neutral setting in which life transpires” (Molotch 888), this paper will also treat space (specifically urban) as such, in both the period of Soviet occupation and today.

Dina Zisserman-Brodsky talks about ethnocentric nationalism in the former USSR and how it constructed politics of us vs. them in regard to one’s ethnicity in her book *Constructing Ethnopolitics in the Soviet Union: Samizdat, Deprivation, and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism*. She writes that “the concept of a “common enemy” comprises the major formative element in nationalistic perceptions. In this context, xenophobia can be considered an important aspect of ethnocentric nationalism” (176). Summer defines ethnocentrism as a “view of things in which “one’s own group is the center of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it”” (qtd. In Brodsky 169). Paradoxically, it seems that in Lithuania at the moment, heterosexuality (or resistance to homosexuality) is getting almost

an ethnic shade. Jaunait et. al., write that state and nationalist movements in the past “used gender to assert their political authority and codify collective behaviors in private and public spaces, and to invent an identity considered “authentic” or “traditional,” particularly in colonial and postcolonial context” (III). Lithuanian far-right or ‘traditionalist’ discourses tend to use heterosexuality as part of their political, nationalist and social agenda. Kanchan Kumari, in *Heterosexual Nationalism: Discourses on Masculinity and Femininity*, says that in nationalism, gender and sexuality are categories that “play an important role in constructing one another by invoking and helping to construct the “us” versus “them” distinction and the exclusion of other” (35). Since the ‘other’ or LGBTQ+ as a periphery is now gaining centre’s attention and negotiates its right to belong, it is crucial to observe and analyse the periphery through the lens of peripheral visions. This is a way of “regard[ing] periphery as able to negotiate its inevitable relation with the center on a variety of terms that belie its construction as statically ‘other’” (Peeren, et.al 27).

Lastly, in this conversation of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ there is a reoccurring theme of invasion, of imposed Western laws and values. One of the comments of the ‘traditionalists’ on social media illustrates it, “God made man and woman and nobody can object that. Family is mother, father and kids. If you want to live in the Western style then go to the West, nobody is holding you [back]. And there you will be able to accept your own laws. We live in Lithuania” (Venckuvienė). Precisely because of this imposition of West being a ‘new’ giant that imposes its values on this small, constantly oppressed nation, I propose to look at today’s phenomenon through trauma perspective. As Jiň Šubrt et al. say, “the topic of memory and historical consciousness is connected with the problem of identity” (83). Astrid Erll in Introduction of ‘cultural memory studies’, proposes the following definition: cultural memory is “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts” (2). To contextualize the ‘remembering’ I cannot avoid talking about ‘factual’ history, so later I can demonstrate

how “stories of victimhood and heroism... attest to the very normal dynamics of collective identity construction” (Kansteiner 111). This will be mostly present in the question of Lukiškių square.

Chapter I

Soviet Architecture_ Ideology_ Identity

In this chapter, I aim to give a historical account of Lithuanian identity ‘building’ during the early and mid-socialism. However, as it was stated before, this paper will only focus on spatial narratives and ideological tools that were used to build a Soviet citizen. I am providing this historical account to emphasize the ‘erasure’ of Lithuanian identity, so that later I could present the implications on Lithuanian society after Independence (or today) and prove that the trauma exists.

The Soviet identity-building went hand in hand with Soviet ideology. For example, in the 1920s, Humphrey writes, it was believed that “carefully designed living quarters... could eliminate the conditions for individualistic and *meshchanskie* (petty-minded bourgeois) ways of life, and on this basis, a new human type would become the norm: Socialist Man and Woman” (39). Soviet authorities monopolized and controlled all forms of life and charged them ideologically. Marija Drėmaitė says that the “Stalinist period of soviet architecture is an embodiment of totalitarian art nature”. She says that, according to the Communist party’s Central Committee Agreement of 1932, all artists had to gather into ‘unions’ to which Soviet authorities determined the ‘right’ direction of the arts; architects in design institutes were trained to comply to the ‘right’ ideologic programs (Drėmaitė). After the Lithuanian annexation, these politics were implemented in Soviet Lithuania too. Even though in the first decade of the post-war period (1944-1955), the Soviets were mainly focused on the reconstruction and the rebuilding of the cities since Lithuania was damaged by war; they also installed new principles of design and aesthetics (Drėmaitė). Caroline Humphrey writes,

“Soviet construction was to build material foundations that would mould nothing less than a new society...after revolution, architecture became one of the key arenas of ideology” (39). Soviet authorities ideologized spaces not only by eliminating the ‘old,’ but by constructing the ‘new’ too.

Vaidas Petrulis in his Lecture on “Modernism: between nostalgia and criticism” (*Modernizmas: tarp nuostalgijos ir kritiškumo*), said that “ideology in architecture is a common thing... and even though a big part of Socialist ideas were closely related to general ideas of modernism,” there are certain aspects typical to Soviets, says Petrulis (55). One of the main features in usage of architecture was creating a new identity; the identity of a soviet citizen’ (Petrulis 55). Petrulis marks out that it was done by ‘positioning Soviets’ in opposition to the ‘West’, and in an ideological opposition of Lithuania as a former bourgeois state (55,56).

Social realism was a powerful ideological tool to convey Soviet ‘views’ upon occupied societies. However, Lithuania saw only the second wave of post-war Stalinist architecture (or social realism), according to Marija Drėmaitė. It was named ‘the style of Soviet triumph’ (*sovietiniu Pergalės stiliumi*). This ‘triumph’, can be seen in the building of the sculptures of the communist leaders (see Fig.1), sculptures of proletariats (working man and woman) (see Fig. 2) in public spaces. Davoliūtė says, that Vilnius city “was provided with its share of monuments to communist leaders, with Lenin on the former Lukiškės square, Stalin near the train station... Many streets were renamed after communist heroes”, etc. (63). These tokens carried an ideological meaning: one must look forward and celebrate the promising communist future. According to Nezar AlSayyad “dismantling the structures of earlier civilizations has been a common practice among colonial empires” (41). Mackevičius’s account demonstrate the ‘dismantling’ too: “children who came back after summer vacation at school could not find crosses on the walls, nor the coat of arms of

Lithuania,² and nearby portraits of Jonas Basanavičius and Vincas Kudirka³ were portraits of Lenin and Stalin” (Mackevičius). This shows how already existing spaces were modified to fit into the communist environment and/or newly imposed Socialist ideology as well.

