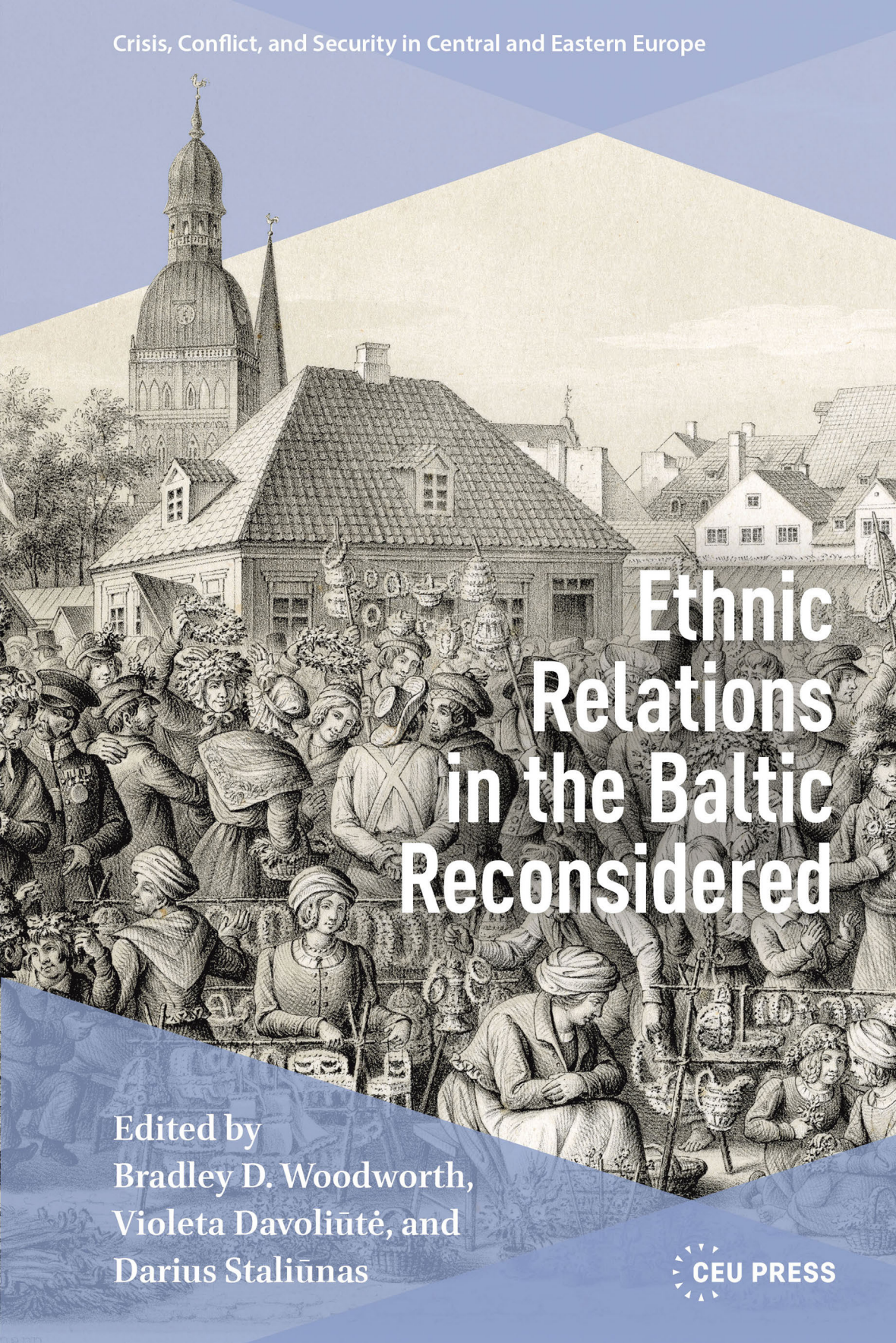


Crisis, Conflict, and Security in Central and Eastern Europe



Ethnic Relations in the Baltic Reconsidered

Edited by
Bradley D. Woodworth,
Violeta Davoliūtė, and
Darius Staliūnas

 CEU PRESS

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Crisis, Conflict and Security in Central and Eastern Europe

Security, crisis and conflicts play a crucial role in the international relations of Central and Eastern European states and in internal affairs, between national, ethnic and religious groups. Crises, conflicts, security issues and their perceptions are closely linked to state building, nationalism, the fall of Soviet hegemony, as well as multi-ethnicity and multi-culturality in Central and Eastern Europe. The series discusses the emergence, fostering and sustainability of conflicts and crises, as well as the perception of security problems and the attempts to create security from various perspectives in modern times. The series includes volumes written by scholars of various disciplines, but with a focus on history. It aims to provide interpretations and historical dimensions relating to the current triggers of in-security and conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe. In doing so, the series provides an innovative insight into current and urgent research problems.

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Bradley D. Woodworth, Violeta Davoliūtė, and Darius Staliūnas

Introduction

Violeta Davoliūtė, Darius Staliūnas, and Bradley D. Woodworth

Abstract: In this introduction, the editors outline the volume and the contributors' novel approach to understanding the Baltic region through examining the lateral relations between its many peoples over the past century and a half.

Keywords: interethnic relations, identities, governance, empire, violence

This book presents a novel approach to understanding the Baltic region through examining the lateral relations between its many peoples over the past century and a half. This is not the essentially pointillist approach of grouping together multiple examples of separate national narratives, nor is it a comparison of development paths of ethno-cultural groups as they became modern political nations. The new scholarship presented here also avoids the paradigmatic linearity that is the inevitable outcome of the story of imperial collapse and genesis of new nations, with some successful and some not. Instead, ethnic relations are treated as a vantage point for a reconsideration of the interethnic Baltic experience through the lenses of identity, governance, empire, and violence.

The contributors to this volume refer to the Baltic region as the lands of the southern littoral of the Baltic Sea that in the twentieth century became the republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, a term that has equivalents in the German *Baltikum* and in the Soviet-era Russian *Pribaltika*. The editors are very aware of the wider uses of the term “Baltic” than these, where “Baltic” is used to refer to the lands and peoples that border all of the Baltic Sea.¹ The use of the term “Baltic” makes sense in reference to the narrower definition

¹ Notably, North, *The Baltic: A History*.

given the parallels between these lands and peoples in the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, when this region was administratively divided into a number of tsarist provinces, then as independent states in the interwar period, followed by Soviet occupation first in 1940 and then again from 1944–45 to 1991, when independence for all three was regained.

The frequent redrawing of geographic borders and boundaries among collectivities during this period destabilized fixed identities, generating novel, hybrid ways of self-identification along with a hardening of oppositions. Innovative forms of coexistence interlapped with violent, sometimes genocidal, conflicts. Ethnic relations are an important topic in the history of this region given current tensions in East-Central Europe. While the transition to democracy after the collapse of the USSR was peaceful, the presence of multiple ethnic groups within each state is potentially an explosive issue, especially in view of Russia's current aggression in Ukraine—a development which can be seen as an ongoing process of disintegration of the Russian Empire and the Soviet one that followed it.

Based on new sources and approaches in political history, nationalism, memory studies, cultural anthropology, and sociology by scholars deeply invested in the region, the studies in this volume provide a timely update to traditional perspectives on nations and nationalism. The volume highlights not only the most important episodes of ethnic coexistence and conflict in the Baltic region from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, but also issues that have received less scholarly attention. The volume concludes with two broad views of the scholarly literature on interethnic relations in the Baltic region, one by a historian and one by a political scientist.

The chapters are organized into these themes:

- Identities: ascribed, contested, and situational
- Crisis and governance
- Legacy of empire
- Legacy of violence
- State of the field and pointing the way forward

Identities: Ascribed, Contested, and Situational

The period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century is the age of the strengthening of ethno-nationalism as an ideology and social movement in East-Central Europe, and thus also in Lithuania, Latvia, and

Estonia. This ideology was based on the frame of mind that the world is made up of nations that differ in language and ethno-culture. Membership in the nation is innate or hereditary and its rejection by an individual is unnatural, likened to remaining asleep and often to illness. This way of thinking about nations was typical not only of activists of nondominant ethnic groups influenced by Herder's ideas, but also of the adepts of Russian nationalism, as well as of tsarist officials. If there were members of the ruling elite in the Romanov Empire who espoused the concept of the civic nation (*rossiiskaia natsiia*), it was no match for the dominant ideology, which sought to assimilate the weaker ethnic groups and promoted a segregationist policy towards the stronger ones.

While language was the main marker of nationhood for activists from nondominant ethnic groups, the confessional criterion still dominated the Russian discourse in the late imperial period. However, both—leaders of national movements as well as tsarist officials and Russian nationalists—often, as in other regions affected by nationalism, were pragmatic and manipulated these criteria. While the confessional criterion worked well when it came to proving that a “person of Polish origin” was not Russian because the person was Catholic, tsarist officials completely overlooked this marker when they claimed that Belarusian Catholics were Russian. The Lithuanian intelligentsia persuaded the peasants that they were all members of one nation because they spoke the same language, but when they included the Belarusian Catholics in the Lithuanian national body, they were already relying mainly on the criterion of ethnic origin. The fiercest struggle between the various nationalisms was between groups living on the fringes of ethnic territories and those less affected by nationalist ideology.

In the nineteenth century, new forms of social identity and cohesion gradually began to form in an emerging public sphere. New means of communication such as newspapers and expanded book publishing helped further new social cohesions that breached the divisions of social estate (Ger. *Stand*, Rus. *soslovie*). Clubs, choirs, learned societies, artisans' groups, and other associations began to form outside the traditional boundaries necessitated by the legal separation of estates. The development of a civil society was much stronger in the three Baltic provinces of Estland, Livland, and Courland—the homeland of Estonians, Latvians, and Baltic Germans—than in the provinces of the so-called Northwestern Region that were Lithuanian (and Belarusian) areas, where Russian state control of society was significantly more oppressive.

Catherine Gibson analyzes how various outside observers characterized two groups on the border regions of ethnicity and confession—*poluvertsy*

(“Half-Believers”)—Orthodox inhabitants in western Pskov province, who spoke a language which closely resembled Estonian and retained some pre-Christian religious practices (approx. 15,000 individuals)—and Russian speakers in Estland province who had converted from Orthodoxy to Lutheranism (5,000 individuals). Although the etymology of the term would suggest certain denominational identification, this chapter shows that the term *poluvertsy* had very different connotations, sometimes even having ethnic group characteristics. Gibson demonstrates that in the descriptions of these groups one can see how various parties sought to claim *poluvertsy* for their own ideological purposes. This chapter also shows that in the late imperial period the language of “in-betweenness” was widespread. It should be noted that some of the main protagonists of this chapter were ethnographers and statisticians. Although these sciences were also influenced by normative conceptions of identity, scholars were much more likely than tsarist officials to describe hybrid identifications (they were more concerned with “how it really was” than “how it should be”). Gibson’s study analyzes the diverse meanings attached to the term *poluvertsy*, but it does not pretend to reveal the “voice” of members of these groups.

The theme of hybridity is continued by Irina Paert in her chapter; she focuses not on the characteristics left by outside observers, but on the self-identifications of a certain group—Orthodox priests in the Baltic provinces—in relation to the Baltic German nobility and the Estonian peasantry. Paert uses not only primary sources stored in the collections of various institutions, but also unique primary sources that rarely come into the hands of historians: the private correspondence of the Orthodox clergyman Father Alexander Bezhanitskii (1858–1926) and his wife, Serafima Bezhanitskaia (1857–1939). This chapter raises the hypothesis that the second generation of Russian Orthodox clergy in the Baltic provinces became close to Orthodox Estonians through intermarriage, education, and friendship. It suggests that by the 1880s in the Baltic provinces a hybrid Orthodox culture was forming that could potentially have led to the Estonianization or hybridity of the Russian clergy, but that these incipient processes were interrupted by the so-called Russification policy initiated by Emperor Alexander III (1881–94). According to Paert, the later generation of Orthodox clergy already identified with the goals of the nationalizing empire. Orthodoxy became more closely linked to Russian language and culture. There was no room for hybridity in this situation.

Voluntary associations have been seen perhaps contradictorily as both incubators of national identity and forums for non-national sociability, part of the development process of modern, democratic, civil societies.

Jörg Hackmann finds that in the Baltic provinces, interethnic contacts were developmentally inherent in voluntary associations. These new social formations proliferated beginning in the late eighteenth century first among urban Baltic Germans, providing a model for societies with primarily Latvian and Estonian members. Voluntary associations themselves were sites of interethnic contact; the scholarly learned societies founded in the Baltic provinces in the 1820s and 1830s that first began studying and writing about Estonian and Latvian culture and language were Baltic German initiatives. Artisans' associations that spread in the second half of the century were diverse both ethnically and socially. Social clubs where Latvians and Estonians were preponderant also had Baltic German members, often playing tutelary roles. For the consolidation of Latvian and Estonian nations, the establishment of nation-states in 1918 and 1919 and the attendant weakening of Baltic Germans' local dominance were certainly important. Hackmann stresses, however, that Estonian and Latvian nation-building began in the late nineteenth century in voluntary associations formed in an environment of interethnic exchange. For Baltic Germans, voluntary associations could not play a similar role after Bismarck's German Reich seized the idea of German nationalism. Their response was to develop a regional conception of their German identity, one that spanned the three Baltic provinces.

The language of "in-betweenness" was characteristic not only of nationalizing empires but also of nationalizing nation-states. Tomas Balkelis reminds us of a well-known case of national indifference: the phenomenon of *tutejszi* (Pol., locals). These were Catholics living in the Vilnius region who usually spoke a "local" language and did not identify with any of the nationalisms that dominated the region. Meanwhile, the activists of the Lithuanian, Polish, and Belarusian national movements, and even earlier in the nineteenth century, the tsarist officials, tried to incorporate the *tutejszi* into "their" national group, not only through rhetoric but also through practical means. The Lithuanians used the criterion of ethnic origin (Lithuanians have lived in this region since ancient times), the Poles used the criterion of denomination (all Catholics are Poles), and the Belarusians used the criterion of language (the "ordinary" language is the closest to the Belarusian language). In his chapter, Balkelis tries to find out why the Lithuanian nation-state failed to integrate this group. He points to limited resources and the fact that the state and the national ideology were represented by newcomers rather than by local people. An important reason for the failure of state policy was also the severing of economic ties that had been established over the years and the government's desire to minimize movement across the newly created state border. In addition to these examples of failed Lithuanianization,

Balkelis pays particular attention to the violence that accompanied the Polish–Lithuanian conflict in the first half of the twentieth century, which may have undermined the willingness of the *tutejszi* to identify with either of the conflicting ideologies.

Crisis and Governance

As Karsten Brüggemann has recently shown, the Romanov government in the late imperial period did not have a clear political strategy for managing the multiethnic populations of the three Baltic provinces of Estland, Livland, and Courland.² After the reunification of Germany (1870–71), the Russian imperial state no longer trusted the Baltic Germans, and there were few ethnic Russians in the region. Some Latvian and Estonian figures in the national movements looked rather for allies in the tsarist state against the Baltic Germans. But the 1905 Revolution in the Baltic strengthened voices for ethno-cultural autonomy for Estonians and Latvians and also those supporting varying socialist ideologies. The tsarist government was thus left without serious social support, relying on various symbolic actions—including erecting statues of Peter I in Riga and Tallinn to testify to the presence of Russian imperial power in these provinces.

The interethnic violence of the 1905 Revolution is not the sole parameter for understanding relations between peoples in the tsarist era. While cultural strengthening was occurring within Estonian and Latvian populations (traditionally called “national awakenings”) in the second half of the nineteenth century, increasing urbanization brought together differing ethnic groups in larger and larger numbers.

After the introduction of elective city councils in the Baltic provinces in 1877, Baltic German dominance began to wane. In Tallinn, an Estonian–Russian bloc led by Konstantin Päts, about whom Andres Kasekamp writes in this volume, won municipal elections in 1904. In the decade before World War I this Estonian–Russian city government both worked with the Baltic German opposition and maintained good relations with tsarist state officials. In Riga, Baltic Germans remained in control of city government to the end of the tsarist era though worked for the common good of the multiethnic population of the city.³

2 Brüggemann, *Licht und Luft*, 208–68.

3 Henriksson, “Riga: Growth, Conflict”; Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*, 172–95; Woodworth, “Patterns of Civil Society,” 150–55.

In Lithuanian areas, Poles, Jews, and Russians dominated in the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas, with Lithuanians being nearly all peasants. The primary concern of the tsarist state was to halt Polonization of weaker nondominant ethnic groups. In an attempt to encourage Lithuanians to be acculturated in a Russian-dominated empire, a ban on printed materials in Latin letters was in place from 1864 to 1904. In Lithuania the Poles were also successful in some municipal elections, for example, in Vilnius, where Michał Węśławski became the city's president, but where the tsarist government was much more restrictive of local self-government than in the provinces of present-day Latvia and Estonia.

In the Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania that emerged after World War I, governance of these multiethnic and multicultural countries was in the first years in the hands of democratically elected parliaments. Peoples of nontitular nationality had rights protecting their cultural autonomy, notably use of their native languages and their own schools and cultural organizations. Governments approached the issue of economic imbalance in ways that favored the majority titular populations, most of which had been poor, often landless peasants. As land had been overwhelmingly owned by small numbers of people—predominantly from ethno-cultural minorities (Baltic Germans in Estonia and Latvia, and in Lithuania Poles, Russians, and in the former Lithuania minor, Germans), elected governments implemented expropriation of land (with compensation) and redistribution. This process began as early as 1919 in Estonia and continued into the 1930s in all three countries.

Democratic rule entered a period of crisis in the interwar period as the parliaments of all three countries saw regular order suspended and authoritarian leaders seize power—in 1926 in Lithuania and in 1934 in Estonia and Latvia. While the building of vibrant multiethnic democracies was not a priority—indeed, the attraction of national socialism among some Baltic Germans was one of the triggers for authoritarian power in Latvia and Estonia—cultural autonomy for minorities was nevertheless maintained, though not in Lithuania. Notably, an important liberal voice in Europe on the rights of ethnic minorities was a Baltic German from Riga, Paul Schiemann (1876–1944).⁴

One of the reasons national minorities (especially Poles) had fewer rights in Lithuania than in Latvia or Estonia was the Polish–Lithuanian conflict over Vilnius. In the interwar period, Lithuanians could not have had a greater enemy than Poland, which had ripped away the “heart” of Lithuania’s

4 Hiden, *Defender of Minorities*.

national body—its historic capital. The national minorities (Lithuanians in Poland and Poles in Lithuania) became hostages to this conflict. As interstate relations deteriorated, so too did the rights of national minorities.⁵

Crisis and governance in multiethnic settings are themes that run throughout the period of rule in the Baltic from Moscow imposed in 1940, then Nazi rule from 1941 to 1944–45. The subsequent more than four decades of Soviet rule changed profoundly the relations between peoples of differing ethnicity and language: renewed imposition of Soviet military occupation, armed resistance from significant portions of the population, additional arrests and deportation of tens of thousands between 1948 and 1951, forced collectivization of agriculture, and large in-migration of Russian speakers to Latvia and Estonia. Popular opinion in the Baltic countries today often views the Soviet period solely in terms of national crisis, underestimating the aspects of life in the Soviet *Pribaltika* that were rooted in local initiative, reflective of local concerns, and even consisting in part of local governance.

The moderate loosening of tight Soviet restrictions between Stalin's death in 1953 and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia—known as the Thaw (*otpepel'* in Russian)—was palpable in the Soviet Baltic SSRs. In Lithuania, where under Stalin Lithuanians had to be found to hold posts within the new Soviet Lithuanian government, there was an expansion of nativization, or Lithuanianization, of the party into the mid-1950s, as Vladas Sirutavičius describes in his chapter. To some degree, the Khrushchevian Thaw included a strengthening of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian cultures, though in Latvia, an increase of Latvians in the local Communist Party was halted in a purge of leadership in 1959–60.⁶

The seizing of increasing levels of local autonomy by Baltic leaders and then wide swathes of the populations beginning in 1987 and continuing throughout the years of the Singing Revolutions (1987–91) are important not only in the narratives of restoration of independence for the Baltic peoples, but also in the story of the end of the USSR itself.⁷ The centrality of interethnic relations in the Baltic republics continues to this day, as discussed previously in this introduction.

In his chapter, Andres Kasekamp traces Konstantin Päts's political life as the most significant figure in twentieth-century Estonian history in the context of his ties with and actions toward Estonia's ethnic minority

5 Makowski, *Litwini w Polsce*; Łossowski, *Stosunki polsko-litewskie*; Mačiulis and Staliūnas, *Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question*.

6 Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*.

7 Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*; Senn, *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania*.

communities. Päts was Estonia's elected head of state multiple times in the interwar period. With the country under the strain of economic depression in the early 1930s, and a veterans' organization with fascist inclinations pressuring his government, Päts in 1934 declared a state of emergency and erected an authoritarian regime. Kasekamp shows that this turn away from democratic government was not based on far-right nationalism as Päts, himself from the religious minority of Estonian Orthodoxy, cooperated with and was notably tolerant of Estonia's minorities.

As Klaus Richter shows in this volume, the interwar economic policies of the states of Latvia and Lithuania had ethnic aspects that went beyond land redistribution. Latvian and Lithuanian governments responded to the worldwide Great Depression of the early 1930s that also hit the Baltic with centralization of their economies. Steps such as nationalization of banks and industries weakened the position of ethnic minorities—Baltic Germans, Poles, and Jews. In Lithuania, the economic nationalism of strengthening the economy of the states themselves had the added aim of integrating the Klaipėda (Memel) region with the rest of the country by lessening the Germans' economic dominance. When Lithuanian troops marched into Vilnius in October 1939, the main concern was how the city's Polish and Jewish population would influence Lithuania's economic strength.

Vladas Sirutavičius in his chapter shows that "Sovietization" of Lithuania in the years following the return of Soviet power at the end of World War II meant necessarily for Moscow the inclusion of large numbers of Lithuanians in leading positions within Communist Party and Soviet state structures. Without support among Lithuanians for the new political order in the Lithuanian SSR at the end of the war, a new Lithuanian national cadre of administrators and bureaucrats had to be built—a process that began in the late 1940s and continued into the mid-1950s. The making of a native, Lithuanian communist government meant the promotion of ethnic Lithuanians to leadership positions, including the removal of many office holders who were ethnic Russians.

In his chapter, Karsten Brüggemann turns around the narrative of captive nations and weakening Soviet power in the face of nationalism. Instead, he shows how beginning in the 1960s the particularities of Soviet internationalism made possible in the Baltic everyday forms of identity and separateness and thus strengthened the national form rather than introducing socialist content into the local cultures. Brüggemann argues that aspects of the Baltic peoples' experience in the late USSR—especially transnational networks of Baltic elites created in varying Soviet contexts

in order to strengthen the “friendship of peoples”—also prepared the way for independence.

Legacy of Empire

Empire is central to any understanding of the Baltic region. The homelands of the modern Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian peoples were for most of the last two to three hundred years under imperial control from St. Petersburg and Moscow.⁸ The Russian Empire was more alike than dissimilar from other empires—major world powers, in Dominic Lieven’s simple and direct definition, that rule over and manage large territories and multiethnic populations.⁹ While this volume focuses on the lived experiences of peoples in the southern littoral of the Baltic Sea in the later nineteenth century and in the twentieth century, the basic reality of life for Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians was for centuries that sovereign power lay far from their fields and farms and instead in offices and command posts headed by people very much unlike them and who were far away. And as part of an empire that stretched across Eurasia, ever more newcomers arrived, people whose native language was most commonly Russian.

The ambition and strengthening power of the Russian Empire under Peter I (1672–1725) brought Estonian and most Latvian lands under Russian suzerainty in 1710, though Peter strengthened the hand of the local Baltic German elite. Throughout the Baltic region—as in all its western borderlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—the empire maintained its power at least until the mid-nineteenth century through collaboration with privileged local elites.¹⁰ Lithuania came under Russian rule in the third partition of Poland in 1795. By this date nearly all Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians were subjects of the Russian emperors. The exception were some two hundred thousand Lithuanians who lived in the eastern-most territory of East Prussia.¹¹

For most of the following two centuries, a central political reality for the Baltic peoples was Russian imperial rule to 1915–17, then the two decades of independence was ended by Soviet occupation in 1940–41, followed by

8 The central work on the Russian Empire as a multiethnic state remains Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich*.

9 Lieven, *The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*, xi.

10 Thaden, *Russia’s Western Borderlands*.

11 Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 157.

the nearly half-century of continuous Soviet rule from 1944 to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The markings of empire are visible today in the tsarist- and Soviet-era buildings in which Balts still overwhelmingly live and work. The deeper legacies of empire in the development of modern Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian cultures are so profound they can be difficult to differentiate—empire was the very environment in which the modern Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian nations came into existence as self-conscious political entities.

In the decades following World War II, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians suffered significantly at the hands of the imperial Soviet state, which was much more willing than was tsarist Russia to use mass violence in pursuit of its interests. In 1941 across the region were executions of leading citizens and widespread forced conscription. Some 43,000 people were deported to Siberia. In 1948 and 1949 some 135,000 were sent there—the demonstrative violence was a means to ensure Baltic peasant populations complied with collectivization of agricultural production. Then in 1951 came a third wave of additional deportations of another 40,000 people.¹² The priorities of the imperial center in wielding control over the Baltic region continued in the postwar decades through state-sponsored Russophone in-migration, especially to urban areas. Toward the end of the Soviet period, just over a third (36.5 percent) of Riga's population were ethnic Latvians.¹³

The 1,500-kilometer-long coastline of the three Baltic countries was not only a topographic border between land and sea—one that throughout the centuries had been both porous and a means for connections beyond home. In the Soviet period, however, the coastline was tightly guarded as not only as a political border but as a possible avenue of escaping the USSR, and local populations could visit only with a special permit. In her chapter about encounters between Estonians and Soviet coastline border guards, Epp Annus writes that while the fear of possible violence by border guards was real, a deeper trauma was caused by the Soviet state's politicization of the physical world itself. Its violation of the "quotidian metaphysics of the earth" through heavy-handed colonial politics could produce ridiculous results, such as in one Estonian's recollection of needing to keep her passport and border zone permit ready at the bottom of her basket while picking mushrooms. The division between Estonians and Soviet imperial power was thus intensified—what Estonians commonly saw as "Russian rule" was fundamentally a violation by foreign, outside forces.

12 Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 119, 132–33.

13 Plakans, *The Latvians*, 166.

When the end of empire came in the wake of the Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika reforms in the late 1980s, the reestablishment of independence of the republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia was anticlimactic. The movements within the three former Soviet Baltic republics first for autonomy and then by 1989, independence, had prepared Baltic societies well; they were the first among the USSR's fifteen union republics to declare independence after the failed coup against Gorbachev in August (Lithuania did so in March 1990).

Ronald Grigor Suny points out the similarities between the experiences within the USSR of the peoples of the South Caucasus (Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians) and those of the Baltic. Both regions saw industrialization and urbanization, with the Baltic becoming the most urbanized part of the empire. In both regions, people came to associate themselves more strongly with their nations than with the Soviet imperial project. But the outcomes after 1991 with independence in hand differed greatly: while both regions in the late 1980s saw cascading civic activism and resistance to the expectations from Moscow, the gradualism, restraint, and pragmatism in the Baltic republics resulted in no violence. But in the South Caucasus, the post-Soviet years have been ones of instability and ethnic conflict. To help understand these differences, Suny posits that peoples of the region have different affective dispositions—the ways ordinary people and leaders understand their history and experience and then act upon them. Balts were inclined toward caution and compromise, while in South Caucasia, fear and senses of threat led to conflict. In Georgia, the Abkhaz and South Ossetin peoples separated, declaring independence. In Azerbaijan, the Armenian exclave of Nagorno-Karabakh has been the site of military conflict stretching back to 1988, and in 2023 the remaining Armenian population of some 130,000 people fled to Armenia.

Empire brought a substantial number of Russians to the Baltic countries—Russians numbered some 1.7 million in 1989, the date of the last Soviet census. While many have either emigrated to Russia, other former Soviet republics, or countries in the European Union and elsewhere, over 800,000 remain. As noted earlier, Russophones tend to live in urban areas; in Riga and Tallinn over 40 percent of people speak Russian as their native language. After the restoration of independence, Lithuania, which had the smallest Russian population (just under 10 percent in 1989), granted citizenship to all. Estonia and Latvia, which had much higher percentages of Russian speakers (in 1989, 30.3 percent of Estonia's population was Russian, 2.7 percent Ukrainian, and 1.5 percent Belarusian; and in Latvia 34.0 percent

was Russian, 3.5 percent Ukrainian, and 4.5 percent Belarusian¹⁴), required knowledge of Estonian or Latvian for those who were not the descendants of citizens of the interwar republics.

While the majority of Russians in Latvia and Estonia are now citizens, the challenges in building well-functioning, multiethnic democracies are large.¹⁵ One area in which Baltic societies overall have taken a firm, clear position is in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the Baltic countries in 2025 one sees nearly as many Ukrainian flags flown as Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian ones. As Mārtiņš Kaprāns writes in his chapter, the majority in the Russian-speaking community in Latvia say they are neutral toward Russia's full-scale invasion beginning in 2022—this despite the clear condemnation of the invasion by Latvian society and by the Latvian state. Using data from popular opinion surveys, Kaprāns finds that Russophones who perceive ongoing linguistic discrimination in Latvia or who are skeptical toward the press tend to be hesitant about the war. Overall, Kaprāns argues these Russian speakers are using this professed neutrality as a means to hide their views that clash with those of the majority—a “spiral of silence.” Moreover, as this stance of neutrality toward the war is the majority view among Russian speakers, there is social pressure for those who are inclined otherwise to go along and not condemn Russia's war.

Legacy of Violence

In modern times, violence has taken many forms in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In addition to the most obvious violence between armies or regular troops and insurgents (such as during the so-called Polish uprisings of 1830 and 1863), there have been at least three different manifestations of violence: communal violence between varying groups of civilians, state-sanctioned violence against civilians, and nonstate violence carried out by various paramilitary groups.¹⁶ During the 1905 Revolution, a wave of violence swept through the Baltic provinces (today's Latvia and Estonia), in the course of which forty-one Germans (nearly all Baltic Germans) were killed by rebellious Latvians and Estonians (overwhelmingly in Latvian areas, where the Baltic German presence was denser) and nearly one thousand

14 Data for Estonia in Ainsaar, *Eesti rahvastik*, and for Latvia in the National Statistical System of Latvia (https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/en/OSP_PUB/START__POP__IR__IRE/IRE010/).

15 For a thoughtful recent study, see Platt, *Border Conditions*.

16 Balkelis and Griffante, *The Shaken Lands*, 10.

manor houses and estates were damaged (primarily in southern Livland and Courland provinces, where Latvians dominated).¹⁷ Many manors were burned to the ground. This triggered waves of counter-violence at the hands of tsarist troops sent to the Baltic provinces and local militias organized by the Baltic German landed elite. From December 1905 stretching into 1907 over two thousand people in Latvian areas and about three hundred in Estonian areas were executed by punitive expeditions following summary courts-martial. Hundreds were given sentences of prison or hard labor, and an estimated 2,600 deported into the Russian interior.¹⁸ Local violence also erupted in Lithuania, forcing Russian officials and teachers to flee the countryside in many places during the revolution, but it was far less brutal than in Estonian, let alone Latvian areas.¹⁹ This third nonstate form of violence became particularly widespread in the Baltic region after 1918 with the withdrawal of the great powers—Russia and Germany—from the region, and given the weakness of the newly emerging nation-states, which facilitated the arbitrariness of the various paramilitary groups.²⁰ The impact of such violence, specifically between various Polish and Lithuanian paramilitaries, on the population of the ethnic peripheries is also discussed by Tomas Balkelis in his chapter.

Jews were impacted by all three forms of violence. In this volume, the greatest attention is given to pogroms and the Holocaust owing to their scale and the challenges that still confront scholars in explaining its specificities, especially in Lithuania. Lithuania was home to the largest Jewish community of the three Baltic countries. In the times of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a large Jewish community settled there; later in the tsarist empire Lithuania was included in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, while Estland province was outside it, and in Courland province, and Riga and Shlok (both in Livland province), only established Jewish communities but not new settlements were tolerated by the government.²¹

Even if we accept that the destruction of almost all Lithuanian Jews during World War II was the result of Nazi genocidal policies, there is still a need to explain why so many locals voluntarily participated in the Holocaust. This question is particularly difficult because Lithuania, both in the nineteenth century and between 1918 and 1940, was a country with relatively

17 Raun, "Violence and Activism in the Baltic Provinces"; Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 273–74; Karjahärm, *1905. aasta Eestis*, 117–98.

18 Raun, "The Revolution of 1905," 465–66.

19 Tyla, *1905 m. revoliucija*.

20 Balkelis and Griffante, *The Shaken Lands*.

21 Klier, "Pale of Settlement."

few incidents of anti-Jewish riots.²² In his chapter, Darius Staliūnas reviews the most notorious excesses of anti-Jewish violence that occurred during the interwar period of Lithuanian independence. While some incidents, like the Kaunas pogrom of 1929, were motivated by a nationalist logic, the remainder did not differ in any significant way from the traditional blood-libel pogroms of the tsarist era. In other words, the sea change in the nature of anti-Jewish violence associated with the Holocaust began with the German invasion in June 1941, not before. However, this does not mean that the processes that took place in Lithuania before 1941 are not relevant. As long as the Lithuanian state existed, it was able to curb the manifestations of mass violence quite successfully, but we are still lacking research on the prevalence of antisemitic ideas in Lithuanian society at that time.

In the Baltic lands, the violence associated with World War II began earlier, and ended later, than in most parts of Europe. Triggered by the Nazi–Soviet nonaggression pact signed in August 1939, it was launched by Soviet-engineered coups, accompanied by military invasions and mass repressions. The first Soviet occupation ended in anticipation of German invasion and was accompanied by the “prophylactic” deportation on June 14, 1941 of approximately 28,000 individuals of diverse ethnicities, including Jews, deemed likely to support the approaching enemy.²³

In this timeline, Operation Barbarossa marked not the beginning of the Great Patriotic War but an epochal shift in the direction of battle. The German invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941, was welcomed by a portion of the population, hoping in vain for a return to normalcy, and feared by a significant minority—principally Jews—the vast majority of whom would be murdered in the weeks and months that followed.

All in all, the Holocaust, mass killings, and forced displacement drained the Baltics of about a quarter of its population. All ethnic groups suffered. Some, like Germans and Poles, were cleansed from the region. But the elimination of the Jews—95 percent of 190,000 living in Lithuania, 75 percent of 70,000 in Latvia, and nearly all Estonia’s 4,500 Jews—was so shockingly complete that the legacy of this atrocity remains at the forefront of efforts to reckon with the implications of the past for the present and future of the region.

While the German occupational authorities were responsible for the planning and initiation of the Holocaust in Lithuania, they could not have executed the task without the active participation of locals. The

22 Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day*.

23 Specifically, 10,500 from Estonia, 15,400 from Latvia, and 17,000 from Lithuania. See Davoliūtė and Balkelis, *Narratives of Exile and Identity*, 6–7.

Einsatzgruppen in charge of killing the Jews numbered less than a single percent of the occupying force.²⁴ They relied on the willing participation of locals in the act of killing, and the accommodation of the masses to the overall enterprise. And for this, they had to win over the hearts and minds of the local population. In his chapter, Stanislovas Stasiulis addresses the role of Lithuanian writers as propagandists for the Nazi regime. Demonstrating a clear alignment of antisemitic views in the public writings and private correspondence of those Lithuanians who wrote for Nazi-controlled newspapers, Stasiulis breaks with convention to assert that these authors were willing accomplices in the incitement to genocide.

As distinct from Western Europe, where the Jewish population was deported to sites of industrial killing, the initial phase of the Holocaust in the USSR—which is to say in Lithuania—took place “on the spot”—on the streets, in town squares, and in nearby forests. Scholars characterize such violence as communal and intimate when victims are killed by perpetrators—neighbors—who know each other by name. In postwar Lithuania, the experience of communal violence would remain in the living memory of Jews and Gentiles for decades, even if expressions of this memory were suppressed by Soviet censorship and ideological controls.

In her chapter, Violeta Davoliūtė draws attention to a little-recognized episode of cultural reckoning with the Holocaust among the cultural elites of postwar Lithuania. De-Stalinization under Khrushchev opened the door to expressions of personal and traumatic experience, even while the regime silenced the Jewish particularity of the Holocaust. In Lithuania, the Thaw fostered grassroots efforts to reckon with contentious aspects of the war that were glossed over in the prevailing “anti-fascist” narrative, including the participation of non-German locals in the genocide. Until the clampdown on dissent in 1972 and the emigration of most Jews to Israel, a small but influential group of Jewish and Gentile intellectuals worked together to face up to the shocking legacy of the Holocaust in Lithuania.

State of the Field and Pointing the Way Forward

In the volume’s concluding section, Toivo U. Raun and Vello Pettai assay the field of Baltic ethnic relations, finding approaches for understanding both historical events and scholarly literature and suggesting where future research may be headed. Raun calls for more work on socioeconomic

24 Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 289.

linguistics, including how the development of modern Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian languages tracks with socioeconomic modernization of these peoples. Both linguistic modernization and the growth of education among nonelite Balts—Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians—took place in multiethnic, culturally diverse environments. How did these environments influence the emergence of the modern Baltic peoples? Scholars should also compare migration trends in the Baltic region and see how these have affected ties between differing peoples. Raun encourages more study of the border zones of the modern Baltic countries, areas where the new innovative concept of nation was less obvious among peoples of mixed culture and language. (The chapters in this volume by Tomas Balkelis, Catherine Gibson, and Irina Paert are answers to this call.)

In this volume's final chapter, Vello Pettai presents analytical models for the study of ethnic relations in the areas that are now the Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia, examining scholarship published after 1991. Pettai's models center on the actions of states and international institutions and encompass developments since the late 1980s. Pettai also reviews the state of the field on what is perhaps the central issue of interethnic relations in the Baltic countries today—integration of Russophone populations. (See the chapter in this volume by Mārtiņš Kaprāns.) Integration has multiple vectors, and with an eye on state policies since the 1990s Pettai points out the emphasis on integration as linguistic assimilation, particularly in Estonia. Most state policies fostering integration, Pettai writes, have not been formed with sufficient consultation and collaboration with Russophone groups; even the scholars who study integration policies are themselves primarily Estonians and Latvians.

The editors hope that this volume will be of use to the wider academic community. In particular, it presents recent research on interethnic relations in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. In addition, it introduces areas of study that may lead to new and innovative approaches. Ultimately, we hope this book will serve as a contribution to comparative research for other regions of Eastern-Central Europe and beyond.

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I.

Identities:

Ascribed, Contested, and Situational

1. Varieties of In-betweenness in the Borderlands of the Baltic Provinces: A History of the Term *Poluvertsy* (Half-Believers)

Catherine Gibson

Abstract: This chapter examines historical usages of the term *poluvertsy* (Half-Believers) in the borderlands of the Baltic provinces during the second half of the nineteenth century. A term to designate populations perceived as ethnolinguistically or confessionally “in-between,” it was applied to two distinct communities: Orthodox Estonian-speaking Setos in Pskov province influenced by Russian culture, and Russian-speaking converts to Lutheranism in Estland province, who were becoming increasingly Estonianized. The chapter traces how the word *poluvertsy* evolved from an ethnographic classification to a marker of religious hybridity and, eventually, an emerging self-identification. It situates these shifts in meaning within broader debates about national indifference, hybridity, and identity formation in the Romanov Empire’s western borderlands.

Keywords: ethnolinguistic terminology, national indifference, “in-between” borderland identities, Setos, Romanov Empire

Introduction

Every reader can now imagine for himself what great harm will be caused by the attempt to Germanize or Russify the Estonian people. Such an attempt gives rise to Juniper Germans [*kadakasakslased*] and Half-Believers [*poluwernikud*], who are neither Germans nor Estonians, neither Russians [*wenemehed*] nor [Estonian] countrymen [*maamehed*],

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but purely half-hearted and in every way useless people. It gives birth to renegades, who would be a disgrace to their brothers, a shame to themselves, and a laughingstock to the world. It corrupts the national language and thereby makes the complete education of the mind and heart in this country impossible. [...] This is the main damage of the Germanization and Russification of everything.¹

The above statement was published in an annex to the newspaper *Eesti Postimees* by Jakob Hurt, one of the key figures of nineteenth-century Estonian nationalism and the Alexander School movement, which aimed to promote Estonian-language higher education.² Hurt used two derogatory terms to describe what he viewed as the undesirable consequences of Germanization and Russification in the region. The first—“Juniper Germans”—denoted people who were presumed to be Estonians but behaved like Germans as a result of their social mobility and multilingualism.³ Along with terms such as “Half-Germans” and “Small Germans,” which were also used by Latvian nationalists to refer to Germanized Latvians, “Juniper Germans” formed part of the vocabulary of Estonian national activists who mocked these figures for betraying their nation, but also regarded them as threats to the consolidation and future development of the national movement.⁴

The second term—“Half-Believers”—was more geographically specific and referred to two distinct populations. In western Pskov province, it was used to describe the fifteen thousand Orthodox inhabitants of the Pechory/Petseri district, who spoke a language which closely resembled Estonian with some Russian influences and retained pre-Christian religious practices; today, this population describe themselves as Setos and the region they inhabit, Setomaa.⁵ In Estland province, the term *poluvertsy* was applied to the approximately five thousand residents of villages on the northern shore of Lake Peipus in eastern Estland, Russian speakers who had converted

1 Hurt, “Mis Aleksandri-koolile wasta pannakse.”

2 I thank the participants of the 2021 virtual ASEES convention panel “Solidarity Contested: Religious, Ethnic, and National Solidarities and Indifference in Russia’s Western Borderlands, 1830s–1930s” for their feedback on an earlier version of this work, as well as Liisi Veski, Irina Paert, and the editors of this volume for their comments on later drafts. This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council (Grant PSG1042).

3 Tark and Liivik, “Kadakasaksluse’ mõiste.”

4 Daija and Kalnačs, “Small’ Germans.”

5 The name “Seto” entered into usage in the mid-nineteenth century, but it also had a pejorative connotation as a term used by Estonians in Livland to mock the Setos’ way of speaking (they used *seto* instead of the standard Estonian *sedä*). Only after 1920 did it come to be used as a neutral ethnonym. Mägiste, “Setude nimetus.”

from Orthodoxy to Lutheranism and were being gradually Estonianized. Both these populations attracted considerable attention in the second half of the nineteenth century from ethnographers, statisticians, and Orthodox and Lutheran churchmen, who referred to them using the term *poluvertsy* (Russian), or the German (*Halbgläubiger*) or Estonian (*poluwernikud*) variants thereof, as a nod to their perceived ethno-confessional hybridity. Both these groups of so-called *poluvertsy* were quintessential borderland populations, located in a linguistic and religious “contact zone where transnational contacts and transfers between cultures create manifold entanglements.”⁶ They became a focal point in the context of discussions about defining the borders of the Estonian and Russian ethnolinguistic and national territories, as well as the religious boundary between the predominantly Orthodox lands to the east and mainly Lutheran Baltic provinces to the west.

Situated in a wider panorama of the western borderlands of the Romanov Empire, *poluvertsy* is just one example of many such terms which entered into circulation to describe populations perceived as ethnolinguistically or confessionally “in-between” or hybrid, as well those who distinguished themselves due to their local particularities, and were thus hard to classify in national terms.⁷ The most well-known example is the term *tutejszy/tuteishi* (meaning “people from here”), which was applied to various inhabitants of the western borderlands of the empire from Courland to Polesie/Palesse/Polissia.⁸ There are also a whole host of lesser-known terms such as *Muchobroden*, used to describe the Roman Catholic “mixture of Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Latvians under the dominance of the Russian element” living in Illuxt/Ilükste county in southeastern Courland province,⁹ *lutsi maarahvas*, referring to the Estonian-speaking “country people” who lived near the town of Lyutsin/Ludza in Vitebsk province,¹⁰ or the Swedish-speaking *aibofolke* (“island folk”) living in coastal Estland.¹¹ In the literature, however, these terms tend to be referenced only in passing and mentioned

6 Brüggemann, “Transnational History,” 24.

7 Key works from the 2000s on various forms of national identification in the region include Brown, *A Biography of No Place* and Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*.

8 Labbé, “National Indifference.” The use of this term extended as far north as southeastern Latvia during the interwar period. Margers Skujenieks, head of the Latvian State Statistical Bureau, described a group of people living in Latgale as *tuteišij*. Skujenieks, *Trešā tautas skaitīšana Latvijā*, 94.

9 Bielenstein, “Reiseskizzen,” 639–41.

10 Jääts, “Üks kuulus välitöö,” 15.

11 White, “Changing Tides.”

in the narrow context of ethnographic studies of these populations.¹² Despite the plethora of terms that emerged to describe hybrid and anational populations, there is little broader reflection of how, taken together, these terms were part of a more widespread language of “in-betweenness” that developed to describe various forms of identification which did not easily fit within the emerging national categories of belonging in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³

This chapter presents a brief history of the term *poluvertsy* from the 1840s to the 1900s as a case study of this wider phenomenon of the emergence, application, and circulation of terms to describe hybrid and anational borderland populations. In doing so, the chapter contributes to historiographical discussions of “national indifference,” initially developed by scholars of the Habsburg Empire, and which later inspired a wave of research challenging the dominance of nationalist perspectives on the history of Central and Eastern Europe. In the Baltic context, the focus has been on applying the concept of “national indifference” to the Baltic Germans, meaning that it has primarily been understood as an elite phenomenon.¹⁴ More recently, scholars of religion have applied “national indifference” as a lens to examine the intersections between forms of confessional and ethnolinguistic identification among Estland’s coastal Swedish speakers and apostates in the Baltic provinces.¹⁵

Here, I attempt to tackle one of the key shortcomings of the concept of “national indifference” as it has been applied in the Baltic region. While skeptical of the applicability of the term to Baltic Germans, Per Bolin and Christina Douglas propose that “national indifference” be applied to three types of populations: (1) “a-national borderland populations with strong local identities but little connection to grand nationalist projects”; (2) “borderland populations creating hybrid versions of regional identities and national ones”; (3) “people in ethnically mixed areas oscillating between different national identities.”¹⁶ In addition, Katja Wezel suggests that concepts such as “national ambiguity,” “anationalism,” and “hybridity” might be more applicable than “national indifference” to the multicultural

12 For instance, Indrek Jääts only briefly discusses the term *poluvertsy*; Toivo U. Raun presents a general overview of ethnographic studies of Setos in the late nineteenth century, but does not dwell on semantics. Jääts *Setude etniline identiteet*, 30–31; Raun, “The Petseri Region,” 514–20.

13 Fellerer et al., *Identities In-between*.

14 Wezel, “Introduction”; Brüggemann and Wezel, “Nationally Indifferent.”

15 Tøllefsen and White, “Navigating an Orthodox Conversion”; White, “Changing Tides”; Gibson and Paert, “Apostasy in the Baltic Provinces.”

16 Bolin and Douglas, “National Indifference,” 15.

setting of the Baltic.¹⁷ Yet, neither Bolin and Douglas nor Wezel elaborate on the factors which might have formed the basis for this ambiguity or hybridity. In all these cases, the authors oppose national indifference to national identification, but without asking how hybridity, anationalism, and ambiguity was defined and understood in different contexts and periods.

This chapter examines the various contexts in which the term *poluvertsy* was used by various actors and the diverse meanings they attached to the term. Although it presents the history of a specific term, and not a concept, it nonetheless draws methodological inspiration from the approach of conceptual history outlined by Reinhart Koselleck and is guided by the following questions:

In what contexts does the term appear? Is the term articulated in terms of a concept with which it is paired, either in a complementary or adversary sense? Who uses the term, for what purpose, and to address whom? How long has it been in social use? What is the valency of the term within the structure of social and political vocabulary? With what terms does it overlap, and does it converge with other terms over time?¹⁸

In contrast to most previous studies featuring discussions of the term *poluvertsy* which are based on published sources, this chapter incorporates unpublished materials from the Archives of the Russian Geographical Society, the National Archives of Estonia, and the State Archive of Pskov Oblast, in addition to newspapers and published works by ethnographers and Orthodox and Lutheran churchmen. It is important to note that these sources—and indeed the name *poluvertsy* is a term that was for the most part externally imposed—focus on outsiders' perceptions; they do not allow us to hear the voices and self-identification of the populations themselves. Moreover, the sources are colored by the views of the ethnographers, linguists, and churchmen who brought their own stereotypes and prejudices to their descriptions of the populations they studied. At the same time, the process of studying these populations forced the authors to interrogate their own stereotypes about the people in these regions and examine the language used to describe specific, local phenomena to wider audiences of the Romanov Empire.

17 Wezel, "Introduction," 7.

18 Koselleck, "Richtlinien für das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe," as summarized in Tribe, "Translator's Introduction," xii.

Pskov Estonians or Estonians Who Are Incompletely Assimilated into Russians?

It is as yet unknown where exactly the term *poluvertsy* originated and when it entered usage, but judging from the religious connotations of its semantics it seems probable that it was a term of “otherness” used by Russian-speaking peasants living next to Lake Peipus to refer to fellow parishioners who spoke differently and preserved their own customs. By the 1840s, however, the term was also increasingly used by elites in the region as an ethnonym and thus also becomes visible to us in the sources.

In particular, the term *poluvertsy* appeared in the correspondence of ethnographers, statisticians, and mapmakers in the late 1840s in the context of early projects to produce ethnographic studies and maps of the Romanov Empire.¹⁹ Populations were not confined to administrative borders and there was considerable uncertainty when it came to mapping ethnolinguistic borders between groups. In the second half of the 1840s, Peter von Köppen, the empire’s most prolific early ethnographic mapmaker who helped to kickstart this cartographic genre in the Romanov Empire, sent a request via the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg to authorities in the Baltic provinces asking for information about the region’s non-Russian inhabitants.²⁰ The cascaded request from the governor of Livland to the Dorpat county court asking for the relevant data specifically mentioned the need for information about “so-called *Poluwernen*” in Walk and Wolmar counties.²¹

In 1849, Köppen also directly wrote to the doctor and writer Friedrich Kreutzwald, famous for writing the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*, requesting information about the Estonians living in Pskov province and asking him to specify where the ethnolinguistic boundary between Estonians and Russians in the Livland–Pskov border area should be drawn.²² Köppen

19 Lillak, “Setode kujunemise kohta käivast diskussionist,” 68.

20 Gibson, *Geographies of Nationhood*, 22–57.

21 National Archives of Estonia (hereafter RA), EAA.949.1.808 (Berichte der Güter über die Zahl der auf den Gütern wohnhaften Russen, Poluwernen und Letten), 1–2. Although this correspondence is between the Academy of Science and authorities in the Baltic provinces, I infer that this request formed part of Köppen’s wider data-collection process at the time. Köppen’s notes about the ethnographic composition of Livland and Estland provinces show that he was particularly interested in learning more about Russians living on the shore of Lake Peipus. Archive of the Russian Geographical Society (hereafter ARGO), f. 2, op. 1, d. 202 (Materialy dlia etnograficheskoi karty Lifliandii), l. 5, 13; ARGO, f. 2, op. 1, d. 203 (Materialy dlia etnograficheskoi karty Estliandii), l. 7.

22 An Estonian translation of Köppen’s correspondence with Kreutzwald is available in Ertis et al., *Kirjad Fr. R. Faehlmaninile*, 439–96.

had previously received information from the office of the governor of Pskov that there were only sixty-four Estonians living in Pskov province, which he wanted to verify. In reply, Kreutzwald informed him that this figure was an error as Orthodox Estonians were being counted as Russians.²³ Later, as a result of his subsequent expedition to the region, which was supported by the Academy of Science as a result of Köppen's lobbying, Kreutzwald informed his correspondent that there were 6,700 Estonians inhabiting the western part of Pskov province.²⁴ Having provided Köppen with a detailed ethnographic description of Estonians living in Pskov province, Kreutzwald (and Köppen following his lead) used the term *poluvertsy* several times. There was no discussion in their letters about the semantics or origins of this term and Kreutzwald only emphasized that it was a local term for "Estonians, whom the Russians call *poluvertsy*."²⁵ Notably, the scholars wrote to one another in German and to be sure that his correspondent in St. Petersburg understood the argument, Kreutzwald always wrote *poluvertsy* in Cyrillic. As a result of the information provided by Kreutzwald, Köppen categorized these people living in Pskov province as Estonians on his *Ethnographic Map of European Russia*, which was published by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO) in 1851.²⁶

The inclusion of *poluvertsy* within the imagined Estonian ethnographic space that spanned Estland, Livland, and Pskov province was continued in two articles published in the *Journal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs* in the early 1850s about the ethnography of Estonians. While the first article was anonymous, the second was written by Arnold von Tidebühl, a high-ranking official in the Livland provincial administration. Tidebühl wrote about the "Estonians of Pskov province" and "Pskov Estonian colonies"; from his perspective, the population's Estonianness was not in question.²⁷ Subsequent generations of Baltic German and Estonian ethnographers followed suit and interpreted *poluvertsy* as Estonians. For example, in 1860, the Baltic German artist Hermann Hartmann wrote an article about his trip to the region around Neuhausen (Vastseliina), in which he used

23 "Letter from Kreutzwald to Köppen, March 22, 1849," in Ertis et al., *Kirjad Fr. R. Faehlmaninile*, 443.

24 "Letter from Kreutzwald to Köppen, December 16, 1849," in Ertis et al., *Kirjad Fr. R. Faehlmaninile*, 478. During the expedition, Kreutzwald was meant to draw up lists, mark the Estonian-inhabited villages on a map, and send the results to Köppen.

25 "Letter from Kreutzwald to Köppen, May 10, 1849," in Ertis et al., *Kirjad Fr. R. Faehlmaninile*, 446.

26 Keppen, *Etnograficheskaia Karta Evropeiskoi Rossii*.

27 "Etnograficheskiia svedeniia ob estakh"; Tidebel, "Ocherk estonskago naseleniia," 15, 48.

the terms “Pskov Estonians” and “*Poluwerniken*” (a Germanized variant of the Estonian term “*poluwernikud*”) synonymously to describe the situation where the “influence of the Greek Church and Russian environment offers a striking contrast to the influence that the Lutheran Church and German rule exerted on the peoples of our provinces.”²⁸ A similar view was offered in 1875 by Mihkel Veske, a lecturer in Estonian language at Dorpat University and a member of the Estonian Learned Society, in his writings on the language and folk customs of the “Pskov Estonians” which had been lost among other Estonians.²⁹ Notably, Ferdinand Wiedemann’s 1869 Estonian–German dictionary did not include an entry on *poluvertsy*, preferring to list them as “*Setu-rahwas*” (“Seto people”) and to define them as “Pskov Estonians.”³⁰

In 1903, IRGO’s Ethnographic Section awarded the aforementioned Jakob Hurt three hundred rubles to carry out a research expedition to study the “Seto-Estonians” inhabiting western Pskov province.³¹ Having left for the field, Hurt spent eight weeks in the summer of 1903 studying their ethnography, folk poetry, and language. He presented his findings to IRGO on November 21, 1903, along with a map of the distribution of “Pskov Estonian or so-called Seto” folksongs, which thereby delimited the territory inhabited by these people.³² Hurt conceptualized the Setos as a branch of the Estonians and their language as an Estonian dialect:

An ethnographic diversion in the true sense has never taken place and cannot be established at present: the national type and linguistic dialect of the Setos and Võro-Estonians are essentially the same, except for the peculiarities in the pronunciation and vocabulary of the Setos, created by the influence of Russian.³³

There was no doubt for Hurt that the Setos were distinct from Russians. According to Hurt, despite living alongside one another peacefully for centuries,

28 Hartmann, “Neuhausen.”

29 Veske, *Bericht über die Ergebnisse einer Reise*.

30 Wiedemann, *Ehsthnisch–Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 1142.

31 “Zhurnal zasedaniia Otdeleniia I.R.G.O.,” 653. For a similar case of national activists taking part in an IRGO-funded ethnographic expedition, see Kotenko, “‘Eto stoilo by obshchestvu deshevle gribov.’”