According to Petrulis until about the 1970s, the process of constructing of Soviet identities not only involved trying to convince ‘what a misery was to live in bourgeois Lithuania’ (or ‘how bad the West is’), but to make citizens of Socialist Lithuania feel like citizens of the USSR, and to show them ‘how beautiful it is in the Soviet Union’ (55). Therefore, in the early Soviet period, Lithuanian magazines were bombarded with images of constructions of the Volga-Don canal, metros and skyscrapers of Moscow, etc. (Petrulis 55).

The Stalinist architecture was dominant in early Soviet Lithuania and had ideological implications. For instance, in the city centre of Vilnius, on Goštautas street, a district of houses, also known as “Amerikankė”, was built (Zacharovas). It was supposed to attract Lithuanian emigrants, who migrated before the war, from Latin and North America to ‘Socialist paradise’ (Zacharovas). Soviets aimed to demonstrate that these migrants can come to live there for free and be loyal to the new government (Zacharovas).

² Known as Vytis ['vî:tis], which consists of an armoured knight on horseback holding a sword and shield.

³ Important figures of 19th century Lithuania: Jonas Basanavičius is known to be the leading figure of Lithuanian National Revival; Vincas Kudirka the author of Lithuanian Nation Anthem (both music and lyrics).



Pic. No.1, Ulfartas, Andrius. *Socialistinio istorizmo stiliaus daugiabučiai Goštauto g.*, Delfi, 31

October 2018, *delfi.lt.*, <https://www.delfi.lt/bustas/archive/vilniuje-state-ne-tik-chrusciovkes-pirmieji-daugiabuciai-ir-nemokamos-amerikankes-kuriomis-sovietai-atsiviliojo-emigrantus.d?id=79463337>.

This architecturally expressed ideology of the USSR being a ‘paradise’ in opposition to the West, was present throughout multiple public discourses. One of the examples could be the caricature from the journal *Šluota*, that Petrulis shared in his lecture (see Pict. No. 2 below). The cardboard of the poster says “The question [or problem] of the housing in America has been solved”. This depiction of America as a place with no actual solution to the housing problem was supposed to oppose the ‘structural’, ‘organized’, ‘modernized’ Soviet housing building system. By creating the narratives of the USSR as having enough of everything, while in reality, it was not the case, it again imposed the socialist illusion of a ‘perfect life.’



Pic. No.2, A Caricature used by Vaidas Petrulis in his lecture *Modernism: between nostalgia and criticism* from the magazine *Šluota*, published in 1961, No.7, pp.7. Architektūrinių leidinių fondas, 25 October 2013, leidiniu.archfondas.lt/. <https://leidiniu.archfondas.lt/en/alf-02/dmarija-dremaite-and-vaidas-petrulis-modernism-soviet-lithuania-rise-and-fall-utopia>.

The apartment building project or Khrushchev ‘modernization’ was also highly charged with ideology of a ‘perfect life.’ Diener and Hagen write that “the political geographies of urban space and place derive from power... That power, in its varied tangible and intangible forms, shapes the spatiality of the urban landscape, structures social relations, and conveys meanings, among them senses of collective belonging” (7). The idea of ‘collective belonging’ through architecture can be seen in *obshchezhitie* (hostel, communal living, dormitory), that according to Caroline Humphrey, “intended to embody the ideas of equality, frugality, openness to other, and communal responsibility” (Humphrey 46). In the

mass construction of 1950-70s, regulations for the *obshchezhitie* were homogenized, e.g., each floor (or sometimes each room) had a *starosta*,⁴ as well as informers, “who let the authorities know, in a clandestine way, about political infringements” (Humphrey 46, 47). These buildings were mostly inhabited by students and built in most of the former Soviet countries, including the Baltic states. Humphrey adds that “these practices of surveillance were heavily moralized, standing for socialist responsibility, respect for others, cultured behaviour, and political reliability” (47).

The famous block apartments of USSR also enforced the idea of ‘collective belonging’ through its very architecture and spatial planning. They had a “protected inner area [courtyard]...contrasted with the outer zone of streets and squares,” in a middle (Humphrey 52). The courtyard in Soviet planning was a space for communal activities and recreation (Humphrey 52). In this area maintaining of plants took place and “was enormously strong part of Soviet urban ideology”, as “‘greening’ was energetically pursued to...provide a pleasant environment for the leisure of the working masses” (Humphrey 52). Most importantly, the “inhabitants themselves were to cultivate their collective well-being” (Humphrey 52). Here, one can see how the space itself was constructed to convince the inhabitants that life is perfect and everyone has enough of everything. However, as Petrulis notes, ‘soviet modernism’ (as in modernism in general) put state interests above the human’s (53). Thus, any ‘attention’ to proletariat’s well-being was only factual, not actual (Petrulis, 58). The proletariat musted to work and serve the ‘common well-being’ of the communism.

⁴ It was an activist worker or student leader who was supposed to ensure that norms in the student dormitories were followed. *Starosta* would rebuke the drunk, the ‘fighters’, etc. Also, organized/assigned domestic tasks to the inhabitants of the dorm (Humphrey 47).

The illusion of a 'perfect life' was naturally followed by the construction of a perfect citizen, as it was already stated before. A perfect citizen was supposed to be a "hardworking proletariat, devoted to the Party, and absolutely and necessarily heterosexual" (Underwood 43). Thus, sexual politics were also not absent in the Soviet Union and operated through space too. Buluta writes that from 1930, great significance was dedicated to the 'traditional' family, with the emphasis on monogamy and faithfulness; cohabitation was not tolerated, and "being divorced or even single could affect a person's career prospects rather badly" (6). In 1967-8 state policy eased, though social practices barely changed; e.g., "in the context of permanent shortages of apartments, only married couples had a real chance of obtaining a separate living space" (Buluta 6). Consequently 'traditional morality' was implemented and maintained and/or 'reproduced' by state and later on by citizens too (Buluta 6).

In 1933, Article 121 of the Soviet Criminal Code, stated that sodomy was a crime punishable with 5 years in prison (Underwood 42); "homosexuality came to be reviled as a tool against the state, while heterosexual relationships were seen as both correct and patriotic", as "static gender roles and the ideological responsibility of the Soviet couple to work during the day and produce children at night, homosexuality was perceived as defying both appropriate gendered behaviour and the couple's responsibility to society" (Underwood 42). Thus, all public spaces were legal only for heterosexual subjects. However, as Cicelis research or accounts of homosexual men from Soviet Lithuania show, the reality was different (less criminalizing) in Baltic states, than in Russia (14). It was rather used "as a tool to control (in)visibility of men with same-sex desires, while ensuring that they remained loyal to the Soviet regime" (Cicelis 15). By 'silencing' homosexual communities and restraining their participation in public spaces it created a myth of heterosexuality and enforced the ideologized union between a man and a woman as the only one that exists.

The reconstruction or rebuilding projects reshaped not only the Lithuanian landscape and/or implemented new, supposedly ‘shared’ values and identities, but was part of elimination politics too. In the first years, forceful forgetting was implemented and myth-making started. Urban space and symbols were one of many tools to *russificate* one’s original identity. The Socialist reality invented new types of places of commemoration, remembering and forgetting, new symbols, meanings and human relations, and with that imposed identity of the soviet citizen. Urban projects and ‘modernization’ “cod[ed] power in a landscape,” and by doing that “shape[d] the formation of identity” (Hall 195, 204).

The *russification* of Lithuanian symbols, history, language, images, etc. was supposed to dominate, overshadow and/or ‘overwrite’ Lithuanian identities, oppress any attempt of individuality and non-normativity. However, people too formed, enforced, contested, etc. these spatial politics that were imposed by Soviet authorities (Baron 380). For instance, “marginal” groups appropriated the public spaces and hidden locales of Soviet cities, creating their own alternative geographies of sexuality...which confronted, challenged or subverted official conceptions of urban space” (Baron 387). It is important to keep in mind that people are not passive actors existing in the space, they too shape spatial narratives, give them meanings and subscribe, contest and adjust to the ideologies it entails.

Chapter II

Linking Past and Present through space_ The case of Vilnius

Architecture_ Memory_ Trauma

In this chapter, my goal is to prove that the ideological tools of the Soviet Union, which were mentioned before, are still haunting Lithuanian society and identity today. I will mostly focus on analysing Lukiškių square, to show how collective trauma manifests itself through spatial narratives.

Martin Hall refers to Lefebvre's notion of "recognition effect", in which the 'monumentalization' of landscape enables repression to be redescribed as celebration" (205, 206). Thus, the forceful placement of the Communist leaders, 'heroes' and symbols in urban landscapes forced the colonized to celebrate Socialist life and union, and invited to forget the repression (and the past). Karen E. Till says that "consolidation of sovereignty and the formation of national identity commonly relate to "official places of memory... created to establish a topography of 'a people' and to maintain social stability, existing power relations, and institutional continuity" (qtd. in Diener and Hagen 13). This, again, demonstrates that Soviet ideology not only aimed to rewrite Lithuanian present and future but past and memory too.

Diener and Hagen write that monuments form a national identity and "affirmation of state sovereignty" (13). However, these 'remembrances' "are highly selective and involve a significant amount of 'forgetting' alternative narratives" (Diener and Hagen 13). The reminders of the former regime or figures involved in that regime are often "purged from the urban landscape" (Diener and Hagen 13). Therefore, it is not surprising that after Lithuania

regained its Independency (11 March 1990), the sculptures of socialism soon started falling. On 23 August 1991, the sculpture of Lenin was eliminated from Lukiškių square.⁵ The crowd of people was chanting and applauding the fall of Lenin's sculpture, and being entertained by the fact that while removing him, 'he lost his legs' (see Pic. No.1 below). Many more soviet sculptures were taken down over the years, the most recent one being the beforementioned working-class man and woman (Fig.2), but I will focus on the phenomenon of Lukiškių square here, to illustrate the collective trauma.



Pic.No.1: Juknevičius, J. *Po žlugusio pučo Maskvoje, 1991 m. rugpjūčio 23 d. Vilniaus Lukiškių aikštėje nukeliamas V.I.Lenino paminklas*, 15min, 11 March 2020,

<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/sovietinio-rezimo-simbolis-lenino-paminklas-vilniaus-lukiskiu-aikste-paliko-be-koju-ir-pirsto-56-1286494>.

⁵ During the occupation, the square was renamed as the Lenin's square.

Palonen writes that “to exist, nations have to be articulated and imagined... identification through symbols is crucial to that process, whether we identify ourselves with or in contrast to them” (45). In the previous chapter, I mentioned how Lithuanian national symbols were erased and rewritten. Consequently, the falling Soviet sculptures indicate the wish to recreate the nation’s authentic image and identity, and to escape the past marked with terror and alien ideologies. As Palonen states, “generally symbolic landscapes are considered tools for writing a common past, regarded by many theorists as central to nation-building” (45). After Lithuanian Independence, the street names regained their old names or got the new Lithuanian names; new places of commemoration were invented and some of the old ones’ demolished. However, the question of the Lukiškių square continues to be an unresolved question which is worth analysing through the trauma and memory theories’ perspective.

In 1999, Lithuanian Parliament declared that Lukiškės square should be the main representative/commemorative square of Lithuania dedicated to the history of struggles for freedom. This symbolic meaning till this day causes arguments and discussions about the usage of the space. In 2008, municipality of Vilnius city arranged a competition dedicated to the reconstruction of the square and the creation of the symbol of freedom. When the projects were presented to the public, the disagreements arose. Older generations wanted a memorial, while younger generations wanted a recreational city space without direct associations with the sufferings of the Lithuanian nation. Due to this disagreement and the involvement of legal authorities, the competition was cancelled. Some sort of symbolism came back to the square in 2013 during the national military day (23 November), when the giant flag of the coat of arms of Lithuania (Vytis) was placed in the middle of the square. The initiator of this idea said that “Vytis flag and military were always inseparable: with Vytis we won many battles, we ‘kicked out’ Tsar’s Russian military in 1661...” (Siaurys). His words and the

national symbol in the square illustrate the collective wish to ‘recreate’ the past that is distant from the soviet era; the past that is ‘ours’, and the square that is marked with ‘our’ symbols. As Pierre Nora notes, “independence has swept into history societies newly awakened from their ethnological slumbers by colonial violation” (7).

In 2017, the square was re-opened after one year of reconstruction that primarily took place due to its ill-condition. However, as Petrulis said, any architectural form/space is ideologically charged; and as Lefebvre, I too inveigh to see the space as neutral. Thus, the replacement of the former red pavements of the square (see Pic. no.2 below) with the grey bricks, dismantling of the centre structure into path-branches, and placement of the Vytis in the centre (see picture no.3 bellow) is the statement of Lithuania disavowing the Soviet-colonial past. This resonates with the words of the former mayor of Vilnius: “Today, for the first time, we are finally walking on the European square and not the one that reminds us of the Soviet times” (Šimašius). I myself recall my friends and acquaintances from Vilnius wondering aloud ‘when will we finally replace these communistic-red pavements of the Lukiškės square?’



Pic. No.2: Vanagas, K. *Liepos viduryje bus uždaryta Lukiškių aikštė*. Diena, *diena.lt*,
<https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/liepos-viduryje-bus-uzdaryta-lukiskiu-aikste-757104>.