32 ARGO, f. 83, op. 1, d. 180 (O pskovskikh estontsakh ili tak nazyvaemykh setukezakh [1903]; Otchet o poezdke zasluzhennogo pastora Ia. Gurta, prochitannyy v zasedanii IRGO 21 noia. 1903), l. 1. The report and map were later published in German: Hurt, *Über die Pleskauer Esten*.

33 ARGO, f. 83, op. 1, d. 180, l. 5.

few of the region's inhabitants were bilingual and mixed marriages rarely occurred. He described how even the men know Russian "very badly." Hurt quoted the response of one Seto who replied when asked about why he does not send his children to a Russian-language school: "Here comes a piglet and a sheep together. The piglet grunts and the sheep bleats, no one understands the other."³⁴ Like Veske, Hurt stressed the "primitive," "half-heathen" nature of the Setos, as well as their "antiquity." Hurt described them as part of the Võro-Estonian tribe that had remained under Muscovite rule and had not been subject to the political and cultural influence of the Teutonic Knights, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Sweden. Hurt argued that the 16,571 Setos constituted

only a tiny fraction of the multi-million population of the Russian Empire, and their social and state importance is equivalent it. Despite this, however, they are of great interest to science, and the small area of their distribution is a treasure trove for ethnographers and archaeologists.³⁵

This interpretation of the Setos as borderland Estonians, and therefore a typical example of rural "frontier people" who garnered considerable attention from nineteenth-century nationalists in their attempts to define the ethnolinguistic boundaries of their nations, did not go unchallenged.³⁶ In response to the aforementioned articles published in the *Journal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs* in the early 1850s, Pskov official Mikhail Mirotvortsev published a rebuttal in the memorial book (*pamiatnaia knizhka*) of Pskov province to correct the statements made by Tideböhl. Mirotvortsev used the term in an adversary sense and contended that "our *poluvertsy*, starting from their name, differ considerably from the Estonians of St. Petersburg, Livland, and Estland provinces," and thus deserve separate attention, yet due to their "transitional state" they have not been studied by ethnographers.³⁷ According to Mirotvortsev, their name "does not mean anything for educated observers; among the people it means that Orthodox Estonians pray in their language with sounds that are incomprehensible to Russians."³⁸ For Mirotvortsev, *poluvertsy* was a term to differentiate Estonians in Pskov province from those living in the Baltic provinces.

34 ARGO, f. 83, op. 1, d. 180, l. 9.

35 ARGO, f. 83, op. 1, d. 180, l. 5.

36 Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 33.

37 Mirotvortsev, "Ob estakh ili poluvertsakh."

38 Mirotvortsev, "Ob estakh ili poluvertsakh," 46.

The prefix *pol-* meaning “half” was a marker of hybridity used to denote a population who was neither Estonian nor Russian.³⁹

Over the coming decades, *poluvertsy* frequently appeared in Russian-language ethnographic texts as a term to distinguish these people from Estonians proper. For example, in 1886 Egor Vostokov used the term *poluvertsy* to refer to Estonians (as well as Latvians) who had lived alongside Russians for centuries, but who had not become fully Russified and “only partially assimilated with the Russians in appearance and way of life.”⁴⁰ Vostokov contrasted *poluvertsy* with the new waves of Lutheran Estonian and Latvian migrants (landless farmers and laborers) who moved to Pskov province in the 1880s and were a subject of concern for the Orthodox church, whose representatives feared that “here denationalization goes, so to say, to the detriment of the Russian nationality and Orthodoxy.”⁴¹ For Vostokov, *poluvertsy* denoted incomplete Russification: “Of all the borderlands of the vast Russian state, the western one is the most difficult to succumb to the Russian influence, not to mention its fusion or assimilation with the national organism.”⁴² In this way, Vostokov’s use of the term *poluvertsy* elided with polemics about the so-called “Baltic question” in the Russian-language press of the time, which saw the Baltic German influence in the Baltic provinces as a threat to the cohesiveness of the empire and—in its most extreme form—as a Germanic colonial “intrusion” into historical Slavic territories.⁴³

Isaku *Poluvertsy*: Estonianized Russians

Running parallel to the discussions about the use of the term *poluvertsy* in conjunction with the inhabitants of western Pskov province, the term also gained valency in a different context in Estland province to refer to a population living on the northwestern shore of Lake Peipus, who were described as Russians who had converted to Lutheranism several centuries

39 This “neither/nor” formulation for conceptualizing borderland populations echoes another key study of anational identifications. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole*.

40 Vostokov, *Latyshy i Esty-Pereselentsy*, 18. Later in the text (p. 30) Vostokov describes *poluvertsy* as “already Russified Estonians.”

41 Vostokov, *Latyshy i Esty-Pereselentsy*, 19. For others, this nuance was lost and they described the population of the region in binary terms of Russians and “*ostzeiskie*.” See, for instance, Kisiakov, *Vostochnyi bolotnyi raion Pskovskoi gubernii*, 27.

42 Vostokov, *Latyshy i Esty-Pereselentsy*, 1.

43 Gibson, *Geographies of Nationhood*, 120. For an overview of the polemics on the Baltic Question in the press, see Isakov, *Ostzeiskii vopros*. On perceptions of the Baltic provinces in the writings of Russian intellectuals, see Brüggemann, *Licht und Luft*.

prior and were now gradually becoming Estonianized. For instance, in December 1844, the general-superintendent of the Lutheran Church, Christian Rein from Reval/Tallinn, wrote a report to the Lutheran consistory inquiring about the situation of the so-called *Poluwerzi*, who live on the shore of Lake Peipus and allegedly do not speak Estonian.⁴⁴ While the subsequent replies from local Lutheran pastors clarified that knowledge of Estonian among these *Poluwerzi* varied a great deal, they emphasized that greater efforts should still be made to improve Estonian-language education in the area so as to strengthen Lutheranism in the region. In the context of a wave of conversions from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy which were just starting in 1845, the *Poluwerzi* were a cause for concern for the Lutheran Church as a potentially ripe area for Orthodoxy to gain a foothold.⁴⁵

Any extension of use of the term *poluvertsy* beyond Pskov province was dismissed in 1849 by Kreutzwald, who refuted Köppen's suggestion that the term *poluvertsy* might be used to refer those living on the eastern shores of Lake Peipus in St. Petersburg province, explaining that they "are completely different from the Estonians of Pskov."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the term gained currency in Estland province in the late 1880s in the context of efforts by the Orthodox Church to reclaim land regarded as holy because of the medieval apparition of Mary. In 1892, an Orthodox convent was built at Piukhtitsa/Kuremäe in northeast Estland, which was accompanied by a surge of writings at the bequest of Sergei Shakhovskoi, governor of Estland and one of the driving forces behind the monastic endeavor, suggesting that the territory in question was historically populated by Orthodox people.⁴⁷ Two key texts, by Mikhail Kharuzin and Jüri Trusmann, put forth the narrative that although the five thousand inhabitants in Iisaku parish in the vicinity of the Piukhtitsa Orthodox convent were Lutheran by confession, they spoke Russian and maintained some Orthodox religious customs, such as reverence for icons.⁴⁸

The use of the term *Isakskie poluvertsy* (*Isaac's poluvertsy*) to describe the population of Iisaku parish was picked up by Sergei Umanets, an orientalist

44 RA, EAA.1187.2.1496 (Die, an der Peipus wohnende, ehstnische Sprache nicht kundigen s. g. Poluwerzi, laut Mittheilung des Herrn-General Superintendenten Dr. Rein), 1.

45 Ryan, "The Tsar's Faith."

46 "Letter from Kreutzwald to Köppen, May 15, 1851," in Ertis et al., *Kirjad Fr. R. Faehlmaninile*, 495.

47 On the history of the establishment of the Piukhtitsa convent, see White, "Russian Orthodox Monasticism."

48 Kharuzin, *Piukhtitsa—sviatoe mesto*; Trusman, "Piukhtitsa krai"; Trusman, "Isakskie poluvertsy," 4.

scholar, publicist, and censor in St. Petersburg, in his chapter on “Estland’s *poluvertsy*” published in an 1899 book of essays dedicated to Shakhovskoi. Umanets presented *poluvertsy* as the “original renegades from Orthodoxy, these Russian Lutherans, who have abandoned their native church and nationality and have not yet managed to completely merge with the Germanic peoples of the Baltic littoral.”⁴⁹ Umanets described the population as the result of a “collision of two opposite worlds—Orthodox Russian and Lutheran German,” which resulted in “a highly curious cultural-ethnographic phenomenon.”⁵⁰ He argued that the population were Russians who had settled on the western bank of Lake Peipus and who had been converted by the Teutonic Knights to Catholicism and then later to Lutheranism. In this way, the term *poluvertsy* denoted an incomplete process of assimilation of Russians into Germans and Estonians: “Local representatives of Baptists tried as before to ‘eradicate’ Russian elements in a country that had long since become Russian and stubbornly suppress everything that prevented their complete domination in the region.”⁵¹ Umanets noted that:

Nationality and faith are two forces so related to each other, so inextricably linked with each other, that falling away from this confession entails the loss of this national type. Take a Frenchman, a German, an Englishman, convince them to stop bowing before the papacy, honor the law of Luther and observe the dogmas of the “high church,” in a word, tear them away from their churches, from unity with their brothers in faith, and you will see how their children, grandchildren, the descendants will little by little lose their national type and begin to ethnographically resemble those whose faith they will profess, instead of the one they renounced.⁵²

According to Umanets, based on external appearances, *poluvertsy* closely resembled Russians: “they still speak Russian well,” they have Russian-sounding names, and their homelife “bears a Russian imprint.”⁵³ He continued, asserting: “the ‘*poluvertsy*’ largely retained their Russian, natural appearance, but in spirit, in their inner makeup, they became Lutherans.”⁵⁴ At the same time, the population was at risk of being further assimilated into the non-Slavic peoples. Umanets reported that the *poluvertsy* were shaving their moustaches “according to the

49 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 135.

50 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 124.

51 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 124.

52 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 129.

53 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 130.

54 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 130.

Estonian custom, wear[ing] Estonian dress, and among them there are those who speak Russian very poorly.”⁵⁵ Fifteen years later, a report by the Estland inspector for primary schools in 1913 commented on the “Estonianization of the Russian former *poluvertsy* of Iisaku volost,” due to the influence of the Lutheran Church, as well as Estonian teachers and youth.⁵⁶ The use of the term “Russian former *poluvertsy*” (“*russkie byvshye poluvertsy*”) suggests that the assimilation process was perceived as being so far underway that *poluvertsy* was used as a historical ethnonym pertaining to past generations, rather than the current population.

“Halfness” as a Signifier of Mixed Confessional Practices

Whereas in the 1840s, the term *poluvertsy* was mainly used in official documents and correspondence between ethnographers and statisticians as an ethnonym, towards the end of the nineteenth century the religious connotations gradually gained greater sway as a pejorative term used by Orthodox clergy to refer to the unconventional ways in which these people practiced Orthodoxy.⁵⁷ This was the meaning emphasized by Jüri Truusmann, an Orthodox Estonian who worked as an imperial censor, in the expedition report based on his fieldwork in 1885 funded by IRGO to study the inhabitants of western Pskov province.⁵⁸ Although Truusmann was clear to emphasize that *poluvertsy* were extremely devout Orthodox, he attributed the meaning of “halfness” in their name to the fact that they also retained pagan beliefs and customs.⁵⁹ Truusmann’s interpretation was later repeated in subsequent texts by Orthodox clergymen.⁶⁰

Among Lutheran pastors, the religious meaning of the “halfness” of the *poluvertsy* was regarded more critically and denoted the impure and incomplete ways in which they practiced Orthodoxy that led to their spiritual and moral impoverishment. One of the most prominent critics of the supposed spiritual impoverishment of *poluvertsy* was Jakob Hurt, who in addition to being one of the most renowned Estonian ethnographers was

55 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 131.

56 RA, EAA.93.1.290 (Delo o vvedenii prepodavaniia estonskago iazyka), 73–74.

57 For an overview of the confessional practices of the Seto in the nineteenth century, see Grichin, “Setude usuellust.”

58 Trusman, “Poluvertsy Pskovo-Pechorskogo kraia.”

59 Trusman, “Poluvertsy Pskovo-Pechorskogo kraia,” 35.

60 See, for instance, Lebedev, *Inorodcheskii vopros*, 8.

also a Lutheran pastor of the Estonian congregation of St. John's parish in St. Petersburg from 1880 to 1901. In the aforementioned report to the IRGO about his 1903 expedition, Hurt explained that the term *poluvertsy* referred to their inability to understand Church Slavonic or Russian, which meant that they had no knowledge of the gospels and holy scripture and thus could only communicate with priests in a limited way. The Orthodox Church's "lack of spiritual care" to provide them with religious instruction in their mother tongue meant that, despite their considerable devotion, the relationship of the *poluvertsy* to Orthodoxy was merely external and ceremonial.⁶¹ Hurt claimed that this alleged spiritual poverty led to degenerative behavior, especially ether addiction, which was prevalent among them. At the same time, Hurt's own religious views likely led him to exaggerate the levels of illiteracy among *poluvertsy*, which has been subsequently disputed by historians.⁶²

Nevertheless, news of the pagan practices of the *poluvertsy* spread around the empire. At the 1884 Archaeological Congress in Odessa/Odesa, Pavel Viskovatov, professor of Russian literature at Dorpat University, presented a paper about the strange practices of the Orthodox Estonians in Pskov province. He elaborated on the case of the villagers of Meeksi, who revered a tree under which they believed Apostle John had once rested, the stone upon which he adjusted his shoes, and the river where he washed himself.⁶³ In 1908, the Riga-based German newspaper *Rigasche Post* presented readers with news of the Setos' (*Setukesen*) idol worshipping of their God Peko, "a small human-sized wax figure, the size of a three-year-old child," which was presented as a sign of their lack of education as they only have "foreign-language written instruction in church and school."⁶⁴ Such stories served to exoticize the image of borderland Orthodoxies in the empire.

In the context of the expansion of Orthodox missionary activities in other parts of the empire and various initiatives—both institutional and "from below"—to improve Orthodox education, from the 1890s the Orthodox Church began to pay more attention to *poluvertsy*. The issue was made more salient by the migration between 1885 and 1890 of more than 8,500 people

61 IRGO, f. 83, op. 1, d. 180, l. 12.

62 Andreas Kalkun has challenged Hurt's bleak assessment of Seto illiteracy and poor knowledge of Russian, arguing that school reforms in the 1860s meant that by the end of the nineteenth century 150 Seto children were studying in Russian-language schools and acquiring Russian was perceived as a means of social advancement. Kalkun, "Russkaia vera."

63 Viskovatov, "Nekotorye svedeniia ob estakh," 85.

64 "Der Götze Peko."

from Livland to Pskov province. Peasants had been migrating to Pskov province since the 1850s; however, the recent influx of migrants tipped the religious composition of the province as the number of Lutherans increased by one and a half times over a five-year period, from 9,142 in 1885 to 14,180 in 1890.⁶⁵ The threat of apostasy from Orthodoxy to Lutheranism, which was illegal in the Romanov Empire prior to the 1905 Edict of Toleration, hung in the air.⁶⁶ Consequently, in 1891 Evgenii Lebedev, a teacher at the Pskov Spiritual Seminary, published a book on the “*inorodtsy* question” (“aliens question”) in Pskov province.⁶⁷ While he recommended that some steps should be taken to address the Latvian and Estonian new arrivals, Lebedev called for greater attention to the *poluvertsy*, whom he regarded as ripe to be “brought closer to the Russian nation.”⁶⁸ In a subsequent article he recommended that education, and especially increasing literacy, was key for improving their spiritual welfare.⁶⁹

Consequently, in 1898 two “Estonian missionaries” were appointed: I. Troitskii in Toropets and Karl Ustav (Kaarel/Karp Usatov) in Porkhov.⁷⁰ On February 7, 1900, Bishop Antonin of the Pskov and Porkhov diocese sent a letter to the Pskov Spiritual Consistory with the results of a survey carried out about *poluvertsy*. The survey included questions on whether *poluvertsy* were Orthodox, their knowledge of Russian, whether it was necessary for priests to deliver the liturgy in the *poluvertsy* language, and whether *poluvertsy* were converting to Lutheranism.⁷¹ One of the questions asked was “to which tribe

65 Lebedev, *Inorodcheskii vopros*, 12–13.

66 Despite the formal prohibition on converting from Orthodoxy, the situation on the ground in the Baltic provinces was more confessionally fluid. Some inhabitants converted back and forth between the two faiths depending on personal preferences and social pressures. See Gibson and Paert, “Apostasy in the Baltic Provinces.” In particular, the map on p. 263 reveals how the authorities in Livland province in 1888 were alert to the large scale of illegal apostasy from Orthodoxy in the region.

67 The term *inorodtsy* referred to a distinct legal category of peoples of the empire who were not subject to the general laws of the empire (nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, and, after 1835, also Jews). By the late nineteenth century, the term, however, was also used more widely in a pejorative sense to refer to non-Russians, as is the case with Lebedev here. See Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the *Inorodtsy*?” 174–75; Kotenko, “Ukrainians as ‘Aliens’ (*Inorodtsy*).”

68 Lebedev, *Inorodcheskii vopros*, 27.

69 Lebedev, “Shkola—tserkov’ dlia poluvertsev.”

70 Kalinina, “Missionerskaia deiatel’nost’ russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi.” The discrepancies in Ustav/Usatov’s name have led some scholars to suggest that he might have been in fact two different figures, although this seems unlikely. See Kolpakova, “Svedeniia o Seto,” 169.

71 State Archive of Pskov Oblast (hereafter GAPO), f. 39, op. 1, d. 7761 (Raporty blagochinnykh o pravoslavnykh inorodtsakh poluverakh po Pskovskoi gubernii), l. 1–3. “Chud” is an ancient Slavic term used to refer to Baltic Finns. See Jääts, “The Komi,” 210.

[*plemia*] they belong, to the Chud' or to Estonians or Latvians?"⁷² The priests replied with "Orthodox *inorodtsy*: Chud', Estonians, and Latvians, known under the name of *poluvertsy*."⁷³ In their replies, the priests used cautionary phrases such as "so-called" or wrote *poluvertsy* in quotation marks, which suggests that by the turn of the twentieth century they were increasingly aware that it was not a neutral term.⁷⁴ The survey responses also indicate an emerging gulf between officials of the Pskov Spiritual Consistory, who used the term *poluvertsy* as an ethnonym, and thus an "experience-distant" category of analysis, and the priests "on the ground," who approached it in the context of the loaded meaning it carried as a category of practice used in "everyday experiences, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors."⁷⁵

Poluvertsy as a Nationality

The use of the term *poluvertsy* to denote both national ambiguity or hybridity resulting from ethnolinguistic assimilation processes among borderland populations (variously defined as Russified Estonians or Estonianized Russians) and/or nonconventional ways of practicing Orthodoxy, gradually gave way to the use of this term to indicate a separate nationality. Early instances of this usage can be found as early as the Estland provincial census of 1881, when a census taker in Reval/Tallinn listed the nationality of an Estonian-speaking Orthodox soldier from the Pskov region as *Halbgläubiger* "probably because he considered himself neither a real Estonian, nor a real Russian."⁷⁶ The census was unusual in the context of the Romanov Empire for asking a specific question about nationality, and there is a possibility that the respondent or census taker simply mistook the meaning of "nationality" and answered with a description of the respondents' confession, as was also common.⁷⁷ Even so, the fact that this ethnonym made it into the published report of the census suggests that its use as a nationality had entered into more widespread usage.

72 GAPO, f. 39, op. 1, d. 7761, l. 1–3.

73 GAPO, f. 39, op. 1, d. 7761, l. 21.

74 A selection of letters from GAPO (f. 39 op. 1, d. 7761) written by Orthodox priests to the dean of the Pechora district, Mikhail Mutovozov, and describing the *poluvertsy* in their parishes have been translated and published online. White, "Seto."

75 On this distinction, which builds on Bourdieu, see Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 4.

76 Jordan, *Die Resultate der Ehstländischen Volkszählung*, 25.

77 For further details of the censuses of the 1860s–80s in the Baltic provinces, see Gibson, "Experiencing Enumeration."

This argument is corroborated by multiple references to *poluvertsy* as a self-proclaimed nationality in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Sergei Umanets, for instance, wrote that in Estland

“*poluvertsy*” do not consider themselves Russians, just as they are not considered Russians by their Russian neighbors who live side by side with them. Because they mix Lutheran dogmas with the foundations of Orthodoxy, they call them “*poluvertsy*” or “*poluverniki*.” In fact, it even entered Estonian speech in the form of the word “*poluvernikud*.”⁷⁸

Umanets described his encounter in Piukhtitsa with a member of the local population who used the term as a self-identification:

Here you will meet among the local peasants Estonians who resemble the Great Russian ethnographic type. You address these apparent Russians in Russian speech. They quickly and willingly answer you in Russian. “Are you Russian?”—you ask them. “Well, we’re not Russian,” they answer you, “we’re *poluvertsy*.” These “*poluvertsy*” distinguish themselves from the Russians and from neighboring Estonians.⁷⁹

Likewise, Vostokov, when writing about the Pskov *poluvertsy*, argued that they displayed all the attributes of a separate nationality, concluding that

[d]espite the complete similarity of their external living conditions with the Russians, they have still, over the course of several centuries, retained their language, producing folk art, homelife, etc., in a word, what we embrace in the word nationality.⁸⁰

By the early twentieth century, this idea of *poluvertsy* as a separate national group was reflected in the gradual supplantation of the term *poluvertsy* with “Pechora Estonians [Seto]” in multiple languages of the region.⁸¹

The most public attempts to transform the term *poluvertsy* into a form of self-identification came to the fore in the figure of Karl Ustav. Ustav was the priest in Pokrov church in Porkhov parish and between 1892 and 1904

78 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 131.

79 Umanets, *Vospominaniia o kniaze S. V. Shakhovskom*, 128.

80 Vostokov, *Kul'turno-religioznyiia dvizheniia*.

81 “Pecherskie esty (Setukezy);” “Die Pleskauer Esten (Setukesen).”

he delivered the liturgy in Estonian on the first Sunday of every month.⁸² From 1907 to 1915, he was a priest in the village of Tailovo. Whereas the Orthodox clergy in the Pskov diocese tended to treat Estonian and the Seto language as one and the same, Ustav began a campaign for Seto-language education and Orthodox liturgy. On January 6, 1907, Usatov published an article about the Setos under the title “Forgotten People” in response to an article published in the *Stock Exchange Gazette* in St. Petersburg about the Setos’ preference for ether over vodka. Usatov complained about the lack of native language education as the cause of Setos’ spiritual and moral poverty:

We Setos, or *poluvertsy*, are a small people [*narodets*] numbering around twenty thousand who are forgotten and despised by everyone just because we do not have command of the Russian language. Although we have belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church for almost three centuries, there is hardly anything typically Greek Orthodox about us except for the cross. Our pastors have not taught us anything in the course of all this time, nor have they been able to teach us anything because they do not know our language. Except for the words “*Anna raha! Anna rug!*!” [“Give money! Pay your debts!”], which our clergy pronounce quite clearly.⁸³

Using the third person singular “we” and signing himself off as a “Seto-priest” (“*Setukez-sviashchennik*”), Usatov presented himself as a spokesperson on behalf of the Setos. He argued that whereas Estonians benefited from the influence of German pastors to the point that they “are by no means lagging behind European progress,” Setos remained as “half-pagans” and “barbarians.” The lack of spiritual education meant that Setos “still honor idols and fetishes,” engage in idolatry, and drink ether. The priest chastised scholars such as Truusmann and Hurt who study the Setos and “come to see us like some antediluvian savages who live somewhere in the Asian tundra but not in civilized European Russia on the border of the highly cultivated Livland.” Regarded as both separate from the main Estonian population, while also not being fully associated with Russians, Setos were left as the “the neglected stepsons of Russia.” Usatov thus argued that Seto children should be provided with education in both Russian and the “half-believer language” (“*po-poluvercheski*”).⁸⁴

82 GAPO, f. 29, op. 1, d. 7762 (Raporty missionerov i sviashchennikov so svedeniiami o staroobriadtsakh, pravoslavnykh latyshakh i estakh po Pskovskoi eparkhii), l. 1.

83 GAPO, f. 39, op. 1, d. 7764 (Delo o poluvertsakh (estontsakh), prozhivaiushchikh v Pskovskoi eparkhii), l. 2.

84 GAPO, f. 39, op. 1, d. 7764, l. 2.

Usatov's article caused a ripple and was subsequently translated and published in the Latvian press in December 1906 and in the German press and in the Estonian press in January 1907.⁸⁵ In early February, the case was brought to the attention of the Pskov Spiritual Consistory. In response, the consistory ordered a survey of the Setos to be carried out in Pechory/Petseri parish.⁸⁶ Based on the results, on June 28 the consistory ordered that priests with knowledge of the "native *poluvertsy* language" should be appointed to Seto parishes and on October 8 a clerical assembly was convened to discuss the appointment of priests.⁸⁷ From May 1, 1909, *Petseri Postimees*, a bimonthly newspaper in the Seto language, was printed in Iur'ev/Tartu, financed by Anton Jürgenstein and edited by Karl Ustav, with the aim of making Estonians aware of the "Estonian splinter community commonly known as Seto."⁸⁸ However, the newspaper closed in 1910, though an attempt was later made to revive it in 1919. By 1917 Usatov became disillusioned and moved to western Estonia, later becoming one of the most prominent spokespeople for the Setos in interwar Estonia.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The way in which the term *poluvertsy* emerged as a battleground for different national movements and confessions was succinctly summed up by Villem Buk, an Estonian former head teacher from northeastern Livland who was forced to leave the Baltic provinces in 1907 following his arrest for left-wing political activity. Settling in temporary exile in Pskov province, he wrote a book about the "*poluvertsy* region" ("*poluvercheskii krai*") and the local population, in which he declared that "Of course, everyone knows the land of the Seto [Setomaa] in their own way—one side is interested in one, the other is interested in another."⁹⁰ Buk concluded that "[w]hatever the name is, we'll leave it to the researcher to take care of that, and as the inhabitants of this land are Estonians and Petseri is their center, then we call them Petseri Estonians."⁹¹

85 "Aizmirsta tautiņa"; "Seda ja teist"; "Ueber Die Setukesen."

86 GAPO, f. 39, op. 1, d. 7764, l. 10b.

87 GAPO, f. 32, op. 1, d. 7764, l. 43–44.

88 "Uus ajaleht, 'Petseri Postimees.'"

89 Rimestad, *The Challenges of Modernity*, 145–46.

90 Buk, *Petseri eestlased*, 4.

91 Buk, *Petseri eestlased*, 3.

This chapter has traced the history of the term *poluvertsy* as an example of the language of “in-betweenness” which developed to describe various forms of identification which did not easily fit within the emerging national categories of belonging in the second half of the nineteenth century. Paying attention to the evolution of the differing, concurrent meanings attached to the word *poluvertsy* and the contexts in which it was used reveals how contemporaries defined and understood various forms of ethnolinguistic and confessional identifications and contested the boundaries between these groups. The malleability of the term—and its connotations of “halfness” and hybridity—meant that various parties took advantage of it to claim the people they described with the help of this term for their own ideological purposes. Situating this case within the broader context of developments in the Romanov Empire at the time, the debates among ethnographers, officials, and churchmen surrounding the term *poluvertsy* also allow us to see how the inconsistent and incomplete nationalization of the empire’s western borderlands was apparent also at the level of the language used to describe borderland populations.⁹²

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92 Kotenko, “An Inconsistently Nationalizing State.”

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2. Negotiating Faith and Ethnicity: Conversions, Social Conflict, and the Russian Orthodox Clergy in Estland Province during the 1880s–1900s

Irina Paert

Abstract: Conversions to Orthodoxy in Western Estonia were part of the “Russification” policy of Alexander III. This chapter examines social conflict in the countryside, as described from the perspective of the Russian Orthodox priest Father Alexander Bezhanitskii (1858–1926) and his wife, Seraphima Bezhanitskaia (1857–1939). It focuses on the intersection of ethnic, social, imperial, and local factors. The chapter provides insights into religious conversions and the social identity of the Russian Orthodox clergy in the Baltic, exploring the shifting association between ethnicity and confession while testing the findings of other scholars. By examining the interaction between religion, ethnicity, and social status in the Baltic, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the Russian clergy’s role in the imperial borderlands.

Keywords: Orthodoxy, multi-confessional order, Russification, priest, parish

Returning home from a fair in the market town of Lihula in western Estland province, conveniently located on the trade route between the islands of Saaremaa and Muhu and the provincial capital of Tallinn, in 1883 the Estonian peasants of Väike-Lahtru, a rural settlement (about 30 km from Haapsalu), decided to convert to Orthodoxy.¹ They brought from the fair

1 This research has been supported by the Estonian Research Council (Grant PRG 1599).

an appeal to converts from Orthodox bishop Platon (Nikolai Gorodetskii, 1848–67) of Riga. The appeal, even though written and translated well over a decade earlier in the late 1860s, was still being read aloud in many places in Estland and Livland provinces, including in the tavern and outside the Lutheran church in Lihula. A delegation of eighty peasants went to Martin Tammert, the teacher in a local Lutheran school, and one of the first Orthodox converts in the area, and asked him whether they should convert to Orthodoxy. Martin encouraged them to do so. The prospective converts streamed into Haapsalu to Mary Magdalen Orthodox Church, where priest Nikolai Poletaev, “received” them through the ritual of chrismation.² The converts formed a new parish, to which another community of peasants from the neighboring Mäemõisa was added. As there was no church, the liturgy was celebrated in the house of one of the converts, Mihkel Reinhart, which also functioned as a school.

The conversions in Väike-Lahtru and Mäemõisa represented one episode in the wave of conversions in Estland in the 1880 and 1890s, following the conversions of the 1840s, which took place mainly in Livland, and of the 1870s in Courland. In 1883 alone, 2,469 men and women converted to Orthodoxy in western Estland province, and by 1887 the number of new converts in all three Baltic provinces (Estland, Livland, and Courland) reached 15,652.³ The conversions were facilitated by the integration of Estland under the Riga Orthodox bishopric in 1865 (it had previously been part of the St. Petersburg diocese) and by the state-financed construction of a number of Orthodox churches. Between 1887 and 1918, fifty-five new churches were built, including the Piukhtitsa (Kuremäe) woman’s convent in northern Estland province. Each church had a parish school, where the clergy taught in both Estonian and Russian. The priests served their parishioners’ needs in Estonian; the text of the liturgy and catechisms had already been translated into Estonian in the 1840s.

This chapter explores the complex relationship in the 1880s and 1890s between the Baltic German landed nobility, Orthodox priests, and Estonian converts. Used here as a key primary source is the correspondence of Aleksandr Bezhanitskii, the Orthodox priest to two parishes of newly converted peasants in Väike-Lahtru and Mäemõisa.

2 The Lutheran converts were not rebaptized; however, their baptism in the Lutheran faith was regarded as incomplete. Therefore, the priests completed the ritual by anointing the converts with holy oil (chrismation), part of the baptism ritual within the Orthodox church that ritually made them Orthodox.

3 Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii*, 288.

The Russian Empire was a confessional state, which meant that all recognized faith groups were legal within the empire; religious leaders gained positions of authority within their communities by securing backing from the imperial state.⁴ Yet, there were still tensions. One was between the standardizing aspirations of the modernizing state and the internal structures of the legal religions, including their canon law and organization. The second tension was between the intention to maintain the multi-confessional establishment and also, as Paul Werth has written, to “uphold a clear distinction between a ‘ruling’ Orthodoxy and the subordinate foreign confessions.”⁵

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the multi-confessional order came into tension with the process of “nationalizing empire” under Alexander III. The association between confession and nationality became more pronounced in the late nineteenth century in the Baltic provinces, even though there was never a strict delineation, especially when the non-Russian people (*inorodtsy*) were concerned.⁶ As for converts, the categories of imperial confessional ascription never functioned perfectly, since large groups of people oscillated between Orthodoxy and Lutheranism and explored opportunities that confessional and imperial loyalties could provide them.⁷

In their interpretation of the conversions, Baltic German historians argued that the Russian Orthodox priests agitated and lured people to convert by promising worldly benefits. All this was said to have been brought about with the direct support of the state authorities, who by this means continued their recent policy and, in violation of Baltic German prerogatives and laws acceded to by the Russian state since the early eighteenth century, sought to undermine the position of the Baltic German nobles and of Lutheranism in the Baltic.⁸ In agreement with the earlier historiography, Michael Haltzel viewed the conversions as part and parcel of the Russification policy of Alexander III and interpreted them as an assault on the rights of nobility and the Lutheran Church.⁹ The actions of the Orthodox clergymen have been interpreted as motivated by Russian nationalism, as expressed in the writings of the Slavophile Iurii Samarin, who argued that the natural inclination of

4 See Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar*.

5 Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths*, 48.

6 See Paert et al., “Confession, Loyalty.”

7 Paert et al., “Confession, Loyalty”; Paert and Gibson, “Apostacy in the Baltic Provinces.”

8 Rebane, “Usuvahetuslik liikumine,” 80.

9 Haltzel, “Religious Turmoil.”

the Estonians and Latvians was to Orthodoxy.¹⁰ Writing about the earlier conversions of the 1840s in Livland, historians have challenged the Baltic German interpretation and insisted on the agency of the Estonian peasants, who had complex motivations for conversion.¹¹ But even in the 1930s, Estonian scholar Leida Rebane (Loone), while seeing conversions in western Estland province as a form of social protest, acknowledged that Orthodoxy began to live its own independent life and became genuinely popular among the people.¹² Darius Staliūnas has argued that in contrast to the northwestern region of the Russian Empire, the clergy in the Baltic were more active, used the local vernacular, and encouraged mass conversions, and that the tsarist authorities did not adopt “radical confessional engineering.”¹³

The state-driven project of nationalizing the Russian Empire under Alexander III minimized the potential of the “imperial nation-building” of the Great Reforms by strengthening Russian statist or Russian ethno-cultural nationalism and by expanding its ideological program into spheres that had not yet been touched.¹⁴ This narrow understanding of “nation” not only did not include those who refused cultural assimilation but also presented those who were adopting Russian culture and Orthodox faith as not sufficiently Russian.¹⁵ The impact of this project on local politics in the Estonian countryside was manifold. This chapter explores its influence with a focus on one Orthodox parish in western Estland province.

Studying the Russian Clergy in the Baltic

While Russian state administrators and civil servants became visible in the Baltic provinces only in the late 1880s when the Russification reforms were underway, the Russian clergy had already been entrenched there since at least the 1840s. The ethnically Russian clergy had established roots in the provinces, producing numerous offspring and intermarrying with Latvian and Estonian converts to Orthodoxy. The social portrait of this group is important as it sheds light on how the Russian clergy were involved in forming alternative religious and social spaces within the Lutheran and German-dominated culture of the region. It was logical that the tsarist

10 Polunov, “Imperiia, pravoslaviie,” 210.

11 Ryan, “The Tsar’s Faith”; Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii*.

12 Rebane, “Usuvahetuslik liikumine,” 201.

13 Staliūnas, “Imperial Government.”

14 Gerasimov et al., *Novaia imperskaia*, 273.

15 Gerasimov et al., *Novaia imperskaia*, 273.

state looked toward the Russian clergy as potential mediators between the imperial state and the countryside, especially when they felt they could not rely on the Baltic German nobility.

This chapter addresses the following questions: to what extent did the Russian Orthodox clergy represent the instrument of the Russian imperial state? Were Russian clergy conscious of their role in the state's imperial designs? Were they even aware of their own "Russianness," and, if so, in what ways? How was their position of cultural power manifested in their behavior and outlook? How were the selfhoods and collective identities of the Orthodox priests and their families formed in relation to their ethnic group and other ethnic groups in the region?¹⁶

The paucity of research on this group can perhaps be explained by the assumed irrelevance of the topic to the main national historiographical themes and by the scarcity of sources.¹⁷ In contrast, the Russian Old Believers populating the shores of Lake Peipus or the industrial slums of the city of Riga are much better studied and understood.¹⁸ To what extent did the clergy associate themselves with other Russian groups and how could they be compared to other urban groups of Russians—merchants, the officer corps, and bureaucrats?¹⁹

Focusing on the Russian clergy in the imperial borderlands sheds light on the interaction between religion, ethnicity and social status in the Baltic.²⁰ By focusing on the grassroots identities, this chapter complements the work of scholars who have written about the role of confession in defining national groups in the Russian discourse.²¹

The Russian Priest and His Parishioners

Father Aleksandr Bezhanitskii (1858–1926) graduated from Riga Seminary in 1880 and served as a sacristan in two parishes in Livland before being

16 The exception are works of the Latvian historian Aleksandr Gavrilin. It needs to be pointed out that prosopography of the Orthodox clergy is badly lacking. See, for example, Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii*.

17 As an exception, see White, "Russian Orthodox."

18 Rikhter, *Russkoe naselenie*.

19 Woodworth, "Patterns of Civil Society," 141; Woodworth, "Civil Society and Nationality," 320.

20 Kolosova, "Narodnost'."

21 Staliūnas, "The Identification of the Subjects," 37. It needs to be kept in mind that Staliūnas's article deals with the northwestern region and focuses on the imperial officials, not on the Orthodox clergy.

ordained as a priest and appointed to the new parishes in western Estland province—in Väike-Lahtru, from 1884 to 1886 and from 1889 to 1896, and in Mäemõisa from 1886 to 1889.

A son of priest Stefan Bezhanitskii (1821–1892), who was a native of the Pskov region, Aleksandr grew up in the parish in Soontaga in the Tartumaa region and followed his father's footsteps in becoming a priest, joining his other four brothers in this profession. Three of the Bezhanitskii brothers became priests in the newly established parishes in western Estland, two others in Livland.²² Before his appointment to Väike-Lahtru and Mäemõisa, he served as a sacristan (priest's assistant) in the parishes of Kärkna, Suislepa, and Arusaare.²³

In 1884 Aleksandr was twenty-six years old, recently married, and madly in love with his wife. Serafima also came from a priest's family. Her father, priest Ioann Raievskii, like Stefan Bezhanitskii, had graduated from Pskov spiritual seminary and came to Livland to serve the recently converted peasants. He was a priest on the island of Muhu, in the parish of Hellamaa. Serafima, his elder daughter, grew up on Muhu and graduated from the girls' school in Kuressaare, on the nearby larger island of Saaremaa, where she studied German, switching to Russian only during her last year at school. Ioann Raievskii was transferred to Viljandi in 1870, where Serafima and Aleksandr met and were married.

There was no Orthodox infrastructure in Väike-Lahtru. The parish had neither a church nor a house for a priest; Aleksandr could not even perform a liturgy as there was no altar. Instead, he celebrated vespers, the service that does not require a choir or altar, and the house of one of the peasants served as a temporary church. Father Aleksandr depicted his flock as pious but ignorant, under the influence of incorrect theological ideas, but deeply religious. He wrote in a letter to his father-in-law:

The peasants of my parish are poor, quite timid but caring and respectful. Reinhard is always glad when the priest arrives and meets him with joy. In Mäemõisa the parish is a bit strange: there are many who formerly belonged to the sect of jumpers [*skakuny*], who sighed during the church service: one could hear, "Oh and oh and jah and jah"; some roll their eyes and bare their teeth, especially women who look like little fools [*kazhutsia prosto durochkamī*]. The impression is rather unpleasant, but this kind of

22 Brothers Nikolai (1857–1919) and Vassilii (1863–1916) were priests in Livland (Kergu, Võru, Viljandi, Tartu, Uduvere, Tõrva). The other three made careers in Estland. Viktor (1852–1924) was a priest in Rakvere and Vladimir in Narva.

23 Eesti Ajalooarhiiv (hereafter EAA), EAA.1895.1.43; EAA.1655.2.38a; 2574; 2601.

holy foolishness [*iurodstvso*] is getting weaker. All in all, one could say that people in both parishes are pious.²⁴

The conversions in western Estland followed a religious awakening of the late 1870s which had begun among the Estonian Swedes (*noarootslased*) and spread among the Estonian inhabitants of Ridala, Martna, Lääne-Nigula, and Haapsalu parishes. It was characterized by the rise of self-proclaimed prophets who said they had visited heaven and hell and now possessed important messages from the Holy Spirit. These “*taevaskäijad*” (“celestial travelers”) expressed their faith by repeated jumping, shrieking, speaking in tongues, and declaiming their mystical visions. While the outsiders called the followers of this awakening “jumpers” (“*hüppajad*”), “congregation of the last days” (“*viimase aegade kogudus*”), “Swedish-faith believers” (“*Svenska usulised*”), “celestial travelers” (“*taevateelised*”), and “pietists” (“*pietistid*”), they called themselves “children of God” (“*jumalalapsed*”), “new believers” (“*uueusulised*”), or “awakened souls” (“*ärغانud hinged*”).²⁵ The mystical movement of the late 1870s can be interpreted as a religious response of the subaltern population to the cultural domination of the Lutheran faith: people gathered in barns and in the fields, and prophets and prophetesses interpreted the message that had been revealed to them through direct contact with the Divine, without the mediation of the protestant Bible or the authority of the pastor. The conversions to Orthodoxy can be understood as a continuation of the peasants’ reclamation of responsibility over their own spiritual life.

One of the persons who reclaimed responsibility for his spiritual life was Mihkel Reinhard, an active member of the new community who hosted the church and schoolhouse on his land allotment. Father Aleksandr wrote about Reinhard:

On Sunday there will be an election of the church elder. Reinhard is a hands-on and well-read peasant; one could say the pillar of the parish. He keeps the school in his house free of charge and tries to help and defend Orthodoxy and act in the spirit and interest of Orthodoxy. But it must be said that he is poor and does not own property.

Apart from reclaiming responsibility for their religious choices, the peasants hoped that Orthodoxy would improve their material well-being, even if

²⁴ Tallinna Linnaarhiiv (hereafter TLA), TLA.1501. Letter, September 14, 1884.

²⁵ Plaat, *Usuliikumised, kirikud*, 73.

they had no evidence to show this was the case. Yet, we see that Father Aleksandr shared their belief:

To tell the truth I cannot meet with these people with peace of mind: their faces are so miserable and everywhere there is extreme poverty, as if poverty left its mark on their faces: through conversion, many will hopefully improve their status.²⁶

It is difficult to understand what exactly Bezhanitskii had in mind since, in the short run, conversions made material well-being worse, not better: many Orthodox peasants had to pay higher rents than those who were Lutheran and faced evictions. In hindsight, however, the converts may have gained material benefits through the subsidized rent of their parish land allotments, where there were any, through subletting rooms in their houses for parish schools, paid for by the Council of the Affairs of the Orthodox Schools in Riga, and, finally, by using Orthodox connections to facilitate migration (discussed below).

Aleksandr described his Estonian parishioners as denigrated and exploited people who were kind and who sincerely cared about the priest and his family. His wife Serafima also characterized the converts as friendly and kind: “[T]he local peasants are caring [*laskovye*]. The main parishioner, Reinhard, brought me fresh butter and potatoes. [...] Yesterday, peasants came to discuss some contracts and brought three large pike perches, a pike, and a bottle of fresh milk.”²⁷

In contrast to their counterparts in Russia, the Baltic priests did not depend economically on their parishioners, but were remunerated by the state. Gifts from the peasants functioned as a gift-exchange economy, not a market transactional one. This also meant that the priest had to repay peasants with his services, which included not only the church sacraments but also petitioning on behalf of their representatives before the authorities. The peasants often involved priests in their lawsuits with their landlord. In some cases, peasants were just trying to avoid legal punishment, such as in the case of a peasant found guilty of stealing firewood from a manor, but who complained that he was prosecuted because of his conversion to Orthodoxy. In other cases, however, the complaints were justified.²⁸

²⁶ TLA.1501. Letter, November 3, 1884.

²⁷ TLA.1501. Letter, October 11, 1884.

²⁸ *Tserkovno-prikhodskaiia*.

The priests' families provided work for local women. Seraphima hired servants, wet nurses, and nannies for her children. Miina Kolga worked for the Bezhanitskii family between 1884 and 1894. Both husband and wife often mention Miina in their letters—what she cooked and what she said, quoting her colorful language. Even if Serafima complained in her letters that some servants stole food and even exposed her children to sickness, she had a special attachment to Miina and grieved when she died in 1894. However, there were other servants who were less reliable, such as a wet nurse (*mamka*), Lisa, whom Serafima threatened to take to court for failing to fulfill her contractual duties, and another domestic worker (*devka*) who lacked basic knowledge of hygiene. Serafima often complained about inefficient domestics but pointed out that she tried to get them cheaply. The nationality of these women was denoted as *chukhonki*, an ethnonym used by Russians for Estonians and Finns. Serafima described them condescendingly, though some she praised as caring and efficient.

Did Aleksandr and Serafima speak Estonian? In one of the letters to his wife Aleksandr quotes Miina, writing her speech in Estonian with correct Estonian grammar. Aleksandr grew up in the villages surrounded by parishioners who did not speak Russian. He must have learned Estonian at the Riga seminary during the 1870s, when Father Mihkel Suigusaar (1842–1916), an Estonian, was a lecturer there.²⁹ Bezhanitskii probably spoke enough Estonian to compose sermons and carry out ecclesiastical services. This made him different from his father, Stefan, who could not communicate in the local language very well. In addition to church services, the local parish schools provided education in Estonian, at least during the first two years of schooling, following the education reforms in 1883. The members of the household had to communicate with Estonian domestics, so Estonian was used by both the wife and children. Aleksandr and Serafima's son Boris, for example, sang Estonian songs when he was small, but his knowledge of Estonian did not develop: as a student in Tallinn in 1905 he did not understand the speeches at the funeral of the victims of the massacre of November 1905 at the Russian market.³⁰

29 Father Mihkel Suigisaar was a lecturer in the Riga seminary between 1868 and 1879, an Estonian censor, and the dean of the Transfiguration Cathedral of Pärnu. He had a reputation of being an Estonophile, and with his permission many writers of the national revival, such as Carl Robert Jacobson, Lydia Koidula, and others, published their works. See <https://www.balticorthodoxy.com/mihkel-suigusaar>.

30 Boris Bezanitski salmik/märkmik (katked). TLA.1501.

The Priest as a Mediator in Local Conflicts

The conversions caused—and were themselves a result of—a profound social crisis in the relationship between different groups within the Baltic provinces, especially Estland. In Väike-Lähtru, Baron Friedrich Rudolph von Rosen steeply increased the rent for several peasants of his estate in the summer of 1884. Peasants argued that the total land rent Von Rosen asked for at the end of the summer did not correspond to the one that he declared on July 25, St. Jacob's Day (*Jaagupipäev*, the day by tradition, when gathering the grain harvest began). In the eyes of the peasants, this was a violation of tradition and the law: changes in the rent should have been announced before July 25 and stand for the rest of the year.³¹ Bezhanitskii alerted Bishop Donat of Riga of this case, and the bishop appealed to the local authorities. Von Rosen, however, argued that, as estate owner, he had the right to increase the rent, and his decision did not depend on the religious affiliation of the peasant farmers.³² The provincial authorities ruled that Von Rosen's arbitrary action was illegal, and that he had no right to demand a higher rent than the one announced on July 25.³³

Yet, no one could prevent a landlord from evicting peasants from his land. Kersti Lust has shown that Orthodox peasants could be evicted for negligent farming or debt but also for “insufficient respect” for the lord.³⁴ In 1845 Margus Vasar was evicted from his farm by the Uusna landlord. The reason for his eviction was, according to the official correspondence on the case, either for converting to Russian Orthodoxy or for “instigating disobedience” towards the manor's orders. Lust writes, “In essence, there was little difference between the two, as the conversion was a ‘legal’ form of protest against manorial oppression and poverty in general, whereas disobedience towards the manor was not allowed.”³⁵ Efforts of the Orthodox bishop to intervene on behalf of Vasar had no affect. The evicted peasant lived in his cowshed before becoming a vagrant.³⁶

Smoke Days, School Tax, and the Crisis of the “Confessional State”

If the converts thought they could improve their material well-being by no longer participating in the maintenance of the Lutheran Church buildings

31 The law of February 18, 1866, has specified this rule. Rebane, “Usuvahetuslik liikumine,” 201.

32 EAA.30.7.1733, l. 2, 20–21v.

33 EAA.30.7.1733, l. 2, 20–21v, l. 21.

34 Lust, “How Permanent,” 229.

35 Lust, “How Permanent,” 230.

36 Lust, “How Permanent,” 230.

and property, they miscalculated. In 1884 the Estland governor's chancellery dealt with complaints about the fines that Baron von Rosen, the landowner in the parish of Väike-Lahtru, imposed on the peasants who failed to carry out mowing duties. The mowing duty was a remnant of *corvée*. Though serfs in Estland and Livland were emancipated in 1819, unpaid work on the manor or pasture land remained widespread. Theoretically, the peasants could resign from this work, but in that case, their rent would be increased. In this case, peasants tried to skip the extra work for the Lutheran pastorate. Bezhanitskii informed the bishop that this form of exploitation was known as "smoke days," which traditionally meant working for the pastorate, and that it was inappropriate for the Orthodox peasants to work on the Lutheran Church land.³⁷

The second problem concerned the maintenance of the Lutheran schools. Converts demanded to be released from dues paid to Lutheran schools, which were collected by townships. In 1884 Bezhanitskii petitioned on behalf of his parishioners who complained that the local authorities were charging them for the maintenance of Lutheran schools. Since the Orthodox parish provided education for its members, why should they also pay for the Lutheran schools? Yet, it was not such a simple matter. The Estland governor's chancellery forwarded a request to the land captain (*Hackenrichter*) of the township to find out the reasons for these charges. The land captain reported that the charges were based on the contract with the Lutheran school teacher signed in spring 1884, while the peasants had not converted to Orthodoxy until the fall of 1884. Therefore, the township authorities reasoned, since the peasants had used the schooling during 1884, they were liable for the tax.³⁸ In reality, since study in the school was not held from May to October, the peasants likely felt they did not owe any school tax. Their demand to be exempted from the tax was satisfied by the province authorities.

Mihkel Reinhard was one of the peasants in Väike-Lahtru who became a victim of the struggle between different actors in the countryside, including the Lutheran and Orthodox churches and the Baltic German nobility. He went on trial because he hosted a church and a school in his house. First, Baron von Rosen increased his rent from 25 to 225 rubles and then tried to evict Reinhard from his land.³⁹ Mihkel appealed against the landlord but lost his case in the local court. Trying to help the convert, Bishop Donat appealed to Estland governor V. P. Polivanov. Under the pressure of the

37 EAA.30.7.1733, l. 2.

38 EAA.30.7.1776, l1–14v.

39 *Tserkovno-prikhodskaiia letopis'*.

Baltic German nobility, Polivanov replied to the bishop that the law did not limit the amount of rent a landowner could impose on his tenants.⁴⁰

The case of Reinhard was especially important for Bezhanitskii. Mihkel Reinhard was one of the “activists” of the conversion movement in the area. In a letter to his in-laws in April 1885 Bezhanitskii wrote that Reinhard lost the case in the local court and had then taken it to the provincial court. From this letter, we can discern the frustration of the Orthodox clergy with the maneuvers of Governor Polivanov, who tried to resolve the crisis without offending either of the parties.

If Reinhard loses, then our Orthodox cause [*pravoslavnoe delo*] is damned. But we hope that Reinhard's case will be won, especially since we feel the protection of vice-governor [Adolf] Tillo. It has been known about him that he stands for Orthodoxy and manages everything with precision, not like Governor Polivanov. I have received two very positive responses to my two petitions regarding the dues benefitting the Lutheran clergy. It states that the taxes should be returned. He, that is, Tillo, ordered the *Hackenrichters* and parish courts not to demand from the Orthodox any kind of dues to the benefits of the Lutheran clergy.⁴¹

Bezhanitskii expresses criticism of Governor Polivanov for what he sees as spinelessness. The crisis caused by conversions placed the administrators of the province in a complicated position. Polivanov's attempt to find a compromise between the conflicting parties in the legal system that was highly contradictory and was doomed to fail. Facing pressure from the church and the Baltic Germans, Polivanov resigned from his post of Estland governor in April 1885, after serving in Estland for sixteen years. Vice-governor Adolf Tillo (1846–1918) filled the governor's shoes for eleven months before the appointment of Prince Sergei Shakhovskoi (1852–1894). While the role of priests like Bezhanitskii in the change of policy was minimal, we should not discard the importance of the “voices from below” that the local priests communicated to the church and secular authorities, as well as to the press. All these court cases against the peasant converts to Orthodoxy served to form Russian public opinion that supported the shift of the policy in the Baltic under Alexander III.

The burden of taxation and the lack of land drove many peasants to migrate to Russia, thus complicating the problem of ethnic relations. Estonian

40 *Tserkovno-prikhodskaiia letopis'*.

41 TLA.1501. Letter, April 19, 1885.

peasants who left for Russia were aware of the need to acculturate in the new territories, even though they migrated not individually but in groups. While migration was not always linked with conversions, in the case of the peasants in Väike-Lahtru, Orthodoxy gave peasants an additional advantage. We learn about the mechanics of migration from Father Aleksandr's letters. The stories of the arbitrary treatment of the Orthodox converts by the landlords received publicity, and Russian journalists wrote about the afflictions of the recent converts to Orthodoxy. In 1884, one compassionate reader, a nobleman with the surname Nikolaev, learned about the plight of the Orthodox peasants of Väike-Lahtru from the St. Petersburg daily *Novoe vremia* and wrote to Father Aleksandr with an offer to help the afflicted peasants resettle in Central Russia to his estate in Ardatov in the Nizhnii Novgorod province. The Finno-Ugric Mordva language was spoken in Ardatov and may have been an attraction for the peasants, but we do not know for sure.

Father Aleksandr remarked that “the peasants are happy about this proposal. They say that in Russia [*na Rusi*] people are kind and landlords are compassionate to Estonian peasants, to their conversion to Orthodoxy.” In November 1884 he wrote that eleven families elected two representatives who went to Ardatov to survey the land and discuss resettlement conditions. They came back with good news: Nikolaev agreed to accommodate not only eleven families, but even more. He gave settlers four years free of charge from rent, and after that asked for four rubles per *dessiatine* (roughly equivalent to a hectare), but many other favors in addition. Alexander wrote:

[T]he dissolute poverty of peasants, high rent imposed by the landlords, and hostile attitude to the Orthodox—all these reasons lead peasants to search for a better lot in Russia. There are many who want to resettle but because of their poverty, [but] they cannot even afford to travel to Ardatov. I don't think that the poor will live better in Ardatov—I am only afraid that as a shepherd [*pastyr*] I will be left without a flock except for a very tiny one.⁴²

This episode was just one in the story of the migration of Estonian peasants in search of land and better living conditions. By the end of the century, 117,105 Estonian-speaking peasants lived outside the Baltic—in Siberia, the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, St. Petersburg, and Central Russia.⁴³ Land shortage was the main reason for resettlement. Even though this chapter

42 TLA.1501. Letter, September 14, 1884.

43 Rosenberg, “Eestlaste väljaränne.”

focuses on a single individual, the case of Aleksandr Bezhanitskii provides additional insight into the history of Estonian peasants' migration to Russia, highlighting an Orthodox dimension, which stands out from the migration of the predominantly Lutheran peasants. We know little about the settlement of the peasants from Väike-Lahtru to Ardatov, but we can be sure that the conditions of the Russian peasants in Nizhnii Novgorod province were not much better and the land was not known for its fertility.⁴⁴

Nikolaev offered Father Aleksandr to resettle together with his parishioners, but he turned down the offer. This was a serious pastoral problem for the Orthodox Estonians: the Riga consistory had been receiving requests from the resettled Orthodox peasants who wanted to have priests who spoke their language. Since the Riga diocese clergy had comfortable conditions—in particular, they were remunerated by the state—priests from Baltic provinces had little motivation to go to a rural parish in Russia with a tiny Estonian flock.