Pic. No.3: *Lukiškių aikštės žaliosios zonos Gyvybės medis. Projekto vizualizacija*. Verso žinios,
 vz.lt, <https://www.vz.lt/laisvalaikis/akiraciai/2018/04/30/kovos-laukas--lukiskiu-aikste>.

This wish to escape the ‘colonial past,’ illustrates how history is actively present in the everyday life of Lithuanian people, how certain urban spaces still evoke that history. As Anouk Bélanger writes, “markers of memory are everywhere in the city: they are buried in language and dialect, found on commemorative plaques, on buildings and battlefields...” (70). Precisely because of this ‘presence’ and ‘everywhere’, there is a strong communal longing to ‘forget’ and with to ‘finally walk on the European squares and not Soviet’. For the same reasons of ‘forgetting,’ the Soviet sculptures were eliminated from the public spaces, so that they would not ‘remind’ and would not point to the history that traumatized different generations in different ways. Many scholars of memory studies noted that ‘forgetting’ is a

substantial element of trauma. For example, Caruth says that “working through the traumatic experience may, then, enact a kind of amnesia – yet, and seemingly paradoxically, due to the belatedness⁶ of trauma it is, of course, only through forgetting that the traumatic event can be grasped” (qtd. in Ward 178). Hence, the architectural attempts of destroying, taking off and rewriting (or in other words the attempts to forget), that were happening in the past decades, indicate the existence of collective trauma in Lithuanian society.

Even though there were disagreements or different visions for the square due to generational differences, it does not mean that the generation ‘afterwards’ is not affected by trauma. Here, Hirsch’s notion of ‘postmemory’ could be used. She describes it as follows, “those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displayed by the stories of the previous generations, shaped by the traumatic events that they can neither understand nor re-create” (qtd. In Ward 180). Therefore, the younger generation (as in the case of the square) might seek to forget even harder, as they cannot understand the events to the full extend, but are still living with the ghosts of the past, as their parents, grandparents, brothers and neighbours were affected by this traumatic experience directly, and thus foreshadowing their being (belonging) in Independent Lithuania; but I will grasp on it a little bit more later on.

It is important to say that, in the postcolonial context, memory is in between the paradox of wanting to remember and forget the traumatic past at the same time (Ward 172). Here, again, I must bring the question of the Lukiškių square as an example. In the summer of 2020, an open Beach was installed in the square (see Pic.No.4), containing beach chairs, a volleyball pitch, and installation of a screen showing the live view of the Baltic Sea during the day and movies during the night. It was a joyful, seemingly innocent space, with an initial

⁶ In the literature review, I provided a psychological definition of trauma, which said, that the response to the traumatic event is usually ‘delayed’.

idea of ‘freedom’ in mind, and an intention to occupy the square temporarily. However, many people (including former patriots, their children, politicians, intellectuals and more) started vocalizing the issue of the beach, claiming that it is a cultural appropriation, and that it disrespects those who fought and died for freedom, as the square’s initial function was/is to commemorate. Therefore, the beach was removed earlier than it was originally planned.



Pic. No.3: The Open Beach that was temporarily placed in the Lukiškių square in summer of 2020, *We Love Lithuania*, <https://welovelithuania.com/vilniaus-centre-atidarytas-dirbtinis-papludimys/>.

In terms of memory, this incident of the beach illustrates the paradox of wanting to remember and forget at the same time. It is what LaCapra calls “a shifting memorial to the dead: one’s bond with the dead... may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound” (qtd. in Ward 178). Thus, as Ward notes, “it is not as simple as just wishing to forget; the victim also has a duty to the dead to remember past atrocities, and so trauma assumes a memorial function” (178). It seems that those who were against the beach project feel in debt for the dead, feel the need to remember and show ‘respect’ for those who fought for freedom, and, in doing so, preserve the memorial function of the square. Blacker and Etkind, echoing Freudian trauma, note that in terms of collective memory in the Eastern European, there seems to be “somewhat obsessive remembrances of the loss,” and that there are “relations between private and public processes of mourning, as well as the constant danger of slipping in destructive melancholia” (8). In Lithuania, symbolic dates and locations that mark particular moments in history, especially events that are considerably recent, are strongly articulated and people are highly invested in public practices of mourning. However, it is very likely that these are the feelings predominantly of those who experienced trauma directly. Hence, for them it seems admissible to eliminate the symbols of soviet atrocities (red bricks, lights, sculptures etc.), as it eliminates past that is wanted to be forgotten; but it is not morally correct to place beach in the place that is supposed to have the symbolical meaning of commemoration of those who died for freedom, a space that is supposed to serve for mourning. Thus, the paradox of wanting to remember and forget at the same time manifests itself through social discourses and contradictions of the space. However, it also seems to be some sort of collective selective memory that chooses which symbols are for keeping and which are for ‘throwing away’.

It is possible that generations who experienced trauma not directly but through ‘postmemory’ find the beach project to be less problematic. Hence, they rather ‘use’ freedom by laying on the beach than mourn in the public space to commemorate the dead. However, it does not make the younger generations trauma-free; but their memory is perhaps simply less linked to architectural tokens which can trigger the direct associations with the past for those who lived communism. Yet they too might wish to forget, as their lives were restrained and/or guilted⁷ by the narratives of older generations. As Hirsch says, “...postmemory seeks connection. It creates where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall. It mourns a loss that cannot be repaired” (qtd. in Ward 182). Thus, their bounds to the past are still vivid, but their memories or association with the objects of the past are indirect. As Blacker noted, “in Eastern Europe, cities have a particular significance, where urban spaces often contain memories that are either uncomfortable for or alien to their inhabitants” (173). The older generation seems to take on the responsibility to remind to the generation ‘afterwards’ by pointing to the places of commemoration, by retelling stories, and in doing so making the generation of ‘postmemory’ responsible (to remember, commemorate and mourn) too. Blacker and Etkind write, “remembering its losses, a postcatastrophic culture lives on through the subsequent generations, as the survivors who struggle with their traumas give way to descendants who mourn the victims of the catastrophe” (8).