The Priest and the Baron

Baron Friedrich Rudolph (Ralph) von Rosen, the owner of the manor in Väike-Lahtru (called Klein Lehtigal, in German) was determined that the sound of the bell of an Orthodox church would not be heard in his land. Having graduated from the Tallinn Cathedral School (*Ritter- und Domschule zu Reval*), he owned a manor in Tõstamaa in addition to Klein Lehtigal and also served as a clerk in the Excise Department of the Estland province.⁴⁵

As has been discussed in the meeting of the Baltic German nobility in Lihula on April 22, 1883, conversions had to be snuffed out and prevented from spreading further.⁴⁶ The nobles agreed to lobby the local and central authorities for their cause and put economic pressure on the converts. Baron von Rosen launched a series of measures perceived by the peasants as persecution of the Orthodox converts on his estate. While he was careful in his communications, his feelings towards the conversions were not dissimilar to those of his wife, Baroness von Rosen, who much more openly criticized the converts. For example, Mihkel Malm, a former household domestic of the baron, filed a complaint against his employer for unjust treatment in 1886. He argued that the baron let him go because of his conversion to Orthodoxy. Malm quoted the baroness, who scolded him for “changing over

44 Kurdin, *Iarem*, 511.

45 From 1889 he worked in a fire insurance society in Reval (Tallinn).

46 Rebane, “Usuvahetuslik liikumine,” 129.

to the devil's faith," telling him that he was "in the jaws of wolves" and that "this dreadful Russian faith has robbed him of his mind."⁴⁷

The Orthodox parish in Väike-Lahtru, on the land owned by Von Rosen, was in dire need of a church building, a cemetery, and a house for the clergy. Father Aleksandr traveled thirty miles from Haapsalu to his parishioners several times a week and could not serve the liturgy in the peasant hut without an altar.

The priest and the converted peasants selected suitable land for the church buildings, school, and cemetery, but they needed the permission of the landlord. In spring 1884 Von Rosen complained with indignation to the Haapsalu Orthodox dean Nikolai Poletaev about the "unlawful and impudent actions" of the Orthodox peasants who surveyed the land on his estate to build an Orthodox church. Since the peasants acted in the name of the estate office (*myznoie upravlenie*), and one of the surveyors was the volost judge, Von Rosen quite rightly suspected that Orthodoxy had already spread in his estate beyond his knowledge. He was outraged and threatened to take the case to court. He also coldly advised Poletaev to write to him in German in the future, since he could not understand Russian.⁴⁸ The latter remark seems to be a tall tale, since working in the Excise Department Von Rosen had to be able to communicate with the Russian administrators.

In the fall of 1884 the bishop invited the Estland province architect to survey the land and asked Von Rosen to sell the plot of land, which was deemed suitable.⁴⁹ It was not a surprise that the baron refused to sell the selected land and proposed two alternative plots, neither of which was suitable because they were forest and marshland. When the petitioners insisted on the plot of their choice he proposed to sell instead of four dessiatines (about 4 ha), seven other agricultural plots adjacent to the selected one, whose total size was more than 145 dessiatines, for 120 rubles per dessiatine.⁵⁰ He justified this by the fact that building the Orthodox church on the manor land would decrease the cost of the agricultural plots that were adjacent to it, so selling four dessiatines for 350 rubles would be unprofitable for him. In a letter to his in-laws on November 3, 1884, priest Bezhanitskii comments that Von Rosen "wanted to get rich at the expense of the state treasury" by selling the land to the church at a price which was 2.5 times higher than the market rate.

47 EAA.30.7.1960, l.1–12.

48 EAA.1884.1.166 (Haapsalu deanery).

49 EAA.30.7.1691 (1884–89), l. 10–12v.

50 EAA.30.7.1691 (1884–89), l. 20–38.

The baron did not relent, even when Bishop Donat personally met with him. The frustrated Bezhanitskii wrote,

There is nothing new here: prices are high, he refuses to sell the manor land by dessiatines, and plots are expensive. He gives three dessiatines for free but it is not convenient and unsuitable. In any case, we hope that we receive land soon since the governor took a most lively interest in this case.⁵¹

The newly appointed Governor Shakhovskoi moved the case forward from the deadlock: he discussed the purchase of land for the parish church in Väike-Lahtru with Bishop Donat and demanded all the paperwork to be sent to him. In February 1886 Shakhovskoi applied to the Ministry of the Interior for the forced alienation of the land for the church.⁵² The alienation was based on the law of 1876, which allowed this administrative intervention in cases when the owner refused to cooperate.⁵³ A similar situation emerged when building the Piuhtitsa convent in the northern Estland province, where a local landlord, Baron Oskar Dieckhoff, tried to subvert the Orthodox establishment by building a prayer house 176 m away from the Orthodox chapel. The building works were stopped by Shakhovskoi, and the private land of Dieckhoff was expropriated on official order.⁵⁴ The State Council and the emperor approved Shakhovskoi's request in 1887 concerning the building of the church in Väike-Lahtru. According to some sources, Von Rosen also lost his position in the Excise Department and, from 1889, worked in a fire insurance society in Reval (Tallinn). A church dedicated to "the Nativity of the Mother of God" was built in 1889 by the architects Bernhardt and Nyman and consecrated on October 24, 1889, by Bishop Arsenii (Briantsev).

The case of Von Rosen was not necessarily illustrative of other landowners' attitudes. Baroness Elizabeth Uexküll, the estate owner in Uue-Virtsu (Neu Werder), voluntarily granted the requested land to build a church, selling two dessiatines for 245 rubles and donating two dessiatines of land in addition.⁵⁵

In sum, the conversions of the 1880s caused—and were a result of—a profound social crisis in the relationship between differing groups within

51 TLA.1501. Letter, October 1, 1885.

52 *Iz arhiva kniazia*, 154.

53 *Svod zakonov*, vol. 10, part 1, chapter VI, as quoted by Bishop Donat, EAA.30.7.1691.1.12.

54 See White, "Russian Orthodox."

55 EAA.30.7.1691 (1884–89).

the Baltic provinces, especially Estland. The local Baltic German landowners raised the rent for the converts and used various pretexts to evict them from their land. They also resisted building the Orthodox parishes on the manorial land or charged a price higher than the market one for the land.

The peasants appealed against eviction or increased dues to the local courts and complained to the Orthodox clergy. Often peasants mentioned the slandering against Orthodoxy which they had heard from Baltic German nobles or Lutheran pastors.⁵⁶ The converted peasants refused to pay the pastoral and parish school taxes in support of the Lutheran Church, and sometimes the representatives of the Baltic German corporations of nobility (*Ritterschaften*) considered the rise of rent as compensation for the loss of the church tax. The new law insisting on liberation of the members of the Orthodox church to pay the Lutheran Church tax had been challenged and often not observed.

The Russian provincial administrators also had stakes in the conflict as it signified the strength or weakness of the local authority in the region. All of these groups appealed to the imperial central authorities, thus involving various individual and institutional actors in St. Petersburg in the conflict.

The Sharpening of the Ethnic Conflict under Imperial State-Building

The above case suggests that national, ethnic, confessional, social, and imperial identities in the Baltic provinces overlapped in ways that require a nuanced interpretation. The Russian priests used ethnic markers such as “German” as a shorthand for the Baltic German nobility, but presented the policy of Russification as confessional and social conflict. The peasants, whose interests were not represented by the imperial authorities, appeared as victims of the arbitrary power of the Baltic German landlords. However, the priests were aware that the peasants were often playing two social powers against each other. For example, in 1891 when the Jõhvi branch of the Orthodox brotherhood sent fifteen copies of the questionnaire to be distributed among the parishioners so that the peasants who were oppressed

⁵⁶ See, for example, the charge of peasants on Hiiumaa against Baron Ewald Stackelberg and the local pastor for raising the rent and slandering Orthodoxy in 1885–86. See EAA.21.1.2577, or the complaints of peasants on the Grossenhof (Suuremõisa) manor landlord who threaten to evict them in 1886, EAA.1884.1.171.

by the landlords could appeal for material help, Father Aleksandr decided not to distribute the questionnaire:

In recent times there have been no obvious oppressions; it will be necessary to present those poor and impoverished due to specific circumstances. [...] I will not make it public: the whole parish might gather, claiming that it is being oppressed.

In this and other cases, he made it clear (although in private correspondence) that not all cases of poverty of Orthodox Estonians were due to injustice of the Baltic German landlords and that the parishioners were eager to play the card of being oppressed to receive material help.

It would also be an exaggeration to interpret the outlook of the Russian Orthodox clergy as an expression of Russian nationalism. Conversions to Orthodoxy brought Estonians closer to the family of the Russian *narod*, or nation.⁵⁷ The clerical solidarity between Estonians and Russians was built not only on ideological foundations, but on personal and family social bonds. Russian and Estonian students studied together in the seminaries. Many Estonian seminarists, who represented one-third of all seminary graduates, married the daughters of the Russian priests. For the Bezhanitskii and Raievskii families, the Estonian clergymen such as Fathers Dionissii Tamm or Karp Tiizik were considered as “us” (“*svoi*”) rather than “them” (“*chuzhie*”). For example, the children of Father Aleksandr lodged with Father Karp’s family during their studies in the Revel high schools in the 1890s.⁵⁸

Their attitude toward the Estonian peasants is characterized by compassion for their miserable lot and a desire to help. The Russian clergy continued to side with the peasants in social conflicts, which culminated in the Revolution of 1905, the violence of which showed the massive level of popular discontent: in the course of a few months, 573 estates were ransacked and set aflame.⁵⁹ In response to the violence, martial law was introduced and the government sent in punitive expeditions that executed 595 people

57 See, for example, Trussman, “Nachalo i rasprostranenie.” Writing on the eve of the celebrations of the nine-hundredth anniversary of the baptism of Rus’, the author interprets conversions of the nineteenth century as a desire to return to the “right,” “peaceful,” “ancient,” Russian faith, the faith of their ancestors.

58 Karp Tiisik (1843–1922), the dean and builder of the Alexander Nevskii cathedral, translator, preacher, delegate to the Moscow Council, professor of Orthodox theology at the University of Tartu. He was married to Liudmila Mutovozova, the daughter of the priest Aleksander Mutovozov.

59 Karjahärm and Rosenberg. *Eesti ajalugu*, 360.

and sentenced hundreds more to jail, forced labor, and exile.⁶⁰ The Orthodox clergy, guided by the call of Bishop Agafangel (Preobrazhenskii) of Riga, advocated for the arrested and accused participants in the revolution before the authorities. Arguing that there was often no way to distinguish between the guilty and the innocent tried by court martial, Bishop Agafangel called on the clergy to become mediators between the Estonian and Latvian populations, including Lutherans, and the state authorities.⁶¹ The Bezhanitskii brothers were involved in the mediation, trying to rescue members of their parishes sentenced to death.⁶²

The Russificatory reforms affected the younger generation of the Russian clergy, giving them the advantage in education and careers and making them proud of being Russians. At schools, transition into the Russian language as the language of tuition clearly put the Russian-speaking clergy children in an advantageous position. Friend of the family of Orthodox priest Ioann Raevskii, Polina Teppak (Teppaks), from a mixed Estonian-Russian background and a student at the prestigious German-language Reval (Tallinn) girls' high school in the mid-1880s, described in a letter to the family the reforms of education and administration under Shakhovskoi, showing her support for "Russification":

All important places came to be occupied by Russians, and the Germans lost their positions [*nemtsy sleteli*], but, more importantly, all administrators in Reval [Tallinn] are Russians. The governor issued orders that during state holidays houses should put out Russian flags (it has not been like this before). Germans are infuriated by these changes and keep a grudge against the governor, but this does not stop him. As for me, I am very glad, like all other Russians. In general, I can say that in German schools the Russian students keep together and stand up for each other. I cannot be silent about the triumphant success of the Russian language.⁶³

In her letters to the Raievskii family Polina assumed that she was addressing a like-minded audience. Another example of these views is in the letter of Seraphima's brother Nikolai, who described the industrial exhibition in Petrovsko-Razumovskoe near Moscow in 1882. Impressed by the exhibition

60 Karjahärm and Pullat, *Eesti revolutsioonitules*, 151–53. See also Karjahärm, *1905. aasta Eestis*.

61 Gavrilin, "Rizhskii period sluzheniia," 53.

62 See Miliutina, *Liudi moei zhizni*, 13–15.

63 TLA.1501. Letter from Polina Teppak to Sofia Raievskaiia, March 16, 1886, Reval. On the educational reforms and the impact of the Russification of schools, see Woodworth, "Civil Society and Nationality," 282–91.

so much that he visited it twice, Nikolai wrote that the aim was to introduce “*Russian* products to the *Russian* people” (emphasis in the original), demonstrating to them how much

we were lagging behind the West and how much we can use our own works without borrowing from the Germans. And what did it turn out to be? It turned out that Russian works are not inferior to foreign ones in their durability and finishing, and as for cheapness, it turned out that they are much more affordable than foreign ones.⁶⁴

The tone of the letter exhibits a similar sense of pride to the letter from the schoolgirl. Polina and Nikolai used the notion of “Russian” in an ethnocentric sense. In the first case “German” was used to indicate the Baltic Germans; in the second case “German” represented the West.

The Russification policy of Alexander III had an impact on the Russian clergy: it provided them with more motivation to emphasize their Russian identity, even if they did not have such a need before since they lived and communicated in a multicultural environment. Children forgot the Estonian language, which they had learned from domestic workers. The relationship with the Estonian Orthodox could be tainted by feelings of national superiority.

Aleksandr was successful in his career and received awards from the bishop for his efforts in missionary work. Between 1898 and 1907 he was a priest in Mary Magdalen church in Haapsalu, which was graced by the royal family’s visits in 1871 and 1880 and accepted donations from the court. After 1907, he was transferred to Tallinn and was a priest in St. Nicholas Church until 1926. He served on the educational boards of the schools in Haapsalu and Tallinn. Unlike his brother Nikolai, Aleksandr was not actively involved in the life of the church and experienced as traumatic the loss of economic security of the priestly position after 1918. His letters during World War I and the subsequent period show their bias against the Germans and their bitterness about the critical attitude toward the church reforms brought about by the Estonian Orthodox Church in the 1920s.

Conclusion

The Russian clergy in the Baltic represented a thin layer of the non-noble and nonagricultural population. They were expected to be the eyes and

64 TLA.1501. Letter, October 27, 1882.

ears of imperial authority in the countryside, but they could not fulfill this role due to their low numbers. Yet, the priests' accounts of the conversion movement of the 1880s give us rare insight into the social conflicts during the time of the nationalizing of the empire under Alexander III.

The Bezhanitskii and Raevskii families originated from the Pskov region, a border region where Russian influence was rather tenuous. Aleksandr and Seraphima belonged to the second generation of newcomers to the Baltic and, unlike their parents, they spoke the local languages. However, they also inherited values and biases (such as Seraphima's dislike of Jews) from their families. In addition, the Orthodox confessional superiority over Lutheranism might have strengthened their national pride in being Russian.

At the same time, we should not forget that the Russian clergy's identity in this period transitioned from the traditional clerical estate culture into a modern social and professional identity. The erosion of traditional relations in rural society in the late imperial period affected different groups, and the Orthodox clergy had to search for other forms of social community outside traditional parish life and diocesan structures, which functioned largely as instruments of control rather than identity. It is not surprising that the Bezhanitskiis integrated better into the urban societies of Viljandi, Tartu, and Tallinn since there they participated in urban culture and voluntary associations, but this will be a topic for another discussion.

In the conversion crisis of the 1880s, the priests acted in solidarity with the peasants, turning a blind eye to the lies and manipulations that peasants might have used to achieve their goals, a strategy of resistance called by James Scott, "the weapons of the weak."⁶⁵ This temporary alliance between the Russian priests and Estonian peasants was based on the noneconomic nature of the relationship. Unlike the Lutheran Church's infrastructure, the Orthodox parishes and schools were maintained through financing by the central state, while the priests did not receive their income from peasants, as their counterparts in neighboring Russia would have done.

Given that Orthodoxy in the Baltic could only survive by recruiting the local population to the positions of the clergy, sacristans, and teachers, the ethnic composition of the educated Orthodox by the 1880s was already ethnically mixed. Through intermarriage, education, and friendships, the Bezhanitskii and Raievskii families became close to the Estonian families of Poska, Lusik, Teppaks, Sepp, Tiisik, and other places. Since the services and sermons were in Estonian, Orthodoxy was a hybrid culture that could have eventually led to Estonianization or hybridity of the Russian clergy

65 See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

(as it happened with some branches of the Bezhanitskii family) if it had not been for the Russification policy of Alexander III.

The relationship with the Baltic Germans was based on anti-aristocratic class bias, typical for the Russian clerical estate.⁶⁶ However, in the Baltic provinces, the class bias is tied with an anti-German bias, which was boosted during the period of Russification under Alexander III.

In hindsight, nationalizing the empire in the last decades of the nineteenth century was counterproductive for the Orthodox project in the Baltic. First, the interference of the imperial state into local conflicts in the countryside, and state funding of the church and schools, led to the image of Orthodoxy as a state-sponsored project. In the long run, when the conversion movement stalled, the newly established parishes faced a lack of funding, while parishioners were unable or unwilling to support their own parishes and schools. Second, the value of the Orthodox schools declined as teaching in Russian became compulsory and the underfunded Orthodox schools could not compete with the ministerial schools that had more resources. The pragmatic value of conversions, therefore, could not be justified. Third, even though conversions by some back to Lutheranism in 1905 were not as massive as expected, Orthodoxy in the Baltic had begun a difficult process of disassociation from being a “ruling” church and the “Russian faith” to becoming a people’s church, that is, one that was independent from the imperial state in the aftermath of the revolution of 1917 and the All-Russia Church Council of 1917–18. With the formation of two Orthodox dioceses, Tallinn and Narva in 1919, parishes were separated according to the ethnic composition of their parishioners.

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66 Manchester, *Holy Fathers*, 38–68.

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3. Voluntary Associations in the Baltic Region: Accelerator or Inhibitor of Interethnic Relations?

Jörg Hackmann

Abstract: Voluntary associations are perceived as crucial in the formation of modern democratic societies and as a core element of the concept of civil society. Yet, issues of interethnic relations are often overlooked in international research either because they are regarded as not being relevant or, rather, because voluntary associations are seen as natural space for the formation of modern ethnic nations. In this chapter, the associational world of the Baltic region in the long nineteenth century is described as a space of intense interethnic entanglements on various levels. Sociability is also examined as an inherent element of voluntary associations implying the production of social boundaries in which linguistic, cultural, or religious issues play an important role.

Keywords: Russian Empire, sociability, pillarization, nation-building, Manasein's senatorial revision

Introduction

When browsing through the international historical research on voluntary associations, issues of ethnicity seemingly do not constitute a major issue: Either they do not appear at all, or the connection seems to be unambiguous, as voluntary associations are perceived as a natural space for the formation of ethnic nations. Which of these perspectives is dominating obviously depends on the respective national historical discourse. Against this background, interethnic relations, interactions, or entanglements enter the debate rather

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through the backdoor, as since the 2000s the focus has shifted towards transnational aspects in the development of voluntary associations. Such a perspective leads to the question whether similar developments in various nations or regions reflect parallel and unrelated developments or whether they also comprise entanglements between culturally, linguistically, or, in the widest sense, socially distinct groups. Here, a closer look will be given at the relevance and nature of interethnic relations within voluntary associations in the Baltic region, understood as the three Russian Baltic provinces until 1917 and subsequently the states of Estonia and Latvia.¹

Historical Perspectives on Voluntary Associations

Voluntary associations are usually perceived as an essential step in the formation of modern democratic societies and also as a core element of the concept of civil society. This becomes evident when looking at the Anglo-Saxon world,² but it is visible as well in many other societies, be it in Germany,³ Finland,⁴ Sweden,⁵ or in imperial contexts.⁶ Somewhat different, the French discussion less looks at formal aspects of civil society, focusing rather on sociability in a long-term perspective.⁷ Arguments and perspectives vary from nation to nation, but the general picture seems to be unanimously accepted—the historical focus is on those developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that lead to democratic structures or civil society.⁸ Against this background, there are noteworthy approaches in which historical and sociological approaches merge.⁹

1 This text draws largely on my book, Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, and on the contributions in Hackmann, ed., *Vereinskultur und Zivilgesellschaft in Nordosteuropa/ Associational Culture and Civil Society in North Eastern Europe*.

2 Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*; McCarthy, *American Creed*.

3 Dann, *Vereinswesen und bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.

4 Stenius, *Frivilligt, jämlikt, samfällt*.

5 Jansson, *Adertonhundralets associationer*.

6 On the Habsburg monarchy, see *Vereine, Parteien und Interessenverbände*; on tsarist Russia, see Bradley, *Voluntary Associations*.

7 See the contributions to Saint-Jour, *Espaces et temps associatifs*, in particular, Agulhon, "L'histoire sociale"; more in line with the focus on civil society is Barthelemy, *Les associations*.

8 For a general approach, see Bermeo and Nord, *Civil Society before Democracy*; Hoffmann, *Civil Society*. For the Baltic region, see Jansen, *Eestlane muutuvast ajast*; Jansen and Arukaevu, *Seltsid ja ühiskonna muutumine*.

9 Besides the French discussion mentioned in fn. 7, see Alapuro and Stenius, *Nordic Associations*; Siisiäinen, *Four Studies on Voluntary Associations*.

In multiethnic or multi-linguistic societies, the picture seems to be more complicated, and scholars take two opposing approaches: one centers on democratization and regards ethnic differences as less relevant, and the other highlights ethnic or national distinctions, usually with a stress on the emancipation of nondominant groups. An example of the first strategy is Henrik Stenius's study of the associational sphere in Finland;¹⁰ for the second approach one may point to studies on the Baltic region¹¹ or on Central Europe.¹² In addition, there is also a third approach to be addressed here that focuses on social pillarization (derived from the Dutch concept of *verzuijing*)¹³ as a process of vertical segmentation within political and religious subsystems, with voluntary associations playing a crucial role in this process. From these contrary perceptions we may obtain an initial general conclusion that voluntary associations are ascribed various roles in democratization, emancipation, and nation-building processes, but also in the shaping or supporting of social boundaries.

Social Spaces and Entanglements

From the discussion here so far on research of voluntary associations focusing on civil society and emancipation processes, one might assume that political functions dominate the perspective on voluntary associations. However, two more aspects have to be mentioned: One is the focus on sociability, which was introduced to sociological research by Georg Simmel in 1910. Sociability encompasses voluntary participation in a community out of a general and not primarily material interest and is based on personal and emotional bonds and the assumption of a fundamental equality between its members. According to Simmel, sociability is the playful form of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*).¹⁴ A basic implication of sociability is that it is always limited in space and numbers. In this perspective, social boundary making is inherent to the formation of voluntary associations that do not count as the "tertiary" type of mere service associations.¹⁵ As sociability is spatially bound, it can be studied when looking at local

10 Stenius, *Frivilligt, jämlikt, samfällt*.

11 As examples, see Wohlfart, *Der Rigaer Letten Verein*; Jansen and Arukaevu, *Seltsid*.

12 E.g., Nolte, *The Sokol in the Czech Lands*; King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*; Mannová, *Bürgertum und bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.

13 Ertmann, "Liberalization, Democratization"; Blom, "Pillarisation in Perspective."

14 Simmel, *Soziologie: Untersuchungen*; Simmel, "Soziologie der Geselligkeit."

15 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 32.

social spaces.¹⁶ In addition, there is also a connection between sociability and ethnicity, according to Max Weber, who understood ethnic relations as a reinterpretation of sociation into personal community relations.¹⁷ In such a perspective, sociability appears as a driving force in two regards: First, with the broadening of associational life, we see not only a rise of membership figures in existing associations, but—and even more important—the creation of new associations with similar orientations as those previously existing, be it, for instance, social or sport clubs. Second, in multiethnic surroundings, ethnicity also appears as a possible element of distinction.

The other aspect to be considered here refers to entanglements as an inherent feature of voluntary associations. At least in the Euro-Atlantic space, voluntary associations created a particular field of cultural transfers on a transregional and transnational level.¹⁸ Against this background, it comes as no surprise that both features—spatially bound sociability and transregional entanglements—are characteristic of the Baltic region. The first may be studied when looking at associations of similar activities (social clubs, sports organizations, or music associations, for instance) on the local level. The second aspect may be illustrated with initiatives to form clubs with the main purpose of providing sociability and usually exclusively consisting of male members. These were widely seen as models imported from England and partly being follow-ups to Masonic lodges. Choral societies, emerging largely from cultural transfers from Germany, presented a similar example. In contrast to clubs and choral societies, which usually formed as local initiatives, learned societies often emerged from top-down impulses. Their members understood sociability to be a tool of knowledge production but combined it with a means of transregional communication.¹⁹ Temperance societies, which were largely based on the transfer of organizational patterns from North America, are another case. However, such approaches of identifying the historical origins of an associational type should not lead to rash conclusions, as such dependencies are not always meaningful, for similar initiatives could occur more or less simultaneously or hardly show any direct connection. One should also have in mind that the transfer might be camouflaged and covered with invented traditions.

16 Bourdieu, "Physischer, sozialer und angeeigneter physischer Raum"; Löw, *Raumsoziologie*, 179–83, 198–203.

17 Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 45.

18 Hoffmann, *Civil Society*.

19 Im Hof, *Das gesellige Jahrhundert*.

Voluntary Associations and Interethnic Relations

Against this background, one should be careful not to conclude that findings from a transregional perspective always point to interactions between various national/ethnic/cultural groups. To exemplify this with just one case from the Baltic region: the Musse²⁰ in Riga, the oldest social club in the city, was founded in 1787 on the example of the Angliiskii klub in St. Petersburg, which—contrary to its name—was initiated by Dutch merchants. “English” in this case, therefore, was a quality sign for sociability rather than an expression of ethnicity. In addition, it reveals that an identification of the Riga Musse as a German club did not yet play a role in the late eighteenth century.²¹ In a next step, Baltic sociability (in an regional understanding of the tsarist Baltic provinces) became a pattern for various ethnic as well as social groups expressing the wish to have similar clubs for their ethnic/linguistic group—examples include the Russkii klub in Riga as well as the Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība (Riga Latvian Society).²² In addition, the Baltic provinces appeared as the region in the tsarist empire with the longest traditions of sociability and the highest density of voluntary associations—this was definitely the case before 1905, but presumably also after the revolution. This is, for instance, reflected in the fact that the Baian association, founded in Riga in 1863, claimed to be the oldest Russian choral society (in a linguistic/ethnic understanding) in the entire empire.²³

Baltic Cases

In the following section a closer look shall be applied to where interethnic relations appear in voluntary associations in the Baltic region. Several cases will be presented. First, there is much evidence of cultural transfers and indirect interethnic contacts in singing and sport associations as in the Estonian societies Vanemuine and Taara in Tartu, the society in Tallinn named Estonia, and the already mentioned Baian in Riga. In their initial stages, Estonian and Latvian singing associations, as well as the first Estonian and Latvian song festivals in the Baltic region, widely appropriated

20 The German name “Musse” is based on an old linguistic connection between the German words *müssen* (must) and *Muße* (leisure).

21 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 366.

22 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 110. For more on both societies, see Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*, 227–59; Wohlfart, *Der Rigaer Letten Verein*.

23 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 151.

models from Germany, most visible with male choirs in four voices (as in the Vanemuine society) and in the organization of open-air song festivals.²⁴ Furthermore, adaptations appear also in song texts, for instance, with an Estonian adaptation of Ernst Moritz Arndt's "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" ("What is the German's fatherland?").²⁵ Transfers, however, did not only happen in contact with Germany, but also through the Finnish impact on Estonian societies. They are visible for the Vanemuine society,²⁶ but also earlier in the Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft/Eesti Õpetatud Selts (Learned Estonian Society) with the publication of the Estonian epos *Kalevipoeg* following Elias Lönnrot's edition of the *Kalevala* epos as a model from Finland.²⁷

Second, learned societies with a focus on languages and culture of the small nations are an important element of interethnic contacts: the Lettisch-Literarische Gesellschaft/Latviešu Draugu Biedriba (Learned Latvian Society/Society of the Friends of the Latvians),²⁸ founded in 1824, and the Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft,²⁹ founded in Tartu in 1838, have to be mentioned here, in particular. Both are examples of the first phase of nation-building among small nations as groups with an external scholarly interest in the language and culture of the Estonians and Latvians.³⁰ In both societies, German Protestant parish priests played a major role at the beginning, although in the Estonian case, Estonians with academic education (in German) were active right from the beginning as well. The language of these societies (and other similar learned associations in the region) remained German, and they refrained from political actions in favor of the emerging small nations. Whereas leading members of the Lettisch-Literarische Gesellschaft edited a Latvian-language newspaper, *Latviešu Avīzes* (Latvian news) from 1822, the Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft preferred to publish the Estonian epos *Kalevipoeg* in a bilingual, Estonian–German edition. The societies had members from the small nations, but with only little representation

24 For details, see Hackmann, "Sängerfeste." On the first Latvian festival of 1869, see Hanovs, "Verein aller Letten."

25 Jannsen, *Eesti Laulik*, no. 1; see Hackmann, "Sängerfeste," 156; Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 72–74.

26 Arro, *Geschichte*, 115–26.

27 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 130–34; Hasselblatt, "Die Bedeutung des Nationallepos 'Kalevipoeg'."

28 Ārons, *Latviešu Literariskā (Latviešu Draugu) Biedriba*.

29 Hackmann, "Von der 'Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft.'"

30 See Hroch, *Social Preconditions*. On the concept of "small nations," see Alexander et al., *Kleine Völker in der Geschichte Osteuropas*; for the Baltic region, see Hackmann, "From 'Object' to 'Subject.'"

on their boards. It was rather an exception that two of the leading figures in the Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft—Friedrich Robert Faehlmann and Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald—were both of ethnic Estonian origin and were literati, i.e., holders of a university degree.

Emancipation based on producing national identity among the small nations was openly promoted in the Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība and the Eesti Kirjameeste Selts (Society of Estonian Literati)³¹ in a deliberate contrast based on linguistic difference to the already existing associations. However, I would not argue that we see fully pillarized groups—in contrast to the argumentations by Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Erwin Oberländer on Riga,³² although there were—albeit short-lived—attempts in Tartu by figures in the Estonian “national awakening” gathered around Carl Robert Jakobson to create an Estonian network of associations with a political agenda. In the case of secular Jewish associations, which were first founded in Riga, one may notice, besides a similar connection of sociability and emancipation like in many of the Estonian and Latvian cultural associations, a strong focus on education as a means of emancipation, which was based not least on the more repressive politics of the tsarist authorities towards Jews.³³

Furthermore, tendencies of ethnic dissociation did not only emerge through the foundation of new Estonian and Latvian associations beginning in the late 1860s, but also within the older learned societies. In the Lettisch-Literarische Gesellschaft, leading Latvian members were excluded or forced to leave over a dispute concerning a Latvian-language press in 1881. In 1907 more than 25 percent of its members were banned because they were accused of having participated in the 1905 Revolution.³⁴ In the Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft, Adalbert Volck, a lawyer, was elected as president in 1912 and tried to replace the focus on Estonian culture with a German one. Although Volck’s activities met with heavy protest not only from the Estonian members, they were finally implemented.³⁵ This issue, however, should be put in context, as at least Volck’s turn away from Estonian culture was not successful in the long run. Similar things could also be said about the Deutsche Vereine (German associations)³⁶ that were founded after the

31 Jansen, “Eesti Kirjameeste Selts”; Hackmann, “Competing National Movements.”

32 Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*; Oberländer and Wohlfart, *Riga. Portrait einer Vielvölkerstadt*, 8.

33 Bogojavlenska, “Der jüdische Bildungsverein”; Bogojavlenska, *Die jüdische Gesellschaft*, 179–96; Heinert, “Ein jüdisches Bildungsprojekt.”

34 Hehn, *Die lettisch-literarische Gesellschaft*, 132–40, 147–48.

35 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 334, 343, 377.

36 Hackmann, “Nachholende Nationalisierung.”

1905 Revolution but which faced difficulties in realizing their initial claim to form a German associational pillar. After being dissolved in 1914 by the tsarist authorities, these associations did not reappear after the war.

Third, the artisans' associations in Livland, in particular the Gewerbeverein in Riga and the Handwerkerverein in Tartu, were socially (and ethnically) integrated and had high membership numbers within the urban associational topography.³⁷ Although German-speaking in their assemblies and minutes, both also comprised members from the ethnic majorities. The multiethnic composition, however, is not directly visible, but there are indirect hints: in Tartu, it is the initially close cooperation of the Handwerkerverein with the Estonian Vanemuine singing association after its founding in 1869. The Vanemuine took over the first premises of the Handwerkerverein after the latter moved to a new location. The integrated aspect of the artisans' associations can also be seen by implication in comments by the long-time president of the Riga Gewerbeverein, Bernhard Hollander, who, in the interwar period blamed Latvian associations for separating themselves beginning in the 1860s from the already existing local associations and for creating their web of associations based on ethnic differences.³⁸ This indicates that for the Handwerker- and Gewerbevereine ethnicity and language were not categories of identity, but rather of othering. For the emerging small nations, on the contrary, referring to ethnicity and language was an argument for separation from the traditional German-speaking associations.

This observation matches with a closer look at the data provided by Nikolai Manasein's senatorial revision of Livland and Courland in 1882–83.³⁹ They include lists of voluntary associations with their "national" composition, which reveal some interesting facts. First, there were associations that scrupulously listed the ethnic composition of their membership, as, for instance, Rigas Latviešu Biedrība (933 Latvians, thirty-six Russians, twenty-three Germans, eight Jews, two Estonians), the Russian choral society Lado (446 Russians, forty-six Germans, twenty-two Poles, three Jews, three Latvians), and the Casino in Riga (twenty Latvians, eleven Germans, two Russians, one Jew). About one-third of the associations, however, gave rather sweeping information as only Germans (for instance, the Schützenverein—the Marksmen's association—with 403 members and the choral society Liedertafel in Riga with 185) or "predominantly

37 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 161–64.

38 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 74–75.

39 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 318–21; Thaden, "N. A. Manaseins Senatorenrevision"; Arukaevu, "Seltsiliikumise üldolustik."

German,” as in the Handwerkerverein in Tartu) or “various nationalities” (among associations in Riga the Gewerbeverein, the Freiwillige Feuerwehr—Voluntary Fire Brigade—the Musse and the Literärisch-praktische Bürgerverbindung—Literary-Practical Citizens’ Union). In the latter case, these were quite characteristically German-speaking associations which were not concerned about the ethnic composition of their memberships. However, even in those associations that defined themselves as ethnic, the ethnic composition of their members was most often heterogenous, according to the information provided. Apart from Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība and Lado, mentioned above, this was the case, for instance, with the Russkii klub (158 Russians, fifty-two Germans, eight Latvians, two Poles, one Jew, one Armenian). Only the Russian choral society Baian claimed that all its members were Russians. Furthermore, another association, the men’s choral association Männergesangverein from Tartu, understood the question regarding nationality differently and gave instead information about the confessional composition (fifteen “Lutherans”),⁴⁰ thus revealing a surprising indifference in ethnic issues. Different, however, was the case of two Jewish charitable associations in Riga mentioned at the end of this list, as the exclusive Jewish membership was not only based on Jewish self-identification, but first of all on social exclusion. There were, however, as mentioned above, also Jewish members among other societies.

From the data of Manasein’s revision on voluntary associations one may first conclude that many associations, in particular, traditionally German-speaking associations, did not apply categories of nationality. Here, the main understanding was that German was the dominant language of the communication in the region, whereas the ethnic background and mother tongue of the associations’ members was of less relevance. Second, those associations that defined themselves in ethnic terms usually had a multiethnic membership, which implies that there were differences between externally ascribed ethnicity and cultural or political self-identification. Interethnic relations, thus, were partly asymmetric with ethnicity more often expressed by the emerging small nations as well as the Russians in the Baltic region. In the case of Russian associations like Russkii klub, an imperial understanding of Russian culture dominated, meaning that as within the German-speaking associations, the ethnic background of the

40 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 321. The list of associations is in Delo o predstavlenii senatoru, revizuiushchemu gubernii Lifliandskuii i Kurliandskuii, Manasseinu svedenie o sushchestvuiushchikh v Lifliandskoi gub. chastnykh obshchestvakh i kruzhhkakh, *Rahvusarhiiv* (National Archives of Estonia), EAA.296.5.3971, fol. 182–208 (Riga), and fol. 245–56 (Tartu).

members was less important. However, here as well as in associations with only Russian members (like Baian), the Russian language was seen, at least before the politics of Russification under Alexander III,⁴¹ in a nondominant position. For the associations that defined themselves in their names as Estonian or Latvian, the perception of their languages as being nondominant also played a crucial role, but the multiethnic composition of their members indicates that they were partly based on blurred cultural boundaries. If many of the (German-speaking) associations that emerged before the 1860s were ethnically indifferent, a goal of producing an ethnic German identity may be observed in some German song and sports societies, though such tendencies came to a halt around 1870, at about the same time that the first Estonian and Latvian associations emerged. This observation may be explained by a significant shift in collective identity among the Germans in the Baltic provinces from perceiving themselves as a part of the linguistically and culturally defined German nation—as reflected in Arndt's song—towards a predominantly regional understanding as Baltic Germans.⁴² There are two reasons for these diverging developments; first is the connection of German nationalism to the emerging *Kaiserreich* in those years, which left the Baltic Germans, as long as they understood themselves as loyal subjects of the tsarist empire, outside of this new German identity; and, second, the critical stance of Alexander III towards the German elites in the Baltic provinces after 1881, which at the same time stimulated the political relevance of Estonian and Latvian associations.⁴³ *Deutsche Vereine*, which were then striving for a nationalization of the entire German-speaking population, emerged only after the 1905 Revolution, though with limited success. In fact, they advanced quickly to become the largest German associations in the decade after 1905, but from 1909 onwards membership began to decline.⁴⁴

This brings us to the fourth point, which refers to the already addressed issue of sociability: the English or German patterns of sociability that were seen to be the goal of many voluntary associations besides the nominal purpose given in their bylaws. In the case of the cycling club Taara in Tartu, a discussion about a modification of the bylaws in 1899–1900 with the Ministry of the Interior in St. Petersburg centered on the issue of whether the tsarist authorities agreed that there was a need for another

41 On Russification of the Baltic region, see Brüggemann, *Licht und Luft*, 210–68.

42 Hackmann, "Einheit des Ostseeraums?" 693–94.

43 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 340–43; Jansen, "Eesti seltside saadikute audients."

44 Hackmann, "Nachholende Nationalisierung."

social club in Tartu apart from the five already existing ones in the town.⁴⁵ In Tallinn, two associations with a double focus as a singing society and a social club—Estonia and Lootus (Hope)—used Estonian as the dominant language but had multiethnic memberships. In both associations there was debate about the inclusion of members from the German elites, but in the 1890s they went in different directions when the association Estonia renounced alcohol consumption and card playing and focused on Estonian high culture, which finally led to the building of a national theater in 1911.⁴⁶ What has been discussed here regarding interactions between Estonians and Germans can also be seen in German–Latvian interactions and in the situation of Russian associations in the Baltic region.⁴⁷ Among the latter we see discrepancies between associations founded by local initiatives and those created by the Russian authorities with the aim of curtailing regional interethnic interactions.⁴⁸

Conclusions

Returning to the general question addressed in the title of this chapter, whether voluntary associations were arenas of multiculturalism or ethnic separation in the Baltic region, three historical assumptions and questions need to be addressed: first, was there an ethnic separation of voluntary associations in the Baltic region right from the beginning? Or should one understand ethnic segmentation as a process that emerged only with the formation of voluntary associations in the region? And if the latter, was there then a tipping point towards nationally separated associational pillars? The first assumption, although frequently expressed, can be ruled out directly. This would introduce a retrospective, anachronistic perspective of national historiography on the development of voluntary associations.⁴⁹ For the second and third assumption there are two major observations to be highlighted here: On the one hand, state formation

45 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 173–74, 263.

46 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 147–48; for details, see Woodworth, “Civil Society and Nationality,” 80–84.

47 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 316–17; Hanovs, “Verein aller Letten.”

48 Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 148–53, 317–18; Woodworth, “Civil Society and Nationality,” 87–89.

49 See the similar criticism largely based on Habsburgian history by King, “The Nationalization of East Central Europe.” For the Baltic region, see Kivimäe, “Re-writing Estonian History?”; Brüggemann, “Von der Renationalisierung zur Demontage”; Hackmann, “Ethnos oder Region?”

in 1918–19 had a decisive impact that led to the dominance of ethnic/national segmentation. In Latvia, the previous support of German-speaking associations for the German Reich during World War I had already fostered such a segmentation. More relevant, however, were the demographic and social changes: many of the traditional German-speaking associations faced financial problems and a decline in membership after 1918. In turn, the overall rise in the number of voluntary associations in interwar Estonia and Latvia indicates a broadening of the associational sphere, which directly implied an inclusion of larger parts of the Estonian and Latvian population, in line with the societal changes after 1918. On the other hand, it would be an oversimplification to connect the argument of a tipping point with state formation after 1918 because the broadening of the associational sphere on a large scale began after 1905 and was preceded by an increase in the number of associations as well as in their members in the Baltic provinces from the 1890s. This means that traditional and often nationally indifferent associations had lost their relevance earlier. Finally, when connecting the debates on multiculturalism with historical developments, one may identify strategies of recognition⁵⁰ among the nondominant or small nations, which made use of linguistic and cultural, i.e., ethnic, distinctions in order to strive for national emancipation. Such a development can be observed, for instance, in the architectural representation of Estonian and Latvian associations, in particular after around 1900.⁵¹ So, ethnic distinctions are not only an inherent feature of multicultural societies; they are produced by, and are part of broader processes of distinctions within the sphere of voluntary associations. In addition, they are not based on static relations between the different groups, but rather are shaped by dynamic interethnic relations in which the nondominant groups use cultural appropriations from groups perceived as culturally dominant.

So, were voluntary associations accelerators or inhibitors of interethnic relations? We do know that voluntary associations played a crucial role in the nation-building process of the small nations. And yet this finding must be put in the context of the wider associational sphere in the region, and here one may detect various forms of interethnic contacts and interactions before 1914 as well as a tendency for vertical pillarization in the associational sphere by ethnicity, in particular after World War I.

50 Following Taylor, *Multiculturalism*. See also Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*; Kymlicka and Norman, *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*.

51 For details, see Hackmann, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa*, 186–245.

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4. Living by the Border: Violence, Nation-making, and “National Indifference” in the Polish–Lithuanian Borderland, 1920–39

Tomas Balkelis

Abstract: This chapter addresses nation-making and lived experiences of the local population in the Polish–Lithuanian borderland. Between 1920 and 1939, the so-called Vilnius region was a hotbed of conflict between Poland and Lithuania. It was also a venue of a long-lasting ethnic conflict fueled by the nationalizing policies of both states. The region was also a site of intense border-making. The author argues that while Poland and Lithuania each sought policy dominance in the borderland, the local multiethnic population made their own use of such policies. The living strategies of the borderlanders often circumvented state policies. Although significant groups acceded to state pressure, others remained “nationally indifferent” and politically disloyal, adopting economic practices that sabotaged the policies of the sealed border.

Keywords: nationalism, ethnic conflict, paramilitarism, national minorities

Introduction

Recent decades have seen the field of border studies gain popularity among scholars of various disciplines, including historians. The so-called “spatial turn” in the humanities and social sciences led to the understanding that space is a political, social, and cultural product shaped by a variety of factors and players. Consequently, the study of border-making has moved from

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a dominant concern with formal state frontiers to viewing the borders themselves as “dynamic functional processes.”¹ Today, many researchers agree that borders are constantly reproduced: they are always constructed by state institutions, political discourses, media representations, school textbooks, and ethnic stereotypes. Different groups of society have their own perceptions of borders. And political boundaries often do not match ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries.

Yet no case of border-making is possible without the presence of the state. It is state elites, not borderland populations, that create or abolish state frontiers. And, therefore, the processes of border-making are closely related to state-building. On the one hand, at the most basic level, following the Weberian definition of the state, states are, first of all, concerned with securing their monopoly of violence within their borders. On the other hand, modern nation-states are nationalizing projects. Like all states, they always seek to ensure the political loyalty of populations within their borders.

The recent focus on borders as *lived spaces* has shifted the attention of researchers to the social and cultural transformations of borderland populations. Their survival strategies, everyday attitudes, identities, community rituals, and economic activities affected by borders became subjects of new studies.²

At the same time, recent scholarship on nationalism developed a considerable interest in the phenomenon of “national indifference” as proposed by Tara Zahra.³ In her influential article, she noted that recently historians of regionalism, localism, and borderlands in East-Central Europe have rediscovered populations and individuals who were not so easily swallowed up by mass nationalization. Among many, she noted the Wasserpolen and Masures in Silesia, the Lemkos of the Carpathians, the Hultschiners of Moravian Silesia, Transylvania’s Szeklers, Bohemia’s Budweisers and the *tutejzsie* in the borderland of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.⁴ What is striking is that some of these “indifferent communities” emerged in those borderlands that, in the first decades of the twentieth century, experienced high levels of violence: interstate wars, communal conflicts, paramilitary struggles, and ethnic strife (for example, in the Vilnius region, Upper Silesia, Galicia, Transylvania, Teschen, and Fiume).

1 Kolossov and Scott, “Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies,” 3.

2 Hirschhausen et al., “Phantom Borders in Eastern Europe”; Venken, “The Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy”; Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence*.

3 Bjork et al., *Creating Nationality in Central Europe*; Holc, “The Polish–Lithuanian Borderlands”; Van Ginderachter and Fox, *National Indifference*; Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole*.

4 Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities,” 96.

This chapter is concerned with the nexus between violence, nation-making, “national indifference,” and the lived experiences of the local population in the Polish–Lithuanian borderland between 1920 and 1939. Historically, the region was highly multiethnic.⁵ Based on the Polish census of 1931, the population of the interwar Vilnius region that is currently part of Lithuania was 514,000.⁶ Of them, about 67 percent were Poles, 16 percent were Lithuanians, 12 percent were Jews, 4 percent were Russians, 1 percent were Belarusians, 1 percent were Germans, and less than 1 percent were others.⁷ On the Lithuanian side of the border, twenty-four counties that faced the Polish–Lithuanian border (or the demarcation line) had a population of 137,000 in 1923. Of them, 73 percent were Lithuanians, 13 percent were Poles, about 7 percent were Jews, 4 percent were Russians (mostly Old Believers), 2 percent were Germans, and 1 percent were Belarusians.⁸

However, this official demographic data provided by the Lithuanian and Polish authorities barely reflected that a significant part of the borderland population was so-called *tuteišiai* (in Lithuanian) or *tutejszy* (in Polish), that is, “locals.” Historically they emerged as a result of the gradual Polonization of the local peasantry that began around the third quarter of the nineteenth century.⁹ The *tutejszy* were Catholic peasants who spoke the local Belarusian dialect *po prostu* (“simple language”) and possessed only a vague notion of nationality.¹⁰ Because of this, they were the target of intense nationalization campaigns by the Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian authorities. None of them recognized their local identity and claimed them either as ethnic Lithuanians, Poles, Belarusians, or Russians.¹¹

5 In this chapter, all administrative units carry their historical names. Other localities have their own current names.

6 Prior to the Great War, there was no entity called “the Vilnius region.” The borders of the territory that encompassed the interwar Vilnius region experienced a number of changes between the late nineteenth century and 1939. The tsarist province of Vilna existed until 1915 and included the districts of Vilna, Vileika, Dysna, Lyda, Oshmiana, Svenciany, and Troki. From 1919 to 1922, the region belonged to the Polish Civilian Administration of the Eastern Lands (ZCZW) and included the districts (powiaty) of the city of Wilno, Wilno, Brasław, the city of Grodno, Grodno, Dżisna, Troki, Nowogrodek, Lida, Oszmiana, Wilejka, and Święciany. In 1931 the Wilno voivodeship included the districts (powiaty) of the city of Wilno, Wilno-Troki, Wilejka, Święciany, Postawy, Oszmiana, Mołodeczno, Dżisna, and Brasław.

7 Eberhardt, *Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie*, 126.

8 Based on the data of the Lithuanian census of 1923, cited in Nekrašas, “Pafrontė,” 43, 61.

9 Turska, “O powstaniu polskich obszarów językowych na Wileńszczyźnie,” 21, 60.

10 For the overview of their historical origins and social and cultural identities, see Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai Vilniaus vyskupijoje*, 120–26.

11 On the various attempts to claim the *tutejszy*, see Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Wileńszczyźnie*.

Neither the Russian (1897) nor German (1916) censuses identified the *tutejszy* as a category of population. During the interwar period, the Polish authorities held two official censuses in the Vilnius region in 1919 and 1931. If in 1919 the nationality (*narodowość*) of residents was established based on their indicated choice of it, in 1931 the authorities tried to determine their mother tongue (*język ojczysty*). The Polish Census of the Civil Administration of the Eastern Lands of 1919 recorded about 192,000 *tutejszy*. They made up almost 5 percent of the total population of the three districts of Wilno, Brześć, and Minsk. Of them, about 37,000 lived in the Wilno district alone (2.3 percent of the total population).¹² However, in 1931, the language of the *tutejszy* was not recorded among the mother tongues used in the Wilno voivodeship.¹³ The results of both Polish censuses were disputed for inflating the figures of Poles at the expense of those groups that could not clearly define their nationality or a mother tongue. Thus, in the Vilnius region, the precise number of *tutejszy* remained unknown but it clearly may have reached more than a hundred thousand people.¹⁴

The social profile of the borderland population had more clear-cut divisions than the ethnic one. In the Vilnius region, like in the rest of Lithuania, the majority of the population were Catholic peasants (75 percent), while about three-quarters of them were smallholders.¹⁵ The Polish-speaking nobility constituted less than 10 percent of the population but owned more than a third of the land.¹⁶

Between 1920 and 1939, the Vilnius region became a hotbed of international conflict between Poland and Lithuania and also a site of intense border-making. There were never any state boundaries in the region before 1920. The first so-called demarcation line emerged there as a result of fighting between Polish and Lithuanian troops in the summer of 1919. The longer lasting borderline was finalized as a result of the discontinued war between Poland and Lithuania on November 29, 1920. The border that cut across eastern Lithuania and split the country into Polish and Lithuanian sides

12 *Spis ludności na terenach administrowanych*, 31–32.

13 Nevertheless, 707,000 *tutejszy* were recorded in the Polesia voivodeship. See *Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dn. 9.XII 1931 r.*, 15.

14 Januszewska-Jurkiewicz mentions about a hundred thousand *tutejszy* ascribed to the category of Poles in the voivodeship of Wilno in 1931. See Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Wileńszczyźnie*, 524. Meanwhile, the *Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia* claims that *tuteišiai* constituted about 15 percent of the population in the Vilnius region. See “Vilniaus kraštas,” *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*, <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/vilniaus-krastras/>.

15 *Pervaja vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii, 1897 g.*, 42, 59.

16 Gudavičius, “Dvarininkai,” 241.

survived for only nineteen years. It was among the shortest-lived borders in interwar Europe. However, it had a significant political, social and cultural impact on the local population.

My argument is that although both nation-states—Poland and Lithuania—had the ambition to hold a strong position in policymaking in the Polish–Lithuanian borderland, its local population made their own use of such policies. Both states heavily engaged in strong-handed policies that strived to ensure border security and the political loyalty of the population. These policies ranged, in the initial period (1920–23), from the use of armed proxies and violence in order to force the people to accept either Lithuanian or Polish identities to, in the later period (1923–39), vigorous nationalization campaigns and the expansion of border security measures. Remarkably, significant numbers of the locals circumvented these policies. Although some gave in to state pressure, others remained “nationally indifferent,” politically disloyal, and adopted living strategies that sabotaged the policies of the sealed border.

Violence on the Border

After almost a year and a half of fighting, on November 29, 1920, Lithuania and Poland concluded a truce in Kaunas, with the mediation of the League of Nations. Although the Lithuanian Army stopped the advance of Lucjan Żeligowski’s Polish troops deep into the interior, the Vilnius region remained under the control of the Poles. As a result of the truce, Lithuania became divided by a twelve-kilometer-wide neutral zone. To avoid new clashes, both sides agreed to withdraw their armies from it. About thirty thousand local people suddenly found themselves in the neutral zone. Its territory was about 4,000 km² and extended for almost 400 km across the whole of eastern Lithuania: from Lake Vištytis to Zarasai.

The area was not fully controlled by either side, so violence soon resumed.¹⁷ The situation worsened after the elections of January 8, 1922 to the Diet of the so-called “Middle Lithuania,” founded by Żeligowski.¹⁸ The second eruption of violence came after February 20, 1922, when the Vilnius region was unilaterally annexed by Poland. Gradually, local Lithuanians and Poles

17 This part is based on my article: Balkelis, “The Logic of Violence in the Polish–Lithuanian Conflict, 1920–1923.”

18 “Middle Lithuania” (in Polish, Litwa Środkowa) was an unrecognized short-lived puppet state of Poland that existed from 1920 to 1922.

became involved in fierce battles against each other. In the neutral zone, most violent agents were armed proxies of Lithuania and Poland: the Lithuanian riflemen (*šauliai*; they were also called “partisans”) and Polish militias.

In the zone, the Lithuanian riflemen (*šauliai*, founded in 1919) were divided into three districts (northern, central, and southern); each included four to five armed groups made up mainly of local men. Although their activities were coordinated by the Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union headquarters in Kaunas, local units often operated independently. They were supported and armed by the Lithuanian Army. In some military operations (for example, near Širvintos) soldiers of the army disguised as paramilitaries took part. The strongest riflemen squads operated in the vicinities of Perloja, Širvintos, and Giedraičiai. In total, there were several thousand Lithuanian paramilitaries in the zone, with about a thousand in the Švenčionys district alone.

The Polish militia (*Milicja ludowa pasa neutralnego*) was founded in the fall of 1920. Its leadership was directly appointed by the Polish police chief in Vilnius, and salaries were paid by the authorities of “Middle Lithuania.”¹⁹ It had regional units in Širvintos, Giedraičiai, and Janiškiei, and five of its armed groups were stationed in Avižonys, Trakai, Rūdiškės, Švenčionys, and near Suvalkija. Its largest units operated in the Širvintos and Giedraičiai districts: in total there were about two thousand members. Part of these units consisted of regular soldiers sent from Poland. They were disguised as militiamen, and their documents were taken. In total, about six thousand Polish militiamen operated in the neutral zone.

Polish militiamen and Lithuanian partisans attacked each other’s villages, kidnapped and killed hostages, tortured civilians, looted and burned houses, postal offices, and landed estates, and carried out requisitions to intimidate the local population and force them to move out or submit to their authority. There were many cases of revenge: violent attacks provoked brutal retaliations that included mutilations and summary executions. Part of the civilian population also joined the fighting. The violence reached its climax in January and February of 1923. The most vicious warfare took place in the areas of Širvintos, Giedraičiai, Avižonis, Liudvinavas, Perloja, and Varviškės.

Along with the paramilitaries, individual robbers also operated. Local national minorities were often affected by the violence. No surprise that those groups who did not fit into the Polish and Lithuanian national projects (the *tutejszy*, Belarusians, and Jews) found themselves in the midst of a cauldron as both sides tested their loyalty. The Lithuanian authorities tried

19 Rezmer, “Likwidacja pasa neutralnego pomiędzy Polską a Litwą,” 31.

to mobilize the Belarusians. In the meantime, both sides occasionally targeted Jews for their presumed disloyalty.

Tara Zahra points out that across Eastern Europe “competition between popular nationalist movements on the ground actually encouraged national indifference.” And this indifference may be explained not as a reflection of political ignorance or a premodern relic, but as “a response to modern mass politics.”²⁰ In the neutral zone, one of the consequences of the fighting was that civilians, who did not have a clear national identity, for security reasons were forced to choose one due to the continuous violence. Yet violent nationalization may have been among the factors that contributed to the “national indifference” of those groups who could not develop their own or join competing networks of self-support.

With the violence ongoing, on September 19, 1922, the Control Commission of the League of Nations sent a delegation led by the Spanish diplomat Pedro Saura to the neutral zone. Its purpose was to establish an administrative border between Poland and Lithuania in order to stop the violence. Western diplomats visited several places, including Širvintos and Giedraičiai, the venues of the fiercest military clashes. For the Polish and Lithuanian governments, their visit became an opportunity to discredit their opponents and present their compatriots as victims of enemy violence. Foreign envoys were welcomed by local Polish, Lithuanian, and Jewish delegations. Lithuanians and Jews complained about Polish attacks, and the local Poles asked the League of Nations for protection against Lithuanian attacks and demanded the annexation of the neutral zone to Poland.²¹

After the foreign diplomats left, the fighting resumed. On February 3, 1923, the Control Commission of the League of Nations, based on Saura's report, decided to cancel the neutral zone and draw an administrative line instead. This decision was accelerated by Lithuania's unilateral takeover of the Klaipėda (Memel) region on January 15, 1923.²² The joint Polish border and police forces occupied the part of the neutral zone assigned to Poland by the League of Nations after intense armed battles in mid-February of 1923. Poland received the Hrodna–Vilnius railway, and Lithuania got the areas of Širvintos and Giedraičiai. Although this move did not improve relations between both states, open military fighting came to an end. Poland and

20 Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities,” 100.

21 Pobyć Delegacji Ligi Narodowej w Pasie Neutralnym. September 1922, Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (Lithuanian Central State Archives; henceforth LCVA), f. 15, ap. 2, b. 78, l. 3–4.

22 After the Great War, the Memel region was detached from Germany and administered by France with the mandate of the Entente powers.

the Western allies viewed this line as a state border, but Lithuania never recognized it as such and considered it only as a temporary demarcation (later an administrative) line.²³

Securing the Border

The “hot” and violent period of border-making was followed by the “cold” period of its securitization (1924–39). Two essential features of this stage were the attempts by both nation-states to turn the former no-man’s land (the neutral zone) into a sealed and fully secured border and to force the local population to accept the new rules of living in the borderland.

Since May 1923, after both sides disbanded their paramilitaries, border control had temporarily fallen into the hands of the Lithuanian and Polish armies. From 1924 on, the demarcation line was guarded by the Lithuanian and Polish border police. The line was long, winding, and confusing, for there were practically no natural boundaries that it could follow. Only parts of it followed the Merkys and Neris Rivers. Due to the lack of natural frontiers, Lithuanian and Polish border guards were forced to patrol next to each other in open fields and forests. As a result, constant incidents took place due to illegal border markings or crossings.

Both sides created an entire border infrastructure. They positioned border guard posts and line-crossing points. A fifty-meter-wide forest zone that separated the states was cut down and fenced. Border guidelines were built every hundred meters, as well as six- to ten-meter-high wooden poles with brooms attached to the top of them. A little later, similar plowed and raked areas were also made in open fields.

On the Lithuanian side, the smallest border police unit was a border guard post, which consisted of five to ten border guards. They guarded a section of the border no longer than 5 km. Three to four sections of the border formed a border police district, which covered about 15 km of the demarcation line. From four to ten districts were combined into so-called *barai* (border zones), larger border administrative units. There was a total of seven border zones: in Zarasai, Utena, Ukmergė, Trakai, Alytus, Seinai–Marijampolė, and Vilkaviškis, which were guarded by about a thousand border policemen. On average, a single kilometer of the demarcation line was guarded by two Lithuanian border guards.²⁴

23 Łossowski, “Ostatni akt kształtowania granic Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej,” 37.

24 Lukoševičius, *Geležinė uždanga*, 8.

By 1934 the Lithuanian commanders of *barai* had telephone contact with district centers and with their district guards. Ninety-nine percent of the border guards were ethnic Lithuanians. During the years 1924 to 1927, about a quarter of border guards were dismissed each year from service as “inappropriate elements,” mostly due to disciplinary issues and smuggling. However, the number of dismissals gradually went down to 9 percent by 1931.²⁵ By 1939 the Lithuanian border police made up almost half of the entire state police.²⁶

Until 1923 Poland’s borders were guarded by the Polish Army and the Border Police (Policja Straży Pogranicza), which were gradually replaced by the Border Corps (Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza, KOP) under the Ministry of the Interior. Individual border sections of Poland were assigned to battalions of KOP, and the latter were divided into companies that controlled the border zone 6 km deep.²⁷ A single battalion of KOP was made up of twenty-five officers and about eight hundred soldiers. On the Polish–Lithuanian border, the KOP battalions were grouped in three echelons. The first line of protection consisted of watchtowers and transit posts located alongside the boundary line. The watchtowers were usually manned by eighteen soldiers under the command of a noncommissioned officer. In the second line, there were commands of border companies and border platoons, as well as company reserves. The third line consisted of battalion reserves and cavalry squadrons.²⁸

The primitive infrastructure of the border line, created in haste and lacking natural boundaries, occasionally raised the eyebrows of foreign observers. This is what happened in June 1933, when eleven Czechoslovak journalists visited the border and published their impressions. After seeing “roads and paths covered with grass and bushes, the railway line of Kaišiadorys–Lentvaris that was dismantled and already overgrown with two-meter-high pine trees” and “border poles marked with straw,” they labeled the Polish–Lithuanian demarcation line “a thatched borderline of straw.”²⁹ The pejorative expression “straw border” was also widely used by the local population to describe its pitiable and porous character.³⁰

Until 1938 in Lithuania martial law remained in the border zone. Between June and December of 1926, the left-wing government of Mykolas Sleževičius

25 “Pasienio policijos tarnautojai,” 23.

26 Žukauskas, “Valstybės sienos apsaugos įstatymo sulaukus,” 438.

27 “Lenkijos sienų apsauga,” 58.

28 Ochał, *Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza*, 29.

29 Lučinskis, “Šiaudinė siena,” 311.

30 Nekrašas, “Pafrontė,” 221.

reduced the application of martial law to a 1 km zone alongside the demarcation line. However, after the right-wing coup of December 17, 1926, martial law was reestablished in the whole country. Despite the de-escalation of the armed Polish–Lithuanian conflict in 1923, the borderline remained a zone of violent incidents throughout most of the interwar years. There were constant shootings at the border, and border guards were occasionally taken as hostages. Most of the time, the incidents were incited by secretly moved border poles. Such actions produced recurring disputes and negotiations between Polish and Lithuanian border guards. During the years 1924 to 1934, nine Lithuanian border guards were killed while on duty. Between 1927 and 1939, Polish border guards injured thirteen and kidnapped twenty-two Lithuanian border policemen. There were casualties among the Polish border policemen, too. On March 7, 1938, Lithuanian border guards shot a Polish border guard near the village of Trasninkai. This incident prompted the Polish government to issue an ultimatum to Lithuania on March 17. As a result, Lithuania was forced to establish diplomatic relations with Poland and to allow limited movement across the border.

Officially, the Polish–Lithuanian border was abolished on October 10, 1939, after Lithuania signed the Treaty of Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union and on October 27, regained the Vilnius region from Soviet hands. In January 1940, the border was dismantled completely, as the eastern border of Lithuania became the border with the Soviet Union.

Living by the Border

Yet life on the frontier was not marked by violence alone. During the interwar period, civilians constantly moved across the demarcation line, both legally and illegally. Relatives visited each other on the other side, weddings and funerals took place, farmers who owned land across the frontier continued farming. Thus, the border was a site of intense social and economic life and, especially, a massive explosion of illegal trade. In the borderland, Lithuania and Poland also engaged in intense state-building by creating self-government institutions, building borderline services, post offices, schools, and issuing personal documents for local people.

As part of their ongoing struggle against Poland, the Lithuanian authorities during the interwar period viewed the residents of the Polish-controlled Vilnius region as potential citizens of Lithuania. Their legal status was defined as “residents of occupied Lithuania.” Based on the Law of December 3, 1924 (no. 11722), all residents of the Vilnius region were entitled to

receive a certificate as a “resident of occupied Lithuania.” However, they could not vote in elections in Lithuania or serve in the Lithuanian Army. Once in Lithuania, they were issued a free residence permit for a year and were entitled to receive Lithuanian citizenship.³¹

The Polish authorities (including those of “Middle Lithuania”) had a different policy of citizenship in the Vilnius region. The Polish citizenship law of 1920 stipulated that residents who were “enrolled in an urban or rural commune or in one of the state organizations on lands of the former empire of Russia that are now parts of the Polish state” were entitled to Polish citizenship.³² However, in the Vilnius region, a significant part of the population did not receive Polish citizenship because they could not meet the above-mentioned conditions. As a result, they were granted various papers as local residents: temporary pass (*legitymacja czasowa*), temporary identity certificate (*tymczasowe zaświadczenie tożsamości*), and temporary identity card (*terminowy dowód osobisty*).³³ Thus, the great variety of temporary documents reflected the liminal status of those borderlanders who could not be easily integrated into the national body of Polish citizens.

According to one estimate, residents of Poland owned about 5,300 ha of land in independent Lithuania, while more than 3,000 ha of land in the Vilnius region belonged to residents of Lithuania.³⁴ Despite mutual hostility, Lithuania and Poland had to cope with the issue of accessing this land. On November 7, 1928, both sides signed a provisional agreement that regulated the local traffic of borderland farmers who owned the land across the border. According to the agreement, people could cross the border only through border checkpoints that were kept open during set daytime hours. The crossing points were especially necessary for local peasants who used them to get to their fields on the other side of the frontier. Guards on both sides constantly monitored and controlled those passing by. People were allowed to cross the border only with official permits. The checkpoints were marked with wooden gates. In some places, both sides had even built decorated gates, for example, in Varėna, Ucieka, and elsewhere. At these checkpoints, border guards from both sides met to clarify various misunderstandings and negotiate daily matters.

As Leonas Nekrašas shows in his recent study, the checkpoints became the sites of constant harassment of civilians by border patrols. Often farmers

31 Jasiukaitis, “Okupuotos Lietuvos gyventojai.”

32 Act on Citizenship of the Polish State of January 20, 1920, <https://polishcitizenship.pl/law/#statue1920>.

33 Šatkus, *Asmens tapatybės ir kelionės dokumentai Lietuvoje*, 228.

34 Žepkaitė, *Diplomatija imperializmo tarnyboje*, 216.

were forced to cut out trees on their land possessions that faced the borderline. They were intimidated, arbitrarily arrested for minor transgressions (such as driving their cattle home along routes to avoid checkpoints), or interrogated with the purpose of gathering military intelligence. Farmers who owned the land on the opposite side felt helpless when their meadows and forests were illegally exploited by their Polish or Lithuanian neighbors. These incidents bred mutual distrust and hostility between civilians and border guards.³⁵

In spite of these tensions, the border saw a constant traffic of people crossing it from both sides to visit their relatives (especially for funerals) and for religious worship. Often the border split entire villages and towns (for example, Linkmenys and Varėna), and locals were cut out of their churches and synagogues they had visited for many years. There were more than a hundred such divided settlements.

This situation led to an increase in illegal crossings. Thus, in the mid-1930s, the number of people arrested for crossing the Polish–Lithuanian demarcation line illegally increased to around 60 to 70 percent of all illegal crossings in independent Lithuania (for example, about 1,400 were arrested in 1935 alone).³⁶ According to a report by a Lithuanian border commandant of the Trakai district, almost half of the illegal crossings were made by those trying to visit relatives.³⁷ Although in some places the Lithuanian and Polish authorities allowed borderland residents from the other side to visit the same churches, in general, such cases were exceptional.

Thus, restrictions on population movement disrupted the economic, social and religious life of the local population. The borderline complicated, completely destroyed or rerouted old commercial networks in the region. It also led to the uneven economic development of both parts of Lithuania, which opened a window of opportunity for massive illegal trade.

Illegal Trade

The official data of the Lithuanian border police show that a large part of the borderland population was involved in smuggling. Moreover, the illegal trade steadily grew through the mid-1930s. Those arrested on the demarcation line on average made up more than 60 percent of all arrested smugglers in Lithuania.

35 Nekrašas, "Pafrontė," 230–31.

36 Nekrašas, "Pafrontė," 244.

37 Trakų aps. komendantas V. Žutauto raportas "Mūsų su lenkais pasienio tyrimo reikalu," January 25, 1934, LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 392.

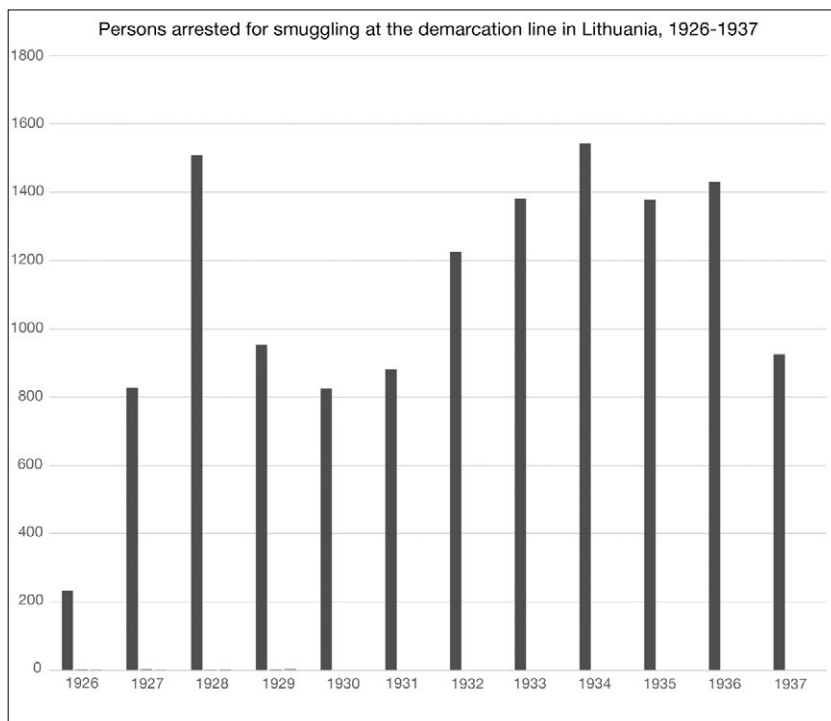


Figure 4.1. Graph created by the author from data presented in *Policija*, 1926–37.

Table 4.1. Persons Arrested for Smuggling in Lithuania, 1926–37

Year	Arrested at the demarcation line	Arrested in total
1926	234 (22% of the total arrested)	1,076
1927	828 (57%)	1,450
1928	1,508 (67%)	2,235
1929	953 (52%)	1,826
1930	825 (58%)	1,411
1931	881 (60%)	1,470
1932	1,226 (60%)	2,030
1933	1,381 (64%)	2,157
1934	1,543 (65%)	2,362
1935	1,377 (69%)	1,996
1936	1,430 (69%)	2,063
1937	925 (59%)	1,576

Source: Table created by the author from data presented in *Policija*, 1926–37.

The most porous border area (where most arrests were made) was in the Trakai district (notable for its multiethnic population). Thus, between July and September 1924, 204 smugglers were arrested on the entire demarcation line—of them, eighty-five in the Trakai district alone. The above-mentioned official report from the Trakai district shows that almost half of those who crossed the border were visiting their relatives, a third were involved in smuggling, and a fifth crossed for other purposes (in search of documents, spying, etc.). As the key reason for smuggling, the report pointed out the relative poverty of people living on the Polish side of the border. Smugglers from Poland brought footwear, fabrics, and knitwear. From Lithuania they carried sugar, saccharine, tobacco, and other commodities. The report mentioned that “sometimes smugglers helped nonlocal people to cross the border, but also there were those who crossed the border just for fun (as if playing a game).”³⁸ It concluded that “the most dominant relationship of the locals living near the border with the other side is smuggling.”³⁹

Lithuanian border guards were less worried about the so-called “one-time smugglers,” border residents who transported goods from the Vilnius region to their relatives in Lithuania. Their major concern was those who kept crossing the border multiple times and belonged to networks of paid local smuggling agents. The goods they transported in significant quantities were sold throughout Lithuania, and this illegal trade was damaging to the country’s economy. The smugglers often used teenagers to carry goods and scout the border area. According to the border police, “the actions of these minors were usually driven by parents or their guardians hiding somewhere behind the scenes.” Often smugglers used clever schemes to evade border guards. For example, they developed decoy strategies to distract the attention of the border police and then easily crossed the border with horse carriages loaded with goods.⁴⁰

The smuggling may have been encouraged by the relatively moderate punishment by the Lithuanian authorities. Usually the offenders faced a choice of either paying fines of fifty to two hundred *litai* or spending from a week to a month in detention.⁴¹ In Lithuania the smugglers from Poland faced harsher sentences than those caught crossing the border into Poland. The difference in living standards between Lithuania and the Vilnius region soon became a propaganda tool used by the Lithuanian government. There is

38 Trakų aps. komendanto V. Žutauto raportas “Mūsų su lenkais pasienio tyrimo reikalu,” January 25, 1934, LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 483.

39 Trakų aps. komendanto V. Žutauto raportas “Mūsų su lenkais pasienio tyrimo reikalu,” January 25, 1934, LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 479.

40 “Pasienio įvykiai,” 34.

41 Nekrašas, “Pafrontė,” 255.

some evidence that, in the 1930s, the Lithuanian authorities even encouraged smuggling to Poland as a tool of economic pressure on Poland's economy. The Lithuanian border police "cooperated with smugglers by supporting, supervising and controlling the export of contraband goods (livestock, food products, farm supplies, etc.) into Poland."⁴² Thus, the new borderline became a site of economic war against Poland.

Failing Nationalization

In the borderland, one of the most visible features of state-building was an attempt to change the cultural identities and political loyalties of the local population. During the interwar period, those residents of eastern Lithuania, who historically did not have clearly defined national identities, came under close state scrutiny and pressure. Both sides conducted vigorous nationalization campaigns aimed to build nationally conscious communities in the borderland.

Here I will focus on the Lithuanian side (bearing in mind that similar research should also be done on the Polish side). The policy of Lithuanianization targeted, first of all, Polish-language speakers and nationally indifferent *tuteišiai*. At the same time, the Lithuanian government tried only to ensure the political loyalty of minorities such as Jews, Belarusians, and Russians. The key tenets of Lithuanianization were the spread of Lithuanian culture through the expansion of the Lithuanian-language primary school system, the Lithuanian-language press, the creation of a network of local Lithuanian state and nongovernmental institutions (from postal offices to branches of patriotic organizations such as the Riflemen's Union and others) and bureaucratic pressure on Polish-language schools and cultural activities.⁴³ As a result of this policy, during the interwar period, the border area saw a massive influx of Lithuanian-speaking border guards, policemen, state clerks, Catholic priests, and members of various patriotic organizations. Moreover, by the mid-1930s, the borderline had become a venue for state-encouraged "heritage tourism," which was also seen as a means of spreading Lithuanian culture in the borderland (to be discussed further).⁴⁴

Yet, faced with the complexity of the borderland, the efforts of nation-builders often ran aground. In late 1933, the chief of staff of the Lithuanian

42 Nekrašas, "Pafrontė," 264.

43 By 1938 there were only ten Polish-language schools left in Lithuania, while in 1927 there had been ninety-one. See Kaubrys, *Lietuvos mokykla 1918–1939 m.*, 141.

44 "Heritage tourism" was state-supported tours to lost places or their borderlands, a phenomenon that emerged in some countries that had lost their territories after World War I.

Army ordered the preparation of a secret survey “On the Matter of the Polish Borderland.”⁴⁵ Military commandants of all the border districts received the questionnaire, which was designed to establish the level of the possible security threat from the Polish minority. It included questions such as how many “Poles” have become convinced Lithuanians, how many were vacillating, and how many were disloyal. The time span of the survey covered the previous fifteen years. The commandants used the questionnaire to gather data from Lithuanian border policemen, postmen, teachers, priests, and state clerks on the progress of the Lithuanianization of the borderland population as well as their views on the Lithuanian government and the issue of loyalty to the state.⁴⁶

The survey of the borderland population showed that in many border districts (especially in the multiethnic Trakai district) Lithuanianization faced serious difficulties. The campaign was slow and uncoordinated. Due to the poor financial situation, the Lithuanian authorities could not provide the border residents with enough copies of Lithuanian newspapers. Thus, in the vicinity of Vievis, although there were subscriptions to 350 Lithuanian and 51 Polish newspapers, only about 40 percent of people spoke Lithuanian, and 60 percent continued speaking Polish.⁴⁷

The military organizers of the survey gloomily concluded that “almost the whole borderland with Poland still remains quite Polonized.”⁴⁸ In some areas (for example, in Aukštadvaris) the Polish language became even more widespread “due to a religious factor, constant squabbles of Lithuanian activists with priests and the church and easily obtainable loans from Polish banks in light of the current economic crisis.”⁴⁹ Two-thirds of the population near Aukštadvaris were “of Polish orientation” (“*lenkuojantys*”), though “only the bravest” claimed officially that they were Poles. They were the ones who felt safe enough to make such a claim since they were not dependent on any help from Lithuanians. The majority declared themselves to be Lithuanians for various practical reasons. However, the survey reported that “in their spirit” they remained Poles.⁵⁰ Thus, it turned out that part of

45 Lenkų pasienio tyrimo reikalai, LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406.

46 For the analysis of this data, see Nekrašas, “Pafrontė,” 87–218; Eidintas and Lukoševičius, “Lietuvos kariuomenės.”

47 Eidintas and Lukoševičius, “Lietuvos kariuomenės,” 242.

48 Lenkų pasienio tyrimo reikalai, LCVA, f. 745, ap. 4, b. 110, l. 57.

49 “Atsakymas į anketą Vilnijos atlietuvinimo reikalai iš Aukštadvario apylinkės,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 433.

50 “Atsakymas į anketą Vilnijos atlietuvinimo reikalai iš Aukštadvario apylinkės,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 433.

the borderland population was totally bilingual, had situational identities, and was “nationally indifferent” or “of Polish orientation.”

The survey pointed out that at home those who had spoken *po prostu* continued speaking in Polish. Even young men who learned Lithuanian in the army continued to speak Polish after they returned home. They refused to join Lithuanian societies, although they considered themselves residents of Lithuania. Their service experience in the Lithuanian Army was often marked by “great contempt for people with a Polish background and mockery of them.”⁵¹

However, the report noted that over time, for example, in Kaišiadorys and some other towns in Trakai district, more residents began to speak Lithuanian in public. Some started calling themselves Lithuanians for economic reasons. They no longer looked toward Poland, where the economic situation was worse. In his testimony, Priest J. Labukas concluded that the better economic situation of Lithuania gave the people living on both sides of the border a “big motive to support Lithuania.”⁵²

As mentioned, most of the agents of Lithuanianization were state employees (border guards, state clerks, riflemen, teachers and priests) who had recently arrived in the borderland. The locals viewed them as strangers. The survey established this as one of the key reasons for failing Lithuanianization:

In the borderland, the Lithuanian element is not made up of natives, but of immigrants and colonists, or administrative managers and clerks. For example, in Kernavė [...] there are only about twenty of them. [...] They are newcomers. Here they are foreign and temporary. In case of an invasion by the enemy, they will have to be evacuated. [...] The Lithuanian movement is kept alive not by the locals [who are Polish oriented], but by the newcomers [Lithuanians].⁵³

The locals did not trust the recently arrived Lithuanian teachers “because the majority of them were nonpracticing Catholics.” In the area of Aukštadvaris, many teachers were unlicensed and second-rate, sent to the borderland as punishment for minor transgressions. Meanwhile, the majority of state

51 “Atsakymas į ankieta Vilnijos atletuvinimo reikalu iš Aukštadvario apylinkės,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 433.

52 J. Labuko 1934 m. balandžio 2 d. atsakymai į anketos klausimus, LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 287–98.

53 “Mūsų su lenkais pasienio tyrimo reikalu ankieta,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 441.

employees and Lithuanian activists held “anti-Catholic views,” which often led to conflicts with the local people.⁵⁴

Another reporter indicated that since the majority of locals were highly religious, only the Lithuanian-oriented church had a chance to change their cultural orientation: “[T]he East never felt and would never feel sympathy for societies of a different nature, such as *šauliai*, nationalists [*tautininkai*], and other political organizations.”⁵⁵ In general, the locals did not join the various Lithuanian organizations, except the Society of Young Farmers (*Jaunųjų ūkininkų sąjunga*).⁵⁶ Meanwhile, ultra-patriotic members of the Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union (*šauliai*) were feared and mistrusted for their violent past, aggressive attitude towards the locals, their drunkenness and public rattling of guns.⁵⁷ An observer noted, “local people of Polish orientation, countryside men, usually refuse to join the *šauliai* [because] they are afraid of the old times when there was the neutral zone, when partisans were roaming, when there were massacres.”⁵⁸

Those living by the border also witnessed a new phenomenon that had a deeply symbolic political meaning of marking each state’s “national territories.” Since the early 1930s, in Lithuania, various patriotic organizations started to organize special excursions to the borderline. Schoolchildren, state employees, members of patriotic societies, and simply tourists were encouraged to visit the border in order to show their support for state policies and patriotism. Excursionists often visited the border near the town of Linkmenys to show that occupation and people’s lives restricted by the demarcation line were only temporary.⁵⁹ According to one testimony, “almost every resident of the Alytus district considered it a matter of honor to go on an excursion to the administrative line with Poland.”⁶⁰ Every year, on October 9, the official Day of Mourning for Vilnius,⁶¹ columns of Lithuanians would march to the demarcation line near Giedraičiai singing and shouting “We will not forget Vilnius!”⁶² As part of the Lithuanianization campaign, from 1927 the Lithuanian scouts opened several branches in the

54 “Atsakymas į ankietą Vilnijos atletuvinimo reikalu iš Aukštadvario apylinkės,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 435.

55 “Kelios pastabos atletuvinimo klausimu,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 437.

56 “Kelios pastabos atletuvinimo klausimu,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 461.

57 “Kelios pastabos atletuvinimo klausimu,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 434–35.

58 “Kelios pastabos atletuvinimo klausimu,” LCVA, f. 500, ap. 1, b. 406, l. 448.

59 Lukoševičius, *Geležinė uždanga*, 38.

60 Lukoševičius, *Geležinė uždanga*, 97.

61 On October 9, 1920, the Polish troops took over Vilnius.

62 Lukoševičius, *Geležinė uždanga*, 53.

borderland and organized annual summer camps where they marched, burned bonfires, and sang patriotic songs.⁶³ The intended audience of these highly ritualized trips, first of all, were those Lithuanians who lived on the other side of the border. Showing them moral support was a form of protest over the occupation of Vilnius and also a claim that it belongs to Lithuania. Yet these trips clearly had a self-mobilizing purpose and were also seen as part of the Lithuanianization of local borderlanders.⁶⁴

The “heritage tourists” were typically ethnic Lithuanians. They included new settlers and some patriotic locals. However, the majority of them were visitors from the interior of Lithuania: members of various patriotic organizations—*šauliai*, scouts, members of the Union of Liberation of Vilnius (Vilniui vaduoti sąjunga), state clerks, soldiers, policemen, border guards, students, and their teachers. In general, the local non-Lithuanian population did not participate in these excursions and viewed them either with curiosity or indifference.⁶⁵

Similar research needs to be done on “heritage tourism” in the Polish-controlled Vilnius region. It seems that the Polish authorities and patriotic organizations did not spend as much effort developing this type of tourism. Overall, the Vilnius region was less important for the central authorities of Poland than for the interwar Lithuanian governments.⁶⁶ Yet there is some evidence that visits by Polish tourists to the “bleeding borderline” also attracted some political and cultural interest. Thus, for example, in the summer of 1932, a certain Dr. Holynski organized a summer trip by steamboat from Polish-controlled Druskininkai to the Polish–Lithuanian border. The trip was seen as a form of entertainment. It gathered a crowd of local Polish tourists but ended unexpectedly. Since no one knew where exactly the border on the Nemunas River was, the boat almost ended up on the Lithuanian side before it was apprehended by the Polish border patrol.⁶⁷

Conclusions

The Polish–Lithuanian borderland was one of the multiethnic East European regions that, after the Great War, experienced high levels of interstate and

63 Nekrašas, “Pafrontė,” 168–69.

64 Nekrašas, “Pafrontė,” 196.

65 Nekrašas, “Pafrontė,” 217.

66 Buchowski, *Litvomanai ir polonizuotojai*, 332–91.

67 Lukoševičius, *Geležinė uždanga*, 126–27.

intercommunal violence. During the “hot” period of the postwar Polish–Lithuanian conflict (1920–23), the local population was terrorized by armed paramilitary proxies (Lithuanian *šauliai* and Polish militias) supported by competing nation-states. The “cold” period of conflict (1924–39) saw a decrease in violence but also an attempt by Poland and Lithuania to seal the border off and conduct strong-handed policies to ensure the political loyalty of the borderland population. These policies included securitization of the borderland and nationalization of its population.

The key premise of this research is that these state policies faced serious difficulty. They were only partly successful because they were implemented in a region that had been recently affected by violence. Violence was conducive to the emergence of Lithuanian and Polish national identities among some of the locals, but it was also responsible for the “national indifference” of significant numbers of them. “National indifference” or situational identities, in essence, became their survival strategies in the cauldron of political violence. By no means was violence the only factor that contributed to “national indifference.” The weak, underfunded, and poorly coordinated nationalization campaign that failed to reach the minds and hearts of the majority of the borderland population was another one.

The Polish–Lithuanian conflict was epitomized by the emergence of the new border (or administrative line) between Poland and Lithuania in 1920. Yet the border turned out to be one of the weakest and most short-lived in interwar Europe. It had no historical precedent in the region and survived for only nineteen years. It emerged as a result of warfare between both states and was drawn in the middle of nowhere. (It lacked natural frontiers that it could follow.)

The border also turned out to be weak because the strong-handed policies of Poland and Lithuania that sought to change the political loyalties and identities of the local population produced a negative reaction among many of them. Their living experiences suggest that they viewed the new frontier as disruptive, porous and bogus. Divided farms, villages, and towns; broken parishes; separated relatives; destruction of traditional trading routes; restrictions on people’s movement; and nationalist propaganda campaigns were the main causes that generated these negative views. The local people saw the agents of Lithuanianization (state clerks, border guards, policemen, teachers, Lithuanian-speaking Catholic priests and members of various patriotic and paramilitary organizations) as newcomers and strangers.

Poland and Lithuania invested heavily in the security and infrastructure of the border in an attempt to seal it off as a result of the hostile relations between both states during the interwar period. However, it turned out

that the border was quite porous. People kept visiting their relatives legally and illegally and working on their land possessions across the borderline. Legal trade was replaced by massive smuggling, while the nationalization campaign produced only limited results as a significant group of the population remained “nationally indifferent” and politically disloyal.

One can argue that the heritage of interwar border-making persists in the region. Even today many Lithuanians continue to be haunted by the phantom interwar border. In Lithuania, the recurring debates about the recalcitrant regional identity and uncertain political loyalties of the population of the Vilnius region or its lack of economic integration remind us of its long-lasting impact. A recent ethnographic survey of the Slavic-speaking residents in east Lithuania showed that many of them continue to see ethnic Lithuanians as strangers.⁶⁸ In the meantime, the Lithuanian census of 2021 identified fifty thousand people (1.8 percent of the total population) who did not indicate their nationality (of them, about half resided in the Vilnius district).⁶⁹ Today, according to some researchers, the local people of the Vilnius region are more ethnic “locals” than Poles or Lithuanians.⁷⁰ Thus, “national indifference” continues to be part of national politics and local identities.

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70 Korzeniewska, “Vietinis’ (tutejszy), lenkas, katalikas,” 174.

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II.

Crisis and Governance

5. Konstantin Päts and Ethnic Minorities: The Political Trajectory of an Estonian Nationalist Authoritarian Leader

Andres Kasekamp

Abstract: This chapter sheds light on influential Estonian statesman Konstantin Päts's relationship with Estonia's ethnic minorities during key milestones of his political trajectory. It advances the argument that despite being a nationalist and authoritarian ruler, Päts was remarkably tolerant in his views and dealings with Estonia's ethnic minorities—Germans, Russians, Swedes, and Jews. The chapter focuses on significant periods and events in Päts's political evolution: his activities prior to World War I, the Russian Revolution and the achievement of independence, the cultural autonomy law of 1925, his takeover of power in 1934, and the new authoritarian constitution of 1938.

Keywords: Konstantin Päts, Estonia, ethnic minorities, cultural autonomy, Baltic Germans

Introduction

Konstantin Päts (1874–1956) was undoubtedly the most influential Estonian of the first half of the twentieth century. He was a leader of the national movement prior to World War I, a founding father of the republic, the first prime minister, its only president and authoritarian ruler, and the one who decided the fate of Estonia at the start of the World War II. While there have been studies on Päts's politics, there has been no research specifically on his relationship with Estonia's ethnic minorities. This chapter aims to shed light on this relationship by examining Päts's actions at key milestones

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in his political trajectory. It advances the argument that despite being a nationalist and authoritarian ruler, Päts was in fact quite tolerant in his views and dealings with Estonia's ethnic minorities. This is not intended as an exhaustive study, but simply one that highlights chronologically key periods and events in Päts's political evolution: his activities prior to World War I, the Russian Revolution and the achievement of independence, the cultural autonomy law of 1925, his takeover of power in 1934, and the new authoritarian constitution of 1938.

Päts's Politics Prior to 1917

Päts belonged to a religious minority among Estonians: he was from an Orthodox family and attended the Orthodox seminary in Riga. Conversion to Orthodoxy had been most prevalent in western areas of Estonian settlement in the Baltic provinces like Pärnumaa, where Päts was born and raised. A substantial number of Estonian peasants converted to the "tsar's faith" in the 1840s in the hope of obtaining land, denied to them by their Lutheran Baltic German estate owners. Konstantin's elder brother Nikolai Päts (1871–1940) became an Orthodox priest who headed the Synod of the Estonian Orthodox Church in the 1930s. Being a member of a religious minority and having a Russian-Estonian mother (Olga Tumanova, 1847–1914) probably had some influence in shaping his political views, such as acceptance of diversity.

Päts studied law at the University of Tartu (Dorpat/Iur'ev) but did not join the Estonian Students' Society (EÜS), which was dominated by cultural nationalists, such as Jaan Tõnisson (1868–1941), the publisher of the newspaper *Postimees*. Instead, he became an adherent of a more materialist current of Estonian nationalism, which followed the spirit of Carl Robert Jakobson (1841–1882), a central figure in the Estonian national awakening of the 1860s to mid-1880s. Upon graduation and completion of military service in 1900, Päts moved to Tallinn (Reval), where he went to work in the law office of Jaan Poska (1866–1920), a fellow Orthodox Estonian, who became his political mentor. Poska would develop into a senior statesman who won the respect of friend and foe alike for his principled, yet pragmatic, advancement of Estonian interests.

In 1901 Päts cofounded and edited the newspaper *Teataja*, which became a rival to *Postimees*. The contrast has often been made between the two preeminent Estonian political leaders and rivals during the early twentieth century: Päts the pragmatist/materialist versus Tõnisson the idealist/

nationalist.¹ This echoed the contrast between the cities of Tallinn and Tartu, with the former, located in the province of Estland, being the commercial capital, and the latter, in the province of Livland, regarded as the cultural capital by Estonians.

The primary objective of Estonian nationalists, including Päts, was to overturn the domination of the Baltic German elite in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres of life in the Baltic provinces. With the advent of the Russian Empire in 1721, the privileged position of the Baltic Germans, especially the landowning nobility, but also the urban oligarchic merchant families, which had existed for centuries, was consolidated as the Baltic provinces received extensive autonomy and self-government. Furthermore, Baltic Germans even extended their influence as many rose to the top ranks of the imperial administration and were valued as loyal servants of the Romanov dynasty. The focus of Päts's efforts was on the practical means of improving the lot of Estonians through economic betterment, land redistribution, and reform of local government institutions. His first major political accomplishment, which also demonstrated his astuteness regarding ethnic relations, was constructing a coalition with ethnic Russian political representatives to break the Baltic Germans' monopoly of power on the Tallinn (Reval) city council in the 1904 municipal elections. As a result of this unprecedented success, Päts became the deputy mayor of Tallinn.²

During the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905 Päts did not stand out as a radical, but he was nevertheless sentenced to death for the publication of a socialist manifesto in his newspaper. Like many other activists, Päts fled into exile, first in Switzerland and then underground in Finland. He kept himself busy by translating pioneering German-American political scientist Francis Lieber's *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* into Estonian. Lieber's emphasis on the crucial importance of durable public institutions would have a lasting influence on Päts's thinking.³ When the situation had calmed down and martial law had been rescinded, he returned to Estonia and gave himself up to the authorities. While serving a nine-month prison sentence in St. Petersburg in 1910, his wife, Helmi Peedi (a Lutheran Estonian), died of tuberculosis. Helmi's sister raised Konstantin's two sons and he never had a relationship with another woman.⁴ After his release from prison in

1 Raud, *Kaks suurt*, 11.

2 Karjahärm, *Konstantin Päts*, 120–29.

3 Laaman, *Konstantin Päts*, 58.

4 Tambek, *Tõus ja mõõn*, 207.

1911, Pääts was able to return to work and resume his political activities as the editor of the newspaper *Tallinna Teataja*.

Pääts continued his fight against Baltic German political hegemony. However, in contrast to the ascendant Young Estonia (Noor-Eesti) movement, whose supporters rejected everything German and looked to Western European culture for inspiration, Pääts admired German cultural achievements as something that Estonians could build on:

We are not fighting with the goal to destroy the former culture of our homeland, but to take over that culture and to modernize and develop it. The fresh current that our young society brings into Baltic culture can only complement and strengthen the unique features of the culture of our homeland. Germans themselves admit that our culture has evolved under German influence, thus the easier it should be for us to enhance German culture in those areas where Estonians are already a factor.⁵

War and Revolution

After war broke out in 1914, Pääts again demonstrated his practical approach to ethnic relations. In 1915, together with Berend von Wetter-Rosenthal, the secretary of the Corporation of the Nobility of Estonia, he authored a compromise reform plan for the governance of the province on the basis of parity between the Baltic Germans and Estonians which would preempt the imposition of the *zemstvo*—the Russian province-level institution of partial self-government introduced in the 1860s—and safeguard the autonomy of the Baltic provinces. Though a retreat from the democratic ideals of 1905, it was a realistic proposal for moving forward in the current situation, which generated intense discussion and received widespread backing, though was rejected by the Russian minister of internal affairs.⁶

The Russian Revolution of February 1917 swept away the previous need for compromise with the Baltic German nobility. Though the new Russian Provisional Government granted Estonia autonomy and democratic freedoms, Pääts and Estonian nationalists criticized it for not sufficiently recognizing the national aspirations of the peoples of the Russian Empire. Pääts was elected to the newly formed *Maanõukogu* (provincial assembly) as a representative of the Democratic Bloc and from October headed the

5 Quoted in Pääts, *Eesti riik I*, 185.

6 Karjahärm, *Konstantin Pääts*, 367–93.

Maavalitsus (provincial administration) until the Bolshevik seizure of power in November.

The Maanõukogu was dispersed by the Bolsheviks after it had declared itself the highest authority in the land. Later it appointed a three-man Rescue Committee, with Päts as its best-known figure. As the Bolsheviks retreated and before the German forces arrived, the Rescue Committee seized the opportunity to proclaim Estonian independence on February 24, 1918. The declaration of independence, formally titled a “Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia,” promised all citizens irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, and political views equal protection under the law, and promised all ethnic minorities, specifically the Russians, Germans, Swedes, and Jews, the right of their cultural autonomy.⁷ The Rescue Committee also named an Estonian Provisional Government with Päts as its head.

However, the Germans marched into Tallinn the next day, and Päts was imprisoned by the German occupation authorities from June to November 1918. After Germany’s capitulation to the Entente Powers on November 11, 1918, Päts returned from incarceration in German-occupied Poland to take the reins of the Estonian Provisional Government. His government mobilized the country to beat back the Bolshevik invasion, which was accomplished by securing aid from Finland and Britain. In its final iteration Päts’s Provisional Government contained representatives of ethnic minorities with ministerial portfolios for German, Swedish, and Russian affairs.⁸ While winning allies for the cause of independence was undoubtedly a practical consideration, Päts and his colleagues were also motivated by a genuine desire to demonstrate inclusivity and tolerance towards minorities. Päts argued that Estonians should be “gracious winners” and be respectful towards ethnic minorities, rather than following the example of their former rulers—learning from “their poor former teachers” how to restrict their freedoms.⁹

As head of the Estonian Provisional Government, Päts pushed for Estonia’s ethnic minorities to receive firm legal support and favored their representation in the interim government and in legislation being written—he advocated for a language law that would give legal protection for “local languages,” for a law to guarantee native-language education, as well as guarantees that minority languages could be used in the court system.¹⁰

7 Eesti Maapäeva vanemate nõukogu, *Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahvastele*.

8 Pajur, *Konstantin Päts*, 177.

9 Alenius, “Under the Conflicting Pressures,” 34.

10 Alenius, “The Birth of Cultural Autonomy,” 448.

With the election of a constituent assembly dominated by the left in spring 1919, Päts was replaced. Now in the political opposition, Päts found himself out of step on two issues animating the most passion among both the left and Estonian nationalists—land redistribution and going to war against the remnants of the Imperial German Army allowed to remain active in the Baltic region to push back against possible Bolshevik advances. Päts and his party argued for a less radical land reform which would be more respectful of private property and generous in compensation of dispossessed landowners (mostly Baltic Germans). He also cautioned against entering into hostilities with the German volunteer forces in Latvia in June 1919. Päts went strongly against prevailing sentiment with both of these positions, which lead to accusations of him being soft towards the Germans, with some questioning his patriotism, even calling him the “Estonian Niedra,” referring to the head of the German puppet government in Latvia.¹¹

The Cultural Autonomy Law

Päts returned to power after the elections to the first Riigikogu (national assembly) in 1921. During the interwar period, Päts served as prime minister (Riigivanem) four times, though only once longer than for one year, as governments tended to have short lifespans and turnover was frequent. While this chapter highlights Päts’s ability to negotiate practical compromises, many of his contemporaries viewed his approach to politics as unprincipled, cynical, and transactional. He was generally regarded as the wiliest politician in Estonia.¹² It is also important to note that during the 1920s, Päts was prominently involved in business; for instance, he was the founding head of the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and of the Estonian–Soviet Russian Board of Trade. Through these activities Päts expanded his networks and personal ties with non-Estonians who were prominent business and industry leaders. However, the intertwining of his financial interests and political influence had more than a whiff of corruption.¹³

One of the most remarkable achievements of interwar Estonia was the adoption of the law on cultural autonomy for national minorities in 1925, which had no parallel elsewhere in the world at the time. The law enabled minorities to establish cultural councils empowered to collect taxes from

¹¹ Pajur, *Konstantin Päts*, 182.

¹² Turtola, *President Konstantin Päts*, 121.

¹³ Turtola, *President Konstantin Päts*, 112.

their members to administer schools and cultural institutions in their own language. Inspired by the ideas of Austrian Marxists Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, this law's innovative feature was basing autonomy on individual self-identification rather than territorial belonging. While Baltic German parliamentary deputies played the leading role in drafting and pushing for the legislation, the efforts of key ethnic Estonian political figures, mainly from Päts's Farmers' Party, were instrumental in securing a majority for passing the legislation. The opponents of the bill came from the left, who viewed the Germans and Russians as economic oppressors, and nationalists, who feared the creation of a "state within a state."¹⁴ During his speech to the Riigikogu in March 1923 advocating for cultural autonomy, Päts was heckled by both Tõnisson from the right and Mihkel Martna from the left. Päts reasoned that "we should not resolve the question of our ethnic minorities for the sake of international commitments, but for the well-being of our own state and to fulfill the promises made in our constitution."¹⁵ Päts was the most influential proponent of the cultural autonomy law and it was under his government in May 1924 when the bill that eventually became the law in February 1925 was tabled in parliament. Kari Alenius rightly concludes that Prime Minister Päts together with his interior minister, Karl Einbund, and defense minister, Ado Anderkopp, "can actually be called the fathers of Estonia's law on cultural autonomy."¹⁶

As the Estonian constitution recognized the three largest minorities—Germans, Russians, and Swedes—as historic minorities entitled to autonomy, a debate arose where to set the lower numerical limit for other minorities. Obviously, in practical terms there needed to be a critical mass which could sustain the functioning of the administrative institutions of cultural autonomy. According to the 1922 census, the Swedes were the smallest of the long-term historic minorities, numbering seven thousand persons; therefore, the minimum could have logically been set at just under that figure. However, the Jewish minority, most of whom had settled in Estonia only recently in the nineteenth century, numbered just four thousand. Therefore, Päts's allies in the general committee of the parliament quite consciously decided to set the lower limit at three thousand in order to facilitate cultural autonomy for the Jews as well.¹⁷ In general, Jews faced little discrimination in interwar Estonia, mainly because of their low visibility

14 Alenius, "Under the Conflicting Pressures," 40.

15 Päts, *Eesti riik II*, 219.

16 Alenius, "The Birth of Cultural Autonomy," 449.

17 Alenius, "The Birth of Cultural Autonomy," 456–57.

in society. Anton Weiss-Wendt characterized Estonian–Jewish relations in the interwar era as “friendly yet largely superficial.”¹⁸

Challenge from the Radical Right

In the early 1930s, Estonian politics was rocked by the economic depression and the rise of a radical right movement, the League of Veterans of the Estonian War of Independence, known as the “Vaps.” A response to the political polarization and instability fueled by the economic downturn, initiated by Päts, was to amend the constitution to create a strong presidency and correspondingly reduce the size and powers of the Riigikogu. Päts first recruited the Vaps (who at this point were still just a veterans’ interests organization and not yet a political movement) to apply pressure on the Riigikogu to support such an amendment.¹⁹ However, the constitutional amendment which was put to a national referendum in June 1932 was narrowly defeated, mainly because it was regarded as giving too much power to the president by the socialists, but not enough power by the Vaps. A reworked constitutional amendment satisfied even fewer voters and was defeated in June 1933. After a third national referendum on a constitutional amendment drafted by the Vaps passed in October 1933, Tõnisson resigned as prime minister and Päts, having supported the Vaps bill, became the caretaker prime minister until new elections under the amended constitution. On the back of their successful campaign to establish a strong presidency, the Vaps movement shot to prominence and by the beginning of 1934 appeared poised to win power. Its radical right agenda echoed fascist trends elsewhere in Europe, but its main target and mass appeal was against the political establishment and the alleged corruption of the parties.²⁰

Though the Vaps appealed overtly to patriots, interestingly, it was the Estonian Nationalists’ Club (Eesti Rahvuslaste Klubi), an elitist intellectual society, which put Päts forward as a candidate for the presidency in 1934. Subsequently, this club would provide some of the intellectual underpinnings for the construction of an authoritarian state.²¹ During the electoral campaign, the Vaps derided Päts as a representative of the old style of corrupt party politics and for being insufficiently nationalist. Trailing the Vaps candidate, retired general Andres Larka, on March 12, 1934, Päts, together

18 Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred*, 7.

19 Valge, “Tee teise rahvahäätuseni.”

20 Kasekamp, *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia*.

21 Karjahärm and Sirk, *Vaim ja võim*, 279.

with fellow candidate and wartime supreme commander retired general Johan Laidoner, declared a state of emergency and had the Vaps leaders arrested. On March 15, Päts appeared before the Riigikogu to justify his state of emergency. He won unanimous approval, including support from all of the elected representatives of the ethnic minorities. Evidently, they felt that Päts was a safe pair of hands compared with the Vaps, who might have potentially unleashed a wave of nationalism had they obtained power.

Authoritarian Regime

While Päts claimed to have saved democracy from the threat of extremism, he had no intention of restoring the status quo ante. Instead, he embarked on remolding the institutions of the state and erecting an authoritarian regime. Though the state of emergency was proclaimed for six months, it was extended annually until the Soviet takeover in 1940. Päts claimed that the Estonian people were politically “ill” and that his dictatorship was the antidote to the illness. When the Riigikogu was reconvened in October 1934, Ivan Gorshakov, the leader of the Russian minority party, was among those deputies who spoke in support of the government’s actions. However, when it became clear that the opposition to Päts held a majority, the Riigikogu was suspended. The subsequent period later came to be aptly termed the “Era of Silence” (*“Vaikiv ajastu”*).²²

While sidelining and demonizing the Vaps as being influenced by a foreign ideology (read: Nazism), Päts nevertheless appropriated many of the popular elements of the Vaps program, including nationalism and strongman rule. This included greater state intervention in the economy and affirmative action to promote ethnic Estonians to replace Germans and Russians in the public sector (though many prominent individuals, such as General Nikolai Reek, the ethnically Russian chief of the general staff, remained). Corporatist chambers along vocational lines were established with the intent of creating a more organic representation to replace the political parties banned in 1935, but these did not elicit much enthusiasm.²³

The newly created Propaganda Office promoted patriotic campaigns, such as the Estonianization of family names, encouragement of wearing folk costumes, reviving folk traditions, composing patriotic songs and flying the national flag. Undoubtedly, these efforts were in part designed to distract attention from the absence of open democratic political participation. The

²² Valge, *Eesti parlament 1917–1940*, 471.

²³ Kasekamp, “Corporatism and Authoritarianism,” 268–69.

interwar Republic of Estonia can be characterized as a nationalizing state, and the pace of Estonianization picked up markedly after the 1934 coup. As elsewhere in Europe during this era, standardization and centralization became the norm, especially evident in border areas, such as Petseri, inhabited mainly by Setos, who were not regarded by the Estonian state as a distinct Finno-Ugric ethnic group, but rather as people to be assimilated.²⁴

Nevertheless, cultural autonomy for the Germans and Jews remained and continued to function with minor restrictions.²⁵ A new chair of Jewish studies was even established at the University of Tartu in 1934, a unique development in Europe at the time. A proposal for establishing Russian cultural autonomy was considered by the government in 1937, but rejected. The Russian community itself was divided on its desirability because of the financial burden it would have entailed.²⁶

On a personal level, Päts maintained his friendships with prominent individuals from the German, Russian, and Jewish communities, especially affluent individuals such as Baltic German bank owner Klaus Scheel. Scheel even initiated the acceptance of Päts in 1937 into the Brotherhood of the Blackheads, an exclusive Hanseatic-era German merchants' guild that had never previously admitted any Estonians—a move that in David Feest's words, created a "space of national indifference."²⁷ Estonian national animosity was directed primarily against Baltic Germans as their former overlords, but Päts did not endorse such prejudice. Indeed, he was furious at the Estonian students (and their parents) who harassed local German youth sports teams at matches and with louts who picked fights with German sailors visiting Tallinn, ordering officials to investigate and take action to prevent further incidents.²⁸

In dealing with ethnic Russians, Päts often spoke in Russian, as, for example, during a visit to an Old Believers' village on the shores of Lake Peipus in 1938, when he addressed the locals in Russian and asserted that Estonian Russians were the equals of the majority population—ethnic Estonians (*enamusrahvus*).²⁹ According to Liisi Veski, "Päts called on minorities to join ethnic Estonians in their state-building efforts." Moreover, Veski notes, "Päts insisted that the Estonian national minority groups had to be seen as integral parts of the state, and their rights respected and protected."³⁰

24 Jäätis, "Ethnic Identity of the Setus."

25 Smith, "Estonia: A Model for Inter-war Europe?" 99.

26 Smith, "Estonia: A Model for Inter-war Europe?" 101.

27 Feest, "Spaces of 'National Indifference,'" 63.

28 Tambek, *Tõus ja mõõn*, 270–72.

29 Veski, "Towards Stronger National Unity," 185.

30 Veski, "Towards Stronger National Unity," 185.

Right-wing dictators are commonly regarded as ultranationalist or, at the very least, hostile to minorities. However, in Eastern Europe during the interwar period, more often than not, authoritarian leaders, such as Kārlis Ulmanis in Latvia, Antanas Smetona in Lithuania, and Admiral Horthy in Hungary, represented paternalism as opposed to a younger generation of radical nationalists enamored of fascism. The latter were outmaneuvered and sidelined (often jailed) by the more experienced authoritarian leaders, who came from the establishment and in many cases were the founding fathers of their state. These leaders stole the clothes of their rivals and tried to dress themselves up in the fashionable garb of fascism and corporatism to conceal their conservatism. They were also frequently criticized by the far-right younger generation for their insufficient nationalism, excessive tolerance or even coddling of national minorities.

Päts constantly spoke of the need to reform Estonia's institutions to replace those shown to be inadequate during the crisis years of the early 1930s. The first step was convoking a National Assembly (Rahvuskogu) in 1936 to draft a new constitution, one that Päts claimed should provide an antidote to liberal and authoritarian excesses of the 1920 and 1933 constitutions, respectively. Notably, the appointed forty-member upper chamber of the National Assembly reserved two seats for ethnic minorities. Proportionally, this was slightly less than the overall percentage of minorities among the general population. According to the 1934 census, Estonians formed 88%, Russians 8%, Germans 1.5%, Swedes 0.7%, and Jews 0.4% of the population.³¹ Smaller groups included Finns and Latvians. At least three deputies of the eighty-member lower chamber were non-Estonians. The assembly completed its task in 1937 and the new constitution it drafted to reshape state institutions to Päts's liking—strongly influenced by the Polish constitution of 1935—came into force in 1938. The new constitution provided for a bicameral parliament which elected a president of the republic. After being securely installed in the newly created position of president in April 1938, Päts issued an amnesty for all political prisoners, both Vaps and communists. He hinted at a gradual lifting of restrictions on civil liberties, but in fact the State of Emergency Act was expanded to allow it to be invoked and extended practically at the president's own discretion, and thus the state of emergency became a "universal means of governance."³² His prime minister, Karl Einbund, who had Estonianized his name to Kaarel Eenpalu, coined the term *juhitev demokraatia* ("guided democracy") to characterize the new system.

31 Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 130.

32 Kenkmann, "Universaalne valitsemisvahend," 37.

In the elections for the new parliament's lower house (Riigivolikogu), for which no political parties were allowed to campaign, voting was conducted using the first-past-the-post system rather than proportional representation as previously, which meant that smaller ethnic minority representatives had little chance of winning a seat. Only candidates from the largest ethnic minority won their home electoral districts: three ethnic Russian deputies were elected, one on the pro-government Popular Front of Estonia (Eestimaa Rahvarinne) list and two independents. When parliament was convened in April 1938, these three coalesced to form a Russian faction, which supported the government.³³ Nearly half of the forty members of the upper chamber of the new parliament (Riiginõukogu) were selected by the new corporatist bodies, a quarter were appointed ex officio as heads of important institutions, such as churches (both Lutheran and Orthodox) and universities, and the rest were appointed directly by Päts. Only one seat in the upper chamber was reserved for a representative of the minorities with cultural autonomy, i.e., the Germans and Jews.³⁴ The chairman (speaker) of the upper chamber was Päts's brother-in-law, lawyer Mihkel Pung, who had been his colleague on the editorial board of *Teataja*.