My mother recently noted that in Lithuania there is as if fear or discomfort to talk about communism, that people act as if those 50 years of people’s lives did not exist. She said that ‘we talk about the period ‘in-between wars,’ we praise the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but Soviet Lithuania is somewhat in the margins of public discourses, a period meant ‘to not talk about.’ As Kublys notes, “in the public discourses there seems to be a

⁷ The ‘guilt/shaming’ is quite common ‘practice’ exposed on younger generations by the elderly. It is often followed by the rhetoric of ‘you are taking freedom as a given’, ‘you’re ungrateful’, ‘that’s not why we fought for freedom’, ‘in our time, we had real problems, not like your generation’, etc.

forceful convincing that socialism was all evil, that is why it is wrong, almost forbidden to remember that there was something good in that period” (n.p.). Though his article is critical to the supposed trauma caused by that period, it is worth noticing of what he says about forceful convincing, or my mother’s noted ‘intentional disregard’. Here, I must again, bring Nora, who says that “on one hand we find an integrated, dictatorial memory-unself conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth- and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces” (8). It seems that in Lithuania, this almost dictatorial memory without the past, a wish to look to the ancestry, origins and former ‘heroes,’ is taking place at the moment too. On the other hand, the memories of those who ‘lived’ through communism are constantly present and haunting. As Blacker and Etkind note, “a subject who has suffered a trauma cannot represent the traumatic situation; this representational inability is precisely what constitutes trauma” (9). Thus, the inability to talk about the soviet past, especially without narratives of victimhood vs. evil, seems to constitute the existence of trauma too. The inability to articulate or solve (or ‘represent’) the question of the Lukiškių square also seems to present underlying trauma.

The forgetting of the bad and remembering the beautiful, the forgetting of the socialist period in general and embracing the ancient past, is all but the search for an authentic Lithuanian identity that would be ‘apart’ of socialism, and that would depart from that period for once and for all. This trauma manifests itself through public discourses of ‘silence’ and/or forgetting, and through spatial narratives, as the phenomenon of Lukiškių square proved. It seems that Lukiškių square is, and at the same time aims to become, the *lieux de mémoire*. As *lieux de mémoire* is an interplay of memory and history; the material, symbolical and functional place, which would not exist without symbolic

investment or imagination (Nora 19), one can see that Lukiškių square is already standing in its symbolical, material and functional sense. However, as Nora notes, for a place to be *lieux de mémoire*, one must want to remember, otherwise, it is no different than *lieux d'histoire*; memory attached itself to sites, while history attaches itself to events (19, 22). The paradox of wishing to remember and wishing to forget at the same time problematizes not only the question of the square or symbolical spaces but the living in/with those spaces too, as trauma seems to haunt Lithuanian society/identity in multiple ways. However, I will try to present that in my next chapter.

Chapter III

The question of Sexuality

I already discussed how people are invested in the paradoxes of trauma, living in the spaces of in-between of forgetting and remembering, building collective awareness of the past and running from it at the same time. Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to show how collective trauma is present in the politics of sexual identity today and will argue that disagreements over the partnership law arrive from there.

Paradoxes of Today_ Sexual Nationalism_

I briefly mentioned in the first chapter how sex in the Soviet Union was ‘absent’ and other than heterosexual subjects ‘did not exist.’ Thus, now, when partnership law is being vocally discussed in public discourses, the ‘traditionalist’ group seems to see the question of partnership as a public declaration of one’s sexual activities, the act of sex itself. People express comments such as “I’m tired of all this visibility in media...sleep [implying sex] with whomever you want...but don’t demonstrate it to us” (Alisauskiene); “if you’re laying, then lay silently. We normal ones are laying [implying sex] but we do not scream to the world with whom we’re sleeping” (Inčienė). These and similar comments are circulating in media, giving an impression that visibility of a homosexual subject in society means declaration of one’s sex life. It seems that society that lived in a world of ‘no sex’ and no visibility of homosexual subjects feels conflicted about the liberation of sexual identities, and even talking about sex makes people feel uncomfortable. In all the comments on the social media that I have read, the word sex is barely used, it is usually ‘laying together,’ ‘sleeping,’

and various Lithuanian slurs. Paradoxically, people seem to have no problem writing insulting and hateful comments, but to write the word 'sex' in public space seems to cause discomfort, as sex was and is a 'private' domain of one's life and it is no public's business. Observing all that, and not only through social media space but through space that was lived (I too grew up within the confinement of 'sex silence'), it does seem reasonable to claim that this 'privacy' too is the legacy of occupation, and any sort of imagination that goes beyond the 'private' seems to make people resist. It suggests that if homosexual subjects would stay in 'silence' there would be no problem.

The resentment from the public, due to 'sudden visibility,' is strongly articulated in 'traditionalists'' discourses, and is taking shape of radical heterosexual nationalism. In far-right political agendas, heterosexuality is being presented, almost in the same way as in the politics of the Soviet Union, as "correct and patriotic"; and homosexuality as almost "a tool against the state" (Underwood 42). Except now it is being linked to Western influence and ideology. One of the traditionalist's writes, "*The Great Family Defense March* is not any protest, but it is the beginning of revival and *sąjūdis*⁸ [movement] for national values... with this protest the fight for family and traditional values only begins...it is obvious that majority is categorically against the ultraliberal government and Istanbul's convention's ideology that is being forced upon people by Parliament's majority... *sąjūdis* not only invites to stop the expansion of liberal communism, but to win back the spaces that were already hijacked by members of this ideology" (Krivickas). Here, Krivickas not only uses rhetoric that places the heterosexual subject as 'correct and patriotic,' but also uses literary tropes that directly connote the Soviet Union. He compares the 'ultraliberal' values to communism; he calls Istanbul's convention 'ideology,' uses words such as 'hijacked,' etc.,

⁸ It is important to keep this word in original (Lithuanian) language, as it directly connotes Reform Movement of Lithuania which was led during the struggles of Lithuanian independence of 90s.

and by doing so, suggests that providing equal rights for homosexual subjects is not compatible with Lithuanian values.

Here, it is worth remembering Jaunait et al., who said that in nationalist movements, gender politics were/is used to codify collective behaviours in private and public spaces, and not only to invent an identity that would be ‘authentic’ or ‘traditional,’ but to express the political authority too (III). It is typical in colonial and postcolonial contexts, authors say. In both Soviet and Independent Lithuania, sexual politics are used to shape the ‘traditional’ image of society, and any non-conformity is being framed as anti-national, anti-Lithuanian. Traditionalists, for those who do not fall into their image of ‘perfect Lithuanian’ (that is to be heterosexual), suggest them to leave Lithuania: “if you want to live in the Western-style then go to the West” (Venckuvienė). As Kumari wrote, in nationalism, gender and sexuality too construct the politics of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ (35). Thus, for ‘traditionalists’ *us* is to be heterosexual and *them* is to be homosexual. Mosse argues that “nationalisms are connected to the notion of respectability, meaning “decent and correct” manners, which refer to decorum as well as modesty, purity, and the practice of virtue, morals, and proper attitudes towards sexuality” (qtd. in Kumari 35). Here, again, the notion of ‘visibility’ comes to place, meaning that ‘decent and correct’ Lithuanian is the one that does not expose their sexual desires, does not talk about it, and on top of that is heterosexual; and if the homosexual subject wants to exist in Lithuania, it is only under the condition of ‘silence,’ otherwise ‘they can leave to the West.’ Kumari writes how “many theorists of nationalism have noted the tendency of nationalism to liken the nation to a family. It is a male household in which both men and women have ‘natural’ roles to play” (37). Thus, it is no surprise that in far-right’s rhetoric the politics of gender and sexuality plays a crucial role.