While these new institutional arrangements and policies were not nearly as generous towards the ethnic minorities as when Päts first came to power in 1918, they nevertheless show that he still took minority groups into account. This is in contrast with Kārlis Ulmanis in Latvia, who followed a very similar political trajectory as Päts—a founding father of the republic, first prime minister, leader of the farmers' party, who instituted an authoritarian regime in 1934 following Päts. Ulmanis crushed the radical right but adopted their slogan of "Latvia for the Latvians" and went much further down the path of a constructing a nationalist dictatorship and put greater pressure on the ethnic minorities.³⁵ Likewise, Antanas Smetona, the authoritarian president of Lithuania, while deploring antisemitism, promoted hostility towards the Polish minority and Poland as the centerpiece of his ambition to recover Vilnius.³⁶ Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the strongman of Poland, sought to assimilate the Ukrainians of Galicia, which in turn led to a violent reaction by local Ukrainian nationalists.

33 Graf, *Parteid Eesti Vabariigis*, 384–85.

34 Eesti Vabariigi põhiseadus (1938), paragraph § 84.

35 Hanovs and Tēraudkalns, *Ultimate Freedom—No Choice*.

36 Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 281–86.

Conclusion

Throughout his career Päts displayed a great deal of pragmatism, and this incontrovertible observation can be extended to his positions and policies towards ethnic minorities. Despite the fact that he became a right-wing authoritarian nationalist ruler who strangled the democratic order in Estonia, he retained a respectful attitude towards ethnic minorities. While such a cooperative approach had been a practical necessity during the earlier phases of Päts's political career, after he concentrated authority in his own hands and no longer needed to take the interests of minorities into account, he still maintained a benign attitude. This disposition was especially remarkable at a time when other authoritarian leaders were scapegoating and persecuting ethnic minorities while consolidating their own power. The nationalizing state that Päts headed was primarily concerned with forging a stronger and more unified national identity for the titular majority, rather than with suppressing the rights of minorities. The main thrust of Päts's patriotic campaigns was not to demonize the "other," but to obtain the support of Estonians for his dictatorship. Indeed, Päts's rule is commonly characterized as mild compared to other authoritarian regimes of the era.³⁷ This is particularly evident in the relative tolerance he demonstrated towards ethnic and religious minorities. While Päts's personality was a major factor in determining this outcome, Estonia also enjoyed favorable demographic and geopolitical circumstances compared to the other Baltic states. Latvia's greater diversity meant that ethnic rivalries would play a bigger role in Latvian politics, and Lithuania's Polish minority was viewed with suspicion because of Lithuania's conflict with neighboring Poland.

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³⁷ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 122.

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6. Economic Nationalism, Minority Policies, and the 1930s in Lithuania and Latvia

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Abstract: This chapter examines economic nationalism in interwar Latvia and Lithuania as a strategy to empower the titular nationalities while marginalizing minorities. After World War I, both states sought to reconfigure economic agency by redistributing economic resources. In the 1930s, the Great Depression catalyzed these efforts, but economic control shifted toward the state rather than individual citizens. Through state-backed financial institutions, governments acquired minority-owned assets, thus centralizing economic power. While some saw this as a failure of true economic empowerment, nationalists viewed the decreasing economic influence of minorities as a sign of success. This economic transformation also shaped responses to the Soviet and Nazi occupations, as the former threatened to undo economic empowerment, while the latter superficially appeared to continue it.

Keywords: economic centralization, national empowerment, minorities

On May 19, 1934, four days after a coup brought Latvian dictator Kārlis Ulmanis to power, the Riga daily *Jaunākās Ziņas* proposed “how Latvians should become an economically independent nation.” Three years after the devastating Central European banking crisis which had brought the Great Depression to Europe, the newspaper declared that the economic crisis threatened to derail the recently established national sovereignty of the Latvian people. This threat arose from the division of the Latvian economy along ethnic lines, the newspaper claimed: industries, which were mostly

in the hands of national minorities, had allegedly fared much better during the depression than agriculture, which was traditionally the sector most Latvians were engaged in. This situation, the newspaper implied, had to be corrected.¹

In this chapter, I will examine economic nationalism in interwar Latvia and Lithuania as a project to empower specific nationalities while marginalizing others. Across East-Central Europe, the economic empowerment of the titular nationalities of the states that emerged from the collapsed empires had moved to the core of domestic politics. This economic empowerment was conceived of as a postcolonial political project that would shift economic agency from national minorities, who were framed as agents of the imperial oppressors, towards the—often agricultural and socio-economically weaker—titular nationalities (Latvians and Lithuanians).² Yet despite ambitious, large-scale ethnocentric policies, which ranged from land redistribution to reforms of vocational training, some observers disappointedly acknowledged that the position of the titular nationalities in the late 1930s was hardly any different from what it had been in 1919: the socioeconomic balance between the nationalities still seemed grossly misaligned, with crucial professions, assets, institutions, and networks still dominated by national minorities. Although ethnic Latvians accounted for more than three-quarters of the total population in 1935, they still owned only 58.2 percent of small private businesses and merely fifteen of the country's thirty largest enterprises.³

In this chapter, I will first argue that the reason for this was a specific form of economic nationalism that emerged during the Great Depression and that fundamentally reshaped the relationship between state, titular nationalities, and national minorities. This change did not come out of nowhere—rather, the depression catalyzed existing trends of the economic empowerment of the titular nationalities but funneled them towards the state instead of the nationalities themselves. The main reason for this, I argue, was that the Great Depression was seen as an economic disaster that threatened to foil and undo the project of economic empowerment, as minorities allegedly profited from the crisis, thus regaining control over the country's economy. In 1919, the Polish-speaking nobility and Russian landowners owned more than 25 percent of the territory of the new Lithuanian state. In Latvia, Baltic Germans owned more than 40 percent. Through land reform,

1 "Kā latviešu tautai kļūt saimnieciski patstāvīgai." *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 1934. gada 19. maijs.

2 Richter, "Economic Empowerment."

3 Salnais and Baltais, *Latvijas amatniecība*, 81–82.

most of this land was redistributed to the titular nationalities in the 1920s.⁴ Yet in other economic sectors, Latvians and Lithuanians continued to play only minor roles. Eighty percent of ethnic Latvians lived in the countryside in 1930, but only 62.4 percent of those who lived and worked in cities were ethnic Latvians. Only half of Riga's population was ethnically Latvian.⁵ Latvians were particularly absent from the commercial sector: in 1930, only 3.6 percent of Latvians engaged in trade, as compared to 49 percent of Jews and 19 percent of Germans.⁶ In Lithuania as well, commerce was seen as the main battleground for economic empowerment after the land reform. In 1923, Jews formed 7.5 percent of the total population but owned 83 percent of trade enterprises.⁷ While this changed only marginally across the 1920s, the depression gave a boost to the commercial activity of ethnic Lithuanians, with the percentage of Lithuanians engaged in trade rising from 13 percent in 1923 to one-third in 1935.⁸

As the depression crushed the socioeconomic conditions of majorities and minorities alike, the state stepped in to save economic empowerment, becoming the primary economic actor in the process. As a second step, the chapter argues that in the wake of the depression and on the eve of World War II there were also numerous observers who regarded the project of economic empowerment as a considerable success. However, this assessment took into view the marginalization of minorities rather than an actual strengthening of the titular nationalities.

To substantiate these arguments, I am taking economic nationalism in Lithuania and Latvia into view (the exclusion of Estonia is based purely on considerations of language and scope). Both countries were regarded—relatively speaking—as safe havens for national minorities. Latvia upheld its institutionalized cultural autonomy for minorities throughout the interwar period. Lithuania tied its case for independent statehood to a pronounced distinction from Poland, where the attainment of sovereignty was accompanied with pogroms and charges of antisemitism.⁹ Although the Lithuanian Ministries for Jewish and Belarusian Affairs were disbanded in 1923 after it became clear that the Vilnius question would not be settled in Lithuania's favor, Jewish cultural autonomy was in practice maintained at the local level until the early 1930s. However, this applied

4 Hiden, "The Baltic Germans"; Vaskela, "The Land Reform of 1919–1940."

5 Balabkins, "Latvia's Economic Nationalism," 163.

6 Łossowski, "National Minorities in the Baltic States," 91.

7 Vaskela, "Jews in the Economic Structure of Lithuania," 293.

8 Tarulis, "Die Juden im Wirtschaftsleben Litauens."

9 Richter, "Eine durch und durch demokratische Nation."

to the cultural sphere only: in both countries, state-building was from its very inception guided by policies to shift the economic balance in favor of ethnic Lithuanians and Latvians.¹⁰ At the end of World War I, the Baltic states, like the other states of East-Central Europe, were founded as what Rogers Brubaker has called “nationalizing states,” i.e., states that were not ethnically heterogenous, but that aspired towards homogeneity.¹¹ This was reflected in economic policy, too, and I argue that it is impossible to understand economic nationalism in the Baltics if we ignore this aspiration to strengthen the core national group. The economic nationalism of the 1930s sought to reconfigure the nexus between states, titular nationalities, and national minorities by speeding up the redistribution of economic agency and resources from minorities to titular nationalities, but primarily to the state. The empowerment of the nation thus came to equal the empowerment of the state.

This aspiration could build on fundamental demographic changes brought about by the war through violence, refugee crises, and territorial change. On the one hand, whereas Lithuanians made up only two-thirds of the population in the lands of the Russian Empire that would constitute the interwar Lithuanian Republic, this figure was at 84 percent in the interwar period. The share of Jews, on the other hand, dropped from 13 to 7.5 percent and that of Poles from 8.5 to merely 3.2 percent. In those areas that would constitute interwar Latvia, 68 percent of the population were Latvians before 1914 and more than 75 percent after 1918. The share of Jews dropped from 6.5 to 4.5 percent and—most importantly—that of the economically dominant Baltic Germans from 9.5 to 3 percent.¹²

Setting out, however, I would like to lay out three dominant, but disconnected narratives of the Baltics during the 1930s. The well-established narrative of international history focuses on the increasing pressure of revisionist powers (primarily Germany, the Soviet Union and, in the case of Lithuania, the Second Polish Republic) that destabilized the Baltic states.¹³ The narrative of political history focuses on the failure of democratic governments in the Baltic states, particularly on the authoritarian coups in Latvia and Estonia in 1934. Although Smetona’s regime in Lithuania came under attack from the extreme right in the same year and was further eroded by

10 Liekis, *A State within a State?*; Hiden and Smith, “Looking beyond the Nation-state.”

11 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.

12 Richter, *Fragmentation*, 59.

13 Senn, *The Great Powers*; Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*; Truska and Kancevičius, *Lietuva Stalino ir Hitlerio*.

mass strikes in the Lithuanian countryside, these political strains are rarely brought into a common frame with the Great Depression.¹⁴ Finally, there is the economic narrative. There is a lack of studies on the Great Depression in the Baltics and a disconnect of interpretations: where the Great Depression is mentioned by name, the Baltics are usually said to have weathered it well. Yet studies that do not explicitly mention the depression do acknowledge hardship, enormous economic pressure, and a trend towards economic centralization throughout the first half of the 1930s.¹⁵

Looking at the history of the Baltics through the lens of economic nationalism helps bring these three narratives together. However, the term has its own problems, which need first to be sorted. A major problem of the study of economic nationalism has been its conflation with protectionist policies and thus with external relations.¹⁶ Economic nationalism is usually regarded as a purely economic, statist, and anti-liberal doctrine. This is despite scholarly calls to “bring the nation back in”¹⁷ and to thus understand economic nationalism as a holistic nationalist project that could incorporate various kinds of social and economic policies (including liberal ones).¹⁸ In this chapter, economic nationalism is thus understood through nationalism studies, not economic theory, and as a political activity, not as an economic doctrine. If we understand economic nationalism as ideology, policy, discourse, and social practice, this provides us with the toolset required to make sense of *Jaunākās Ziņas*’s interpretation of the Great Depression as a fundamental threat to the project of the economic empowerment of the Latvians. As Nicholas Balabkins noted in 1982 with reference to Latvia, economic nationalism was in essence about “a reduction in the share of capital owned by foreigners and nonindigenous Latvians.”¹⁹ Yet while Balabkins defined the purpose as primarily symbolic (fostering a Latvian national identity), I argue that the project of economic empowerment was more existential: it was the *sine qua non* of national sovereignty itself.

14 Hanovs and Tēraudkalns, *Ultimate Freedom—No Choice*; Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona ir jo aplinka*.

15 Karnups, *The Little Country That Could*; Klimantas, “Lithuanian Economy, 1919–1940”; Vaskela, *Lietuva 1939–1940 metais*; Norkus and Markevičiūtė, “New Estimation of the Gross Domestic Product.”

16 Fetzter, “Beyond ‘Economic Nationalism.’”

17 Crane, “Economic Nationalism.”

18 Helleiner, “Economic Nationalism”; Pickel, “Explaining, and Explaining with, Economic Nationalism.”

19 Balabkins, “Latvia’s Economic Nationalism,” 165–66.

How did the Great Depression affect Lithuania and Latvia? Before 1931, there was little sense of crisis in either country. The dairy industry boomed and butter production surged. A new commercial treaty with the Soviet Union protected Latvia's industries. In the late 1920s, Lithuania was the only East-Central European state to benefit from a surge in trade relations with Germany.²⁰ Eastern European agriculture had suffered a crisis of medium severity beginning in 1927, and, if anything, signs seemed to be pointing towards recovery. The harvest of 1930 was so plentiful that the Latvian government passed a law banning exports, thus making Latvia de facto independent of wheat imports for the two years to follow. The Great Depression hit both Lithuania and Latvia with the 1931 collapse of the Austrian bank Creditanstalt and the German Danat-Bank. Depositors stormed banks in Riga, prompting the Latvian government to issue a bank moratorium, which was progressively prolonged. Massive deflation ensued, followed by the insolvency of numerous banks. As Britain abandoned the gold standard and Germany introduced exchange controls in the same year, Lithuanian and Latvian foreign trade slumped. Latvian imports fell precipitously by 40 percent and exports by 35 percent. Exports of timber shrunk by 50 percent, and exports of textiles by 80 percent. The Latvian government's decision to maintain the gold standard impeded recovery. The government responded with protectionist policies, such as fixing prices, introducing control of the exchange of gold, increasing custom tariffs, and introducing quotas on certain commodities. By 1933, Lithuanian exports were at less than 50 percent of their 1930 levels.²¹ In addition to a slump in income from wheat sales by almost 90 percent between 1929 and 1935, Lithuania came under pressure following the government's trial against local Nazis in the Klaipėda region in 1934–35.²² German economic sanctions severely damaged Lithuania's economy, prompting the government to abandon the gold standard. On September 28, 1936, the Latvian government finally ruled to abandon the gold standard—as one of the last states in Europe to do so—pegging the Latvian lats to the UK's pound sterling. Both countries' relatively late departure from the gold standard resulted in an economic crisis that was more protracted than in many other European states.²³

20 "Ekonominis krizis Vokietijos-Pabaltės ir Rytų Europos prekyboje," April 25, 1931. LCVA, f. 383, ap. 4, b. 80: 15–17.

21 Wezel, "Latvia: Between Economic"; Richter, "Lithuania: The Great Depression."

22 "Eltos pranešimas apie įvykius Suvalkijoje," *Lietuvos ūkininkas*, August 29, 1935.

23 Vaskela, "Ekonomika"; Karnups, "The 1936 Devaluation of the Lat"; Klimantas et al., "Reinventing Perished 'Belgium of the East.'" On the impact of the gold standard on recovery during the Great Depression, see Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters*.

Economic Nationalism in Latvia

In 1920, a representative of the Peasant Union (*Zemnieku savienība*) told minority representatives in the Latvian Constituent Assembly:

The Latvians only wish to insist upon their claims on their right to be the lords in their country, owing to their crushing majority. The idea of the Latvian state is *our* thought, the consolidation of the state is a national work, and we are the bearers of the politics and culture of Latvia.²⁴

Responding to charges of the League of Nations Minority Section that the Latvian state privileged ethnic Latvians in the civil service, Latvian Peasant Union politician Miķelis Valters claimed the Latvians had a larger stake in the well-being of the state than the minorities did:

If we consider the conditions under which the political and economic reconstruction of the country had to take place, the fact is that it is only thanks to the energy and devotion of the Latvian people that the foundation of a free state has been possible.

Valters argued: “It becomes clear that the state should hire officials who offer all the desirable guarantees for the regular fulfillment of official service.”²⁵

Across the 1920s, the Latvian government carried out a series of policies aimed at the empowerment of ethnic Latvians. These projects of economic nationalism were so transformative because they were conceived as a zero-sum game in which economic agency was finite: the empowerment of Latvians, i.e., the enhancement of their economic agency, could seemingly be achieved only if the agency of ethnic minorities was curtailed. This transfer of economic agency was based on historical narratives—often going back to the medieval incursion of the Teutonic Knights—that framed the history of ethnic relations as the exploitation of the titular nationalities at the hands of the minorities. These were primarily the Baltic Germans, but also Jewish merchants and the Polish nobility in Latgale, who were conceived of as agents of imperial oppression.²⁶ The most prominent of these projects was land reform, which led to the dismemberment of the

24 “Latvijas Satversmes sapulce,” 1920. LVVA, f. 2575, ap. 1, l. 399: 130.

25 Miķelis Valters, “Protection des Minorités en Lettonie,” February 18, 1922. LNA, R1666/15782. Doc. no. 19122: n.p.

26 Richter, *Fragmentation*.

vast landholdings of the Baltic German nobility and their redistribution among Latvian landless peasants.

However, as economist Jānis Bokalderis argued in 1933, the Latvian government had to change course in its economic policy under the pressures of the Great Depression. Individual ethnic Latvians, who, in essence, were still too weak and inexperienced as economic actors to weather the crisis, could no longer be the primary agents of economic empowerment. As the liberal order appeared doomed, only the state had the power and reach to guarantee the continuation of the empowerment of the Latvian nation. To ensure this, the Latvian state had to intervene in the economy and in society to an unprecedented degree, Bokalderis claimed, writing that “the material interests of an individual or group are increasingly determined by the power and requirements of the state.”²⁷

In the late 1930s, foreign observers claimed Latvia had been rather successful in overcoming the Great Depression, emerging as a stronger economy than it had been before the crisis, whereas in Lithuania this was much less so the case. This mirrors observations within the Baltics: Latvian economists looked on their country’s economy with much more confidence than their Lithuanian counterparts did. This is striking, given that their economic development across the 1930s was very similar, at least in relative terms. The Great Depression did not radically change the Baltic states’ position vis-à-vis the other European states: Lithuania ranked at the bottom of European states with regards to per capita income both in 1929 and 1938, whereas Latvia’s remained relatively higher in the mid-field.²⁸

Yet Latvia’s economy had been entirely transformed over the course of the 1930s, and this transformation was very much in line with the dominant economic ideologies of the time: Latvia’s trade balance, which was firmly passive before the depression, was now active (i.e., Latvia’s total exports were larger than its imports, thus indicating a high degree of independence from international markets). Lithuania’s formerly active trade balance had slipped into passivity.²⁹ Although economic historians would later agree that the entrenched belief in the stabilizing power of the gold standard aggravated the depression (those who abandoned the gold standard earlier recovered earlier), economists of the 1930s insisted that an active trade balance—combined with currency stability through a peg to gold—was the primary indicator of a healthy economy. Moreover, since the Great Depression and the global rise of protectionism, economists overwhelmingly

27 Bokalderis, “Tautsaimniecības perspektīvas.”

28 Norkus, “The Economic Output Growth,” 184, 197.

29 *Latvian Economic Review* 2 (1938); *Statistikos biuletenis* 1 (1939).

agreed that only an active trade balance could enable a state to be autarkic and thus sovereign—a state with a passive state balance was deemed prone to gradually losing its independence to those states it traded with and defenseless against the shocks of another economic crisis.³⁰

So what did Latvia's economic policy during the depression look like? The most striking aspects are, first, the radical centralization of the country's banking sector, and, second, the establishment of a corporatist system modeled on that of Mussolini.³¹ Financial experts dispatched by the League of Nations to Latvia in 1931 to aid with the country's financial reconstruction claimed Latvia's financial system was "from almost every conceivable point of view in contradiction with the well-established principles of central banking." Latvia was "if anything, over-banked": it had only 1.9 million inhabitants, but nineteen joint-stock banks, four mortgage banks, four municipal banks, one loan bank, one exchange bank, seven municipal savings banks, thirty-six cooperative mutual credit societies and 593 savings and loan banks.³² Many of these banks collapsed during the banking crisis that began in 1931, leaving industries and, in particular, agriculture, without access to loans.

Latvian finance minister Ludvigs Ēķis would claim in a speech to the Latvian Chamber of Commerce in 1937 that only the coup of Kārlis Ulmanis had made possible Latvia's recovery, as the Ulmanis government had solved the banking crisis and in 1936 had taken the long overdue step of abandoning the gold standard. While critics blamed the government for not having taken this step much earlier, Ēķis claimed that parliament had hindered the necessary reforms, thereby suggesting that democratic Latvia would not have taken any measures at all.³³ According to Ēķis, the other crucial reform of Latvia's authoritarian era was the establishment of the notorious Latvian Credit Bank (*Latvijas Kredītbanka*) in 1934, a state-run bank created to liquidate insolvent banks, but also commercial and industrial enterprises. At its opening, Ēķis claimed that "the government stands above the various public interests, all of which must submit to the government, because only the government can see the whole situation impartially."³⁴

The Ministry of Finance claimed in 1936 that "the period of political disintegration and economic uncertainty" had "been brought to an end

30 Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters*; Irwin, *Trade Policy Disaster*.

31 Kasekamp, "Corporatism and Authoritarianism."

32 Simon, "Note on the Monetary System of Latvia," August 14, 1931, LNA S 56, DOC. 14: un-numbered; Francis Rodd to Jan van Walrē de Bordes, August 24, 1931, LNA S 56, DOC. 14.

33 "Chamber of Commerce General Meeting," *Latvian Economic Review* 5 (1937); Ludvigs Ēķis, "Valdības darbība saimnieciskā laukā." *Ekonomists* 21 (November 15, 1935).

34 Ludvigs Ēķis, "Saimniecības plāna izstrādāšana." *Rīts*, April 11, 1935.

by force of will.”³⁵ By solving the banking crisis, Ēķis claimed, the Latvian Credit Bank had proven itself a “sanative institution” as it swallowed up rural banks, credit cooperatives, and private banks, gradually putting ever more enterprises into the hands of the state, nationalizing entire economic sectors.³⁶ In 1937, the Credit Bank purchased the Liepāja naval engineering works, thus allowing the state to regulate the local ironware market, as well as the Phoenix wagon building works.³⁷ Heavy industry, building materials, electricity, tobacco, brewing, confectionery, and textiles followed. The Credit Bank’s director, Andrejs Bērziņš, publicly refuted criticism that the degree of state involvement indicated the country’s route to either communism or national socialism.³⁸ By 1939, the Latvian economy had not only recovered, but boomed. Yet, as the British weekly *The Economist* asserted, Latvia had, in the process, become a state entirely guided by economic nationalism:

Latvia is, indeed, a fully authoritarian state in which no opposition may be permitted to its economic policy. In the name of national necessity, the state has entered the business of production and thereby weakened the hold of private enterprise, not excluding foreign interests. There is in Latvia today no branch of industry in which a more or less privileged state enterprise is not working; and, although this development is not yet completed, it may already be said that the state is the biggest industrialist, the most extensive banker, and the leading salesman in the country. It is a process that is more and more being accelerated.³⁹

This systematic buildup of economic agency within the hands of the state was not only a matter of economic and social control in an authoritarian state, but also represented the state’s assumption of the whole project of economic empowerment. As the Latvian Credit Bank scooped up struggling companies, even foreign observers noted the ethnocentric element in the transformation of private companies into state-run enterprises. In 1937 *The Economist* reported:

This policy is doubly justified in official circles: first, it is asserted that it is in the Latvian national interest to suppress the overruling influence

35 “Economic Representation on New Lines.” *Latvian Economic Review* 1 (1936).

36 Ludvigs Ēķis, “Banking Reform in 1935,” *Latvian Economic Review* 1 (1936).

37 “Chamber of Commerce General Meeting,” *Latvian Economic Review* 5 (1937).

38 Andrejs Bērziņš, “Mums nepieciešama plānsaimniecība,” *Brīvā Zeme*, November 29, 1937.

39 “Latvia: An Authoritarian Economy,” *Economist*, March 11, 1939.

of the alien, i.e., of Jewish and German as well as other foreign capital in Latvian trade and industry; and, secondly, it is emphasized that the new undertakings which have been founded with State capital are able to safeguard common interests and not simply the interests of the individuals who founded them. They are alleged to produce better quality goods at regulated prices.⁴⁰

Whereas Baltic German entrepreneurs and merchants had, unlike their landholding and bureaucratic counterparts, largely managed to sustain their prominent positions across the 1920s, the new policy of economic nationalism finally resulted in their marginalization. Baltic German politician Wilhelm von Fircks accused the Latvian government of aggravating the impact the collapse of the German Danat-Bank had on the Latvian banking landscape. The government's inactivity, Fircks claimed, caused several Latvian banks to become insolvent, clearly revealing its agenda of "breaking the 'economic dominance' of the Germans in Riga" by removing Germans from the management boards of banks and replacing them with ethnic Latvians.⁴¹

However, the nostrification of banks was only one aspect of economic nationalism in Latvia. The corporatist system, which Ulmanis introduced after the depression, but which clearly built on the depression's economic dislocations, subjected Latvia's economic structure to additional control and centralization and further marginalized Latvia's minorities. This was particularly true for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which was the only chamber that did not act only as a means of control for Ulmanis, but exerted considerable economic influence of its own. This was not least because its chairman—the same Andrejs Bērziņš, director of the Latvian Credit Bank—was a close ally and confidante of Ulmanis.⁴² Bērziņš enjoyed the privilege of a direct communication channel with Ulmanis, usually bypassing the minister of finance.⁴³ If Latvian economic nationalism had a protagonist, it was Bērziņš. As the chamber's chairman, Bērziņš effected the dissolution and expropriation of all Baltic German guilds and commercial and industrial associations (except for the Riga Trade Association). Although private associations of Latvians were also dissolved, their property was transferred to newly established, state-run professional associations that were

40 "Latvia: The State in Banking, Trade and Industry," *Economist*, November 13, 1937.

41 "Baron Fircks spricht in Windau," *Rigasche Rundschau*, August 7, 1931.

42 Stranga, "The Political System and Ideology," 61.

43 V. Munters to Lavrentii Beria, August 25, 1940, <https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/32327>.

exclusive to ethnic Latvians and whose personnel was often congruent with that of the associations that had been dissolved in the first place. For Baltic Germans, no such substitutions were provided. Although Baltic Germans could be co-opted (and were, in limited numbers) into the membership of the chambers, they never managed to attain significant roles in the directorship or management. In pleas for help to Nazi Germany's representation in Riga, Baltic Germans claimed that this expropriation meant "the most significant blow to Germanism since the agrarian reform."⁴⁴

At the international level, Bērziņš refuted allegations that Latvia's economic policy was guided by ethnic nationalism:

No one is handicapped by not being a Latvian national. [...] The newly established associations are not intended to supersede the merchants and manufacturer. [...] But in cases where activities do not conform with the policy of the state, [...] the necessary intervention will be made to restore order.⁴⁵

Towards a domestic audience, however, Bērziņš would later contextualize Latvia's responses to the Great Depression within the broader frame of economic nationalism, e.g., as efforts to restore to ethnic Latvians economic agency that "foreign" elements had robbed of them: "There is yet another principle which has been expounded in our work throughout all these years, and this is the so-called national principle," he declared at the Riga Congress House in 1939. "In striving to make Latvia really and truly the State of the Latvians, it is clear that we have been endeavoring simply to recover that which was taken away from us, and which is ours by right."⁴⁶

While the land reform of the early 1920s had aimed at empowering Latvian peasants, responses to the Great Depression aimed specifically at commerce and industry as economic sectors that were still dominated by Baltic Germans and Jews. On the eve of World War II, Bērziņš framed this dominance as one of the main causes of the depression in the first place, which had made Ulmanis's coup necessary:

Before May 15, 1934, Latvia was like a large auction house, where the fever of speculation had taken hold of almost everybody. [...] Latvia must be the

44 Von Schack, "Jahresübersicht 1936," January 21, 1937. TNA, GFM 33/2547/5924, E435568–E435578.

45 Andrejs Bērziņš, "Latvia's Economic Course," *Latvian Economic Review* 4 (1937).

46 "New Stage in Economic Policy in Latvia," *Latvian Economic Review* 1 (1939).

state of the Latvians! [...] We are now determined to get the appropriate number of Latvians into place in the manufacturing sectors.⁴⁷

Only through the economic empowerment of Latvians could the interventionist policy of the Latvian state be successful:

It soon became apparent [...] that the “free and unhindered” course of economic life, practiced hitherto in the field of trade and industry, was leading to a chaotic state of affairs by creating a commercial and industrial structure which was full of unsound features. It gradually became clear that agriculture was not necessarily the only scope of activity for the Latvians, and that it was the duty of the Latvian people to be equally active in all the other branches of work and production in order to obviate the possible danger of an unsound commercial and industrial structure collapsing and simultaneously ruining the other healthier branches of production through no fault of their own.⁴⁸

As part of the Hitler–Stalin Pact of 1939, almost all Baltic Germans left Latvia. Bērziņš described this as “a serious blow to our national economic organism” as “thousands of workings hands have been lost to Latvia at a single stroke.” Yet he also emphasized that the program of economic empowerment had prepared Latvia well for this challenge: “It is gratifying to know that just during the last five years, the Latvians have done much to capacitate themselves for work in the branches which suffer most in consequence of the departure of the repatriated Germans.”⁴⁹ Strikingly, the positive evaluation of interwar economic nationalism was primarily made on a demographic basis. The number of Baltic Germans had decreased by almost half since World War I, and the Hitler–Stalin Pact had merely accelerated the existing trajectory of national empowerment. The international mouthpiece of Latvia’s economic policy, the *Latvian Economic Review*, continued in this ethno-national vein:

Had there been no German repatriation, the German-owned property and enterprises would in the course of a few generations, owing to the constantly falling German birth rate and the resulting natural extinction

47 “Mūsu tautsaimniecības virziens atdot Latviju latviešiem,” *Zemgales Balss*, January 27, 1939.

48 “Latvia: The State in Banking, Trade and Industry,” *Economist*, November 13, 1937.

49 “Latvia’s Economic Position Portrayed by the President of the LCCI,” *Latvian Economic Review* 1 (1940).

of the German element, have passed gradually into the hands of the local Latvian inhabitants and thus remained in this, their country of origin.⁵⁰

Economic Nationalism in Lithuania

Although Lithuania's economic system was not as thoroughly transformed as that of Latvia—Lithuania did not introduce a corporatist system—the economic responses to the Great Depression nonetheless had a significant impact on the country's minorities. The Lithuanian government, intending to mitigate the impact of the slump in agricultural prices on the peasantry, vastly expanded the support for large-scale cooperatives, such as Maistas (Food), Lietūkis (Lithuanian Agriculture), and Pienocentras (Milk Center), which resulted in the marginalization of private merchants—most of whom were Jewish.⁵¹ In 1932 the government introduced a legal monopoly on bacon trade for the government owned meat-trade cooperative Maistas. By 1939, 90 percent of all meat exports went through Maistas, thus accounting for 25 percent of the total value of Lithuanian exports.⁵² By the same year, the sales of Lietūkis had quadrupled compared to 1932.⁵³ When statistician Jacob Lestchinsky traveled to Lithuania in 1936, he reported of closed Jewish shops next to newly opened cooperative warehouses and Lithuanian businesses. Lestchinsky, who himself was Jewish, wrote: “The contrast between these vigorous, young [Lithuanian] proprietors and their worried, prematurely aged Jewish competitors, who had until recently monopolized the clothing trade, the wholesale business and others, symbolized the arrival of a new era.”⁵⁴

Kazys Grinius, the last president of democratic Lithuania and a vocal opponent of nationalist chauvinism, distorted the nature of Lithuanian economic nationalism when he portrayed it as a game played on equal footing. “The Jews must not be artificially driven out of trade,” he told a Jewish newspaper in 1935: “Only the principles of free competition must prevail here. If a Lithuanian is able and fit, he will penetrate into trade, and a Jew who is able and fit will also maintain his position here.”⁵⁵ Grinius, of course, knew that economic nationalism did not happen on a level playing

50 “The Role of the Germans in Latvian Economic Life,” *Latvian Economic Review* 1 (1940).

51 Richter, “Jews, the Great Depression.”

52 “Maistas.”

53 Simutis, *The Economic Reconstruction of Lithuania*, 38.

54 Lestchinsky, “The Economic Struggle of the Jews,” 276.

55 “Žydai neturi būti dirbtinai išstumti iš prekybos. Pasikalbėjimas su Doktoru K. Grinium apie Lietuviių Žydų santykius,” *Apžvalga*, July 21, 1935.

field: Lithuanian nationalists felt they were disadvantaged vis-à-vis the experienced and well-networked Jewish merchants, and Jewish merchants felt they were at the receiving end of discriminatory policies. In 1933, Grinius's compatriot, Vincas Rastenis, a leading figure in the Federation of Lithuanian Businessmen (Lietuvių verslininkų sąjunga, LVS), brought to the fore this notion of Lithuanian inferiority against the allegedly well-organized, wealthy Jewish merchants. According to Rastenis, Jews objected to the government's economic policy out of fear that it would finally put Lithuanians on an equal footing with Jews:

“We have nothing against you doing business, but don't push us out, compete with us as equals with equals.” These words sound really nice, but the editors of the Jewish newspapers are too naïve if they think the Lithuanians do not understand the truth. [...] “Compete with us as equals with equals, because then we can be sure that you will not beat us; you will not beat us because we have capital and you do not, we have special banks [...]—and where will you get your loans?”⁵⁶

There is probably no institution that more embodied the radicalized spirit of Great Depression-era economic nationalism in Lithuania quite as much as the LVS. Founded in 1930, it was established with the purpose of educating ethnic Lithuanians to compete in economic sectors dominated by national minorities. In 1933 economist Kazys Sruoga claimed at an LVS assembly that Lithuania's national minorities were using the depression to close their ranks and provide work and financial support only for “their own.”⁵⁷ Although historians have mostly framed the relationship between the Lithuanian government and the LVS as conflictual, with the government repeatedly warning the “businessmen” to abate their antisemitic attacks, there are strong indications that the LVS was very close to state power. In addition to his involvement in the LVS leadership, Vincas Rastenis was the general secretary of the ruling Lithuanian Nationalist Union (Lietuvių tautininkų sąjunga, LTS), also known as the Nationalists (Tautininkai), from 1931 to 1935. For Rastenis, the Great Depression was a unique opportunity for the state to ensure that intellectuals and the unemployed were provided with support to compete with Jews in urban professions. “The money works in good times, the mind works in bad times,” he claimed, and he promoted a

56 Vincas Rastenis, “Prieš ką ir už ką mes kovosime?” *Verslas*, October 19, 1933.

57 “Lietuvių Verslovininkų Sąjungos Kauno skyriaus visuotinio susirinkimo, įvykusio 1933 m. rugsėjo m. 24 d. Šaulių S-gos salėje protokolas,” LCVA, f. 605, ap. 1, b. 3, l. 21.

policy that would get more Lithuanians into vocational schools, schools of commerce, and university to be able to enter the commercial sector, “which is much easier to enter at the moment.” He wrote in 1932:

The economic depression itself has already begun to purge the foreign, dirty merchants and industrialists from our land through massive bankruptcies. That is why today those positions are becoming free. [...] If we learn to work in this field in difficult times, we will be even more capable to do so in normal times.⁵⁸

He stressed the liminal nature of the crisis for Lithuania’s becoming a nation-state:

We are not daunted by the fact that we are embarking on this difficult work at a time of severe crisis. On the contrary, this latter circumstance even encourages us. Times of general upheaval sometimes shatter convictions which, until recently, seemed to be indisputable truths, but which now appear to be merely windswept. And these times of crisis have already revised more than one truth of yesterday, which now appear to be a handful of sand.⁵⁹

In 1938 the LTS declared economic nationalism the central component of their effort “to morally and economically build and strengthen the Lithuanian nation-state.” With the commercial sector, the party focused on the sphere of Lithuania’s economy that was traditionally dominated by Jews: “Recognizing the importance of attaining independence of trade from foreign influence, the LTS will by all means seek to construct and strengthen Lithuanian trade, no matter whether it is spread on the basis of cooperatives or other Lithuanian initiatives.”⁶⁰

Lithuanian economic nationalism was guided by the same rationales as in Latvia, but it was deployed for a more specifically delineated purpose: to facilitate the integration of the contested Lithuanian territory. Thus it cannot be understood outside the context of Lithuania’s two paramount domestic issues: the Vilnius question and the Klaipėda question. In a bid to integrate the Klaipėda region, annexed to Lithuania in 1923, deeper into the Lithuanian state and strengthen the region’s Lithuanian speakers versus

58 “Susirupinkime savo ekonomine būkle,” *Tautos balsas*, September 24, 1932.

59 Vincas Rastenis, “Ko mes norime?” *Verslas*, February 25, 1932.

60 “Lietuvių Tautininkų Sąjungos programa,” 1938. LCVA, f. 554, ap. 1, b. 115: 1–21, here 19.

the economically stronger German-speaking population, the Lithuanian government used the crisis to buy up banks and businesses in Klaipėda, most of which were in German hands. In the fall of 1931 the ripples of the Central European banking crisis reached the region, resulting in mass withdrawals of funds, pushing banks to bankruptcy. As wheat prices dropped by half and the region's agriculture struggled, German diplomats warned that German-speaking farmers might have to turn to the attractive loans that the Lithuanian government offered them, thus making them dependent on the Lithuanian state.⁶¹ Responding to the panic caused by the Central European banking crisis, the Bank of Lithuania (Lietuvos bankas) began to target struggling businesses in Klaipėda with loans and provided inexpensive loans to Lithuanian entrepreneurs from outside the region to buy up foreclosed businesses, with the specific requirement that they could hire only workers from outside the region.⁶² Moreover, the government created jobs for Lithuanian day laborers who settled in the region. By the late 1930s, several of Klaipėda's largest businesses had workforces that almost entirely consisted of Lithuanian speakers who had moved there from other parts of Lithuania. The share of Lithuanian speakers in the city had increased from merely 3 percent in 1920 to more than 35 percent in 1938.⁶³

From 1937, Lithuania's economic nationalism increasingly came under international pressure, especially from Nazi Germany. This was not because Nazi Germany objected to Lithuania's policy. Nazi observers took favorable note of the successes of the Lithuanian institutions in encroaching on the economic life of Jews. A memorandum drafted for the German Foreign Office noted the "progressive constriction of their economic *Lebensraum*" as a crucial characteristic of Lithuania's Jewry. Lithuanian government policies of stimulating the move of Lithuanians into towns and cities had directly contributed to a lowering of the birth rate and an increase in emigration among Jews. "The Lithuanian nation, in order to maintain the independence of their small country, wishes to bring all important positions of power in state and economy into their own hands," the memorandum claimed. "Although they officially reject the slogan 'Lithuania for the Lithuanians,' Lithuanian policy aims to push Jews (and other national minorities) slowly out of their positions of economic privilege." The memorandum also noted

61 "Die wirtschaftliche Lage des Memelgebietes," March 16, 1932. TNA, GFM 33/3474/9644, E683740–E683755.

62 "Die wirtschaftliche Lage des Memelgebiets," March 16, 1932. TNA, Kew, GFM33, 3483: E683723–E684692; Kriminalpolizei des Memelgebiets, Öffentliche Versammlung der Landwirte. April 22, 1933, LCVA, f. 1636, ap. 1, b. 96, l. 133.

63 Žukas, "Soziale und wirtschaftliche Entwicklungen," 95.

an increased number of Jews dying prematurely at fifty or sixty years of age: “This fact specifically points towards a strong physical exhaustion of the Lithuanian Jews due to the growing hardship of their struggle for life.”⁶⁴

Yet a Lithuanian law from September 6, 1937, that legitimized expropriations to develop Klaipėda’s port, custom facilities, and infrastructure, and for military purposes, met with aggressive resistance from the Nazis. There was little the Lithuanian government could do as a response. Referring to Lithuanian policies to Lithuanize the city, German diplomat Werner von Grundherr claimed that “past experiences” had led him to assume that “the Lithuanian expropriation law is actually only one link in the long chain of Lithuanian efforts to *überfremden* [over-foreignize] the Memel region by force.”⁶⁵ He referred to figures he had received from the head of the Klaipėda region’s directorate, August Baldschus, that a thousand Lithuanians had moved to Klaipėda in the three months preceding the promulgation of the law and that Prime Minister Juozas Tūbelis had divulged his plans to increase the city’s inhabitants from forty-eight thousand to a hundred thousand. There was only one conclusion, Von Grundherr claimed—that Lithuania intended to use the seized land for the purpose of settling it with Lithuanian speakers.⁶⁶

Others joined in. A British memorandum criticized the vague phrasings of the law, concluding that “the assumption is obvious that the wording of the law in such general terms was chosen on purpose in order that it might serve other intentions, especially those of settlement.” British diplomats saw as further evidence the leadership of Ernestas Galvanauskas in bringing the law about, as Galvanauskas had led the annexation of Klaipėda and was regarded an expert in settlement matters.⁶⁷ Ultimately, international pressure led the Lithuanian government to revoke the law.⁶⁸

As in the case of the “repatriation” of Baltic Germans from Latvia, the lens of economic nationalism sheds new light on crucial developments at the start of World War II. In late October 1939, the Nazis expelled hundreds of Jews, most of them women, children, and elderly, from the Polish region around Suwałki and Sejny and marched them to the Lithuanian border.⁶⁹

64 “Die Juden in Litauen,” April 22, 1937, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (hereafter, PA-AA), RZ 211 104639, pp. 4–17.

65 Von Grundherr, “Aufzeichnung,” January 13, 1938, PA-AA, RZ 211 104746, p. 243.

66 Von Grundherr, “Aufzeichnung,” January 13, 1938, PA-AA, RZ 211 104746, p. 243.

67 “Memorandum,” April 10, 1939, PA-AA, RZ 211 104747, pp. 3–7.

68 “Žemėi nusavinti karioumenės, susisiekimo, uosto ir muitinių reikalams Klaipėdos mieste ir apskrity įstatymo panaikinimo įstatymnas,” *Vyriausybės žinios* 631 (January 9, 1939), 7.

69 Beckelman, “Memorandum.”

The Lithuanian government refused them entry and urged the Nazis to take them back. Foreign Minister Urbšys indicated willingness to negotiate in the case of Lithuanian citizens and, later, citizens of the Vilnius region.⁷⁰ By early November, 1,500 Jews were already stuck at the border in freezing temperatures, with news gathering that the Nazis were also pushing Jews from Danzig and Gdynia across other parts of border.⁷¹ The German Foreign Office told Lithuanian diplomat Juozas Kajeckas to “stop insisting” that the Nazis take the Jews back, and after Nazi threats about the future of German–Lithuanian relations, the Foreign Office noted that “Mr. Kajeckas did not insist any longer.”⁷² Šarūnas Liekis has explained Lithuanian reluctance to accept these Jews as refugees as being “simply because they were seen as foreigners, ineligible for the citizenship [and] as representing a burden on the country.”⁷³

But when viewed through the lens of the project of the economic empowerment of Lithuanians, this looks quite different. By the late 1930s, the project of the economic empowerment of Lithuanians seemed far from complete, but on a continuous trajectory to success. Lithuanian cooperatives had asserted control over large parts of trade and production. The land reform had broken the power of the Polish-speaking nobility. The ethnic Lithuanians’ main economic competitors—Jews—registered a decreasing birthrate, thus catalyzing their long-term marginalization. On October 28, 1939—just a few days before the Nazis began to expel Jews across the Lithuanian border—the Lithuanian Army had entered Vilnius. Official propaganda stressed the unity of all of Vilnius’s nationalities under the Lithuanian banner.⁷⁴ Yet the newly installed government commissioner for the city and area of Vilnius immediately commissioned an inquiry on the impact of the city’s overwhelmingly non-Lithuanian population on Lithuania’s project of economic empowerment. At this time, Poles constituted 66 percent of Vilnius’s population and Jews 29 percent.⁷⁵ With the annexation, Poles now constituted approximately 11 percent of the entire population of Lithuania. Given the strength of Polishness in the Vilnius region, Lithuania could not hope for their quick dissolution, the inquiry concluded: “We need to scrape

70 Zechlin, “Telegramm,” 27 October 1939, PA-AA, RZ 211 104639, p. 40.

71 Woermann, “Abschrift,” November 9, 1939, PA-AA, RZ 211 104639, p. 42; “Aide-Mémoire,” November 9, 1939, PA-AA, RZ 211 104639, p. 43.

72 Von Grundherr, “Abschrift,” December 30, 1939, PA-AA, RZ 211 104639, p. 47.

73 Liekis, “The Suwalki Triangle,” 187.

74 “Šiandien Gedimino kalne iškilmingai iškeliamai Lietuvos vėliava,” *Lietuvos aidas*, October 29, 1939.

75 Stravinskienė, “Ethnic-Demographic Changes.”

this nest—physically and economically. We need a ‘*Siedlungspolitik*’ from west to east and from east to west.” Poles should be moved westwards by the thousands to ease labor demands and to facilitate their assimilation as Lithuanians.⁷⁶ The annexation also raised the share of Jews in Lithuania’s total population to approximately 8.4 percent, meaning Lithuania was now “first place in the world concerning the proportion of Jews.”⁷⁷ Through the lens of economic empowerment of ethnic Lithuanians, this was a major setback. From this perspective, Lithuania could not accept more Jews—on the contrary, the report for the Government Commissioner suggested expelling half of all Jewish families from Vilnius, many of whom worked in trade, to allow Lithuanians to take their place in the city’s commercial sector:

They need to be expelled not to the cities but to the villages. Some of them should be forcibly dispersed throughout the countryside as artisans, who are now too scarce in the countryside. This will be a very useful measure in economic terms, because it will encourage the development of crafts in the countryside. But the majority of Jews must be absorbed into agriculture, the most thankless field of work. We need to get rid, for once, of the innate “landlord” attitude, whereby we value only the land and divide it up. If we want to live, let us share the towns, and let us tie the Jews up in the countryside, where they will die out as a species, because they will not be able to do hard, decent work. The result will be twofold: the Jews will be relegated to a passive and unpromising rural life and put on the road to extinction.⁷⁸

Apart from the violence and deportations it brought to Lithuania, the Soviet occupation was also seen as a rollback of the achievements of the economic empowerment of Lithuanians—especially because it was perceived to bring Jews into central positions who had only recently been marginalized through enormous political and economic efforts. Accordingly, the Lithuanian Provisional Government, which was in office for a brief time when the Nazis displaced the Soviets as occupiers of Lithuania, proclaimed the continuation of economic empowerment and economic nationalism as a key component of its government declaration. Land confiscated from peasants (inevitably, Lithuanians) should be returned, but a sizeable proportion of state property maintained—particularly in areas of strategic relevance to

76 “Lenkiška problema Naujoji Lietuvoje,” 1939, LCVA, f. 317, ap. 1, b. 17, l. 177–78.

77 “Žydų problema Naujoji Lietuvoje,” 1939, LCVA, f. 317, ap. 1, b. 17, l. 179–80.

78 “Žydų problema Naujoji Lietuvoje,” 1939, LCVA, f. 317, ap. 1, b. 17, l. 179–80.

Lithuania's sovereignty. However, nationalized property of Jews and Russians should remain in the hands of the Lithuanian state (Russians were struck out in a later version of the declaration).⁷⁹ Neither were financial assets of Jews deposited in the Lithuanian national bank to be returned to their previous owners.⁸⁰ After the Provisional Government's dissolution, the extreme right-wing LTS (the only Lithuanian party to legally exist in 1941 under Nazi occupation) continued to lobby for economic empowerment. "In some districts the local administration remains in the hands of nationalities that are opposed to the interests of the Great Reich, of Lithuania, and of the Lithuanian nation," its leaders complained to General Commissar Adrian von Renteln: "Jewish property and riches, which have exploited the Lithuanian state and nation, have not been put at the disposal of the Lithuanian nation." Nazi Germany, the LTS ascertained, had not yet met the Lithuanians' hopes for economic empowerment. The Nazi authorities had not returned to their owners any of the land expropriated by the Soviets, whether they were Lithuanian or not, Lithuanian entrepreneurs and civil servants were treated degradingly, and employment programs turned out to be forced-labor schemes, threatening a "labor shortage that will become even more severe once all Jews will emigrate from Lithuanian territory."⁸¹

Conclusion

Through projects of economic empowerment, both the Latvian and Lithuanian state sought to empower the titular nationalities, which were conceived of as socioeconomically disadvantaged versus the Baltic Germans, Jews, Poles, and Russians living in those states. Such policies were ingrained into the interwar states of East-Central Europe from their formation in 1918–19, but drastically accelerated during and in the aftermath of the Great Depression. Both Latvia and Lithuania emerged entirely transformed from the Great Depression—not only politically, as is generally acknowledged, but also as economically centralized and highly interventionist states. Both Latvia and Lithuania used existing or new financial institutions to systematically buy up assets of minorities.

79 "Lietuvos Laikinoji Vyriausybė, vykdamą lietuvių tautos valią, skelbia..." No date, but most likely July 1941. LCVA, f. R-496, ap. 1, b. 2, l. 7, l. 25.

80 "Projektas," August 1, 1941. LCVA, f. R-496, ap. 1, b. 2, l. 19.

81 "Jo Ekscelencijai Ponui Generalkomisariui von Renteln, Kaune," September 14, 1941. LCVA, f. R-739, ap. 1, b. 2, l. 1.

Latvijas Kredītbanka, established with the view of consolidating Latvia's struggling banking sector, turned almost entirely into a state instrument to deprive the national minorities of their economic agency. In Lithuania, its national bank Lietuvos bankas fulfilled a similar purpose, although to a lesser degree. Nonetheless, Lietuvos bankas was a decisive actor in Lithuanizing the economy of the Klaipėda region. This type of economic nationalism was considered only a limited success by some, who criticized it for concentrating economic agency in the hands of the state rather than in the hands of (ethnically Latvian and Lithuanian) citizens. However, nationalists and state actors pointed to the clear economic marginalization of the national minorities, using economic and demographic data. Clearly, these actors viewed the economic empowerment of ethnic Latvians and Lithuanians on a trajectory to success, if the economic agency and birth rates of the minorities continued to be reduced through political efforts. This view of Baltic economic nationalism helps explain the responses to both Soviet and Nazi occupation, the former of which seemed to foil economic empowerment, while the latter seemed to promise to continue it along the established lines.

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7. Nationality in Cadre Policy in Soviet Lithuania, 1944–53

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Abstract: The chapter examines cadre policy in Lithuania after World War II, when Lithuania was reincorporated into the Soviet Union. In the absence of Lithuanians loyal to Moscow, Soviet authorities sent to the republic cadres mainly from the Russian SFSR. The head of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Antanas Sniečkus, also encouraged the promotion of loyal Lithuanians to leadership positions. Even this cautious recruitment caused tensions between Russians and the local Lithuanians. In 1953 Moscow instructed leaders in the Lithuanian republic to encourage the promotion of Lithuanians to leadership positions. This policy led to the Lithuanianization of cadres, and some of the newcomers left Lithuania. This policy was intended to raise the prestige of the party and accelerate the Sovietization of society.

Keywords: Lithuanian Communist Party, Sovietization, Russification, *nomenklatura*

Introduction

A theme that in Soviet times attracted fairly strong interest among historians of the Lithuanian Communist Party was the selection, distribution, and training of “cadres”—the leading employees in the Communist Party apparatus, state executive bodies at the republic level, and various economic institutions and enterprises.¹ While ideological positions generally prevailed

¹ The concept of cadres came into widespread use in Soviet discourse after Stalin declared, in 1935, that not technology, but “cadres decide everything” in achieving the victory of socialism in the USSR. All categories of the leading party and state executive staff were part of the

in their evaluations, studies began appearing in the 1970s in which historians no longer limited themselves to ideologized evaluations but provided facts on the social origin and education of party cadres, and, occasionally, although fragmentally, discussed their composition by nationality—Lithuanians, Russians, Poles, and others.² Beginning approximately in the mid-1950s, the number of Lithuanians in the party began growing much faster than that of other nationalities, notably Russians.³

After the reestablishment of Lithuania's independence in 1990, Lithuanian historians were able to write about the party and Soviet state apparatus not only as the key instrument of coercive Sovietization but also as an instrument of Russification that obediently fulfilled instructions of the "center"—that is, Moscow.⁴ With the reestablishment of Soviet power in Lithuania in 1944, purges in the new administrative-Soviet apparatus took place and Lithuanian officials accused of political disloyalty were dismissed from the positions they occupied. When connections of officials with the Lithuanian anti-Soviet underground came to light, these officials were arrested and imprisoned. Over six thousand employees lost their jobs in various state institutions in 1945 alone.⁵ Massive cleansing of the apparatus continued in 1946 and 1947.⁶ Around the turn of the 1950s, massive purges ended.

Lithuanian historians have also written about Russification of the party and Soviet apparatus.⁷ Russification was most intensive during the early

nomenklatura, which also included newspaper editors, heads of higher education institutions, heads of research institutions, and several other categories of employees. For more on the *nomenklatura* in the Lithuanian SSR, see Antanaitis, *Lietuviškoji sovietinė nomenklatura*.

2 Atamukas, *Nauja Lietuva*; Šarmaitis, *LKP istorija skaičiais*; Treinienė, *LKP gretų augimas*; Surblys, *Tarybų Lietuvos visuomenės*; Šarmaitis, *Lietuvos komunistų partijos istorijos*.

3 Šarmaitis, *LKP istorija skaičiais*, 118–23, 186–204.

4 Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953*, 135–142; Antanaitis, *Lietuviškoji sovietinė nomenklatura*, 36–37.

5 Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953*, 137. Not all were dismissed from work for political motives. From early 1945 to the autumn of 1945, more than 3,700 persons were dismissed from the administrative-Soviet apparatus, of whom more than 1,700 persons "as class-alien, hostile elements." See Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 259.

6 Between summer 1946 and spring 1947, 1,351 persons were "purged from the Soviet and economic apparatus as politically unreliable and dubious." Most of these were civil servants of ministries and their various agencies, while nearly three hundred others were dismissed from provincial (rural district and village council) executive committees. See Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 260.

7 The party apparatus consists of secretaries, heads of departments, and instructors of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, also secretaries, heads, and instructors of the party committees of cities, counties, and rural districts. The Soviet (administrative) apparatus consists of the leading staff of ministries, their subordinate boards, and executive committees (of cities, counties, and rural districts).

postwar years and progressed in several stages. The largest number of newcomers—mostly individuals of Russian and Ukrainian nationality—arrived in Lithuania during the first postwar years and between 1946 and 1950, during the fourth five-year plan. In 1944–45, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (henceforth CC CPSU(B)) and various people's commissariats of the Soviet Union (roughly the equivalent of government ministries) "seconded" slightly over six thousand employees to the Lithuanian SSR. Most of them were sent by the commissariats of internal affairs and state security⁸ and by the railway authority. Over five hundred of these were leading party and Soviet cadres.⁹ The majority of the newcomers were employed in the party committees and executive committees of cities and districts, and around eighty of them in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (henceforth, CC LCP(B)). Another six thousand employees of various ranks were sent to Soviet Lithuania before 1948. With this wave of new arrivals, Russification affected not only the party apparatus, but also that of various ministries and their subordinate agencies.¹⁰ The majority of ethnic Russians worked in the interior and state security structures.¹¹ This situation arose in the immediate postwar years because sufficient numbers of Lithuanians whom party chiefs considered "reliable" had not yet been secured and trained.