However, the homosexual community, as *peripherized* ‘other,’ is not confirming to the ‘silence’ anymore, and contests the centre through spatial narratives.

Therefore, in the next sub-chapter, I would like to present these negotiations and the reaction/resentment of traditionalists towards LGBTQ+ activism.

Contestation of identity through space

I mentioned before Lefebvrian notion of ‘recognition effect’ where monumentalization of the landscape enables repression to be redescribed as a celebration. The same notion should be mentioned in relation to the contemporary context of LGBTQ+ identities. As the partnership law caused a lot of resistance from the general public, the city space(s) is a terrain of political action and/or space is an active participant in the political (sexuality) questions. Though, if following Lefebvre, the urban space is/was never neutral and is always loaded with meanings. Therefore, I would like to go into more specific examples of the beforementioned ‘recognition effect’.

On 11 March 2021, which is a Day of Restoration of Independence of Lithuania, two artists Karolina Rimkutė and Linas Salučka, created an installation in one of the underground pedestrian crossings of Vilnius city. They painted one of the walls in the LGBTQ+ rainbow flag colours and accommodated statements such as ‘your neighbour’, ‘your voter’, ‘your dentist’, etc. (Sargautytė n.p.) (see Pic. No. 1 below). Less than a week after, a group of men painted the wall over in the colours of the Lithuanian national flag (Saugartytė n.p.) (see Pic. No.2 below). A couple of days after, on the same wall, the words ‘don’t paint us over – we too are children of Lithuania’ appeared (Liubertaitė n.p.) (See Pic. No.3 below). Some more days later, the pink reversed triangle, symbolizing resistance to homophobic power structures was painted on the same wall (Liubertaitė n.p.) (see Pic. No.4 below). Then, the wall was painted over in the colours of the national flag again. In June same artist, Rimkutė, with a group of friends, incorporated fragments of the rainbow flag on

the Lithuanian national flag. It also contained the words “silence = death” (see Pic. No. 5 and 6 below).



Pic. No.1: Gedvila, “Žygimantas. Vaivorykštės spalvomis išmarginta požeminės perėjos siena,”

15min.Lt, 16 March 2021, [https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/vizualieji-](https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/vizualieji-menai/pozemineje-vilniaus-perejoje-55-metru-vaivorykste-drasinanti-lgbt-bendruomene-ir-kviecianti-visuomene-susimastyti-929-1471034)

[menai/pozemineje-vilniaus-perejoje-55-metru-vaivorykste-drasinanti-lgbt-bendruomene-ir-kviecianti-visuomene-susimastyti-929-1471034](https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/vizualieji-menai/pozemineje-vilniaus-perejoje-55-metru-vaivorykste-drasinanti-lgbt-bendruomene-ir-kviecianti-visuomene-susimastyti-929-1471034).



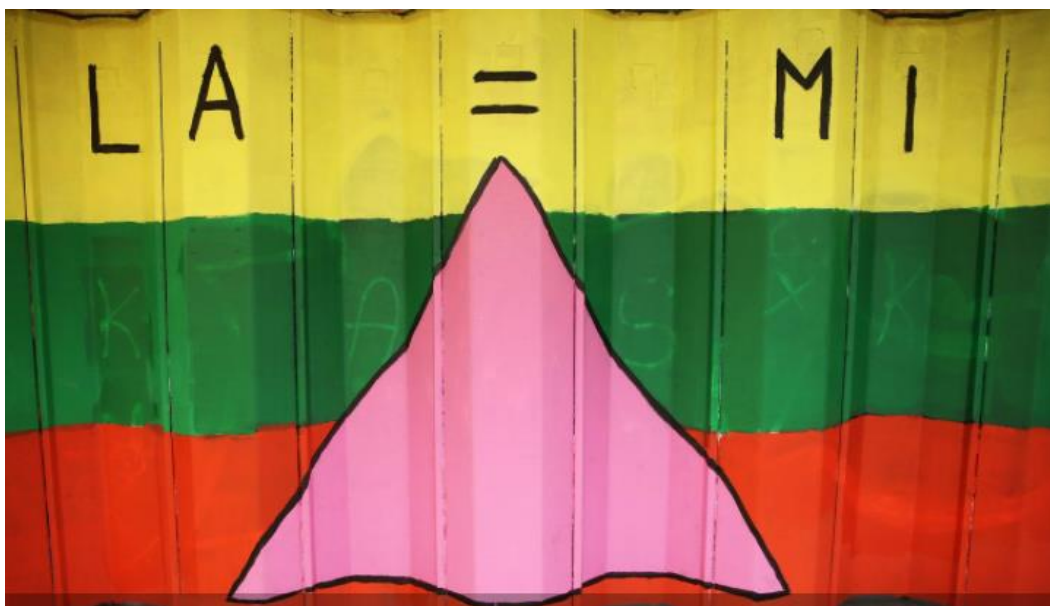
Pic. No. 2, Gedvila, Žygimanto. “Vaivorykštės neliko – ji uždažyta Lietuvos vėliavos spalvomis.”

15minLt, 19 Mar. 2021, www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/vizualieji-menai/vilniaus-pozemines-perejos-vaivorykste-uzdazyta-lietuvos-veliavos-spalvomis-kurejai-neliudi-lgl-vertinimu-tai-panasu-i-neapykantos-akta-929-1473728#_.



Pic. No. 3, Bauras, T. “Penktadienį ant trispalvė nudažytos sienos atsirado naujas užrašas”. *Lrytas.lt*, 20

March 2021, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvsdiena/aktualijos/2021/06/14/news/ivertino-tremties-ir-rezistencijos-itaka-lietuviu-tapatybei-pastebi-pasikeitusi-naratyva-19716053/>.