The second stage of Russification, from 1950 to 1952, coincided with territorial-administrative reform in the Lithuanian SSR, when counties and rural districts traditional in Lithuania were abolished and replaced by new districts and four regions (those of Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, and Šiauliai), following the example elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Moscow did its best to fill the regional apparatuses with "seconded" party cadres, and about 140

8 People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Rus. *Народный комиссариат внутренних дел*), renamed the Ministry of the Interior in 1946 (Rus. *Министерство внутренних дел*, МВД). People's Commissariat for State Security (Rus. *Народный комиссариат государственной безопасности*), which was renamed the Ministry of State Security (Rus. *Министерство государственной безопасности*, МГБ) in the same year.

9 Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953*, 137; Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 244.

10 In 1950, Lithuanians accounted for only 36% of the party apparatus of the republic, Russians for up to 51.2%, and persons of other nationalities for 12.8%. At the beginning of 1953, almost 39% of the party apparatus were Lithuanians, about 47% Russians, and 14% other nationalities (including 1.2% Poles). In 1952, only 33% of employees in the ministries of the Lithuanian SSR and 47% of directors of enterprises were Lithuanians. See Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 240–41; Antanaitis, *Lietuviškoji sovietinė nomenklatura*, 49.

11 Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953*, 138. Only two Lithuanians (out of thirty-two) worked in the central apparatus of the state security of the Lithuanian SSR in 1946 and seven (out of fifty-six) in 195.

individuals were sent to Lithuania to occupy leading positions. The second stage was not as extensive as in the immediate postwar years for several reasons. First, a two-year Vilnius party school was launched in 1945 which trained party and executive committee secretaries; second, the system of party education was rapidly developed; and third, special “in-service” courses for party and Soviet cadres were established under CC LCP(B) and the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR. With these changes, there was no longer a need for a massive influx of cadres from other parts of the Soviet Union.¹²

Another important question is why the number of Lithuanians in the Soviet and party apparatus began rising during the period of de-Stalinization. This increase began in the summer of 1953 and was influenced by the initiatives of Lavrentii Beria and Nikita Khrushchev. The abolition of four regions and the initiated reform of the bureaucratic apparatus had an effect on the Lithuanianization of the party and state apparatuses. A number of ministries were merged, and their subordinate agencies and boards were liquidated. Consequently, some of the new arrivals and those brought from elsewhere in the Soviet Union were forced to leave Lithuania.¹³

While the consequences of the Soviet state’s cadre policy have been examined, the factors that influenced Moscow’s policy for party and Soviet cadres in Lithuania are not yet adequately understood, nor is the practical implementation of the cadre policy between 1944 and 1953, or the response of the political leadership of Lithuania to the “center’s” initiatives in cadre policy. This chapter fills in these gaps and also elucidates the process of the promotion of national cadres during the late Stalinist period. With the help of lesser-known archival materials, this chapter shows that while state and party officials in Moscow did increase the numbers of Russians holding high positions in the Soviet Lithuanian republic, Lithuanians loyal to the party and Soviet state were promoted to key leadership positions. The aims of this policy were to increase the attractiveness of Soviet power among rural Lithuanians, who made up the bulk of the population, and also to ensure a stable border between the USSR and Poland, which in the years after World War II was not seen in Moscow as a fully reliable ally.

12 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 261–73.

13 Streikus, “Politinės ir ekonominės raidos bruožai”; Tininis, *Sniečkus*, 115–30; Pocius, “Sovietų režimo nacionalinės politikos”; Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 414–55. See also Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*.

So far, the specifics of cadre policy on the western fringes of the Soviet Union (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the three Baltic republics) during the late Stalinist period remain understudied by historians. The cadre policy in the Soviet Baltic republics between 1944 and 1953 has been discussed by Elena Zubkova, who noted that in the immediate aftermath of the war, Moscow supported the “internationalization” of the republics’ cadres in order to secure their influence in the region and to “block separatist tendencies in the republics.”¹⁴ Cadres sent from the Soviet Union were a reliable tool for the Sovietization of the republics. However, filled with such cadres, the Soviet party apparatus did not have the support of the republics’ titular nationalities, and this fueled anti-Soviet and anti-Russian sentiments. Zubkova maintains that the Soviet leadership was thus forced to seek an “optimum balance” between the policy of promoting native cadres and the internationalization of cadres in the formation of the Soviet and party apparatus.¹⁵ While Zubkova is basically correct in her description of the general trend in the cadre policy, it can be argued that there were differences among the Baltic republics in the practical implementation of cadre policy.

In my analysis of Moscow’s cadre policy, I draw on two methodological approaches formulated in the revisionist historiographical tradition by the historians Moshe Lewin, Ronald G. Suny, Terry Martin, and others.¹⁶ Historians saw the promotion of native cadres into positions of power as an important goal of nationality policy and a feature of the Soviet ethno-federal system; second, cadre policy, just as nationality policy, was contradictory and inconsistent. The policy of promotion into positions of power of titular representatives of Soviet republics was often replaced by a policy of repression and Russification—protection of Russian cadres and the dominance of the Russian language in official paperwork.

The promotion of Lithuanian cadres in the party and Soviet apparatus, particularly in rural areas, was affected by several specific factors: first, due to the war with anti-Soviet Lithuanian partisans, a career in the bureaucratic apparatus was less attractive to many Lithuanians; second, selection of cadres in rural areas was often determined not by political loyalty but by various informal connections and through nepotism.

14 Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 147.

15 Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 147.

16 Roeder, “Soviet Federalism”; Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, 102–20; Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 75–124; Lewin, “Rebuilding the Soviet *Nomenklatura*”; Suni [Suny], “Sovetskoe i natsional'noe”; Kivelson and Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 290–95.

“Ensuring the Training of National Cadres”: Resolution of the CC CPSU(B) of October 1946

Between 1944 and 1946, the executive body of the Communist Party’s Central Committee—the Organizing Bureau (henceforth Orgburo)—adopted three resolutions on the “question” of the Lithuanian SSR.¹⁷ In all three resolutions, the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party was criticized for its mistakes in building the Soviet-socialist system. The Lithuanian party leadership was also blamed for mistakes in cadre policy. As early as October 30, 1944, the Orgburo of the CC CPSU(B) noted that the party and Soviet leadership in Lithuania not only was “not fighting with sufficient resolve” against the bourgeois nationalists but also “showing indecision in the promotion of cadres for the leadership of economic and Soviet work from among the working people devoted to Soviet power.”¹⁸ Several objective factors caused the “indecisiveness” of the Lithuanian Communist Party. First of all, it was lacking in numbers. Early in 1945, the party had just over three thousand members, with just over a thousand of them Lithuanians. Also, there was an acute shortage of Lithuanians who were knowledgeable in economic and administrative work, educated, and politically loyal.

The CC LCP(B) began training cadres while the war was still being waged. Special courses for party and Soviet workers were set up in a number of Russian cities, and every effort was made to select as many Lithuanians as possible for these courses. The following describes a good example of such cadre policy. In the summer of 1943, Chaimas Aizenas, deputy head of the department for cadres of the CC LCP(B), remarked in a letter to Dveira Berzakaitė, a representative of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR in Yaroslavl county in Russia, that none of the candidates she proposed were suitable for the course. Aizenas explained the principles of candidate selection:

It is true that some concessions could be made if they [the candidates] were Lithuanians and not Jews or Russians. I think you understand very well the importance the national question will have for us. Now the situation is such that the acutest shortage is in Lithuanian cadres, and this must be borne in mind when training new cadres.¹⁹

17 The first resolution was adopted on October 30, 1944, the second on August 15, 1945, and the third on October 5, 1946. Historian Mindaugas Pocius published all three resolutions of the Orgburo CC CPSU(B) in a collection of documents: Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 128–32, 309–16, and 556–65.

18 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 129.

19 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 236.

The leaders of the LCP realized that in order to involve Lithuanians in the building of the Soviet system in the Lithuanian SSR, it was necessary to form a party and Soviet apparatus that would be as Lithuanian as possible. It is likely that the CC CPSU(B) did not object to this principle of cadre selection: it provided money for the courses and did not interfere in the selection of candidates. But the courses did not yield the desired effect—not many employees were trained, and the competence and professional skills of the newly trained leaders did not please the leadership of Soviet Lithuania.²⁰ The CC LCP(B) attempted to attract leading Lithuanian cadres from various enterprises and institutions of the Soviet Union, but even these efforts failed to produce tangible results.

In August 1944, Antanas Sniečkus, first party secretary in the Lithuanian SSR, wrote to Central Committee officials in Moscow admitting that the authorities in Lithuania lacked “leading Soviet cadres” and noting that “it is necessary to accelerate the transfer of cadres from other Soviet republics.”²¹ Moscow responded and by April 1945 had sent (“seconded”) just over six thousand officials. The “internationalization” not only of the party but also of the party-economic apparatus began gaining momentum. Lithuanian historians have not been able to determine the exact ethnic composition of all those “seconded” to the Lithuanian SSR, but it is believed that most of them were Russians, with a smaller number of Ukrainians and Belarusians.²²

In August 1945 the Central Committee in Moscow again criticized Lithuanian party leaders, saying that they were not showing resolve in the fight against the armed nationalist underground in Lithuania, were not taking the necessary political and organizational measures against “nationalist-bourgeois elements,” were not enacting land reform in a satisfactory way, and also had not yet “cleansed” the Soviet apparatus of nationalist elements.²³ Moscow also criticized Vilnius for poorly organized training of party and Soviet cadres. Incidentally, the same resolution also included a provision of the nationality policy: the CC CPSU(B) obliged all communists working in

20 One hundred future apparatus workers—eighty Lithuanians, ten Jews, and ten Russians—completed a six-month course for “party-Soviet workers” organized in the town of Shuya in Yaroslavl county. The absolute majority (eighty-seven) of the participants in the course had a primary education, seven of them were “self-educated,” and only six had a secondary education. According to the optimistic estimates of the party historians, a total of about six hundred people had completed similar courses by the end of 1944. Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 235.

21 Sniečkus’s letter to the CC VKP(B) “On the situation in the liberated districts of Lithuania,” (?) August 1944, Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (Lithuanian Special Archives, henceforth LYA), f. 1771, ap. 7, b. 85, 1,70–71.

22 Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953*, 137; Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 245–46.

23 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 309–16.

Lithuania who did not speak Lithuanian to “learn the Lithuanian language.”²⁴ The CC LCP(B) was ordered to implement the provisions of the resolution without delay.

In the spring of 1946, the CC CPSU(B) sent to Lithuania a brigade of inspectors headed by Vasili Zhavoronkov, a Central Committee inspector in Moscow, to check how the Lithuanian party leadership was implementing the Central Committee’s provisions from the previous year. Complaints from party officials and state employees had reached the Central Committee in which Lithuanians were accused not only of “putting up with politically unreliable individuals [Lithuanians] in the apparatus,” but also of “nationalist excesses” such as being unwilling to recruit demobilized Russian Army officers and dismissing communists of Russian nationality for not knowing the Lithuanian language; moreover, Lithuanian party officials were said to have “pressured Russian communists and supported unreliable Lithuanians.” In their inspections, the new arrivals from Moscow were extremely particular about party organizations in Kaunas city and Kaunas county. The inspection found that various items with “nationalist emblems” were being distributed “freely and on a large scale” among the city’s population. Badges of “Smetona’s tricolor”—the yellow, green, and red of the flag of independent Lithuania—were reportedly sold freely in shops and markets, and shop windows and billboards displayed “shields with Smetona’s emblem.” Factories, it was reported, did not display items or show signs with Soviet agitation texts and emblems and “did not have a single slogan about Stalin’s Five-Year Plan.”²⁵ Sniečkus hurriedly dismissed both party secretaries and Lithuanians in the party apparatus.

Upon his return to Moscow, on August 17, 1946, Zhavoronkov submitted a report on the situation in Lithuania to the Orgburo of the CC CPSU(B).²⁶ He noted in his report that Lithuania’s leaders were unable to solve the existing social-political problems—most importantly, the nationalist underground resistance movement had not been crushed—that “the class principle is flagrantly violated” in the implementation of land reform, “organizational-party work” was unsatisfactory, and cadres were not selected on the basis of

24 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 313. For various reasons—lack of textbooks, limited finances and, finally, the reluctance of the newcomers to learn Lithuanian—the provision was never implemented.

25 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 301.

26 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 511–23. In March 1946, a new fifteen-member Orgburo was elected. It included Mikhail Suslov, who had worked in Lithuania from 1944 to 1946 as chairman of the Lithuanian Bureau of the CC CPSU(B). Lithuanian historiography notes that the relations between Suslov and Sniečkus were good, even friendly.

their political and professional qualities, which led to the apparatus being highly “contaminated” with politically hostile elements. In another note, sent to the Orgburo on August 31,²⁷ Zhavoronkov wrote it was necessary “to banish bourgeois nationalists and anti-Soviet elements from the state and cooperative apparatus” as soon as possible and “to promote workers, working peasants, the Soviet intelligentsia, and women who are more daringly committed to Soviet power, to the leadership of the organizations of the republic, counties, and rural districts.”²⁸

Lithuanian historian Mindaugas Pocius has published the comments of Aleksei Kuznetsov, a member of the Orgburo, to Zhavoronkov’s text.²⁹ Kuznetsov’s comments include observations on the issue of cadres not mentioned in Zhavoronkov’s note; these include the notes “insufficient cadres,” “the cadres are young,” “too few Lithuanian communists,” and “the cadres sent [to Lithuania] are very bad and only compromise Soviet power. It is necessary to review the cadres dispatched.” Kuznetsov wrote that the Lithuanian Party Central Committee is scared “to promote local cadres, [and this] must be overcome.”³⁰ Kuznetsov emphasized the need to create a new Soviet intelligentsia in Lithuania and, at the same time, to attract the old Lithuanian intelligentsia to the side of Soviet power.

As late as October 5, the Orgburo passed a resolution criticizing the Lithuanian party leadership for “*weak organization of the promotion of leading workers, working peasants, and representatives of the intelligentsia of the local nationality to leading positions.*”³¹ Although the resolution did not define the representatives of the “local nationality,” there are grounds to believe that the members of the Orgburo had the Lithuanians in mind. This interpretation is supported by several circumstances: firstly, 1945 and 1946 were the years of massive repatriation of the Lithuanian Poles to Poland.³² Secondly, the Jewish community of Lithuania was practically exterminated during the years of the Nazi occupation and barely a few thousand from among several hundred thousand Jews remained in Lithuania alive.

27 Both the note and the report were sent to the same four members of the Orgburo. Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 530–41.

28 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 540.

29 Part of the text is typewritten; the rest is in manuscript. See Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 551–55.

30 A. Kuznetsov used the term “*mestnye kadry*” (“local cadres”) in his text. Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 555.

31 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 556–65. In the Russian text the term “*korenniaia natsional'nost'*” (“local nationality”) is used. My emphasis.

32 Over 97,000 people repatriated from Lithuania to Poland in 1946. In 1945–46, 170,000 Poles left Lithuania for Poland. Stravinskienė, *Tarp gimtinės*, 171.

The resolution obligated the CC LCP(B) “to ensure *training of national cadres* and creation of [a local] Soviet intelligentsia.”³³ Finally, the resolution contained an imperative emphasis on the need to “expel” bourgeois nationalists and other anti-Soviet elements from the state and cooperative apparatus. To this end, the leadership of the Lithuanian Communist Party had to mobilize all its forces, with the Lithuanian Party Central Committee obliged to submit a report on the implementation of the resolution by January 1947.

Judging from the provisions of the resolution, the Orgburo only criticized the CC LCP(B) for the “too weak” promotion of Lithuanians to leading positions but *did not call for speeding up the promotion process*. The promotion of Lithuanian cadres was to take place gradually, together with the purging of the Soviet apparatus of “politically unreliable and bourgeois elements.” With the partisan war well under way and the anti-Soviet underground causing havoc for Soviet state officials in Lithuania, it was this cadre policy goal that the CC CPSU(B) and the Orgburo considered a priority.

Implementation of the Resolution of October 1946

After the adoption of the resolution, the Lithuanian party leadership began to “cleanse” the Soviet and economic apparatus of “hostile elements.” By the spring of 1947, 1,351 people had been dismissed as “politically unreliable and dubious.” The majority were employees of departments and agencies subordinate to various ministries and operating in the districts (i.e., in the provinces). Just over 250 more were dismissed from the executive committees of rural districts and rural councils.³⁴

In spring 1948, the secretary for cadres in the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Daniil Shupikov, sent two reports to Moscow on how the Central Committee’s directives from 1946 were being implemented. In the first report, “On the Activities of the CC LCP(B) in 1947,” Shupikov discussed the socioeconomic situation in the republic and noted the growth of party ranks and rapid formation of the system of party education.³⁵ He wrote that “newly promoted cadres of the titular nation”

33 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 558. My emphasis.

34 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 260.

35 The most important institution for the training of new party and Soviet cadres was the Vilnius Party School under the CC LCP(B) (from 1946, it was a two-year school). The majority of the students at this school were Lithuanians. In 1946, Lithuanians accounted for almost 77%, in 1947, 81.9%, and in 1948, 79.5%. Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 301.

made up about half of the *nomenklatura* of the CC LCP(B),³⁶ although it should be noted that the total number of the “promoted” Lithuanians was not large (220). In the party *nomenklatura* of the cities and counties, the share of the “promoted” Lithuanians was 43.8%, though here the number of Lithuanians was markedly higher (2,159). As many as 60% of those “promoted” to new positions did not belong to the party or Komsomol.³⁷ The absolute majority of nonparty staff were Lithuanians, a consequence of the fact that there were still very few Lithuanians in the party. Though Shupikov did not specify the positions to which the Lithuanians were “promoted,” it is quite likely to positions in the party and Soviet apparatus of rural districts, that is, to the lowest level of Soviet bureaucracy.³⁸ These were also positions that were the most dangerous during the partisan war. The promoted Lithuanians worked as heads of various economic organizations.

In his second report, “Report of the CC LCP(B) on the Work with Cadres,”³⁹ Shupikov used a different criterion to illustrate the national nature of promotion of cadres: individuals *for the first time promoted from lower positions to “leading and responsible positions.”* Such a “recalculation” reduced the number of the promoted individuals but boosted the number of Lithuanians, who amounted to 70% of those promoted to “leading and responsible work” in the CC LCP(B) and in the *nomenklaturas* of city and county party committees.⁴⁰ (At the same time, the number of nonparty Lithuanians “dropped” significantly.) Such statistics represented more impressively the achievements of the CC LCP(B) in “improving the qualitative composition of the cadres.” In fact, according to Shupikov’s calculations, in 1947 the *nomenklatura* of the CC LCP(B) was dominated by newcomers and non-Lithuanians, with Lithuanians forming 43%. In the *nomenklatura* of city party committees, the number of Lithuanians was even smaller (31.8%), while in the county party committees, Lithuanians already dominated (70.6%).⁴¹

36 In 1947 there were 3,254 positions in the *nomenklatura* of the CC LCP(B), 2,950 of which were filled. In the *nomenklatura* of the party committees of cities and districts, there were 11,699 posts, 10,424 of them were filled. Report of the CC LCP(B) for 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 137–38.

37 Report of the CC KCP(B) for 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 139.

38 In his report, Shupikov noted that the party had done “significant work in selecting, promoting, and preparing cadres, especially for rural areas.” Report of the CC LCP(B) for 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 137.

39 Report of the CC LCP(B) on the Work with Cadres for 1947, March 6, 1948, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 157.

40 Report of the CC LCP(B) on the Work with Cadres for 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 164.

41 Report of the CC LCP(B) on the Work with Cadres for 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 166.

The apparatuses of some ministries were also becoming more Lithuanian. Lithuanians dominated the Ministry of Finance and its subdivisions: out of 2,853 employees, 1,974, or 69% of the workforce, were Lithuanians; the composition of the “leading cadres in trade” was similar (60% were Lithuanians).⁴² The number of Lithuanians was extremely low in the repressive structures—security (MGB) and internal affairs (MVD).

At the end of the report, Shupikov concluded that the Lithuanian Communist Party had made some achievements in implementing the resolution of October 1946: the qualitative composition of the cadres improved, the number of communists and Komsomol members increased, there was a “slight increase” in the number of local cadres, and the purging of unreliable cadres continued.⁴³ He did not mention the need to accelerate the promotion of national—Lithuanian—cadres.

In its reply to the report of the Central Committee of the party in the Lithuanian SSR, the Orgburo noted the positive changes in the cadre policy of the CC LCP(B), but also leveled some criticism at the party leadership: cadres were often selected without regard to their moral and political qualities, which was why the state apparatus was still “heavily contaminated with nationalist elements.” The situation had to be changed: the training, selection, and promotion of cadres had to be discussed at a special party plenum, “the reserve of the leading cadres” had to be formed, and more attention should be paid to the ideological political education of cadres.⁴⁴ The national composition of cadres was not mentioned, very likely because, first, the Orgburo apparatus considered the promotion of national cadres an important but not a priority task—it was more important to purge the apparatus of unwanted and politically alien elements. Second, the Orgburo considered the pace of the promotion of Lithuanians to the party and Soviet *nomenklatura* sufficient and did not see a need to accelerate it.

To first party secretary in Lithuania Antanas Sniečkus both these tasks in cadre policy were likely of equal importance. Only a bureaucratic apparatus cleansed of politically unreliable elements could effectively implement the tasks of the first postwar five-year plan. It was also important to make the apparatus more Lithuanian by promoting Lithuanians loyal to Soviet power to top jobs. In this way, Soviet power would become “closer” to the titular

42 Report of the CC LCP(B) on the Work with Cadres for 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 205, 207.

43 Report of the CC LCP(B) on the Work with Cadres for 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 226–27.

44 Note of Yakovlev, instructor of the Orgburo of the CC CPSU(B), to Antanas Sniečkus, July 10, 1948, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 214, l. 231–32.

nation and the Sovietization of society thus accelerated. It was therefore not incidental that party secretaries of the counties were criticized for not being active and determined enough in promoting the “frontline workers and engineers of the local people.”⁴⁵ The heads of some ministries also came under criticism. Meanwhile, the first secretary rejoiced not only at the successful implementation of the Orgburo’s resolution, but also at the increase in the number of Lithuanians in the Soviet apparatus, which happened at the Sixth Congress of the LCP(B) in 1949. In his report, Sniečkus noted that over nine thousand new employees were promoted to “leading and responsible positions” between 1946 and 1948, of which 6,500 (or about 72%) were Lithuanians.⁴⁶

In 1950, 1,677 persons were promoted from lower to higher positions in the *nomenklatura* of both cities and counties, 944 (56.3%) of them Lithuanians. Among those newly appointed, slightly over 20% were not members of the party.⁴⁷ More detailed data on the cadres newly “promoted” in 1951 show that 6,568 persons were appointed to higher and leading positions at all levels of the *nomenklatura*, and that 4,583 (or 69.8%) of them were Lithuanians. It should be noted, though, that the distribution of the newly promoted cadres was highly uneven. Only 136 Lithuanians were appointed to organizations subordinate to the *nomenklatura* of the CC LCP; 250 Lithuanians were appointed in the *nomenklatura* of the counties, and as many as 4,399 (or 71.2%) to positions of the *nomenklatura* of the cities and districts. Thus, the largest number of Lithuanians were appointed to various positions of the Soviet administrative and economic apparatus in the provinces, districts, and the smallest rural administrative units.⁴⁸

Such trends in the cadre policy prevailed until the spring of 1953. It seemed that Moscow was satisfied with the speed of the promotion of Lithuanians to the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus and with the *nature* of the process. First, the LCP was not rushing the promotion of ethnic cadres; second, the Lithuanians newly appointed to the leading and responsible positions were “sent” to the Soviet-administrative apparatus. In addition, such a policy matched the interests of the CC LCP(B) and its first secretary, Sniečkus: the cadres were becoming more Lithuanian, and

45 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 253.

46 Sniečkus’s report to the Sixth party congress, *Tiesa*, February 18, 1949, no. 40. In 1948, 259 persons, 156 of them Lithuanians, were promoted to “leading work in the party apparatus.”

47 Aggregate statistical report for 1950, January 25, 1951, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 130, b. 67, l. 96–96ap.

48 In 1951, Russians dominated the party apparatus of the republic (50.3%), while Lithuanians accounted for only 35.5%. Non-Lithuanians and newcomers from other republics of the Soviet Union accounted for 64.5% of the party apparatus.

this was happening in the positions where they were urgently needed and where they were in shortage—in rural areas. However, as we will see, even this rather cautious cadre policy was causing ethnic tensions.

The issue of the promotion of Lithuanian cadres to leading work was discussed at the plenum of June 1952 of the CC LCP(B). At the plenum, the party leadership, secretaries of the party committees of the counties and cities, and those who held executive positions in the government Soviet structures, reported on the implementation of the resolutions of the CC CPSU(B) of October 1946. Moscow sent an observer to the plenum: Yuri Andropov (the future head of the KGB and eventually the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) was an instructor for the CC CPSU(B), charged since 1951 with supervising the work of the party organizations in the Baltic republics. The plenum participants spoke about the difficulties that were hindering a faster promotion of new, qualified staff, but at the same time they also tried to highlight achievements and talk about the promotion of new Lithuanian cadres. First Secretary Sniečkus set the tone for the plenum. Having admitted that not everything had been done in the implementation of the October 1946 resolutions, he expressed satisfaction that in just a few years, “7,945 workers had been promoted to leading positions” and that the overwhelming majority of these workers (66%) were Lithuanians.⁴⁹ Other participants spoke on similar themes. Kazimieras Liaudis, secretary of the party committee of Klaipėda county, stated that the party committee had promoted 1,700 employees to higher positions, 80% of them Lithuanians.⁵⁰ Aleksandras Drobnys, minister of finance in the Lithuanian SSR, was satisfied that in the finance departments in districts “persons of local nationality” (Lithuanians and Poles living in the eastern districts of the Lithuanian SSR) accounted for 85% of the staff.⁵¹ (Lithuanians accounted for 54% in the ministry apparatus.) Mečislovas Gedvilas, chair of the Council of Ministers, criticized the heads of republic-level ministries and “central organizations” (i.e., all-union organizations), who “do not realize the importance of the promotion of national cadres” and in whose institutions Lithuanians still made up a negligible proportion

49 Materials of the plenum of the CC LCP(B). Sniečkus's speech, June 26–28, 1952, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 27, l. 20.

50 Verbatim report of the plenum of the CC LCP(B), June 26–28, 1952, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 23, l. 82.

51 LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 23, l. 87, 89. Pranas Olekas, secretary of the Vilnius regional party committee, said at the plenum that “for the first time, the party committees in cities and districts” promoted Lithuanians (44%) and Poles (almost 7%) to positions of responsibility. LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 23, l. 262.

of employees.⁵² Meanwhile, Alfonsas Kairelis, secretary of the Klaipėda party committee, complained that it was difficult to promote Lithuanians because they made up just over 18% of the city's party organization and because they did not speak Russian, while political education was conducted only in Russian.⁵³ Pyotr Kondakov, minister of state security, also admitted that “the situation with the promotion of national cadres is bad.” This was because the party committees, he said, send Lithuanians who, for various reasons, were not suitable for the job.⁵⁴

All participants at the plenum agreed that it was necessary to encourage the promotion of national cadres. The first provision of the plenary resolutions obliged party organizations to remedy the shortcomings in their cadre policy and to promote politically reliable and “work-tested employees.” Also, “to be more daring in promoting new well-performing Lithuanians in positions of leadership.”⁵⁵ It was not incidental that the resolutions emphasized the need to encourage—to “promote more daringly”—hard-working Lithuanians into leading positions. The Nineteenth Congress of the CPSU(B) was due to take place in October of the same year. The congress was also scheduled to discuss the priorities for the fifth five-year plan, the implementation of which required cadres who were reliable and, just as importantly, well performing and trusted by the public, and thus by implication the titular nation of the Lithuanian SSR.

Challenges of the Policy of Promotion of Lithuanian Cadres

Lithuanians newly promoted to leading positions often found themselves at the epicenter of various intrigues and behind-the-scenes “battles” between various agencies and party committees. In 1947, a Lithuanian worker with the surname Mikšėnas, not a member of the party, was appointed director of the Laimė factory in Kaunas. A few years later, after several factories had been merged, Mikšėnas was transferred to the Audimas factory as director. Such a career “leap” was influenced by the position of officials in the Ministry of Light Industry: this was their response to calls for the promotion of new cadres from the workforce. However, Mikšėnas's candidature was not good

52 LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 23, l. 193.

53 LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 23, l. 203.

54 Verbatim report of the plenum of the CC LCP(B), June 26–28, 1952, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 23, l. 257, 259.

55 Resolution of the plenum of the CC LCP(B) “On the selection and development of cadres,” June 26–28, 1952, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 21, l. 9.

enough for the Kaunas city party committee, which filed a complaint against him to the CC LCP(B). Mikšėnas was seemingly incapable of managing the factory properly, but he was also politically unreliable as he refused to hire communists.⁵⁶ Konstantinas Gabdankas, first secretary of the Kaunas party committee, raised the question of Mikšėnas's suitability for the position. However, the ministry did not support the secretary, the CC LCP(B) approved the ministerial position, and the director retained his post.

Practical implementation of the policy of promoting national—Lithuanian—cadres fueled ethnic tensions between demobilized Russian military party members, usually workers, and the Lithuanian “leading staff”—heads of the enterprises and the staff of local executive committees. Newly arrived in the Lithuanian SSR, former army officers accused Lithuanians not only of protecting politically unreliable compatriots in the selection of cadres but, in many cases, also of “bourgeois nationalism.”⁵⁷ In their justification, the Lithuanian leading cadres explained that by promoting their compatriots, they were implementing resolutions of the All-Union Communist Party and pursuing Stalinist nationality policy. Such conflicts were a headache for the Lithuanian party leadership: they had to explain and justify themselves to Moscow.

Russian workers from the Aušra plant in Klaipėda appealed to Nikolai Shvernik, chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR. (They also sent a copy of their appeal to the CC CPSU(B).) From Shvernik's office, the letter was forwarded to Justas Paleckis, chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR. The workers accused Julius Kedys, the Lithuanian director of the plant, of dismissing Russian communists working at the plant and replacing them with unreliable Lithuanians.⁵⁸ The workers illustrated the director's “cadre policy” with the following example: during a meeting with the workers, the director said: “You Russians have nothing to do in Lithuania; you'd better go to Russia where you'll have a

56 Letter of Konstantinas Gabdankas, secretary of the Kaunas party committee, to the CC LCP(B), February 4, 1949, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 11, b. 318, l. 30.

57 The newcomers expressed their dissatisfaction with the cadre policy in written complaints, which they usually addressed to party and state leaders of Lithuania and the Soviet Union. There are several hundred such complaints in Lithuanian archives. In accordance with the established complaints procedure, complaints were forwarded to the CC LCP(B) for investigation. After a complaint had been investigated, a secretary of the CC LCP(B) usually wrote a letter to the sender, confirming or rejecting the validity of the accusations and explaining what measures had been taken to correct the situation.

58 A complaint by six Russian factory workers, May 28, 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 395, l. 136–38. All the complainants were recently demobilized army officers.

better life.”⁵⁹ From Vilnius, the letter was forwarded to the Klaipėda city party committee. In his reply to the CC LCP(B), city party secretary Aleksandr Smirnov explained that the dismissal of the Russian workers had been lawful and that the authors of the letter had displayed “inappropriate behavior”: they had failed to observe work discipline and to carry out their tasks. Kedys’s “nationalist” statement was explained thus: the authors of the complaint were not present at the meeting, while the director only spoke about the need to “encourage the promotion of local national cadres.” Consequently, the accusations against the director were unfounded, wrote the secretary of the Klaipėda party committee at the end of his response.⁶⁰

Aleksandr Trofimov, the second secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, wrote the reply to Moscow. He briefly outlined the essence of the complaint and focused on the accusation that Kedys had insulted the Russian workers. According to the second secretary, the accusations could not be confirmed. Trofimov wrote that during the meeting, Kedys spoke about “friendship between Soviet peoples” and the special role of the Russian people in World War II.⁶¹ Kedys’s lecture had a positive impact on the workers present, Trofimov reported, as labor productivity in the Aušra factory had increased.

Here is another example. A communist worker, a former soldier from Kaunas, accused a Lithuanian director of “not caring about the company’s indicators” and of “fighting” against Russian workers and employees. He wrote that the director, Albinas Plioplys, had publicly ordered his juniors to “get rid” of Russian and communist employees. Such an order led to the dismissal of Russian workers.⁶² Several inspectors from a department of the CC LCP(B) investigated this complaint.⁶³ They found numerous shortcomings in the operation of the enterprise: low productivity, months of unpaid wages,

59 LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 395, l. 137.

60 The director’s loyalty to Soviet power did not raise any doubts. In independent Lithuania, Kedys distributed communist literature on behalf of the Lithuanian Communist Party and took part in the 1935 peasant uprising in Suvalkija. He served several terms in prison for anti-state activities. In 1939, he was sentenced to eight years. In 1940, he was released and did trade union work. When the war broke out, he left for the Soviet Union and from 1942 to 1944 he served in the 16th Division. He joined the party in 1943. Kedys’s letter to Sniečkus, December 14, 1947, LYA, f. 771, ap. 10, b. 385, l. 113–14; Kedys’s personal file, 1946, f. 1771, ap. 3, b. 1402, l. 5.

61 A copy of the note, July 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 377, l. 12–14.

62 A complaint by V. Kurachok, a worker at the Drobė factory in Kaunas, to the chair of the Party Control Commission of the CC CPSU(B), July 1, 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 374, l. 117–20.

63 Plioplys’s explanation, 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 374, l. 124–25; Director Plioplys’s speech, August 15, 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 374, l. 134–35; the inspection act by the CC LCP(B) instructors Beriozova and Teshetnikov, August 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 374, l. 138–40.

no structured “socialist competition,” and a “chronic failure to implement the plan.” The “facts” about the dismissal of Russian party members were confirmed: eleven Russian workers, five of whom were communists, were dismissed within a three-month period.⁶⁴ Formally, the dismissals were motivated by “redundancies,” but as the instructors of the CC LCP(B) noted, new Lithuanian workers were hired to replace the dismissed. The inspectors proposed the removal of the director from his post.

The CC LCP(B) secretary Eduardas Ozarskis wrote the reply to the office of the Party Control Commission in Moscow. He explained in his letter that the Kaunas city party committee had examined the complaint. Ozarskis criticized not only Plioplys (“he failed to keep the communists in the factory”), but also the Kaunas party committee for not helping the factory and the Ministry of Light Industry for not taking care of the situation in the factory. Yet Ozarskis did not propose dismissing Plioplys, arguing that he was young and recently appointed “from among the workers.”⁶⁵ Despite the accusations, Plioplys was an effective manager; also, he may have had supporters in the party committee. In 1948, Plioplys was admitted to the party, and in 1949 he was presented to the public as an exemplary factory director in the newsreel *Tarybų Lietuva* (Soviet Lithuania). In 1952 he was elected as a delegate to the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Lithuania.⁶⁶

Not only heads of companies and employees of executive committees were the targets of complaints; Minister of Trade of the Lithuanian SSR Adolfas Ivaškevičius was also accused of patronizing Lithuanian cadres and “violating Stalinist nationality policy.” In a letter to Stalin, the head of the personnel department of the Valgis company in Kaunas—a Russian former soldier and party member surnamed Smirnykh—accused the minister of carrying out unlawful dismissals from work. According to the letter writer, “terrible nationalism prevails” in the ministry and “we Russians will soon be kicked out.” Smirnykh wrote that only Lithuanians were being permitted to hold significant positions in the company.⁶⁷ Smirnykh’s complaint was forwarded to Vilnius and then to the Kaunas city party committee. The committee found the dismissal lawful and accused Smirnykh of ignoring

64 Inspection act by the CC LCP(B) instructors Beriozova and Teshetnikov, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 374, l. 139.

65 Eduardas Ozarskis’s letter, July 15, 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 374, l. 141.

66 Questionnaire of the party congress delegate Albinas Plioplys, September 21, 1952, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 5, l. 316–16ap.

67 Smirnykh’s letter to Stalin, June 25, 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 376, l. 101–3.

the policy of the development of national cadres.⁶⁸ The new head of the personnel department was a Lithuanian. Still, the author of the complaint did not lose his job: the party committee employed him as a staff inspector in a tobacco factory.⁶⁹

There were more similar complaints accusing Lithuanian leaders of aiding their compatriots and punishing Russian workers and communists. In many cases, Lithuanian managers were able to get away clear and keep their positions. Those who the party organs considered reliable (these generally were individuals who had participated in the “revolutionary struggle” in interwar Lithuania, were members of the party, or had fought in the war), or who were capable and effective managers and leaders, were fortunate. Informal contacts with the secretaries of the party committees of cities, often with the CC LCP(B), or even with Sniečkus himself also played a role in the fate of such leaders. Obviously, not everyone had such luck. Those whose political loyalty to Soviet power seemed questionable—those who had belonged to the Nationalist Party or the Riflemen in interwar Lithuania, worked in the local administration during the German occupation, or whose relatives had fled the country with the Germans, and those accused of “bourgeois nationalism” and “mismanagement and embezzlement”—lost their jobs.⁷⁰

Changes in the Cadre Policy in Spring–Summer 1953

After Stalin's death in March 1953, the new collective leadership of the Soviet Union decided to pursue an even more radical cadre policy on the western fringes of the USSR, including the Lithuanian SSR. On May 8, Minister of the Interior Lavrentii Beria sent a note to the presidium of the CC CPSU on the political situation in Lithuania, and on May 25 the presidium adopted the resolution “Problems of the Lithuanian SSR.”⁷¹ Both documents heavily criticized Lithuanian leaders, most notably for “distortions of

68 An inspection of the company found that between early 1946 and the summer of 1947, the number of Lithuanians in the enterprise had decreased by more than a hundred, while the number of Russians had increased by almost the same number. Among the cafeteria directors, five were newcomers (four of them Russians) and only one was a Lithuanian, although all nine heads of canteens were Lithuanians. Act of Inspection of the Valgis Amalgamation of Kaunas, 1947, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 376, l. 114.

69 Letter from the chief trade inspector of the LSSR to Shpakov, deputy minister of trade of the USSR, August 18, 1947, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 10, b. 376, l. 112–13.

70 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 254–61, 300.

71 Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 426–29. According to Zubkova, the document was prepared by Khrushchev's secretariat. Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 324.

Leninist–Stalinist national policy.” Moscow demanded prompt action, starting with cadre policy. In the nearest future, more Lithuanian cadres were to be trained for leading work in all branches of the party, Soviet, and economic apparatus.⁷² The *nomenklatura* cadres who had been dismissed from their positions and did not speak Lithuanian were to be recalled to the CC CPSU. Lithuanians should be appointed in the positions of second secretary. The Lithuanian language should be used in official paperwork of all party, state, and public organizations. In districts with a Polish majority, the use of Polish should be guaranteed in office work.

In adopting such a resolution, the Presidium of the CC CPSU was pursuing political aims. The implementation of the resolution would have led to a broader inclusion of Lithuanians in important positions in the Lithuanian SSR, and the social base of the regime would have expanded. The aim of the new orders from Moscow was for the dominant ethno-cultural community to accept the Soviet system more willingly and see it as their own. Such a policy would accelerate the Sovietization of society and consolidate Soviet power. In Lithuania, Beria and Communist Party First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev attempted to revive key elements of the policy from the 1920s of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization of cadres), which Stalin had supported in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

At the plenum of the CC LCP held on June 11–13, 1953, Sniečkus admitted that many mistakes had been made in cadre policy and that the implementation of the policy of “promoting national cadres to leading positions” had been “totally unsatisfactory.” Local cadres had not been trusted, said the Lithuanian first secretary. He stressed: “In nationality policy, national cadres play the key role, and it is only on the basis of such cadres that the political situation in Lithuania can be strengthened and the Soviet system be consolidated.”⁷³ Sniečkus also pointed out that the Lithuanian language had been ignored: in Vilnius, capital of the republic, almost all public signs are in Russian, he said, and it is difficult to communicate in Lithuanian in Soviet institutions. Party organizations and the CC LCP should assume responsibility for the mistakes made. Other participants in the plenum seconded the first secretary.⁷⁴ The resolutions adopted at the plenum repeated verbatim the key provisions of the resolution of the Presidium of

72 In the Russian original: “широкое выдвижение литовских кадров во все звенья партийного, советского и хозяйственного руководства.” Pocius, *Lietuvos sovietizavimas*, 429.

73 The Fifth Plenum of the CC LCP. Verbatim report. Sniečkus's speech, June 11–13, 1953, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 183, l. 32.

74 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 425.

the CC CPSU from May: to increase the number of Lithuanians in leading positions, and to switch to the Lithuanian language in correspondence and recordkeeping.

Taking advantage of the resolutions of the Presidium of the CC CPSU, Sniečkus initiated a cadre reform and started it from the party and Soviet power elite. The plenum was still in progress when the Lithuanianization of the republic's authorities began. Lithuanian party figures, who were also loyal to Sniečkus, were promoted to the CC LCP and the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR. The number of Lithuanians rose in the party apparatus at all levels (the CC LCP, city, district, and village party committees): in 1950 Lithuanians had made up 36% of these positions; in the autumn of 1953 this figure was already 48.3%.⁷⁵ In the apparatus of the CC LCP, 35% of positions were held by Lithuanians in 1950 and 50.7% in autumn 1953.

The new nationality policy and the changes in the republic's leadership had an immediate impact on local authorities, i.e., on the leaders of district and city party and executive committees. Surviving fragmentary data appear to indicate that in the provinces, Lithuanian representatives of party and executive authorities often took the initiative to remove Russians from key commanding positions.⁷⁶ Complaints reached Moscow that after the June plenum "some secretaries of district party and executive committees descended into local nationalism" and were firing Russians en masse.⁷⁷ There were additional complaints from local communists who were Russian. They accused local authorities of bending the nationality policy by unjustifiably promoting Lithuanians and treating Russians with disdain.⁷⁸

Sniečkus himself admitted that the local authorities "went to extremes" in the implementation of the provisions of the May resolutions of the CC CPSU and the June resolutions of the CC LCP on the nationality and cadre issues.⁷⁹ In a note to Khrushchev in August, the first secretary wrote that "in some places" the decisions of the June plenum were perceived as a course

75 Data on the number of Lithuanians in the party apparatus, October 15, 1953, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 170, b. 6, l. 59.

76 Arūnas Streikus writes about some of such cases in his article "Politinės ir ekonominės raidos bruožai Lietuvoje 1953–1955 m.," 72.

77 An anonymous complaint addressed to Georgy Malenkov, chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, and Antanas Sniečkus, first secretary of the CC LCP, July 2, 1953, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 146, b. 18, l. 135.

78 Sniečkus's letter to Khrushchev, August 4, 1953, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 133, b. 29, l. 142.

79 Sniečkus's note to Khrushchev, August 4, 1953, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 133, b. 29, l. 142. The cases of Russians being bypassed and Lithuanians being promoted in the districts were already discussed after Beria's arrest at the Sixth Plenum of the CC LCP in July.

“towards the overall replacement of non-Lithuanian cadres by Lithuanians.” This was especially the case within the intelligentsia, and also among some of the Lithuanian cadres in the Soviet apparatus. According to Sniečkus, this was due to insufficient leadership of the CC LCP.⁸⁰ In other words, the party did not control the promotion of Lithuanian cadres in the provinces, and the initiative was taken over by the local Lithuanians.

These changes in the structure of Soviet and party cadres were influenced not only by the June resolutions but also by two other factors: the mergers of ministries and the administrative dissolution of four counties, which were also initiated by the new leading authorities in Moscow. Mečislovas Gedvilas, chair of the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR, insisted that with the dissolution of the counties and reorganization of ministries, about six thousand workers lost their jobs, among whom was a large number of “responsible workers and communists.”⁸¹ Many of those dismissed left Lithuania. Those who held leading positions were recalled by the CC CPSU to other positions in the USSR, while others were sent to various party schools for training. The meeting of the Bureau of the CC LCP in January 1954 stated that between June and October 1953, 2,528 communists had been dismissed from their positions and “left Lithuania.”⁸² For Lithuanians, such changes created better opportunities to move up the career ladder. However, some were discontented. Following Beria’s arrest in June 1953 and the plenum of the CC CPSU on July 2, which condemned “anti-party and anti-state activities,” the CC LCP and Antanas Sniečkus personally were criticized for “distortions of the nationality policy.” The first secretary was also reprimanded for “an incorrect cadre policy,” i.e., the massive replacement of Russians with Lithuanians, without consideration of their qualities. Sniečkus was criticized by the party organizations dominated by Russian communists—those of Vilnius and Klaipėda.⁸³

At the plenum of the CC LCP on July 13–14, Sniečkus spoke about the mistakes in the implementation of the cadre policy. On the one hand, he admitted that there was haste in the selection of cadres: non-Lithuanian cadres were rashly replaced by Lithuanians. On the other hand, the first

80 Sniečkus’s note to Khrushchev, August 4, 1953, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 133, b. 29, l. 20.

81 Gedvilas’s speech, draft version. Minutes of the Buro of CC LCP, January 7, 1954, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 149, b. 54, l. 61.

82 These figures are given in a note by two Moscow emissaries, Shcheblykin and Vashkevich, on a complaint by a group of employees of the Russian-language newspaper *Sovetskaiia Litva*. Both inspectors stated that the CC LCP was “hastily replacing cadres of non-Lithuanian nationality.” Bureau of the CC LCP, minutes, January 7, 1954, LYA LKP, f. 1771, ap. 149, b. 54, l. 24.

83 Sirutavičius, *Politinė galia*, 453–54.

secretary pointed out that despite the various distortions of “Leninist–Stalinist nationality policy,” which he attributed to Beria’s criminal activities, not only the provisions of the May 26 resolution of CC CPSU, but also the resolutions of the June plenum of the CC LCP remained in force. This meant that the policy of promoting national cadres to the leading party and administrative positions was not being abandoned and would continue.⁸⁴ Sniečkus’s attitude found reflection in the resolutions of the plenum. The CC LCP and the Council of Ministers of the LSSR committed themselves “to widely promote Lithuanian national cadres to leading positions in party, Soviet and economic organizations,” and “to be more daring in promoting to leadership” nonparty cadres who have “demonstrated their commitment to Soviet power.” In Polish-dominated districts, the Lithuanian Central Committee and Council of Ministers pledged “to promote cadres of Polish nationality to leading positions” on a broader scale.⁸⁵

Conclusions

The Sovietization of the Baltic republics after World War II was influenced by international and domestic factors. Moscow did not have any significant social support in the republics: first, in the Baltic republics, communist parties loyal to Moscow were small and unpopular; second, the bulk of the republics’ populations—Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians—did not regard the communist government as “theirs,” as a native, national power, and identified Sovietization with Russification; third, anti-Soviet partisan violent resistance and unarmed anti-Soviet undergrounds were present in all three republics. Finally, Moscow’s dominance in the region was compounded by the fact that the West did not recognize the Soviet occupation and annexation of the Baltic countries and supported the armed and unarmed resistance of the three Baltic nations.

In order to pacify, stabilize, and Sovietize the region, the Kremlin needed to overcome armed resistance and build an effective administrative apparatus. As there was a shortage of loyal local cadres, Moscow formed the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus of the republics by sending reliable cadres from various regions of the Soviet Union, mostly from Russia. However, the party-Soviet apparatus, largely made up of newcomers, did not have the confidence of the local population—the titular nationalities.

84 Sniečkus’s closing speech at the Sixth Plenum of the CC LCP, I. 10–11.

85 Resolution of the Sixth Plenum of the CC LCP, July 13–14, 1953.

In implementing its cadre policy in Soviet Lithuania, Moscow combined the internationalization of the party-Soviet apparatus—meaning, essentially, a degree of Russification—with the promotion of the representatives of the titular nation, that is, Lithuanians loyal to Soviet power. The October 1946 resolution of the Orgburo of the CC CPSU(B) criticized the Lithuanian party leadership for “weakly promoting loyal Lithuanians to positions of leadership.” Moscow obliged the CC LCP(B) to ensure the training of national cadres—Lithuanians—and to purge the bureaucratic apparatus of “bourgeois cadres” as quickly as possible. The CC LCP(B) and its first secretary, Antanas Sniečkus, undertook active implementation of both tasks. The purges affected a wide range of Soviet institutions, from the ministerial apparatus to the local authorities, and national cadres were usually promoted to various economic organizations, enterprises, and the apparatuses of local executive committees. Yet even such a cautious policy of promoting Lithuanian cadres led to tensions between the Lithuanians and the newcomers, mostly Russians. In their complaints to Moscow, Russian workers accused the Lithuanians of protecting their compatriots and of “bourgeois nationalism.”

However, these reactions of the newcomers did not halt the policy of the promotion of Lithuanian cadres. On the contrary, the plenum of the CC LCP(B) in June 1952 decided “to be more daring in promoting new, well-performing Lithuanian cadres to positions of leadership.” The plenum adopted this resolution with Moscow’s approval. Controlled by Moscow and supervised by the Lithuanian Communist Party, the cautious and limited policy of promoting local cadres to leading positions satisfied both the Kremlin and the Lithuanian party leadership. In the spring and summer of 1953, this approach changed, with Moscow ordering Vilnius to “increase the number of Lithuanian cadres” in leading positions at all levels of the party, Soviet, and economic apparatus. The leadership of the Lithuanian Communist Party was unable to control the turnover of cadres in the provinces: Russian newcomers were massively dismissed on grounds that they could not speak Lithuanian. After the arrest of Lavrentii Beria, First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party Antanas Sniečkus admitted mistakes in the cadre and nationality policy, but this did not mean abandoning the priority of promoting of Lithuanian cadres.

The cadre policy of the Lithuanian SSR during the Stalin period rested on three principles: internationalization, the removal from the bureaucratic apparatus of “hostile bourgeois elements,” and the promotion to leading positions of Lithuanian cadres loyal to Soviet power. Moscow supported the policy of promoting Lithuanian cadres for several more important

reasons. From the Kremlin's point of view, the formation of a more Lithuanian administrative-bureaucratic apparatus in the provinces would make Soviet power more attractive to the peasants, who still made up the bulk of the Lithuanian population; this was expected to stabilize the situation in the republic. Stabilization of the political situation in the Lithuanian SSR was particularly important because Lithuania bordered on the People's Republic of Poland, which also had an armed underground, and the prospects for the Sovietization of that country were not entirely clear. From Moscow's point of view, a stable Lithuanian SSR would act as a buffer in case the political situation in Poland became more complicated. This influence of geopolitical factors should be the object of further research.

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8. Doing It the “Baltic Way”: Internationalism and the Soviet Roots of the Singing Revolution

Karsten Brüggemann

Abstract: The roots of the “Singing Revolution” in the Baltic Soviet Socialist Republics are often attributed to a spirit of resistance. However, in the “Soviet West,” a mixture of Soviet internationalism and nationalism was typical in everyday life. Although party leaders believed the national question resolved, Soviet nationalities policies evoked both an emphasis on bringing diverse national particularities together into a greater whole and a celebration of the blossoming of ethnic cultures. Personal networks were created under the guise of the “friendship of peoples,” forming a supra-national *Sovetskaia Pribaltika*. These personal ties during perestroika fostered cooperation between the Baltic SSR’s popular fronts. Thus, Soviet internationalism encouraged “banal” nationalism on an everyday basis, creating an opening for nationalizing policies throughout late socialism.

Keywords: Baltic SSRs, Soviet internationalism, nationalism, perestroika, song festivals, trans-Baltic networks

Introduction

In the historical memory of younger generations in the Baltic states, especially in Latvia and Estonia, there is a striking imbalance between, roughly speaking, a mainstream memory and the way how minority groups, mostly Russian-speaking communities, conceptualize the second half of

the twentieth century.¹ In a newspaper article in summer 2022, a young Estonian, Annette Nordmann, remembered a conversation with a Russian colleague about everyday life in Soviet Estonia, which they were both too young to have personally experienced. To the dismay of Nordmann, the Russian expressed her difficulty understanding why Estonians would insist on the term “occupation” to characterize the Soviet period; for her, Estonia “was a much richer region than other parts of the USSR. The people were free, they could do anything. People came here for holiday.”²

Taken aback by this statement, Nordmann countered that Russian schools apparently do not tell “the truth” about the Estonian SSR and paint a far too idyllic picture of the years of dictatorship, deportation, and repression. Clearly, the two interlocutors used mutually excluding frames for their assessments. The Russian woman saw the Estonian past in a Soviet context: the Baltic SSRs were known for having high standards of living and had become an attractive site for holiday for citizens from all over the USSR. In contrast, Nordmann remained within the national narrative of suffering: the nation-state was a victim of Soviet aggression and everything must be seen through this lens. While the Russian stressed positive memories of an individual character, Nordmann’s story is national: How could Estonians be free and enjoy a good life if their independence was liquidated and national aspirations were repressed?³

This manner of talking past each other mirrors a pattern known from the Soviet period. There was an anti-Soviet national perspective, essentially a view from outside the Soviet realm. In contrast, a Soviet context framed by the all-union setting put an emphasis on the integration of the three Baltic nations into *Sovetskaia Pribaltika*, accompanied by Soviet internationalism and the slogan “friendship of peoples.”

The region building efforts of the Soviet regime were employed not the least in order to overwrite distinct national traditions. With regard to the Baltics, one of the modes of these integrative policies since the 1960s was the creation of trilateral structures organized according to professional patterns,

1 This chapter was written with support by the Estonian Research Council grant PRG 2140, “The ‘Soviet West’ Revisited: Individual and Collective Agency in the Contact Zones of Everyday Life in the Estonian SSR.” The author thanks the editors for their support and comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

2 Nordmann, “Mis okupatsioon!”

3 Suffice it to say that ethnographers have demonstrated how diverse Estonian memories of the Soviet period can be. But this diversity of individual remembrance has no impact on the general story of the nation’s “Great Battle for Freedom.” See Jõesalu, “The Meaning of ‘Late Socialism.’”

realized often in annual meetings where colleagues from the three republics met. With representatives of the center never far away, the trilateral professional networks could be used to promote both—a future-oriented view of a particularly Baltic way to socialism or a feeling of trilateral solidarity that rested in the past, i.e., in the common fate of the prewar national states.⁴ These networks never engaged in outspoken anti-Soviet activities, but they contributed to a certain kind of regional solidarity, sometimes balancing central policies.⁵ From the outset, perestroika promised just that: a new balance, and legal, authorized ways of looking for alternatives. Even if a certain yearning for independence could not be denied, especially among the generations that were born during the interwar era, nobody in the late 1980s expected the Soviet Union to implode.⁶ Against the background of stable relations between the center and periphery, Moscow fostered transnational connections that made the “Baltic Way” of August 1989 possible. What was perceived, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as anti-Soviet protest, was actually enabled by Soviet nationality policies.