Danisevičius, R. “Vilniaus Požeminėje Perėjoje tęsiasi palaikymas LGBT bendruomenei: ant trispalvės pasirodė itin reikšmingas simbolis.” *Lrytas.lt*, 21 Mar. 2021,
www.lrytas.lt/lietuvsdiena/aktualijos/2021/03/24/news/vilniaus-pozemineje-perejoje-tesiasi-palaikymas-lgbt-bendruomenei-ant-trispalves-pasirode-itin-reiksmingas-simbolis-18761382/.



Pic. No. 5, Kalinskas, Julius. “perdažyta siena Vilniaus požeminėje perėjoje.” *15min.lt*, 19 July 2021.

https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/veliavu-karas-vilniaus-perejoje-tesiasi-ant-trispalves-vel-vaivorykste-56-1517622#_.



Pic. No. 6, Kalinskas, Julius. “perdažyta siena Vilniaus požeminėje perėjoje.” *15min.lt*, 19 July 2021.

https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/veliavu-karas-vilniaus-perejoje-tesiasi-ant-trispalves-vel-vaivorykste-56-1517622#_.

This painting and repainting are not only a political statement, but a declaration of one's right to space and the state, as 'we too are children of this country.' Peeren et al. say that peripheral visions are “about looking for ways to regard the periphery as able to negotiate its inevitable relation with the centre on a variety of terms that belie its construction as statically ‘other’” (Peeren, et.al 27). Therefore, the ‘other’ is now claiming the ‘inevitable,’ its very existence and right to belong. By placing the symbols of LGBTQ+ in the public spaces, the community asks for recognition and is recognized in return (e.g., many Lithuanian companies and businesses are expressing LGBTQ+ solidarity in their marketing programs (see Pic. No. 7 below)). Lefebvre's ‘recognition effect’ explains ‘monumentalization of landscape’ as ‘enabling repression to be redescribed as celebration’ (Hall 205, 206). The rainbow flag, with slogans about love and peace, that is appearing in multiple spaces of the city at the moment (see Pic. No.8 below) is a declaration of celebrating one's identity, despite the repression, imposed by the heterosexual traditionalist 'majority.'



Pic. No. 7, Lithuanian businesses and companies showing support for LGBTQ+ community. My collage.



Pic.No. 8, Stasiulevičiūtė, O. and Žygimantas Gedvila. “LGBTQ+ bendruomenę palaikantis gatvės menas.” *15min*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujiena/vizualieji-menai/socialines-zinutes-ir-gatves-menas-kodel-palaikymas-lgbtq-bendruomenei-persikeleant-sieniu-929-1485642>.

By claiming the space (in both LGBTQ+ and Lithuanian national flag cases), one negotiates one’s right to be in the city and one’s right to citizenship. Preen et al. say that the “question of whether the periphery is inside or outside is deeply relevant when power relations are articulated through center-periphery distinctions, whether the periphery is considered part of the center (albeit distant from it) or whether it constitutes its border or is external to it has significant implications for the functions assigned to the periphery and for its ability to redefine the relationship to the center” (4). In today’s Lithuanian society, homosexual and heterosexual beings (and the power relations involved in it) are defined through the centre and periphery relations, where heterosexual couples are free to legalize their partnership or get married while homosexual couples are left to live in the ‘shadows.’

However, the peripheral being (of inside, but distant from the centre) is contesting these power dynamics and is breaking the constructed heterosexual ('normative') spaces, both symbolical ones and physical. As well "in figurative uses that do not refer to a spatial relation, peripherality is less a fixed status than the result of an active process driven by established or emerging power structures" (Pereen et. al 6). The 'established' as well as emerging far-right power structures are being contested at the moment by the periphery, and negotiating its inevitable relation/belonging to the centre.

Pierre Nora says that *lieux de memoir* originate "with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies" (12). Thus, it is also symbolical spaces; spaces that are not necessarily physical, but symbolically marked in collective consciousness/memory: certain dates and celebrations that have a symbolical memorial meaning. Therefore, it is very likely that the fact that the LGBTQ+ flag was painted on the 11th of March, a date that marks Lithuania gaining its Independency back from the USSR, is also not accidental. By painting it on this symbolic date, it also declares that 'freedom too belongs to us.' For the same symbolism, it is very likely that the traditionalists went and painted the Lithuanian flag on top as if claiming that 'there is only one flag that marks freedom.'

Though this negotiation over the underground pedestrian wall is a symbolic one, it constitutes the bigger power dynamics of not only who gets to be in the city (and the state), but who is in the centre too. Men who painted the LGBTQ+ flag over said to the *15min* media portal that they are not against the LGBT community; they think that this group of society is getting too much attention (Liubertaitė n.p.). This statement demonstrates the 'centre' not willing to give the centre's position to the periphery. The fact that 'periphery' does not want to be in the periphery anymore (does not want to be silenced, as the slogan

“silence=death” indicate) and demands for equal rights, angers the centre, as their status as the ‘centre’ is being contested. As Lefebvre said, “people fight not only over a piece of turf, but about the sort of reality that it constitutes” (Molotch 888). These spaces, marked by LGBTQ+ symbols, not only expose the existence of the community that was for long silenced, but constitute the reality of ‘unavoidable’: parliament’s considerations over the Istanbul convention, partnership law and provision of equal human rights to all citizens of society. Thus, the current fight is not only about who gets to belong in the city (or the state), but who gets to be in the centre too, as the opposition is clearly bothered by the attention that the LGBTQ+ community is gaining.

Linking Back to Trauma

As it was stated before, trauma not only is present when the issue of space comes to question but also highly regulates the lives of those who live with/in those spaces. Blacker and Etkind write that “in mourning as well as in trauma, the subject obsessively returns to certain experiences of the past, and these returns can obstruct this subject’s ability to live in the present” (10). In the light of partnership law, this obsessive return to the past seems to be the case. The rhetoric of “invasion of the West,” “ultraliberal communism,” “gendered ideology,” “LGBTQ+ ideology,” “enemy,” “we need to protect our country,” “threat for Lithuanian traditions,” all these statements that I already indicated before, seem to constitute this ‘obsessive return to the past.’ More detailed ‘obsessive return to the past’ can be seen in the following comment (posted by one of the traditionalists under the post regarding LGBTQ+ question, on Facebook): “We were occupied...we lived according to symbols of socialism...we fought for freedom, so we could live like others tell us, or so we could live the way we want to? We should never forget how life looked when we were

constantly dictated what to do, how to do, how to live... what side one's apartment can be, what kind of car one can drive, where to have vacations, what kind of songs to sing" (Kuliešius).