Scholars have only recently begun to get a fuller understanding of Soviet everyday life, emancipating their conceptualization of the Soviet period in the Baltic SSRs from the “grand confrontations” exemplified by the basic antagonism “resistance” vs. “collaboration.” Imagining half a century exclusively in terms of shortages, limitations, and national oppression dramatically reduces the options of individual agency for those living under Soviet dictatorship.⁷ Moreover, the focus on each nation’s individual suffering under foreign rule leaves no place for the role trans-republican networks

4 These Baltic networks are discussed in Berndsen, “Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz.” On a larger scale, they spanned across the whole union and largely contributed to peripheral connections between non-Russian republics, a particular result of the Soviet era that so far has not yet received enough scholarly attention. One might speculate to what extent these diverse transborder networks across the USSR might have been one of the factors that averted post-Soviet Armageddon in the early 1990s. One generation later, in the early 2020s, these networks are most certainly extinct.

5 See the similar argument made by Risch, “A Soviet West,” 78. “Sovietness” (as understood in the center and the older Soviet republics) was challenged by quite a number of factors in the Baltic SSRs, first and foremost the different layers of historical heritage, including the interwar period of independent national statehood. Yet, this “background culture” of difference did not make the citizens of the three republics automatically anti-Soviet.

6 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*. This includes, of course, Soviet dissidents. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 2–3. On trilateral cooperation among the few Baltic dissidents, see Berndsen, “Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz,” 130–45. In general, see Vihalemm et al., “Development of Political Culture in Estonia,” 203; Saleniec, “At First We Missed,” 132–33.

7 In general, see the discussion of everyday life under Nazi rule in Lüdtkke, *The History of Everyday Life*; Kaljundi and Velmet, “Eesti ajalooteaduse uued suunad,” 175.

of professional elites played in the prehistory of the Singing Revolution. Instead, the Soviet context can contribute significantly to our understanding of the mobilization processes in the late 1980s in the Baltic SSRs. In what follows, I will therefore discuss the complex mixture of internationalism and nationalism typical for everyday life in the Baltic SSRs. Finally, I introduce the issue of trans-Baltic networks and their role during the perestroika years.

Under the ideological umbrella of Soviet internationalism, investments in national culture of the titular people of the Soviet republics were seen as enhancing the local identification with the Soviet whole. “National in form, socialist in content” was the magic formula through which education or, for that matter, indoctrination in internationalist spirit was to be performed. The local tension in the Baltic SSRs between imposed Soviet internationalism and the “friendship of peoples” paradigm, on the one hand, and traditional local nationalism, on the other, was particularly intense. Here, where the memory of interwar independence provided a powerful counter-narrative to any claim of Sovietness, internationalism ambiguously contained both, a celebration of national particularity and an emphasis on bringing those diverse national particularities together into a greater whole.

For the Soviet officials tasked with distinguishing “good” internationalism from “bad” bourgeois nationalism, the matter was delicate, as recent studies analyzing musical cultures in the Baltic SSRs reveal.⁸ An example in case was Secretary for Ideology of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Estonia Leonid Lentsman. As Andres Kasekamp and I have pointed out, Lentsman in 1959 clearly saw the danger coming from Estonian patriotic songs of the nineteenth century performed on stage at the national song festival scheduled for summer 1960. These songs, he acknowledged, had sounded “progressive” during the struggle against “German feudalism,” but now “carried the stamp of national narrow-mindedness.” Thus, even during the Thaw, the period of cultural relaxation during Nikita Khrushchev’s rule, these songs were “completely unacceptable in terms of content.”⁹ Despite Lentsman’s concerns, however, these songs were performed throughout the Soviet years reaching, in the Estonian case, a particular enhanced presence during the song festival of 1969 that was organized on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of this proud national tradition (and thus

8 Herzog, *Sozialistische Völkerfreundschaft*; Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*; Mikštaitė, “Der ‘Singende Stalinismus.’”

9 Brüggemann and Kasekamp, “Singing Oneself,” 269–70. Lentsman’s quote is from “Informaciia. Obsuzhdenie na plenumе CK KP Estonii voprosa ‘O sostoianii i merach uluchsheniia massovo-politicheskoi raboty v respublike’, 10.8.1959,” *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii*, Moscow (RGANI), fond 5, opis’ 31, delo 23, ll. 200–37.

in aberration from the five-year rhythm introduced by the Soviet regime in 1950 to celebrate the "reestablishment" of Soviet rule in 1940 and the victory against Nazi Germany in 1945, respectively). If this festival had been celebrated according to the normal rhythm, in 1970 it would have been devoted triumphantly also to Lenin's hundredth anniversary. Instead, only a dance festival, another Soviet invention to foster national Estonian culture, was held. In the "anti-national" Soviet Union, national traditions that dated back into the nineteenth century could outweigh even the most holy Soviet memory of Lenin.¹⁰

The impact of local nationalism in the Baltic SSRs before perestroika has been acknowledged in recent literature. In her attempt to reach a postcolonial understanding of the Baltic Soviet past, Estonian literary scholar Epp Annus summarizes: "Not only did colonial rule bring forth essentialized forms of local nationalism, it also produced an essentialized understanding of Soviet rule as such—which, indeed, in the Baltics was generally referred to as 'Russian' rule: another distancing gesture." For her, "everyday nationalism during Soviet times" was grounded, among others, on "cultural nostalgia for the lost pre-Soviet era."¹¹ Yet, other scholars went beyond this traditional understanding of local nationalism as simply an expression of the heritage of the prewar era and as a "distancing gesture" against the Soviet colonial other. In his study of the Estonian folklore movement during the 1970s, Philipp Herzog argues convincingly that the outspoken national consciousness of Estonians on the eve of the twenty-first century has to be attributed at least partly to Soviet nationalities policy, which often supported and encouraged local cultural activists in their search for authentic expressions of national traditions. In short, in Herzog's view, the post-Soviet national consciousness of Estonians first and foremost must be seen as "Soviet heritage."¹² Also, Annus acknowledges the cultural impact of the Soviet period on expressions of Estonianness, but she does not devote any attention to the possible hybridization of Estonian nationalism with

10 See Brüggemann, "Sowjetestland zwischen 'bürgerlichem' und 'internationalistischem' Nationalismus," 178. Also in more conservative Latvia, the hundredth anniversary of the song festival tradition was duly honored in 1973, instead of the thirtieth anniversary of the victory in the "Great Patriotic War" in 1975. Yet the Riga festival in 1973 could conveniently be devoted also to the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the USSR. In the Latvian case, this "unionist" identification continued when in 1977 the next festival was staged to honor the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Only in 1980 was the rhythm again aligned to the former five-year sequence.

11 Annus, *Soviet Postcolonial Studies*, 226, 207.

12 Herzog, *Sozialistische Völkerfreundschaft*, 104–5.

Soviet internationalism. In sharp contrast to Annus, Odeta Rudling even argues that only the Soviet state invested in national Lithuanian culture to such an extent that local nationalism became fostered in the masses.¹³ In her view, local nationalism was something established firmly due to Soviet ambitions to make the republics' nations "blossom."

Research on everyday life in the socialist block has also revealed a much more diverse picture of late socialism, offering, in particular, a "socialist good life" and "socialist pleasures," but also leeway for "dropping out of socialism."¹⁴ Everyday life under socialist dictatorships can be described in many other forms than the totalitarian dichotomy of an oppressive state and a suffering society, which is dominating popular memory in the Baltic states. Yet, it is one thing to concede the possibility of "normal" life under socialism despite political repression (and to disregard thus "normality" under capitalism). GDR-related research provides the much more provocative conclusion that "the undoubtedly dictatorial political system was 'carried' by the active participation of many of its subjects."¹⁵ It is indeed important to note that giving agency back to ordinary citizens under dictatorships makes "collaboration" simply one of the choices open to every individual and not a pattern revealing the activity of "traitors."

Soviet Internationalism and the National in the Baltic SSRs

Joining the party during the 1960s became a mass phenomenon especially among the cultural and technical intelligentsia. This was neither a conscious strategy of "resistance" against foreign oppression in undermining the administrative hierarchy of state and party nor "collaboration" with the enemy. Rather, it was something in the wide field between opportunism (looking for individual benefit) and idealism (looking for collective benefit). It was the era of the Thaw, after all, and internationalist Soviet ideology promised the blossoming of socialist nations. During late socialism society finally opened up in the Soviet republics to allow a broader set of individual choices, even for "socialist escapes,"¹⁶ and the state promoted inter-republican communication.¹⁷

13 Rudling, *Von der nationalen Form*, 318–19.

14 Scarboro et al., *The Socialist Good Life*; Crowley and Reid, *Pleasures in Socialism*; Fürst and McLellan, *Dropping out of Socialism*.

15 Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 1–2.

16 Giustino et al., *Socialist Escapes*.

17 This point is made in some of the chapters in Kozlov and Gilburd, *The Thaw*.

Inter-republican communication and rapprochement was at the heart of the "friendship of peoples" project that Isabelle R. Kaplan has described as a "fundamental tenet of Soviet ideology." According to her, cross-cultural interaction was "necessary to forge a unified Soviet identity," but at the same time national cultures and their contribution to the universal Soviet culture were massively validated.¹⁸ National form and content, albeit in an officially sanctioned version, were thus part of a Soviet socialist utopia and thereby legal forms of expression on an everyday basis. A Soviet type of "banal" nationalism could thus not be avoided. Michael Billig has described banal nationalism as the "endemic condition" in established nations. National collectives use "ideological habits" to reproduce the nation in their citizens' everyday life. "Daily," Billig writes, "the notion is indicated, or 'flagged,' in the lives of its citizenry."¹⁹ To be sure, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were not long-time established nation-states like those in the West Billig focuses on. Yet in comparison with other Soviet republics their national statehood was firmly established. Not least thanks to the authoritarian national regimes of the 1930s, all three Baltic nations had a clear imagination of their particular national culture. For Billig, the "metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion: it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building."²⁰ In Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, the national flags of the Soviet republics hanging on public buildings were certainly among the most ignored visual elements in public space. Still, paradoxical as it may seem, even they symbolized nationhood, albeit in a "socialist" vein. Also, the newly written anthems of the Soviet republics by 1950 reproduced (internationalist) nationhood. The anthem of the ESSR even evoked the hero of the Estonian national poem *Kalevipoeg* since motifs from the national awakening of the nineteenth century were pretty much in favor during Stalinism. For at least they emphasized the fight with the "real" enemy, the Germans.²¹

The Soviet republics were modeled after national states embellished by national symbols and anthems. They were led by a political leadership including (native) heads of republics and even foreign ministers, whose

18 Kaplan, "Comrades in Arts," 80; Kaplan, "The Art of Nation-Building," 33.

19 Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 6.

20 Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 8.

21 "Endure, Kalev's strong people/And stand as a boulder, our homeland!" Even if the notion of "homeland" may be intended as a hint to the greater Soviet homeland, the anthem praises Estonia's distinctiveness: "Among the people and nations of our union,/You, Estonia, march at the firm forefront!" Translation from "Anthem of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic," Wikipedia. See Tannberg, "Eine 'elende Stümperei'?"

functions were, however, decorative at best, despite their official status. The existence of separate republics during Soviet times allowed Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian nationhood to endure quite vividly. Rogers Brubaker suggested understanding the nation “as practical category, nationhood as institutionalized form, and nationness as event,” thus explaining how banal nationalism functioned in the Soviet context.²² In established nations, according to Billig, “the community and its place are not so much imagined” anymore, “but their absence becomes unimaginable.”²³ In the Baltic SSRs, any absence of the national community was indeed unimaginable. What Annus calls “everyday nationalism” was therefore never purely oppositional. In Brubaker’s terms, the nation was “institutionalized” in the USSR as a “practical category” and a “contingent event.”²⁴ There was thus nothing subversive in praising the (socialist) nation. It was a matter of framing. Behind the “good” internationalist nation in the Soviet context almost inevitably lurked “bad” bourgeois nationalism referring to the nation-state context. Everyday “banal” nationalism endured as a hybrid mixture of new socialist and traditional bourgeois colors. Therefore, besides the “form” that despite socialist vocabulary continued to be national in any case, the “content” never actually became firmly established as unequivocally socialist. Using internationalism to overwrite nationalism did not work out in the long run and neither could nationalism being used to “sell” socialism.²⁵

Internationalism failed in making local everyday nationalism fully banal. Behind the formula “national in form, socialist in content,” according to Violeta Davoliūtė, Sovietization “created an opening to pursue the same nationalizing project of the interwar regime” only with even better forms of mass politics (as can be exemplified with the song festivals). In her eyes, it was local elites and intelligentsia who shaped the contours of life in the Lithuanian SSR to an extent that outweighed Soviet internationalism—by using actively its very foundations, including the slogan of the “friendship of peoples.”²⁶ In general, the same can be assumed for the other two Baltic SSRs. Soviet internationalism was supposed to justify the dominant position of everything Russian in the union.²⁷ But it also solidified pre-existing national identities in granting national republics many symbolic elements

22 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 22.

23 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 77.

24 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 16.

25 Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*, 264; Herzog, *Sozialistische Völkerfreundschaft*, 29; Feest, “Neokorenizacija in den baltischen Sowjetrepubliken.”

26 Davoliūtė, *The Making*, 69.

27 Brandenberger, “Global and Transnational in Form.”

characteristic for national statehood, including the national vernacular (and, as Rudling stresses, a state-financed ensemble for national folklore). No doubt, this whole "internationalist" package stabilized the regime in the Baltic republics after the period of violent Sovietization was over. Yet for the genuine Soviet observer, this must have been like playing with the fire of "bourgeois nationalism" right from the start, as Lentsman in Tallinn understood very well.

There is no general answer to the question how local authorities reacted to nonofficial symbols of nationhood. The system appears to have been quite flexible. The Estonian tricolor, for instance, was forbidden, but on the jerseys of Estonian athletes the three colors blue, black, and white were easily recognizable. In competitions with teams from Finland or the US, the "national" team of the Estonian SSR had additionally the term "*Eesti*" on its jerseys instead of, e.g., "*Eesti NSV*."²⁸ The degree of tolerance of national symbols that can be recorded with regard to the Baltic SSRs, especially in cultural policy, is remarkable. Ronald G. Suny has stated that the post-Stalinist indigenization policy lasted there until at least the 1960s.²⁹ It went well beyond that.

There were other ways prewar national traditions counted on the all-union level. One example is Estonian jazz. German historian Michel Abeßer states that cultural policy "was hardly to be controlled centrally" in terms of its results. Soviet Estonian jazz was strongly influenced by artistic traditions developed in bourgeois Estonia during the 1930s and therefore, Abeßer argues, could be envisioned as a role model for Soviet jazz in general. First, Estonian jazz musicians mostly had an academic education, which was regarded to be the precondition for letting people publicly perform, in any case. Second, they integrated local folklore and traditions in their compositions, which made it a showcase in the frame of the "friendship of peoples" agenda. Third, because of their traditions they saw improvisation and the new style of bebop more critical than their colleagues from Moscow or Leningrad.³⁰ This observation aptly proves Risch's claim that the "Soviet West" can be seen as a "space where new ideas of Sovietness developed," ideas that were shaped by compromises between locals and state and party institutions.³¹

One may say that promoting national bourgeois traditions for the benefit of the Soviet project is just another example of the paradoxes of late socialist

28 Antons and Voolaid, *Eesti spordi lugu*, 230.

29 Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, 109.

30 Abeßer, "Progressiv weil national?" 426.

31 Risch, "A Soviet West," 70.

culture. Moreover, does popular memory not often emphasize jazz as a form of cultural resistance? Yet, on closer inspection jazz was never prohibited, not even during Stalinism, and was later even strongly encouraged by the Soviet regime. This is confirmed by Heli Reimann's recent study on the Tallinn Jazz Festival of 1967, which saw a legendary concert by the rising stars of the Charles Lloyd Quartet from the US. Myth has it that this scandalous performance was the reason there was never any such festival organized again, especially in the aftermath of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. However, Reimann shows that preparations for another festival continued with Moscow's support until the early 1970s, albeit without any result.³²

Things were possible under Soviet rule in terms of national, or, in the case of jazz, transnational culture that a helpless historiography still recently could only describe as a "miracle."³³ This term is used in trying to come to terms with the astonishingly "national" program of the already mentioned Estonian Song Festival of 1969, where more than two-thirds of the songs performed can be categorized as patriotic Estonian tunes. Not even a fifth of the music praised the Soviet Union or official internationalism.³⁴ In looking for explanations of this "miracle," historians generally argue that the "Estonification" of party ranks and administration created an atmosphere of enthusiasm for all things national.³⁵ How this enthusiasm was translated to Moscow, we still do not know. Moreover, there are parallels in Lithuania. During the passage from the Thaw to the Brezhnev era, the population adapted "more and more decisively" to life in a one-party state, while the leadership became ever more Lithuanian.³⁶ The economy developed rapidly and living standards on the Baltic littoral rose steadily, especially if compared to the rest of the union. If in Lithuania especially the intelligentsia appeared ready for adjustment to the regime, it is said to have been in the name of the preservation of national identity within the opportunities provided by Soviet ideology.³⁷ In the words of the late Lithuanian historian Vilius Ivanaukas: "[B]ureaucratic performance [...] created the filters protecting local interests."³⁸ Even if the

32 Reimann, *Tallinn '67 Jazz Festival*, 160–62. Among the reasons for the failure of these efforts Reimann notes the waning popularity of jazz as opposed to the rising enthusiasm, also among officials, for beat and pop music.

33 Randjärv, *Loovisiksuse roll*, 61, 63.

34 Herzog, *Sozialistische Völkerfreundschaft*, 100; Randjärv, *Loovisiksuse roll*, 56.

35 Karjahärm and Sirk, *Kohanemine ja vastupanu*, 234–41.

36 On the Lithuanianization of Communist Party cadres in the Lithuanian SSR in the late 1940s and early 1950s, see the chapter in this volume by Vladas Sirutavičius.

37 Rudling, "Der 'rustic turn,'" 160.

38 Ivanaukas, "The Projection of the 'Blossoming of the Nation,'" 176.

"protection of local interests" was a legitimate concern in the Soviet context, the nation-state context can only invoke a "miracle" when national traditions outweigh even Lenin's hundredth anniversary.

How party instructors actually felt about the policies they were supposed to implement locally is still largely unexplored for the Baltic SSRs. In his study of post-Stalinism in East-Central Europe, Pavel Kolář points to the contradictory and ambivalent character of identification with the party: the "rejection of one aspect of the regime's official policy" was quite compatible with the "support of another aspect."³⁹ This observation, again, contradicts the popular image of local communists as either blind followers of the Kremlin or national resistance fighters in the lion's den. Kolář's observation, however, that in the party bodies of the GDR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia since the mid-1950s a "moderate variety" of interpretations of history had become possible, is certainly true also in the Estonian case.⁴⁰

The Internationalist Transnational Roots of the "Baltic Way"

As the "Soviet West," the Baltic SSRs had been pacified but never really Sovietized.⁴¹ The region provided the union with "alternative narratives" and produced a "sense of difference" without becoming inherently anti-Soviet.⁴² Yet it was also the national cultures promoted in the frame of the "friendship of peoples" paradigm that shaped local consciousness and fostered this feeling of being different, being neither really "Soviet" nor "Russian." Paradoxically, thus, as Soviet citizens people in the three republics preserved their national identity. The "banal," everyday nationalism prevalent in the region, however, never served as a basis for a large-scale national resistance movement (with Catholic dissidence in Lithuania being the exception to confirm the rule). As the memory of the prewar independent states receded and the aspiration to reclaim them dissipated, the Soviet context and the nation-building potential of Moscow's "friendship of peoples" paradigm became increasingly evident. However, this was a process that, at least ideally, was to be strictly controlled from above, thus provincializing any local nationalisms.

According to David Brandenberger, the "best way to counteract the divisiveness of nationalism" for Soviet authorities was "to celebrate national

39 Kolář, *Der Poststalinismus*, 9; a similar argument is made in Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*.

40 Kolář, *Der Poststalinismus*, 69; Karjahärm and Sirk, *Kohanemine*, 248.

41 Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 256.

42 Risch, "A Soviet West," 78.

cultures in an explicitly internationalist way that stressed inclusivity, mutual respect, and the sharing of cultural traditions.⁴³ In this regard, the Baltic song festivals were a major stage for Soviet internationalism and as such they are remembered today as events when the local cultural traditions were reconfirmed.⁴⁴ They were the “better forms of mass politics” Davoliūtė writes about⁴⁵ and became an exemplary forum for divergent understandings of nationhood sponsored by the regime to “sell” internationalism to a national audience in the republics. In this regard, the song festivals were a Soviet performance of national cultures that provided a tolerated forum for ethnic exclusiveness, (inter)national(ist) in form and content. As such, it was a celebration of being “Soviet” in very different ways.

Nationalism was reproduced on a daily basis with selected symbols from the interwar period or newly created ones (flag, anthem). Moreover, since the 1960s a younger generation of intellectuals articulated local interests as an alternative to all-union agendas. Something that had been punished in Estonia and Latvia previously with purges of party and state institutions organized, however, not without initiative from local communists,⁴⁶ later was often tolerated and sometimes even encouraged. To be sure, this was a union-wide phenomenon, nothing singular “Baltic.” A general motivation for the new emphasis on local matters shared by the cultural intelligentsia in many Soviet republics was the deficits of urbanized industrial modernity as propagated by the regime. Davoliūtė has called this intellectual movement—the return to rural (and thus “national”) traditions, as exemplified also in the Russian village prose—a “rustic turn.”⁴⁷

This transnational backward-oriented cultural mainstream of the 1970s emphasized rural motifs in photography, village traditions in stage performances and literature, and the search for authentic expressions of folklore.⁴⁸ These mostly local initiatives “to preserve national history, culture, and literature or forming discussion clubs” are typically regarded “as soft resistance to Moscow power.”⁴⁹ Still, there are much more appropriate terms

43 Brandenberger, “Global and Transnational in Form.” See also Nunan, “Asymmetries of Internationalism.”

44 Brüggemann and Kasekamp, “Singing Oneself”; see also the 2006 documentary *Singing Revolution*, dir. Maureen Castle Tusty and James Tusty.

45 Davoliūtė, *The Making*, 69.

46 Prigge, *Bearslayers*; Loader, “Purging in the Khrushchev Era.”

47 Davoliūtė, *The Making*, 69; Davoliūtė and Rudling, “The Rustic Turn.”

48 Rudling, *Von der nationalen Form*; Herzog, *Sozialistische Völkerfreundschaft*; Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*; Pluhařová-Grigienė, “Im Spannungsfeld.”

49 Bennich-Björkman, “The Cultural Roots,” 323.

to describe these practices. Many of these activities were by no means underground, but very much open to the public and often financed by official cultural institutions such as the Houses of Culture and thus republican budgets.⁵⁰ It seems more suitable to suggest using terminology pertaining to Western societies confronted with similar forms of disagreement, such as "counter-culture" or "alternative cultures" for these initiatives trying to negotiate a reassessment of Soviet modernity.⁵¹ In many regards, this counter-culture provided the internationalist transnational resources for the Singing Revolution. Baltic difference, as pointed out by Risch, was not inherently anti-Soviet, but it made the Soviet West "much easier to become so" when it was possible in the era of glasnost.⁵²

Indeed, those who participated in these Baltic counter-cultural movements quite easily became involved in the Singing Revolution.⁵³ But there was an even more official reservoir for the personnel of the later autonomy movements. Silke Berndsen has studied the "networking potential of system-compliant inner-Baltic contact spaces" providing "low-threshold unofficial contact opportunities beyond the republic's own borders."⁵⁴ Trilateral contacts were perfectly imbedded in the strategies of the regime to create identification patterns beyond the ethnic boundaries. "Thinking Baltic" was a strategy developed by younger people of Baltic origin in the US during the 1970s to keep the "Baltic question" alive in Washington and thus on the front lines of the Cold War.⁵⁵ However, "thinking Baltic" is also what Berndsen finds in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian activities already long before perestroika. "Ideas of regional coherence," imposed from above and realized from below, reached their climax in autumn 1989 with the "Baltic Way."⁵⁶ In Berndsen's words, this "regionalization" and the "discursive development of a trinational 'Baltic' frame of reference" formed the pillars of "the success of trinational cooperation during the 'Singing Revolution.'"⁵⁷

Initially, the process of creating a *Sovetskaia Pribaltika* (sometimes extended to include the Kaliningrad Oblast or even Belarus) was based primarily on economic and security assessments. There was a Baltic economic

50 Kulbok-Lattik, "Seltsi- ja rahvamajad."

51 Suri, "Counter-cultures."

52 Risch, "A Soviet West," 88.

53 Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*.

54 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 13, 120.

55 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 97; see, for the Estonian diaspora, Merivoo-Parro, "Estonian by Recreation."

56 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 100.

57 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 102.

region, defined in 1966 as a “peculiar and internally unified economic region of the country,” a Baltic military district, and a combined transport region.⁵⁸ Historians from the Soviet Baltic republics contributed to this invention of a new regional mindset and provided common historical roots in publications such as “The Battle for Soviet Power in *Pribaltika*,” the “Bourgeois Right-wing Ideology in *Pribaltika* during the Bourgeois Dictatorship,” or “Questions of the Ethnic History of the Baltic People.”⁵⁹ Moreover, the poetic imagination of a “region of amber” (“*iantarnyi kraj*”) was popularized during the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the Russian and non-Soviet languages.⁶⁰ This invention of a region was to form a common historical identity in accordance with Soviet eschatology among those countries having jumped later on the Soviet bandwagon. It should moreover create a supranational sense of community as a kind of precondition for joining the “new community of humankind,” as Soviet civilization liked to call itself.⁶¹ Eventually, according to Russian historian Elena Zubkova, the Baltic republics were conceptualized in the minds of the Soviet leadership as a kind of “shop window” of the socialist project.⁶² Here, the backward-looking ideology of local “bourgeois nationalism” was to be subverted with the utopian optimism the frame of the “friendship of peoples” claimed to provide.

In result, there was a “gradual development of a Baltic regionalism, differentiated from the rest of the Soviet space,” a particular transnational understanding that was shared in particular by Baltic elites, whereas inner-Baltic differences were bridged by the commonly upheld difference to “Russianness,” reminiscent of Annus’s “distancing gesture.” The perceived threat of “Russification” strengthened Baltic solidarity and identification with the equally “colonized” Baltic neighbors.⁶³ In the long run, the newly established (Soviet) “Baltic” frame provided an internationalist space for

58 Mints and Rostovtsev, *Sovetskaia Pribaltika. Problemy ekonomicheskoi geografii*, 5–6. Cf. *Sovetskaia Pribaltika. Sbornik statei; Sovetskii Soiuz; Sovetskaia Pribaltika v bratskoi sem'e narodov SSSR; Sovetskaia Pribaltika. Fotoal'bom; Grebov, Pribaltiiskii ekonomicheskii raion*. See Loeber, “Towards Baltic Regional Identity”; Zubkova, *Sovetskaia model' ekonomiki [...] 1953 g.–mart 1965 g.*; Zubkova, *Sovetskaia model' ekonomiki [...] 1965 g.–1975 g.*

59 Mints et al., *Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast'*; Miller, *Burzhuznaia pravovaia ideologiya*; Tarananova et al., *Voprosy etnicheskoi istorii narodov*. A Soviet two-volume encyclopedia provided information about the ethnography of the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian SSRs. Terenteva, *Istoriko-etnograficheskii atlas*.

60 Rostovtsev, *V kraiu iantaria*; Rostowzew, *Im Lande des Bernsteins*; Zheleznova, *Tales of the Amber Sea*.

61 Kulichenko et al., *Razvitie sovetskogo naroda*.

62 Zubkova, “Das Baltikum als Teil der Sowjetunion,” 468.

63 Berndsen, “Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz,” 108–9.

transnational networking. All this was embedded in officially sanctioned activities to demonstrate internationalist family bonds and to encourage the "convergence" (*sblizhenie*) of the Soviet peoples. This Soviet version of "thinking Baltic," however, contrary to the ideological intentions, did not provide a gateway to more Soviet identifications. Instead, it created trilateral "Baltic" ties sometimes even on the level of everyday work.⁶⁴

Among the pan-Baltic networks created officially, one of the first were the Baltic conferences on the history of science organized from 1958 onwards by the Soviet Academy of Sciences.⁶⁵ Research with a Baltic regional focus was "flourishing," within the central scientific structures existed Baltic "subcommissions" or "branches," e.g., in the Soviet Sociological Association. There were annual or biannual meetings of Baltic librarians, archaeologists, ornithologists, botanists, mycologists, chemists, medics, and forest scientists, not least of all of historians; next to professional theater or music festivals there were regular conventions of Baltic amateur photographers and actors, and there were also student musical festivals (Gaudeamus festivals) and trilateral art exhibitions.⁶⁶ All these organizations and forums certainly offered space for ideological ambiguity and alternative perspectives, but remained formally compliant with the system. Political programs were not formulated.⁶⁷ In this regard, it is not surprising that after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in spring 1985, it was the few active Baltic dissidents, supported by exile activists and soulmates from the other Baltic republics, who had met each other often in the gulag, who went on the streets first to test if glasnost was meant seriously.⁶⁸

The professional and cultural intelligentsia initially had more to lose, and they looked for less overtly political ways to mobilize and promote local agendas. One of the most memorable events of the Singing Revolution was the Baltica international folklore festival in Riga in June 1988, which

64 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 114. Largely unexplored so far are the inner-Soviet transnational networks of the party and the Komsomol. See Grybkauskas, *Governing the Soviet Union's National Republics*, 187; on the friendship between Mikhail Gorbachev and Vaino Väljas dating back to their careers in the Komsomol, see Graf, *Rahvuskommunistid*, 79–82.

65 These meetings were held fifteen times up to 1991. See Vasil'ev et al., *Annotirovannyyi spisok konferentsii*; Vasil'ev et al., "Opyt naukochecheskogo analiza"; Vasil'ev, "Obzor deiatel'nosti."

66 See the long list provided by Loeber, "Towards Baltic Regional Identity," xv–xvi; Simon, "Regionalism in the Soviet Union," 127; Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 121–24. Only the trilateral cooperation in art has so far received scholarly attention. See Talvoja, "Eesti kunsti internatsionaalsed ahelad."

67 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 129.

68 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 146–54. On the "calendar demonstrations," see Brüggemann, "One Day We Will Win," 237–38.

contributed not least to the legalization of the Latvian national flag.⁶⁹ The idea to organize an international folklore festival for all three republics and guests from abroad, however, was born some years before in Moscow, in the Folklore Department of the Soviet Ministry of Culture. The official framing for this festival was telling. The USSR was a member of the Conseil international des organisations de festivals de folklore et d'arts traditionnelles and had participated in international folklore festivals for years. At a meeting of the Conseil in Tallinn in July 1985 it was decided to hold such a festival on Soviet territory to propagate “the Leninist national and cultural policy of the Soviet government,” the “broadening of cultural collaboration with foreign countries” and “in order to strengthen friendship and mutual understanding among nations.”⁷⁰ For the officials in the ministry, only the Baltic republics met the necessary cultural and artistic preconditions to be trusted to organize such an international event, but when the first Baltica festival took place in Vilnius in summer 1987, the situation had begun to change.

In the summer of 1988, when the Estonian artist Heinz Valk coined the term “Singing Revolution,”⁷¹ several trinational festivals took place in the Baltic SSRs. Among them were the Baltica festival in Riga in mid-June and the tenth Gaudeamus student song-and-dance festival in Vilnius in early July. Both became apt illustrations of the dynamics of trans-Baltic cultural exchange in the official guise of “friendship of peoples.” As mentioned above, Riga saw the first public demonstration of the prewar national flag that went unpunished, but when Gaudeamus started, the Estonian SSR had already legalized the prewar tricolor. The Estonian participants thus openly displayed their national flags in Vilnius without having them confiscated, thereby encouraging the Lithuanian and Latvian students to similarly display their respective flags. Despite being initially confiscated, by the final concert they were already pervasive.⁷² This effectively illustrates how the more liberal circumstances in Estonia initiated significant changes in the neighboring republics, largely due to those trinational events the regime had previously endorsed in an effort to promote socialist internationalism.

A notable trinational dynamic also accompanied the establishment of the popular fronts in 1988. In Estonia, perestroika gave rise to public debates on reform. It is noteworthy that the resolutions and speeches delivered at the

69 Klotiņš, “The Latvian Neo-folklore Movement,” 123–24.

70 Quoted in Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 173; Klotiņš, “The Latvian Neo-folklore Movement,” 122.

71 Valk, “Laulev revolutsioon”; Brüggemann, “One Day We Will Win,” 228.

72 Berndsen, “Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz,” 158–59.

annual meeting of the Creative Union (Loominguliste Liit) were broadcast on Estonian radio and published in the media in their entirety. Abridged versions were also published in Russian in the newspaper *Sovetskaia Estoniia*, which facilitated the dissemination of information across the entire union. However, in Latvia and Lithuania, public media did not provide coverage of the developments in Estonia. Here, personal professional networks played an active role in disseminating information. The personnel of the popular fronts was predominantly comprised of individuals from the creative and scientific intelligentsia, whose networks extended into the party and state structures. In the initial stages, the open support these new organizations offered for reforms within the existing Soviet system made them appealing to both the reformers in Moscow and a significant portion of the population. For many, the prospect of revolutionary changes, including the vision of restoring independence, was simply too illusory to be motivating. For the time being, the popular fronts, carried by individuals who had learned to make use of the Soviet context, were nevertheless inclined to support the long-term vision of an evolutionary process of the system, albeit with an open end.

From the outset, the popular fronts articulated a unified Baltic stance in opposition to any attempts to impede the reform process. In the autumn of 1988, they were successful in coordinating the collection of signatures in protest against planned constitutional changes in Moscow. At their inaugural meeting on November 8, they entered into an alliance, agreeing on common positions. Despite the failure of the Popular Front of Estonia (*Eestimaa Rahvarinne*) to initiate declarations of sovereignty along the lines of the adopted decision in Tallinn on November 16, regular exchange of information and attempts to formulate a common line continued. In 1989, the leadership of the three popular fronts began preparations for a joint congress in Tallinn, the "Baltic Assembly."⁷³ At this meeting, the delegates initiated a discussion on the potential utilization of the fiftieth anniversary of the Hitler–Stalin Pact on August 23 for the advancement of their agenda. Concurrently, Baltic representatives in the recently constituted Soviet Congress of Peoples' Deputies sought a legal assessment of the implications of the pact at a time when Moscow officially still denied the existence of the secret protocols.⁷⁴

Thus, the Eastern European *annus mirabilis* 1989 constituted a notable shift in the agenda of Baltic activists, as their efforts to internationalize the "Baltic question" effectively challenged the prevailing state of relations

73 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 177–78, 187–88.

74 Berndsen, "Zwischen Kooperation und Konkurrenz," 212–14. See Lipinsky, "Reception and Historiography"; Lindpere, *Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact*.

between the center and the periphery with an emphasis on the illegality of Soviet power on the littoral. When the three fronts eventually decided to organize the “Baltic Way” in late July (leaving them just one month for preparations), they openly stepped out of the former consensus to support a reformed union. Now they took course on leaving the union, a right that after all was constitutionally reserved for each Soviet republic.

Conclusion

Instead of framing the perestroika-era movements in terms of colonized nations fighting for freedom, the Soviet context should be seen as a factor that actually prepared the stage for these movements for quite some time before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. Soviet nationalities policy was by no means employed to denationalize the Baltic peoples. Instead, it rested on the idea of internationalism as expressed by the slogan “friendship of peoples,” which followed a complex and ambiguous agenda. While it was used in the newly annexed Baltic republics as a tool to overwrite the national traditions of the three national states, it nevertheless offered space and massive material support for each titular national culture to develop and to contribute to the multicultural Soviet whole.

The huge personal network created by trilateral structures officially sanctioned under the guise of the “friendship of peoples” enabled the popular fronts of the three Baltic republics to start working. Carried by members of the Soviet creative and professional intelligentsia, the new organizations had access to official media and the party and state institutions. Still, the situation was different in each of the three republics. But without these local and trans-Baltic networks, the organization of the “Baltic Way” on August 23, 1989, would not have been possible. Eight months after the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Estonian SSR and seven months before Lithuania’s Declaration of Independence, this massive mobilization of Soviet citizens to form a human chain from Tallinn to Riga and Vilnius made it clear that the popular fronts would no longer be content with reforms within the framework of the system. In the media age, the “Baltic Way” successfully propelled the internationalization of the Baltic question to the fury of Moscow.

It was the cultural and scientific elites from the Baltic Soviet republics, the “institutionally constituted national elites,” to use Brubaker’s term,⁷⁵ who shaped the local pro-perestroika agendas and led the popular fronts. This

75 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 25.

common trajectory led automatically to conflicts between the established "Red" elites, on the one hand, and "aspiring counter-elites," dissidents, exiles, and younger radicals, on the other, which is also beyond the aims of this chapter. The uneasiness of these counter-elites with the fact that many of the protagonists of the Singing Revolutions actually came from within the established Soviet political and cultural elites of their republics, is owed to their adherence to the narrative pattern of the "Great battle for freedom" and the nation-state context.⁷⁶ For the "institutionally constituted national elites," perestroika and glasnost offered new political frameworks, officially sanctioned channels to express local concerns, concerns that had been legitimate actually even in the Soviet context.

Soviet internationalism created an opening to pursue nationalizing policies throughout late socialism.⁷⁷ "Banal" nationalism on an everyday basis in the Baltic SSRs was colored red and encouraged. As long as the given institutional arrangement was seemingly unalterable, and to some extent even seen as necessary, nothing changed. The evolution of the popular fronts from enthusiastically supporting perestroika to advocates of secession owes a lot to the bourgeois "background culture" Risch mentioned.⁷⁸ Being Soviet in the Baltic way always implied national independence as a background option on a much more self-evident basis than it was the case in 1918. In the "Soviet West," a shared Baltic sense of difference was emphasized not least in the regime's internationalist effort to create a *Sovetskaia Pribaltika*. With the onset of perestroika, "friendship of peoples" turned into a tool to mobilize Baltic solidarity against the Moscow center.

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⁷⁶ On this narrative pattern created in the interwar period, see Tamm, "History as Cultural Memory."

⁷⁷ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 20.

⁷⁸ Risch, "A Soviet West," 88.

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III.

Legacy of Empire

9. Spring Flowers and Border Guards: Estonian Narratives of the Soviet Military and Border Troops

Epp Annus

Abstract: This chapter examines narratives of Estonians' encounters with Soviet military units and border troops from 1956 to the 1980s as represented in life writing and oral history. This material reveals the mismatch between local naturecultural practices and Soviet-imposed systems of control. This mismatch was typically perceived through a strong ethnic coloring: those who control the land have arrived from elsewhere and speak a different language. Such border zone encounters significantly impacted the way that ethnic Estonians regarded Russophone populations as cultural others. In the general context of the era, the conflictual encounters with border guards were situated within the colonial matrix of Soviet rule—more specifically, within the matrix of systemic colonial ecosocial violence.

Keywords: Estonian SSR, Soviet border, colonial ecosocial violence, ethnic tensions, naturecultural practices

Introduction

In mid-May of 2016, my extended family and I paid a visit to my aunt, Oivi, then seventy-five years old.¹ She sat in her stylish living room, in her late Soviet apartment, fully dressed, with a fresh hairdo. A small box on the floor pumped oxygen to her nose through a tube. The sound of her breathing was

1 This description is based on my notes taken right after the visit.

loud and seemed to fill the room. My niece, a medical student, checked her blood pressure and looked disturbed.

As we drank our tea, my aunt talked slowly, sentence by sentence and with visible effort, yet she started telling us a story. What struck me then and to this day is that of all the possible stories she might have shared of her life, this was the one she wanted to tell, in what was explicitly intended—on both sides—as the farewell visit to a dying woman.

Hers was a story about a house near the sea, an old farmstead, where she, her husband, and their two children spent their summer vacations—a kind of a rental agreement, not a family home. The farmstead belonged to an elderly woman with no surviving children: the understanding was that my aunt's family would help tend the place and would then inherit it after the death of the owner.²

A seashore on the northern Estonian coast meant, in the Soviet era, having to navigate a guarded border zone, with special permits and the like. Yet controls were lax in the 1960s and the family brought Oivi's mother (my grandmother) for a visit, notwithstanding her lack of permit.³ Together, they drove around in the nearby forests, until the road unexpectedly took them to the gates of a military base or a border garrison.⁴ They then turned around abruptly, and no one halted their return. And that was the end of Oivi's story that day.

Why, of all stories she might have told of her life, my aunt felt the need to share this particular one during our last visit, two weeks before her death? What was it that made this story stand out? There was not even an actual encounter with soldiers, no words exchanged, no documents checked—just a closed gate and a frightful sense of “what if.” What if grandma, an old woman, gets caught there without a permit? The shock that carried this memory derived from the absurd dissonance between the harmless old woman and the invisible, threatening presence of armed, hostile soldiers who kept guard of that area.

2 Such a contract was common enough to make an appearance in fiction, for example, in Lattik, *Pastoraal*. In the case of my aunt's family, this plan had to be abandoned. Circumstances obliged them to begin tending to their own family farmstead, and another family took over the border zone home, inheriting it upon the death of the owner.

3 Because my aunt's family members were, for officials, simply guests there themselves, they were not entitled to request permission for visiting family members.

4 The number of military sites in tiny Estonia in 1991 was somewhere between 1,565 (according to the Estonian Ministry of the Environment) and 4,900 (a Russian figure), depending on the methods of counting. Soviet military sites in the Estonian SSR covered about 87,000 ha. The largest site, near Aegviidu, covered 33,000 ha and included hundreds of structures. Pärn, “Soviet Military Infrastructure,” 19.

Oivi's story, like many narratives of encounters with Soviet-era border controls, is based on a sense of a mismatch between simple personal desires and Soviet-imposed systems of control. In its concrete manifestations, this mismatch was typically perceived through a strong ethnic coloring: those who control our land and restrict our movement have arrived from elsewhere and speak a different language. Such border zone encounters significantly impacted the general way that ethnic Estonians in the Soviet era regarded Russophone populations as cultural others. In the general context of the era, the conflictual encounters with border guards were situated within the colonial matrix of Soviet rule—or, more specifically, within the matrix of systemic colonial ecosocial violence.⁵

This chapter examines narratives of Estonians' encounters with Soviet military units and border troops from 1956 to the late 1980s as represented in life writing and oral history. It leaves out of consideration Stalin-era direct physical violence against border zone populations, resettlings, appropriation of property, destruction of fishing boats, and other era-specific forms of state violence.⁶ The year 1956, known for Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's cult of personality and the mass crimes associated with it, serves here as a turning point in the ethnic buildup of local military and border guards: until 1956, the compulsory military service had been performed in a national unit, in one's own home region. In 1956, the national units in the Soviet armed forces were dismantled; thereafter, as a rule, military service for Estonians had to be performed in multiethnic units located outside the Estonian SSR. Thus the encounters with military units and border controls in Estonia would be encounters with those from other parts of the USSR.⁷

While the tone, atmosphere, particularities, and narrative buildup of border guard stories vary substantially, we can nevertheless observe common cultural patterns and strategies of narration. This chapter proposes that the narratives about Soviet-era border controls carry an implicit structure of a mismatch (1) between personal desires and Soviet-imposed systems of control, and (2) between local naturecultural practices and colonial politics. I regard narratives as cognitive instruments that are of special importance in shaping both cultural imaginaries and people's everyday understanding of their surrounding world. As James V. Wertsch explains, "Because their mastery [of a narrative form] does not require extended formal instruction,

5 Annus, *Environment and Society*.

6 For these accounts, see Paavle, "Kuidas ära hoida"; Kuusk and Kärjinen, *Stopp!*

7 Luts, *Eestlastest ajateenijad*, 43–46.

they are widely and naturally used as ‘cognitive instruments’ for making sense of the world.”⁸

As a decolonial scholar, I consider it important to acknowledge my own embodied situatedness in relation to my research. My childhood and youth in the Estonian SSR in the 1970s and 1980s were marked by frequent, during the summertime, daily encounters with Russian-speaking border guards: our summer home was situated by the seashore in the outskirts of Tallinn, in the border zone. Since by the end of the Soviet years there were nearly twenty-eight thousand summer homes in the Tallinn area, mine was in no ways an atypical experience.⁹ While the limited length of this chapter does not allow for inclusion of autoethnographic material, the stories displayed through different sources in this chapter were mostly already familiar to me prior to any research, as I myself was a participant in this narrative circulation in the late 1970s, in the 1980s, and during the years following the collapse of Soviet rule.

This chapter will first fully outline the selective logic of storytelling and its allegiance to preestablished cultural scripts; second, the basic structure of border control is explained; and third, the structural buildup of local experience, as shared in narrative circulation, is analyzed.

Eventness: The Narrative Logic of Cultural Imaginaries

The Soviet era has often been characterized by a communal silence, by the deliberate choice not to transfer memories of politically sensitive issues to younger generations. Families of prewar elites were more likely to openly discuss their past with their children, yet “ordinary” families often opted for silence. As a result, the end of the Soviet era gave rise to an upsurge in various forms of narrating the past: traumatic experiences, often related to the Stalin era, were shaped into stories hitherto unspoken.

The genre of border guard stories was different, however: it did not involve politically uncomfortable family secrets or sensitive information that had to be kept from prying ears. Much like the jokes about the Soviet Army, the border guard stories contained easily narratable material, centered around a moment of tension, followed by relief. These stories were extensively circled during the Soviet era and formed a well-established narrative genre. Hundreds of these narratives have by now been published, either in thematic

8 Wertsch, “Deep Memory,” 174.

9 Leetmaa, “Suvilapiirkonnad,” 1.

collections or as parts of life stories, essays, or author interviews.¹⁰ This material as a whole includes plenty of variety: in addition to most typical “unexpectedly bumping into border guards” stories, there are reminiscences of tedious routine checkpoints, of constructive cooperation on the islands, but also of lootings, rape attempts, fatal shootings of civilians, and of simple jokes sending high school students to prison. While the stories often contain bitterness, fear, and disappointment, they are not always victimization narratives. The agency of the locals is not completely erased, occasionally elements of tricksterism might gain eminence, and laughter and ridicule might well define the story.

The folkloric narrative production and the circulation of such stories belong to the hazy field of cultural imaginaries, a collective reservoir of values and cultural scripts. The term “cultural imaginaries” is useful in distinguishing between the ideological networks of institutionalized power and the popular circulation of ideas. This term denotes a diverse, hazy, and ever-changing set of images, ideas, and values that are accepted by the general population at any given time and thus constitute a tacit self-understanding of that society.¹¹ Cultural imaginaries do not—and cannot—include everyone’s experience: it is a selective system in which only a part of the national culture finds representation. In this field, communal identity is produced metonymically, foregrounding certain parts of era-specific experience over others.¹² Us–them figurations function as important formal categories that condition cultural imaginaries; border guard stories have also entered this vibrant cultural archive, but through a specific cultural screening.

What do I mean here by cultural screening? Cultural imaginaries presuppose narratability and adherence to preestablished cultural scripts

10 The most prominent example is the themed collection that contains hundreds of stories: Tammer, *Nõukogude piir*. My sources also include what in anthropological research is called participant’s observations; these range from fragmentary remarks to more developed narratives. I have not collected material or performed interviews specifically about encounters with Soviet armed forces—rather, a good part of this material is “overflow” by nature, as these topics would simply resurface when I collected material for my previous research on homes and homing practices in the Estonian SSR and in the Baltics. Annus, *Sotskolonialism Eesti NSV-s*; Annus, “Comparative Spatial Intimacies.”

11 Annus, “Estonians’ European Imaginaries.”

12 As visits to Estonian islands required a special permit during the Soviet decades, islanders were significantly cut off from the nationwide circulation of ideas and imaginaries. Even though border guard encounters were part of their everydayness, their experience has not entered the national distribution of cultural imaginaries. As evident in research, the experience of islanders often lacked the antagonistic structure prevalent in the mainland narrative circulation. See Hiiumaa Militaarjalooelts, “Nõukogude piirivalve”; Koppel, *Hiiumaa piiritsoon*.

and normative frames. At least a portion of the grounding cultural ideas must have an easily narratable buildup, a combination of “eventness” and “repeatability.” A story doesn’t enter into circulation unless it is repeatable. A good story must have some tension in it, and a strong affective charge is a bonus. As a result, uneventful, “normal” relations with cultural others may enter into a narrative circulation to a significantly lesser extent than those with strong affective charge and easily graspable tension. Similarly, border guard stories that did not conform to the accepted cultural script were not widely circulated or shared at all. Stories without conflict did not correspond to the common cultural script, lacked narrative tension, and thus were not widely circulated.¹³

In narrative circulation, categories such as ethnicity become structural categories, and they lose particularity: labels such as “Russian” are imposed according to an established cultural logic, and not according to the facts of someone’s birthplace or linear heritage. Russian-speaking border guards were broadly labeled as representatives of “Russian rule,” regardless of their actual ethnicity.¹⁴ And while the tone and affective charge of encounters in the border zone depended in part on the diligence or laxity of the particular garrison, these narratives started to circulate as part of the framework of a colonizing power as such, rather than as stories of particular individuals.

Geopolitical Framing: The Basic Outline of the Structure of the Border Zone

During the period under consideration, the Estonian northern coastline and the islands were under strict control, and only two cases of successful escape are known (in 1978 and 1984).¹⁵ The Estonian coastline includes 1,242 km of mainland coastline and an additional 2,552 km of insular coastline, of which the northern coast and the western islands were tightly controlled

13 I have myself described a benevolent encounter from my teenage years in an article tellingly titled “The Colonizer’s Day Off.” This story does not fit the cultural script, and I myself did not share this story during the Soviet era. It would have only caused embarrassment. Annus, “The Colonizer’s Day Off.”

14 The other side of such clear-cut ethnic polarization is the ethnic distrust implicit in various Soviet regulations—for example, fishing boats could not be staffed by crews composed only of ethnic Estonians.

15 Paavle, “Kuidas ära hoida,” 88; Pihlau, “Lehekülgi Eesti lähiajaloo.”

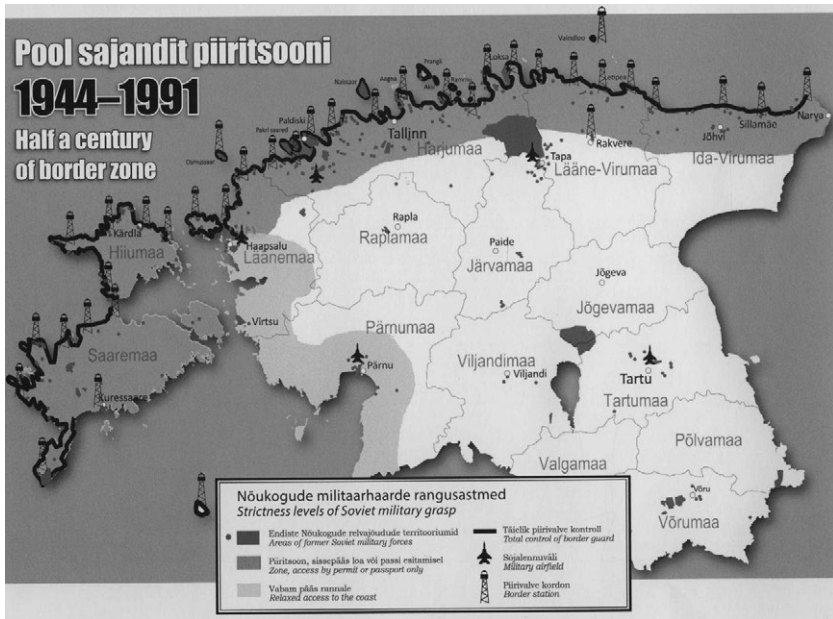


Figure 9.1. General outline of the border zone and major military objects in the Estonian SSR. Source: Kuusk and Kärjinen, *Stopp! Piiritsoon/Stop! Border Zone*, 6. The editors thank the Rannarahva Muuseum and Tammerraamat for permission to publish this map.

and equipped with observation posts and watch towers at regular intervals. As Ann-Leena Miller notes, the military layer included

observation posts, missile bases, coastal defense batteries, trenches, observation towers, barracks, bunkers, border guard stations, airfields, radar stations, commando points and army campuses, etc. Building military structures and monuments has always been a significant way for foreign rulers to show their power and mark their territory.¹⁶

In the Soviet era, the Estonian coastline became divided into three surveillance zones: “the North coast (Zone I), the open sea coasts of the Western Estonian Archipelago (Zone II) and the West Coast (Zone III).”¹⁷ As regards width, USSR legislation from 1927 distinguished between four guarded border zones: 4 m, 500 m, 7.5 km, and 22 km, with “progressively stricter authorization.”¹⁸ The border regime in the annexed Estonia, Latvia, and

16 Miller, “Keep Out!” 2.
 17 Miller, “Keep Out!” 2.
 18 Chandler, *Institutions of Isolation*, 63.

Lithuania followed the 1927 and 1935 all-union regulations; in Estonian territory, the area under control included zones measuring 2 km, 7.5 km, and 22 km. In 1960, a border zone (*piiritsoon, pogranichnaia zona*) was defined as an administrative unit and varied in its distance from the coastline; a stricter border zone (*piirivöönd, pogranichnaia polosa*) could not extend over 2 km. In 1983 this restriction was discarded.¹⁹

Indrek Paavle has compared different regulations on border control over the Soviet decades and has concluded that the system did not change fundamentally:

There were no fundamental changes in this system—the rules for entering the border zone and living and operating in it were similar in the legislation of 1935 and 1983 until they were replaced. The main one was the simple method of allowing as few people as possible near the national border and checking those few with utmost thoroughness.²⁰

The changes made over time were terminological and administrative—since the border zone followed administrative borders, redrawings of administrative units also required new outlinings of what districts belonged to the border zone. And even as the principles of the border guarding varied little over the Soviet years, control nevertheless tended to lax over a period of time, if not on paper, then in actuality. Significantly more permissions to enter the border zone were issued in later years. While this was surely also tied to the rising demand, Paavle stresses the impact of the highly efficient sea control—as it was almost impossible to get past the guards on the sea, the shoreline control could become more relaxed. Yet the well-known near impossibility of a successful escape made the tight border control along shorelines look doubly out of place to casual vacationers.

Jüri Pärn provides a lengthy description of the specifics of border control:

From 1976 to 1993, the Border Guard (BG) of Zones I and II consisted of three Troops (Tallinn, Rakvere and Kuressaare) manning 42 BG stations, a BG Boat Brigade subordinated to the BG Navy based in Tallinn and Haapsalu, which had up to 40 patrol vessels, a BG flight squadron in Rakvere, a BG construction company in Tallinn and other, smaller military units and institutions, with a total strength of up to 6,000 troops. The number of BG stations peaked between 1945 and

19 Paavle, "Kuidas ära hoida."

20 Paavle, "Kuidas ära hoida," 88.

1953 (approximately 100). In the vicinity of the border guard stations were practice fields and visual observation towers. The BG stations located further from each of the brigade headquarters were organized into separate commandantures (of approximately 5 BG stations each) with a larger training center and a firing range for automatic weapons. Along the coastal border, each BG station had 2–10 posts consisting of up to 10 buildings and other constructions, where a detachment of 2–4 border guards would permanently or periodically be on duty. These posts consisted of technical surveillance posts with 1 or 2 stationary radars, a diesel power station, an observation tower, and a searchlight mounted on rails; radiolocation posts with a small one- or two-story building for the operation of a portable miniature radar; and mobile searchlight positions for coastline observation at night.²¹

Local Experience: A Systemic Ecosocial Violence

Encounters with non-Estonian border guards form a significant part of Soviet-era Estonian cultural imaginaries. A glance at the map of Estonia, combined with some basic knowledge of history, will provide the context: take Estonia's long coastline, patrolled by border troops (fig. 9.1), add the central role of the sea in Estonian culture (evident in fishing villages, a densely populated coastline, and the popularity of seashore vacationing, a practice dating back to pre-Soviet decades), and there you have a combustible setting for tensions, and the potential for conflict. While only 13,959 persons in Estonia lived from fishing according to the 1934 census, for many more, fishing had been an important part of income in addition to farming and renting rooms for vacationers. In the 1930s, vacationing in the countryside and especially by the sea had become a prestigious and valued way of spending a summer.²² With the revival of vacation culture in the 1950s, and especially after the standard workweek was shortened to five days in 1968, the “summer people”—those who crossed into the border zone periodically—became the main source of the circulating border guard stories. At the same time, the border guard stories as a category merged into one narrative body together with stories about unpleasant or frightening encounters with military troops and military objects located in the closed

21 Pärn, “Soviet Military Infrastructure,” 26.

22 Kuusk and Kärigen, *Stopp!*, 15.

zones in other areas of the Estonian SSR.²³ Commonly, border guards were called “soldiers” in narrative representations: both presented an intrusive foreign presence, backed by colonial apparatus of power.