This constant referring to the past and comparison of the partnership law with the Western ideology, imposed on Lithuania by alien forces, for me seems to suggest that the very reason for resistance is the underlying trauma of communism. The aggressive acts of repainting LGBTQ+ symbols, The March of Family Defence, threats to political leaders, the rhetoric of 'let's unite,' 'let's defend' and so on and so forth, seems as if traditionalists are in a fight for Lithuanian freedom again. Paranoid and imaginative alien forces that they refer to, suggest the existence of collective trauma that still highly regulates people's lives. Thus, by 'defending' Lithuanian values, the far-right feel ensured that Lithuania will stay an authentic and independent country because before any authenticity and individualism were impossible and punishable, as my first chapter shows. The desperate wish to keep an 'authentic' image, that was taken away during the period of Soviet occupation, seems to 'obstruct' Lithuania's ability 'to live in the present,' as Blacker and Etkind argued (10).

Therefore, it seems that the battle is not so much against LGBTQ+ as such, but against an imagined enemy that is preparing to occupy Lithuania again. This radical 'traditionalism' or simply nationalism, Nora notes, is typical for societies that were violated by colonial powers (Nora 7). Kumari in her text poses the question, "why we are afraid of homosexuality or so called 'illegitimate sexualities' (as society and state perceive them). Why are these sexualities seen as threats to a nation?" (37). I propose to try to answer this question, in the context of Eastern and Central Europe, by applying theories of memory and trauma. It is very likely that a vast majority of CEE countries are still haunted by the period of Soviet occupation, and that collective trauma has its implications on the politics of today. Thereby, I propose to examine the relation between post-communist collective trauma (that

manifests itself in radical forms of nationalism) and homophobia, as they seem to be highly related.

Conclusion

I recall from my childhood and teenage years the stories of ‘victimhood’ and stories of Lithuanian ‘heroes.’ I recall how we were collectively convinced to perceive Soviet Russia, and consequentially Russia, as an enemy, and stories of the strong spirited Lithuanians who resisted. I recall stories of my parents, grandparents, and in general of the older generation, which brought me to imagining unimaginable narratives. I recall conversations among friends where we were contemplating how lucky we are to live in an independent country. I recall older generations reminding us of the past and telling us to be grateful for our freedom. Each time a younger generation would do ‘unforgivable’ they would be guilted for not appreciating the freedom, that our ancestors fought for. I recall annual partisan celebrations and readings of eulogies, journals or memoirs of the exiled, and monuments and places of commemoration. The more I think of that past, the more it makes me reflect upon the concept of collective trauma. I am a generation of ‘postmemory,’ who has no direct connection to the places of remembrance but remembers, due to generationally transmitted knowledge and symbols, and spaces of mourning. I am more and more convinced that collective trauma in Lithuanian society exists and actively modulates people’s lives today.

With this paper, I did not aim to look for whom to blame, nor tried to justify Lithuanian present narratives and political agendas. The concept of trauma does not serve here for this purpose. Kublys notices that in certain public discourses of Lithuania it seems to become common to blame everything on the post-communist trauma, while there was/is no decent research made on what real implications trauma has on Lithuanian society and on multiple identities that it inhabits (n.p.). Kublys writes that by misusing the concept of trauma, it takes the collective responsibility from actions of today; by using ‘we are not

faulty – it's communism'; it does not solve the present issues nor proposes anything for the future (n.p.).

However, I think that a decent trauma analysis is necessary to understand the implication of communism on Lithuanian society. Only by studying it to the full extend, it can be clear if it does solve something and if it can offer something for the future. This study should be done not for the reasons of 'blaming,' but for understanding, and hopefully dealing with certain realities of today with higher sensitivity, or as LaCapra suggests "a psychological approach to traumatic experience may prove helpful in seeking to understand the past and negotiate identities in the present" (qtd. in Ward 176). As my paper showed, collective trauma is related to homophobic expressions and actions of the group that I called 'traditionalists' in this paper. However, it is crucial to analyse Lithuanian history and the present through the concept of trauma and memory and examine in what other ways it manifests itself in Lithuanian society today. As Leela Gandhi said that trauma theory is a rather therapeutic approach which is crucial in order to recover (qtd. in Ward 172).

With this paper, I aimed to set a beginning for possible further analysis of collective trauma. I used spatial narratives to illustrate the impact of space on collective identities, and demonstrate the existence of trauma and how it manifests itself in spaces. As well as to demonstrate that collective trauma (and space) is related to the politics of sexuality. However, I am fully aware that including only spatial narratives offers a limited study of collective trauma. Therefore, I hope that this study could continue one day with more extensive and inclusive research, that would be expanded historiographically, culturally and socially, as well as would include more public discourses into consideration.

As well as, it is important to not forget that soviet propaganda functioned through all domains of society, thus further analysis would have to expand itself and go beyond spatial narratives; one of the most crucial fields to analyse would be religion, as it

still has a strong authority in Lithuanian society today (also plays a huge role in regard to the question of sexuality and the Partnership law), which I speculate is because of the role of the religious communities during the Soviet occupation.

Also, important to say that such analysis would require to encompass the variety of individual identities that might have been touched by trauma differently. It would have to include LGBTQ+ communities, Lithuanian dissidents, former partisans, migrants, active participants of the regime, resistors, exiled, as well as the variety of ethnic groups that lived and still lives and shapes Lithuanian society today. It should also include the study of generational trauma: children whose parents were partisans, children of executors, KGB agents, children of victims, children of Independent Lithuania, etc.

This paper aimed to propose a hypothesis that trauma might be the reason for current homophobia and fear of so-called 'liberal' values in Lithuania. Most Eastern and Central European countries are going through similar issues and non-supportive politics of LGBTQ+ identities. All of these countries were affected by war, and later by the totalitarian regime of Soviet Russia, which erased individualism, authentic image and memory of the nation, and forced an ideologized image of a 'perfect citizen.' There is no doubt that trauma, in all of these former USSR countries, exist and highly regulates the realities of today. There are some studies already made in the field of trauma and post-socialism, but there are no attempts to link trauma and homophobia. I believe that this approach deserves to be examined further, as it might answer 'why?' and from there, hopefully, help to move forward.

Attachment



Fig.1: *Lenino aikštė ir paminklas* (Lenin's square and monument, my trans.), The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. <http://elibrary.mab.lt/>, <http://elibrary.mab.lt/handle/1/293>.



Fig.2: Grigelytė, Judita. Statues of the workers on the Green Bridge of Vilnius, Verslo žinios. *vz.lt*, 14 July 2015, <https://www.vz.lt/laisvalaikis/kultura-ir-visuomene/2015/07/14/zaliojo-tilto-skulpturos--istorijos-naikinimas-ar-sovietmecio-zenklu-atsisakymas>.

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