The border zone was not necessarily marked with a barbed wire or any other clearly identifiable design. Checkpoints were established where feasible, and not necessarily at the administrative borders. Public beaches and vacationing areas were granted free access until ten in the evening. Legislation on movement by the public near these borders was not publicly shared—only short announcements were published in the local media when the rules changed. Given also that exact maps were not available, it was easy to cross (semi-)accidentally into a restricted zone. How could one tell while hiking in the woods that one had now crossed from one administrative unit to another and arrived at the border zone? Also, as public access to some beaches was granted, it often came as a surprise when vacationers were sent back from a sandy beach that happened to be outside of the permitted area.²⁴ Indeed the majority of border guard stories tell of “spoiled fun,” in which a planned amusement suffers from what feels like an unfair, unnecessary, and perhaps also a frightening and humiliating intervention.

The historian Indrek Paavle has recollected a hiking trip with friends interrupted by the border patrol and followed by a night-long investigation and a thorough search—a situation that the historian counted as “not among my most agreeable memories.”²⁵ The journalist Enno Tammer, the editor of many popular collections of life stories, shares a story of his own boyhood experience—traveling to visit his aunt, he was pulled from his bus by the border guards because he lacked an identificatory document. As in many other memories, the boy’s fear and humiliation is accentuated by bad weather—“wet, humiliated and afraid,” the boy had to wait alone, facing the border guards, for a bus to return him home.²⁶ Stories of being forced to turn back from the beach are a common genre, and tinted by bitterness.²⁷ Senseless waiting, presumed to be part of a strategy of humiliation, is a frequent feature. In going to visit relatives on an island the complex process

23 Jaan Eilart’s account of his encounter with the military troops bears the same narrative structure as border guard stories. He is halted, has to stop his activities, and needs go with armed troops to “sort it out.” Pauts, “Jaan Eilarti elu meeldejäävaim jaanipäev.”

24 I start my monograph (Annus, *Soviet Postcolonial Studies*) with a description of this kind. In a popular Vääna-Jõesuu beach, walking away from an area filled with people turned out to be forbidden.

25 Paavle, “Kuidas ära hoida,” 85.

26 Tammer, *Nõukogude piir*, 13–15.

27 Haug, *Mööda Koidu tänavat*.

of obtaining permission culminates, after finally reaching the island, in a long wait outside, in the rain and heavy wind, with the queue moving so slowly that it feels artificially produced—an oft-recounted situation that I remember well from my own experience in the 1980s. If it rained when I myself arrived at Saaremaa island, I'm not sure; the narrative structure of shared imaginaries replaces the individual experience with the typical representative of the genre. Wind, however, is more of a norm than an exception when exiting your vehicle in a harbor area.

As a rule, the border guards did not speak Estonian, and all interaction was in Russian. They carried a gun. “Stoi, strelyat’ budu,” is often repeated in personal narratives—Stop, or I will open fire. Scientists working in the border zone were also frightened and dismayed by the release of dogs on them.²⁸ Of actual shootings, the most notorious was the Letipea massacre, a mass shooting of civilians by Soviet forces in August 1976, when several people died and more were wounded.²⁹ Of course, this event inspired a whole wave of widely circulating rumors; as no official information was provided, one could only guess the exact number of victims and the full details of events.³⁰ The narrative of a different shooting in 1972, in which a border guard shot a mother and a daughter and then himself (an interrupted rape attempt), circulated among the participants of the 1972 Estonian children's song and dance festival—as masses were gathered there and kids and teachers from different parts of Estonia shared accommodations, the story could, again, spread easily.³¹

The Sensible Earth and the Order of Colonial Politics: Or, the Mushroom–Passport Dissonance

In addition to fear and systemic physical and/or psychological violence, the particular dynamic of border narratives features also a more deeply rooted sense of conflict and injustice: that of a conflict between land and colonial politics. These are our lands, our places, our belongings—how can outsiders, those who do not speak our language and are ignorant of our culture and customs, put obstacles between us and what is ours? Private conflicts were

28 Peil, “Geograafia.”

29 Paavle, “Kuidas ära hoida,” 85; Annus, *Environment and Society*.

30 After the collapse of Soviet rule, the newly gained access to archival materials has made it possible to shed some light on what happened. There were twenty-four civilian casualties, six of whom died. Annus, *Environment and Society*, ch. 2.

31 Lepassalu, *Rüigipär*, 65.

felt most strongly in the early Soviet years, when fishermen's boats were destroyed, and fishing became a highly politicized, restricted activity. In later years, the sense of intrusion into "what is ours" was typically experienced in naturecultural terms: in my own homeland, and even at the outskirts of the capital city, I am, for no reason, "treated like a criminal suspect."³² As Viljo recollects:

I was always amazed and enraged how, from time to time, while walking around on the soil of my homeland, a couple of guys with scruff on their chins, green caps, and Kalashnikov assault rifles would appear along with a youngish lieutenant. [...] They would demand to see my documents: "Vashi dokumenty!" and, after seeing the honest red passport of an honest Soviet citizen, they would insist "nemedlenno pokinut' pogranichnuyu zonu"—that I leave the border zone immediately.³³

An economist (and, in the 1990s, a member of the Estonian parliament), Valve Kirsipuu has shared how she was stopped on her way to visit relatives and had to peel potatoes in the border guard station, a situation that she described in the mid-2000s with a clear sense of bitterness: "I am driving in my home country and, two kilometers from the Tallinn city limit, I am taken into custody. I am not trusted, even though I have a passport to show, and I'm dragged along like a prisoner."³⁴

This conflict between land and colonial politics could also be described from the perspective of what I call "a quotidian metaphysics of the earth." Consider the sense of natural environments and natural phenomena—for example, violent storms, earthquakes, meteorite impacts creating deep craters, sunset and sunrise, lunar cycles: these phenomena strike us as larger than any political system or its demands in the sense that they unfold in a register that cannot be fully organized by politics. Thus, there is a fundamental incommensurability between political regimes and a good part of the matter found on Earth—the moss that grows on the cliffs, the trees that grow taller each year, giant erratic boulders found in abundance in northern Estonian coastline. When colonial regimes attempt to politicize places that are not, for local inhabitants, defined by politics—the sea, the sand, the forest—the mismatch between the sensible earth and colonial

32 Tammer, *Nõukogude piir*, 23.

33 Tammer, *Nõukogude piir*, 17. The Soviet passport was the primary document Soviet citizens used for identification within the country.

34 Tammer, *Nõukogude piir*, 18–19.

politics creates a dissonance that translates into an internal protest, the sense of a fundamental violation that, in the case of border controls, exacerbates ethnic us–them polarizations. The notion of colonial ecosocial violence, understood here as the imposition of restrictions upon everyday interactions with homely environments, is most apt to describe the situation.³⁵

The dissonance between local naturecultural practices and colonial politics could manifest itself in strangely alogical situations. Take Epp Kukemelk's recollections: when she went to pick mushrooms in the forest, she kept her passport and the issued *propusk*—permit—on the bottom of the mushroom basket, separated from the mushrooms by a protective sheet of paper³⁶—a situation that is clearly discordant, as such documents do not belong in a mushroom basket. The mushrooms, of course, are in their proper place—it is the policing that is both excessive and disturbing. The mushroom–passport dissonance thus displays the fundamental disjunction between the stuff that grows on earth and the ways local people engage with it, versus the control exerted by the colonial regime.

Yet another version of the dissonance between local naturecultural engagement and colonial politics involves young people gathering spring flowers in the forest. The story contains an element of tricksterism: in 1958, near Kohtla-Järve in northeastern Estonia, the border guards stop a young couple in the forest and demand to see their documents. Unlike the cautious mushroom gatherers in the earlier anecdote, these people had not thought to bring official documents along on their walk. They are ordered into a truck, where ten to fifteen others have already been detained for enjoying the fresh spring forest without their passports on hand. All are taken to the border station. After a tedious wait, they spot a ball field with a net and a ball, and a volleyball game begins. No one in the station seems to care much about them. There is an open window nearby, the phone is visible on the table, the room is otherwise empty. One of the players picks up the phone. He happens to be the chief engineer of the local electricity networks, a graduate of Tartu State University, well informed about the local electricity networks and telephone connection lines. He orders a power cut in the Ontika line, which supplies electricity to the Ontika border station and two small villages nearby.

35 The term “ecosocial” conveys “the fundamental interdependence of societal and ecological contexts.” Krieger, *Ecosocial Theory*, 17. On colonial ecological violence in the North American context, see Bacon, “Settler Colonialism.” My own use of “colonial ecosocial violence” builds on these works.

36 Tammer, *Nõukogude piir*, 29.

Annoyed, the border guards contact the main power station to investigate and are told that the power has been turned off by order of the main engineer—who, as it happens, is playing volleyball at the border station. After much cursing, the border guards drive the detainees back to Kohtla-Järve, where they live.

The chief engineer was my father-to-be, his young companion my mother-to-be. This story was often told by my father at parties in our Khrushchevka apartment, and my father's great oratorical talent, honed by pre-Soviet-style rhetorical schooling, made his vivid performances the highlight of these gatherings.³⁷ My mother would nod along, laugh, and add a few remarks to confirm the veracity of the story. The post-Soviet versions did not change much of it; only in a sober private conversation would my father add that such reckless behavior could have ended quite unhappily, and that it was mere luck that no measures were taken. If the audience was even a little less intimate (as in August 2022, when my father told this anecdote again to me and my daughter), all the rhetoric of the trickster narrative yet again defined the story.

In trickster stories, the local agency is reestablished, and the nonlocal border guards are fooled or overplayed. Such stories suited well a joyous house party atmosphere, where the unwritten agenda was, after all, to celebrate friendship, family, and continuity. But the trickster position was one of privilege (in my father's story, a combination of youthful recklessness, education, and social standing) and was not always a feasible option for everyone.

Conclusion

Narratives of encounters with armed, Russian-speaking border guards significantly contributed to the sense of foreign rule over Estonia. Even as these guards came from different parts of the Soviet Union, for the native populations they signified an undifferentiated "Russian rule." Negative connotations associated with "Russians" were accentuated and deepened by the sense of a mismatch between local naturecultural engagement and colonial politics, and the common experience of spoiled fun, fear, and a sense of violation, sometimes lightened by trickster-type narrative

³⁷ My father always opened his "speeches" with a call for attention with "Mu daamid ja härrad!" ("Ladies and gentlemen!"). The use of the Soviet-style "comrades" would have been utterly unthinkable.

self-positionings. The fact that border guards might have at times helped locals on the islands and may in late Soviet times have been on good terms with some permanent inhabitants in the guarded areas, counted for little, given the selective logic of cultural imaginaries that foregrounded starker experiences of dissonance, emotionally narrated by would-be vacationers.³⁸

While evaluative judgments could be attached to different narrative types, the widely circulating border guard stories typically did not attribute any human characteristics to Russian-speaking men in uniform: the conflict, and not human behavior, formed the core of this narrative structure.

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38 While this chapter has followed a particular narrative cluster of border guard stories, a number of competing notions of "Russianness" circulated during the period under discussion, from 1956 to the late 1980s. One common conception associated "Russians" with barbarism and ignorance; new Russian-speaking settlers in particular were often perceived as unrooted, uninterested in local values and cultures, lacking a proper work ethic, and prone to alcoholism. One also finds a common imaginary of the "Russian soul" as warm and generous, albeit accompanied with perhaps limited intellectual capacity (Kallas, *Eiseni tänav*; Promet, *Primavera*). Among the more approving figures of "Russianness" there was also an imaginary of the Russian artist or intellectual, living in Leningrad or even in Moscow, with a pre-Soviet family tradition, a solid education, and perhaps with an aristocratic background. This figure was mentioned with approval and even admiration for his or her great civility and intellectualism. Of course, all these models were not particular to the Estonian perception, but were in transnational circulation, stereotyped, for example, in popular jokes with ethnically distinct characters.

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10. Exiting Empire: Civil Wars in South Caucasia versus Civil Peace in the Baltic Republics

Ronald Grigor Suny

Abstract: Various explanations have been proposed as answers to the perplexing question of why the years of the disintegration of the USSR resulted in relatively peaceful politics in the Baltic republics while the South Caucasus suffered from civil, ethnic, and inter-republic war. This chapter outlines the major factors explaining these differences—the Soviet state shaped the twentieth-century history of Caucasia much more fundamentally than it did the Baltic peoples; the Caucasus could plausibly be understood to have benefitted from being within the Soviet Union, while the Baltic republics were thrown backward by Soviet occupation; the much later annexation of the Baltic republics was experienced as a loss not only of independence but of a higher civilizational status.

Keywords: disintegration of the USSR, South Caucasus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, ethnic conflicts

Various explanations ranging from cultural to geopolitical have been proposed as answers to the perplexing question of why in the years of the disintegration of the USSR, relatively peaceful politics prevailed in the Baltic republics while the South Caucasus suffered from civil, ethnic, and inter-republic war. The similarities between the experiences of the two sets of republics—a century of integration into the tsarist empire of both regions; the long nation-making processes of both in tsarist times; languages of the major nationalities that are mutually unintelligible one to the other; the coincidence of social/class and ethnic/national experiences/

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identities; and the positive relation to Europe, the modern world, and the opportunities that they offered. These contrast with the differences between them—the proximity to Europe and affinities with Scandinavia of the Baltic republics; their experience of independence between the world wars and the coherent hostility of all three peoples to Russian/Soviet domination; the longer Soviet experience, which involved national consolidation, of the Caucasian republics; the vulnerability of the South Caucasians living in a dangerous neighborhood (particularly of the Armenians located between Turkey and Azerbaijan); fault lines between traditional religions, Islam and Christianity; the fractured ethnic makeup of the South Caucasus with more and less privileged nationalities coexisting under imperial rule; and the differentiated attitudes of the peoples of the Caucasus to Russia and the Soviet experience. And, one might add, post-Soviet Russian intervention was far more direct in the South Caucasus than in the Baltic region.

A major factor explaining the different responses to the collapse of Soviet power was that the Soviet state developed and shaped the twentieth-century history of Caucasia much more fundamentally than it did the Baltic peoples. The Caucasus could plausibly be understood to have benefited from the modernizing project of the Soviet Union, while the Baltic republics were thrown backward by the brutal Soviet conquest and occupation. The fact that the Baltic states were the last to become Soviet republics and the first to secede from the union is related to the deep feeling that the annexation was experienced as a loss not only of independence but of a higher civilizational status. The coherence of Baltic national feelings toward the Soviets was distinct from the mixed and conflicting attitudes of the Caucasians, which in the cases particularly of Armenia and Azerbaijan, were experienced by many as harsh, imposed development but simultaneously as historical progress. Political tensions, as well as a far more fractured multiethnic environment, undermined early hopes that the Caucasus would emerge peacefully from Moscow's imperial grip. The civilizing mission of the Soviet empire was much more palpable and progressive in the southern tier of the USSR than the forced integration of formerly independent countries that identified with the West, particularly Scandinavia, into an essentially colonial relationship with the Muscovite metropole. The Baltic experience was one of occupation, while in the South Caucasus, most notably in Georgia, that term was deployed only in the last years of Soviet rule.

The many structural, cultural, and historical factors so far enumerated, as well as the differences between the processes of imperial annexation and transformation, can all be considered important influences on, even

causal explanations of, what occurred in the late 1980s and the following decades. But structures, experiences, and contingent events do not determine outcomes in an automatic and unmediated way. History and the near present are read through perceptions, discursive frameworks, and, in my analysis, the developing emotional environment in which actions are taken and choices made. Here I deploy the concept of “affective disposition,” the emotional and cognitive sensibilities in which ordinary people and national leaders perceive and understand their structural, cultural, and historical experiences and weave them into a cognitive and emotional disposition that mobilizes their populations.¹ It is assumed in this approach, which I introduced in my study of the Armenian Genocide, that people act on what they subjectively think and feel is true rather than on what might be objectively real.²

Affective Disposition

Unlike emotions, which spring up and dissipate quickly, I use the term “disposition” to refer to something like an affective *habitus* that makes it more likely for individuals and groups to think, feel, and act in certain ways and not in others. Such dispositions are formed and persist over time, and like cultures and discourses may contain within them conflicting and contradictory elements that can be referenced, manipulated, or stimulated by powerful actors or formative events. Although terms vary among scholars, a useful distinction is to think of the affective realm, or affective states or processes, broadly, to include emotions (episodes of shorter duration and related to objects and action); visceral feelings (intimately related to the body); moods (long, diffuse, low intensity, objectless states); dispositions (diffuse states of long duration but involving greater appraisal and evaluation); as well as preferences. Emotions in my usage are those feelings that are motivational and have an object, like the loved one or the feared future, and should be distinguished from moods, like irritation or feeling good, that are not immediately motivational.³ Emotions, then, are things felt, feelings, though not all feelings are emotions (and not all emotions feelings).

1 My theory of affective disposition was independently conceived before I discovered that the term had been used by psychologists and communication scholars for studying audience reactions to fiction, drama, and film. For this alternative use of term, see Raney et al., “Testing Affective Disposition Theory.”

2 Suny, “*They Can Live in the Desert.*”

3 See the discussion by Fridjda, “Moods, Emotion Episodes”; Gendolla et al., “The Informational Impact of Mood,” 12, 14.

Here I am using disposition to mean a tendency or proclivity to think or act in a certain way under certain circumstances, a collection of preferences, beliefs, attitudes, habits of mind, and their associated feelings and emotions that lead people or groups to certain kinds of actions under certain circumstances.⁴ While moods are characteristically affective states of individuals, dispositions can also be affective states of collectivities. An affective disposition contains the emotional and cognitive experience and understandings of an individual or group. It provides the framing in which attitudes, inclinations, proclivities, and likely preferences are formed. Dispositions do not completely determine behavior or thought but they shape possibilities and the likelihood of certain actions. Given certain dispositions, precipitating events are more likely to lead to certain actions rather than others. Structures, historical experiences, prevalent discourses, and cultural proclivities feed into and shape affective dispositions, but it is the latter from which meaningful action arises.

An analogy for disposition is fragility of a glass: the glass has the potential of being shattered but only under certain events, like being dropped or thrown. Pessimism, depression, optimism, anxiety, and other emotional states contribute to affective dispositions that see the world in certain ways, excluding others, and making more predictable what actions are likely to result from precipitating events. Psychologists have found experimentally that a happy mood influences individuals to evaluate situations more positively, while sadness tends to perceive the environment to be less benign.

The student of nationalism can appreciate the extension of this insight to anxious and insecure dispositions that heighten the sense of threat and read experience and history in particular ways that heighten the sense of distance and danger from others. Social theorists have proposed similar background conditions in which and from which thought, behavior, and intentional action occurs. Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, Talcott Parsons's "value pattern," or the ubiquitous concept of political culture (within which Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba included "affective orientation") all provide a context that while not directly causal is a condition that enables or constrains. Affective disposition is such a background condition but one that conceptually foregrounds what is felt as well as thought and insists on the interconnectedness of cognition and emotion. Dispositions have effects; they are part of a causal explanation, but they cannot be the whole explanation, for structures, events, and particular conjunctures, not to

4 Much of the literature on dispositions comes from educational philosophy and the effort to teach "thinking dispositions." See, for example, Tishman and Andrade, "Thinking Dispositions."

mention unanticipated contingencies, precipitate the potential of an affective disposition to be manifested in a definite action.

Nation Formation and Imperial Influences

In the two cases examined here, the Baltic and South Caucasian states, national identity, formed historically and consolidated in the twentieth century both outside the Soviet Union and within, was deeply embedded in affective connections between individuals and the related collective, that is, the nation as constructed and perceived, imagined and felt, by people. Nations were not only imagined communities, but affective communities based on evaluations of historic experiences and ideas of shared destiny. Since the mid-nineteenth century, national identity construction has most powerfully been about a single, unitary identity, not a multiplicity of self-understandings, one usually embedded in a long history and attached to a specific territory. The power of that identity lay within a broad transnational discourse of the nation, which consolidated in the early nineteenth century and justified both territorial possession and statehood to those with prior and exclusive claims based on shared language, culture (ethnic or civic), or race. As a new form of political legitimation, the nation brought culture together with a strong political claim to self-rule that ultimately found its sanction in a story about the past. For people in the Baltic and South Caucasian republics, for much of the twentieth century and even more robustly in the late 1980s, national identity was inseparable from the affective dispositions of leaders and ordinary citizens.⁵

A cozy collaboration has distinguished historical writing since the early nineteenth century between the emerging discipline of professional historiography and the growing salience and power of the nation form and the discourse of the nation. History was written as national history, and, along with the efforts of other intellectuals, statesmen, and national activists, historians made arguably the most important contribution to national formation, namely composing narratives of the past that midwived the delayed rebirth of the suppressed nation. This is a familiar story of how

5 My definition of national identity is “a provisional stabilization of a sense of self or group that is formed in actual historical time and space, in evolving economies, politics, and cultures, as a continuous search for some solidity in a constantly shifting world—but without closure, without forever naturalizing or essentializing the provisional identities arrived at.” Suny, “Provisional Stabilities,” 144.

grammarians, collectors of folk tales and songs, even fabricators of national epics and myths, later teachers and journalists, and still later militant nationalists gathered the material and dispersed it among the largely peasant populations so that by the early twentieth century mass movements were calling either for autonomy and rights within the empire or outright separation and independence.⁶ That independence was briefly achieved, somewhat reluctantly by some like the Armenians and Azerbaijanis, in the moment of imperial collapse during World War I. Rival empires promoted nationalisms of “small peoples”—the Ottomans defended the Azerbaijanis; the Germans supported the Baltic peoples—as part of their effort to defeat decisively the Russians. In the chaotic, anarchic conditions of the war, revolution, and postwar scrambles for territory and sovereignty, the Caucasus were brought into the Soviet orbit by the Red Army, while the Baltic republics, with the support of Western imperial powers, and, given the relative weakness of the Bolsheviks, in agreement with the Bolsheviks, became independent states. The political, social, economic, and ideological trajectories of the two regions diverged markedly—the one capitalist, ostensibly democratic but more often authoritarian, and nationalist—the other anti-capitalist, eventually state “socialist,” violently transformed by the Stalinist regime, living under a dictatorial regime, and devoid of civil rights, but at the same time forcibly driven into modernity, urbanity, social mobility, and educated in an ideology dedicatedly collectivist, supposedly anti-nationalist, and convinced it was on the leading edge of history. As World War II came to an end, the republics of the battered Soviet Union were on the victorious side, while people in the formerly independent republics of the Baltic region had collaborated to a degree with the Nazis and been viciously brought into the USSR against the popular will, tainted by their wartime association with fascism and popular participation in pogroms against Jews.

Despite all six republics being part of the USSR for nearly half a century, the Soviet experience from 1945 to 1991 was significantly different in the two regions. The four post-Stalin decades were formative in both the Baltic and the South Caucasian republics politically and in the political discourses and affective dispositions of leaders, regime opponents, and more generally the population. De-Stalinization was an uneven process in both regions. After the death of Stalin in 1953, Stalinism was partially dismantled; the arbitrary terror ended, and the gulag was disassembled; the public sphere grew more tolerant of different voices. The long-lived party elites in the republics accommodated their constituents by allowing greater national

6 Hroch, *Social Preconditions*.

cultural expression, nimbly dancing between local, nationalist pressure for attention to their cultural and social desires and demands from Moscow for conformity to Soviet norms. In the Baltic states communist rule resembled a kind of foreign occupation, with the small ruling parties heavily populated by non-natives. “By 1953 the new Soviet leadership,” write historians Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, “may have decided because of the number and growing seniority (and trustworthiness) of home-grown members, a moderate renationalization was desirable in order to reduce the most glaring signs of external control.”⁷ Local parties became more national, while in the South Caucasus the entrenched Stalinist leaders were replaced by loyalists to the Khrushchev regime. In the cultural sphere concessions were made to national sensibilities. In a speech that foresaw Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” of 1956, Anastas Mikoyan restored the prestige of nineteenth-century Armenian nationalists like the novelist Raffi and the poet Rafael Patkanian, and the Soviet poet Yeghishe Charents, and prose writer Aksel Bakunts, who died in the Stalinist terror.⁸ In Lithuania the ancient island capital Trakai was restored despite complaints by Khrushchev. The Baltic republics flourished within the strict constraints of Moscow’s dictates and was revered by many as the most culturally civilized and liberal region in the USSR. The Thaw allowed a new generation of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian writers to emerge in the 1960s, and in other republics as well intellectuals pushed against the boundaries enforced by party stalwarts. From Moscow ethnographers and other scholars predicted that eventually there would occur in the post-national future not only *sblizhenie* (growing closer) of the different Soviet nationalities but *sliianie* (merging together) of the Soviet peoples. But in the Baltic, there was effective resistance to assimilation, and in the South Caucasus, homogenization of the republics made them more national.

Empires mix populations, while nation-states unmix them. Many empires—think of the Ottomans’ *sürgün* (forced migration) policies or Stalin’s deportations of minorities, Poles, Meskhetian Turks, and others from the borderlands of the USSR—deliberately replace “foreign” populations on their frontiers with those peoples they consider more loyal.⁹ In the Soviet empire, the Baltic republics were subject to in-migration of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians that accompanied industrial development, and the party leadership was filled with non-Baltic peoples. Whatever tensions and resentments existed between the indigenous Baltic peoples and the largely Slavic

7 Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 132.

8 Shakarian, *Anastas Mikoyan*.

9 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 274–82, 311–43.

immigrants into their republics, peaceful relations largely free from violence prevailed under the imperial umbrella. Soviet policy transformed the Baltic states from agrarian to industrial within the half century communists ruled. Estonia and Latvia were roughly 66 percent rural before World War II and became just over 70 percent urban by restoration of independence. Even more dramatically, Lithuania shifted from 77 percent rural to 71 percent urban, thus rendering the Baltic region the most urbanized part of the USSR.

In a pattern reminiscent of indirect rule in European empires, Communist Party leaders of Soviet republics governed as agents of Moscow and were rewarded by lengthy reigns. Antanas Sniečkus was head of the Communist Party of Lithuania from 1936, when the party was illegal and existed underground, to his death in 1974. He was followed by Petras Griškevičius, who was first secretary from 1974 until 1987. Johannes Kābin headed the Estonian Communist Party from 1950 to 1978; while in Latvia there was somewhat greater turnover—Jānis Kalnberziņš (1940–59), Arvīds Pelše (1959–66), and Augusts Voss (1966–84)—but also more overt efforts to placate if not encourage Latvian nationalism.¹⁰ In 1959, Latvian “national communists,” including the first secretary, were dismissed from their posts for insufficiently unmasking “bourgeois nationalism.” In the South Caucasus in the post-Stalin years, Anton Kochinian served as prime minister and first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party for more than two decades (1952–74), followed by Karen Demirjian as first secretary (1974–88). In Georgia Vasil Mzhanavadze ruled from 1953 to 1972, succeeded by Eduard Shevardnadze (1972–85). Before he rose to foreign minister of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev, Shevardnadze famously resisted the removal of the Georgian language as the sole state language in his republic in 1978. When ordinary Georgians protested, the first secretary ultimately defended the popular position of the crowds. Armenians soon followed Georgia’s example. In their long tenure after the removal of the Stalinist terror, in both north and south, party leaders maintained authority by cautious concessions to national and religious sentiments and by moderately tolerant policies protecting old communists of pre-Soviet times. Their reciprocal policies accommodated the nationalist sentiments that the very ethnoterritorial structure of the Soviet Union encouraged.

The background condition in both the Baltic and South Caucasian republics were the general political and social developments of the modern world, particularly those affecting the Soviet Union, what might be called “Soviet

10 On Latvian party politics, concessions to nationalism, and the purge of national communists in 1959, see Loader, “The Death of ‘Socialism with a Latvian Face.’”

modernization.”¹¹ Moshe Lewin, the grandfather of Soviet social history, in one of his last books, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*, presented the phenomenal growth of the urban USSR as an explanation for the appearance of radical reform in a relatively stagnant and conservative Soviet Union. Lewin began his analysis with the failure of fundamental reform after Stalin’s death. “Khrushchev’s destalinization, in fact, was thwarted, but restalinization did not occur. Kosygin’s economic reforms failed,” but a whole generation of economists were in place, underground, to revive thinking about a socialist market system. “The country went through a social revolution, while Brezhnev slept.”¹² In Lewin’s view just as rural Russia and the archaization of society after the revolution had produced the context for Stalinism, so the achievements of Soviet modernization—urbanization, literacy, social mobility—had created the possibility of Gorbachev and democracy. Following Marx and Weber, he argued that it was cities, not the countryside, that produced capitalism, the state, and democracy. Even though the revolutionary upheaval in a society with weak institutions had ended in despotism, the despot was unable to stop spontaneous social developments and a degree of autonomy for ordinary people.

Exceptionally important in the late Soviet years was the educated elite, the intelligentsia, both those who supported the regime and worked toward reform and the dissidents who criticized or actively opposed it. Professionals and intellectuals were taking charge, increasingly taking over, and running affairs. The post-Stalin Soviet Union had transformed from the illiterate, immobile, largely agrarian society that had existed in Lenin’s time. The authoritarian vanguardism of the Communist Party no longer provided the initiative and drive of modernization but had become an impediment to further development and innovation. There was a tidal wave of social changes that many thought required a pluralist, less rigid, and paternalist society. By the time Gorbachev came to power the pathologies of late state socialism had ripened into a crisis and growing disaffection, first from the top, and then through other social layers. The movement for change, however, came from above, from the regime itself, rather than from the grass roots.

Although the rapid and radical defection of the Baltic republics, as well as, to an extent, Georgia and Armenia, and eventually Ukraine, were contributory causes of the failure of Gorbachev’s reforms, the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union was primarily caused by the political suicide

11 See Siegelbaum, “Modernity Unbound,” on the city of Togliatti.

12 Here Lewin quotes Martin Walker’s words. Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon*, 2. Note that this edition was published in April 1991, months before the USSR disintegrated.

of the center. A determined but inconsistent reformer with no clear vision of where he was taking his country, Gorbachev had dismantled the major features of Soviet authoritarianism and introduced radical changes in a liberal democratic direction, but his moves to preserve a reformed, less centralized Soviet Union were undermined by his own unwillingness to use the coercive powers that remained in his hands. The year that both the Soviet Union and Gorbachev himself began to come apart was 1990. The leaders of Russia and other Soviet republics were by the fall of that year looking toward independence. In September Gorbachev moaned to his close advisor Anatolii Chernayev, "Tolya, what should we do? Where is the way out?"¹³ He repeatedly threatened force and then retreated. In March 1991, after referenda in Estonia and Latvia, calling for independence, Gorbachev's all-union referendum secured 76 percent support for preserving some form of union. That same month he ordered troops to prevent a demonstration by supporters of Yeltsin, only to send them back to their barracks. On April 9, marking the day two years earlier when Soviet troops had killed twenty-one Georgians protesting Abkhazian separatism, a referendum overwhelmingly supported Georgian independence. Gorbachev took no responsibility for what happened in central Tbilisi, blaming instead the army and local authorities. As historian Serhii Plokhy writes, "Gorbachev balked at the prospect of large-scale bloodshed."¹⁴ "The majority of Russians," Vladislav Zubok writes,

wanted Gorbachev to use his power, not to devolve it; and Gorbachev's reluctance to use that power appeared to many as weakness. The Soviet leader also suffered from an accumulating crisis of confidence: his long-winded explanations, in contrast to Yeltsin's more succinct populist style, no longer appealed to the majority who felt cheated and disillusioned.¹⁵

Gorbachev pleaded in vain for the Americans to bail him out, but Moscow soon discovered it was on its own.

The Baltic Republics: A Relatively Peaceful Exit from Empire

On my first visit to the Baltic republics, in the spring of 1966, I observed a sullen reluctance to engage with Soviet dominance in both Tallinn and Vilnius. A

13 Taubman, *Gorbachev*, 529.

14 Plokhy, *The Last Empire*, 39.

15 Zubok, *Collapse*, 105.

young man playing basketball just outside the walls of the old city of Tallinn was willing to share his ball with me as we shot baskets, and though he understood my Russian, he never uttered a word in that language. A drunk accosted me on the street a little later, lifted his arm in a Nazi salute, and loudly proclaimed that they were waiting for the Germans to return. That same spring, in Vilnius my guide stood silently, disapprovingly by while I admiringly photographed the statue of Lenin. In front of the beautiful arch of the Gates of Dawn, I was surprised to see a woman on her knees, oblivious to passersby and the ruling practices of an atheist regime, praying to the painting of the Madonna of Vilnius. My amateur ethnographic observation noted segmented populations in the Baltic region rather than interethnic unity and pan-Soviet identification. There was no true bilingualism as one finds in multinational states like Canada and Switzerland. Russians made little effort to learn Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian.¹⁶ The Soviet Union was neither a nation-state of equal citizens with shared culture nor a true multinational state with equal citizens but distinct and protected cultures. The USSR remained an empire to the end, with differential advantages and disadvantages for citizens defined ethnically, usually advantages for titular nationalities in the South Caucasus but less so in the Baltic republics, and almost ubiquitously advantages for Russians throughout the union if less robustly in Armenia and Georgia.

The Baltic peoples had suffered the arrests, deportations, and executions of hundreds of thousands of their fellow citizens in the first years of annexation and the defeat of a desperate rebellion against Soviet power, which went on well into the 1950s. Only after the consolidation of Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw were the deportees allowed to return home. Open action against the state was dangerous, though instances were notable, but less direct resistance, along with widespread collaboration, was common. In the 1960s, accommodating themselves to what appeared inevitable and eternal, the readiness of the Baltic peoples "to cooperate within the Soviet framework increased, and confrontational tactics were avoided."¹⁷ Yet, shortly afterwards, dissent, of which there had hardly been any evidence in the mid-1960s, was born. The confrontation was peaceful, but it was confrontation none the less. August 1968 [the moment of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia to end the Prague Spring] can be said to have been a psychological watershed, marking an end of a cooperative evolution of Moscow's rule in the Baltic republics.¹⁸

16 Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and the Transition to Democracy*, 13.

17 Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 201.

18 Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 203.

Through the next decades two contradictory tendencies affected people in both the Baltic and the South Caucasian states: nationalization and Sovietization (usually read as Russification), that is, identification with one's own republic and nation versus identification with the Soviet project and the USSR. But through the Brezhnev years (1964–82), in the Baltic region Russification proceeded at an accelerated rate, as it did as well in Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, in contrast to the rise in national consolidation in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

As the reforms initiated by Gorbachev opened up the public sphere after 1985, and society wriggled free from authoritarian control to greater democratic participation in politics, Baltic leaders were cautious about violently confronting Russia by overly aggressive policies toward Slavic minorities. At the same time Russia was careful to avoid creating problems around irredenta (for example, in the overwhelmingly Russian city of Narva, hugging the Estonian–Russian border across from Ivangorod).¹⁹ Gorbachev, wading into crowds in Vilnius in January 1990, futilely attempted to convince Lithuanians that it was to their advantage to stay within the Soviet Union. And the democratic forces in Russia, eventually with the dubious democrat Boris Yeltsin at its head, allied with nationalists everywhere, urging them to take as much power as they were able. Once he became president of an independent Russia, Yeltsin made few meaningful efforts to interfere in the nationality policies of the Baltic republics except rhetorically.

Baltic gradualism in the transition out of empire was illustrated on July 28, 1989, when the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR declared the republic to be sovereign and its laws superior to Soviet laws within the republic. While the declaration did not call for full independence, and phrases in the document avoided anti-Soviet hostility—praising the workers during the revolution who aided the formation of a Latvian republic and noting that Lenin's government recognized the independence of Latvia—Latvia was clearly moving toward separation from the USSR. The right to declare sovereignty was based in the injustice and illegality of the annexation of independent Latvia during the period of the Nazi–Soviet Pact, as well as in the sufferings of Latvians—“the decline of the economy and culture of Latvia, ecological crisis, the deformation of ethnic relations, and the devaluation of universal human values”—in the period of “Stalinism and the totalitarian administrative command.” Rather than defending the ethno-national principle of Latvia for the ethnic Latvians, the declaration spoke in a civic national idiom guaranteeing “prosperity not only for Latvians,

19 Laitin, *Identity in Formation*.

but also for all national and ethnic groups living within the territory of Latvia.²⁰ Here as in the other Baltic states moderation rather than violent confrontation was chosen as the better means to achieve the increasingly radical demands of the people.

Peaceful demonstrations—like the series of events from 1987 to 1991 known as the “Singing Revolution” and the Baltic Chain protesting the Nazi–Soviet Pact on the fiftieth anniversary of its signing, August 23, 1989, which involved two million people and stretched 430 miles across all three republics—were the norm. Moderation was even more the case in Lithuania than in its neighboring states. The non-Lithuanian population was a mere 20 percent, with ethnic Russians outnumbered by Poles. In the late 1980s, Russians made up 33.9 percent of Latvia’s population, 30.3 percent of Estonia’s, and only 9.4 percent of Lithuania’s. While Latvia and Estonia adopted the principle of *jus sanguinis* (the right of blood), which favored the “indigenous” population, Lithuania based citizenship on *jus soli* (the right of soil), that is, citizenship based on place of birth. Russians were marginalized and discriminated against in Estonia and Latvia, refused or restricted in obtaining citizenship, and forced to learn the language of the now-dominant population in order to advance politically or professionally. Eventually, the entry of the Baltic republics into the European Union eased the situation of the minorities, and while tensions existed, as in the famous incident of the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn, the Soviet memorial to liberation from the Nazis, in 2007, integration and acceptance by Russians of their new, less favored status continued relatively peacefully.²¹

In late Soviet times neither in the Baltic nor the South Caucasus (in distinction from the North Caucasus) did masses of ordinary people openly defy Soviet authority with force and violence. Dissent and resistance to Gorbachev’s reforms began cautiously, with environmental demonstrations, first in Latvia and Armenia, that appeared to stay within the lines of the permissible. Soviet legality was frequently invoked. Nationalists called for autonomy, then sovereignty, and, eventually, independence. On December 20, 1989, the Lithuanian Communist Party, whose support had withered, voted overwhelmingly for independence. As the authority of the central state evaporated, people took matters in their own hands, even arming themselves, as in the occupation of major buildings in Armenia by 1990 and the forced opening of the border by masses of people between

20 Quotations of the Latvian Declaration of Sovereignty are from the website “Seventeen Moments of Soviet History,” translated by Tija Karklis and Marins Janis Zvaners.

21 Carpinelli, “The Citizenship Policies”; Brüggemann and Kasekamp, “The Politics of History.”

Azerbaijan and Iran. While five of these six republics (Azerbaijan like the traditionally Muslim Central Asian republics being the exception) were among the most determined to secede from the USSR, there was little mass resistance when confronted by the Soviet police or army, again with exceptions as on April 9, 1989, in Georgia, and in Azerbaijan in the Black January pacification by the Soviet Army in 1990. Violence was almost always provoked by forces allied to or in line with the state authorities, such as OMON (military special police units within the Russian armed forces) or conservative communist agitators. When, in January 1991, Soviet forces attacked nationalists in the infamous *Sausio įvykiai* (January Events) in Vilnius and the *Barikādes* (The Barricades) in Riga, the violence was initiated by the forces of order, not local nationalists. The desire for independence mobilized people as the central state both hesitated to use violence and sporadically launched attacks on nationalists.

The relatively peaceful transition to independence in the Baltic republics was framed as a restoration of the norms and institutions of interwar independence. But the early post-Soviet years also saw an explosion of criminality, much of it associated with Russians, particularly in Estonia and Latvia, where non-natives were excluded in various ways from becoming full citizens. In 1993 there were fifty bombings by criminal gangs in Estonia, as well as forty murders connected with criminal networks smuggling nonferrous metals from Russia.²² But there were no armed militias, like *mkhedrioni* in Georgia, which fought the government and drove the country into civil war. In all three Baltic republics, unlike in South Caucasia, state authority remained intact and stable, and the transition from communist governments to the opposition was comparatively smooth and without serious resistance from the local communist leaderships.

An argument was made by the young Estonian prime minister, Mart Laar, in the early 1990s that the youth in his country were less nationalist and anti-communist than the older generation that remembered independent interwar Estonia and had suffered the horrific annexation, the double Sovietization of Estonia, and the deportations in the Stalin years. "This is because," Laar said, "the young are not influenced by Soviet society. We know who we are and that makes us more free and more calm."²³ Or, one might turn that view around: the young generation who came to power after 1991 had in fact been influenced by Soviet society, the stable, stagnant, orderly society of the Brezhnev era, and had not experienced the oppression of

²² Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, xv–xvi.

²³ Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, xvii–xviii.

Stalinism but lived through the dull slowdown in reform and change since the 1960s. Their sense of self and expectations for a different future were pragmatic, cautious, and moderate.

The fruit of civil and relative ethnic peace as well as proximity to Europe was effective if discriminatory democracy in the Baltic states as well as a degree of economic stability, even relative prosperity. The affective disposition in the region was emotional identity with Europeans, distance from the civilizations in which they had lived as colonized peoples for centuries, and a sense of superiority over the Russians, who were perceived as dangerous and treacherous. They eagerly worked toward integration with the EU and eventually into NATO, which they achieved in 2004.

The Baltic republics were multiethnic states at the time of their second independence. Political scientist Rasma Karklins argues that in Latvia ethnic pluralism assisted the creation of political pluralism and that a democratic society deals better with ethnic diversity than an authoritarian one.²⁴ Yet in the South Caucasus multiethnicity, combined with pseudo-autonomous structures bequeathed by Leninist nationality policy and mutually exclusive claims to territories, had the opposite effect: it led to civil and ethnic war. While Estonians, according to political scientist David Laitin, “had low expectations of ethnic violence among Russians and titulars,” far to the south peoples expected annihilation at the hands of those different from them.²⁵

South Caucasia: Instability, Ethnic Conflict, and War

The trajectory of the South Caucasus differed greatly from the Baltic transition. State authority quickly collapsed, at least in Azerbaijan and Georgia, and ethnic conflicts and social divisions favored more militant rather than moderate rhetoric and those who expressed radical policies. The time bomb that Lenin had set in his nationality policies exploded with the decline and fall of the empire. The Bolsheviks after 1917 had granted each major nationality their own territory and a degree, often abused, of autonomy. Unlike the Baltic republics, in Caucasia minorities—Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan; Abkhazians, Ajars, and South Ossetins in Georgia—were granted their own autonomous regions. The Soviet authorities were scrupulous in attempting to match borders to ethnicity.²⁶

24 This is the thesis of Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and the Transition to Democracy*.

25 Laitin, *Identity in Formation*, 325.

26 Saparov, *From Conflict to Autonomy*.

The Leninist solution to the problem of national difference and nationalism was to develop national cultures in order somehow dialectically to diminish interethnic conflict and, ultimately, to move beyond an age of nationalism.²⁷ Instead, the very “solution” to the “national question,” made the union unstable and created lines of territorialized conflict between nationalities in the South Caucasus. As the South Caucasian republics became more ethnically homogeneous and dominated by the entitled nationality whose name adorned the republic, claims by minority nationalities, which had predated Sovietization, led in the Leninist model to claims by nationalities to demarcated “homelands” within two of the three Union republics. Nontitular nationalities felt beleaguered by the dominance of the largest nationality, and resentments, expression of discontents, and occasional demonstrations kept interethnic tensions alive.²⁸

In Georgia the rule of their native son Stalin and his satrap Beria had been imagined as a period of privilege. With the attack at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 by Khrushchev and Mikoyan on the dictator and his reign, Georgians felt that they had been diminished. The status of the republic was now threatened. A popular movement sprang up spontaneously.²⁹ Discontents had long been impossible to openly declare in Soviet society, yet ordinary people clung to the sense that the regime responded to complaints. The widely believed notion that petitions, appeals to patrons, letters to newspapers, and other forms of special pleading might bring results preserved a degree of flexibility in the rigidity of the Soviet system. Even under tsarist and Stalinist despotism, a degree of reciprocity existed between state and ordinary people. But when open demonstrations erupted, and the Georgian authorities could no longer contain the anger of the crowds, the uneasy standoff collapsed in a volley of bullets.

At first the protests were not fundamentally anti-Soviet. The crowds defending the monument to Stalin in central Tbilisi in 1956 conceived of their protests as within the bounds of Soviet legality. For them “Soviet-think was linked inextricably with the personality of Stalin and was embedded alongside notions of Georgian nationhood. [...] It was Khrushchev, Mikoyan, and other leaders who were subverting the true essence of Soviet

27 Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*; Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

28 Nationalities like the Ingilos, Tats, and Talysh in Azerbaijan did not have institutionalized autonomous territories as did the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, and their experience is dealt with insightfully in Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

29 For a full treatment of the events of 1956 in Georgia, see Blauvelt and Smith, *Georgia after Stalin*.

socialism.”³⁰ Violent repression of the protests became the seedbed for a new, more virulent dissident Georgian nationalism directed against the existing order. What began within the discursive universe of Soviet values turned quickly into a fundamental critique of the anti-nationalism of Soviet nationality policies. A focus on ethnicity and territory as the basis of Soviet nations ended up in a zero-sum game: what one ethnic nation won, another lost, and vice versa. Even though the people of Georgia prospered in the post-Stalin years, “Georgian activists in this period were riled not so much by perceptions of economic injustice but by the perceived privileges being accorded to Georgia’s minorities—Abkhaz in particular.”³¹ Anti-Armenian sentiments focused on the figure of Mikoyan, an Armenian, Khrushchev’s close ally, and the first high Soviet leader to have openly criticized Stalin. As Georgians expressed their desires increasingly in ethno-national rhetoric, resentments toward Armenians and other minorities, who traditionally had been seen as a privileged group of *stumrebi* (guests) within Georgia, grew exponentially. Non-Georgian peoples of the republic, most importantly the Abkhaz and South Ossetins, living in their own autonomous regions, reacted with their own claims to self-determination.

In those tragic days of March 1956 Georgia changed fundamentally. The accommodation to Soviet power that had taken decades to establish was shaken. The figure of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, then the obscure son of a famous Georgian writer and later the first president of independent Georgia, is emblematic of the shift in Georgian consciousness. His increasingly militant nationalism provisioned a different and dangerous future for Soviet Georgia. A small group of male friends who had grown up and been in school together formed a dissident movement that managed to survive underground and repeated arrests in the 1960s and 1970s. Gamsakhurdia’s movement called for “Georgia for the Georgians,” which sparked bitter memories of the non-Georgian minorities within the republic, who had been subjected to a state policy of Georgianization during the 1930s–40s, when Georgia was dominated by Lavrenti Beria. The effects of those years reverberated in protests and resistance in the decades after Stalin’s death. The Abkhaz demonstrated against Georgian dominance repeatedly, in 1957, 1966, and 1977–78. The failure to integrate non-Georgians into a pan-Georgian society tore the republic apart in civil and ethnic war in the early 1990s. Secessionist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the end of the Soviet period and beyond were backed by Russian state intervention.

30 Blauvelt and Smith, *Georgia after Stalin*, 7.

31 Blauvelt and Smith, *Georgia after Stalin*, 7.

Both the Soviet government and the All-Union Communist Party came to be seen as anti-national. The peculiar amalgam that blended nationalism of Soviet nationalities with patriotic loyalty and identification with the Soviet Union—both could be simultaneously thought of as homeland (*rodina* in Russian; *samshoblo* in Georgian; *hairenik* in Armenian; *vətən* in Azeri)—was torn apart. Nationalism separated over time from Sovietism first for the dissidents and increasingly among many, particularly in Georgia, and more gradually in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Armenia and Azerbaijan came to independence in quite different ways: Armenia through an anti-communist nationalist movement that successfully replaced the Communist Party in power through democratic elections; Azerbaijan with its communist leadership intact and prepared to support the anti-democratic coup of conservative communists against Gorbachev in August 1991. Armenia enjoyed a reputation internationally as a brave, resistant anti-communist supporter of Western-style reforms, while Azerbaijan stumbled from coup to coup until state power reverted to the former Communist Party boss, Heydar Aliiev.

Armenia was one of the most loyal of the Soviet republics. Living alongside a dangerous neighbor, the smallest Soviet republic gained security and a restricted modernity in the Soviet years. Unlike Georgians, who generally remained within their republic, Armenia's educated elite populated institutions and political positions throughout the union. Armenians were a diasporic nation, with as many people scattered throughout the USSR and the rest of the world as lived in the republic. Given their precarious position on the border with Turkey, the power that had nearly annihilated Armenians in the Genocide of 1915, Armenian memories through generations maintained that experience of mass loss—territories, towns, and the culture of Western Armenia (Eastern Anatolia)—as the central focus of national identity. The affective disposition of Armenians was as a martyred nation; in Milan Kundera's phrase, they are a small nation that can disappear and knows it. For Armenians, their other neighbors, the Azerbaijanis, were a suspect people, considered culturally inferior, potentially barbaric, and once the conflict over the exclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh for Armenians) erupted in 1988, expanding into an interstate war in 1991, Armenians saw Azerbaijanis simply as Turks and as possible perpetrators of a second genocide.

Azerbaijanis had benefitted as well as suffered from the years of Soviet rule. The modernizing policies of the Kremlin had brought literacy in the Azeri and Russian languages, urbanized and industrialized the republic, and raised the material well-being of the population, which benefitted

from its oil and gas riches. The conflict over Karabakh stimulated what had smoldered as resentment of the more privileged Armenians and Russians into an Armenophobic nationalism. Azerbaijan lost the first Karabakh war, which ended with a Russian-brokered armistice in 1994, but with large parts of their country occupied and about a million Azerbaijanis turned into refugees by subsequent Armenian conquests. Azerbaijanis, like Armenians, saw the other as an existential threat to their future.

In Azerbaijan, the nationalist opponents of the communists failed to hold power very long, and the communists soon reappeared, now dressed in nationalist garb. In Georgia, the former Communist Party boss of Georgia in the 1970s and early 1980s, Eduard Shevardnadze, returned to his homeland and effectively put down the armed resistance of the nationalists under Gamsakhurdia, attempted but failed to retake Abkhazia, and reluctantly gave in and dealt with the Yeltsin government in Russia. In Armenia the communists swiftly accepted their impotency and moved aside to allow the Armenian National Movement under Levon Ter-Petrosian to come to power through democratic elections. Unlike Georgia and Azerbaijan, Armenia avoided civil war, and the Ter-Petrosian government benefitted from its victory in the war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The republic of Azerbaijan fell into the hands of the Aliev family, heirs to the powerful Heydar Aliev, the longtime Communist Party chief (1969–82) before being dismissed by Gorbachev. The sultanist regime of the Alievs brought a harsh domestic peace to Azerbaijani society, aided by oil and gas exports, but the catalyzing element in forging a unitary Azerbaijani sense of nation was the Karabakh war, the refugee influx from lands occupied by Armenians, and regime propaganda stirring up hatred of Armenians. Azerbaijani nationalism, never very strong in Soviet times, was a reactive nationalism, inflamed by the Karabakh conflict. Heydar's son and heir, Ilham, used the struggle over Karabakh as a weapon to generate anti-Armenian fervor and support for his repressive oligarchic regime. While neither side was willing to compromise on the Karabakh question, Azerbaijan grew richer, built up its armed forces, and found reliable allies, most importantly Turkey and Israel but also at times Russia, to supply it with weapons.

In 2020 Baku launched a successful war against Karabakh, reducing its size and forcing thousands of Armenians to flee to Armenia. Three years later, after months of blockading Karabakh, the Azerbaijanis conquered what was left of the self-proclaimed republic of Artsakh, and ethnically cleansed the enclave of the remaining 120,000 Armenians. Armenia's ostensible ally, Russia, was preoccupied with its war in Ukraine, disaffected from the democratic government of Nikol Pashinyan in Yerevan, and did not

effectively aid Armenia in its defense. Dictatorship Aliev-style, aided by Turkish and Israeli drones, proved to be a more effective military force than the divided, distracted democracy in Armenia.³² No Western power sanctioned Baku for its ethnic cleansing of a population that could trace its continuity back millennia.

Conclusions

Given that the most profound difference between the Baltic and South Caucasian republics was the intensity of ethnic and territorial conflicts, it is possible to make a simple structural, strategic, or rational choice explanation for the more peaceful transition to democratic governance in the north and the fratricidal and sanguinary exit from empire in the south, which resulted in instability in Georgia, autocracy in Azerbaijan, and fractured democracy in Armenia. But structures do not determine or motivate action in an unmediated way; they influence but do not fatally shape attitudes and understandings. The affective dispositions in the two regions, despite the experiences of living in the Soviet empire, differed fundamentally. The propensity in the Baltic republics was to compromise and negotiate cautiously as leaders contemplated how to deal with Russian minorities that they feared. At the same time, Yeltsin's Russia was far less interventionist in the Baltic region than in the South Caucasus, which bordered the country's most fragile and fractured frontier, the North Caucasus. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Soviet and Russian leaders felt less danger from Europe than from Turkey, which spewed pan-Turkic rhetoric and appeared to have ambitions in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. And, therefore, in the early post-Soviet years the Baltic states enjoyed support from the West and less threat from Moscow.

The calculation of who was the principal enemy shifted in the Baltic region but not in the South Caucasus. Until the mid-twentieth century Poles

32 In his brilliant analysis of the war, Vicken Cheterian demonstrates that in "the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan succeeded by securing the participation of the Turkish military and Syrian mercenaries, plus a constant supply of Israeli weaponry, while keeping Iran out and Russia waiting for 44 days. On the other hand, Russia, despite being Armenia's principal strategic partner, preferred to take a balanced position during the fighting, even while NATO member Turkey was directly participating in military operations in Russia's 'Near Abroad'. It was this configuration of forces that tilted the strategic advantage to the Azerbaijani side's favour in 2020." "The Armenian military, just like its strategic thinking and diplomacy, was not ready to fight the kind of war machine that faced them in 2020." Cheterian, "Technological Determinism," 13, 17.

were the major threat to Lithuanians, only later to become potential allies. Germans ceased to be a danger to Estonians and Latvians, who a century earlier had been subordinated to them. But Turks and Azerbaijanis had been a menace for Armenians throughout the twentieth century; Armenians had been resented and seen as a danger by Azerbaijanis in 1905 and 2005; and Russians remained decisive in the conflicts between Abkhazians and South Osetians and Georgians, as well as the arbiters in the Karabakh wars. Turkey and Russia were in the neighborhood, and Europe was far away.

The deployment of affective analysis encompasses cultural explanations without the essentialism that often stealthily lurks in conceptualizations of national character. Culture, as William H. Sewell informs us, is a “thin coherence” that characterizes ethnicities, classes, and other groups, and, I would add, it constitutes and is shaped by the evolving affective dispositions of those who share the sense of affiliation with the group.³³ In some cultures, and this fits the Caucasus better than the Baltic cultures, fiery expression of one’s passions is permissible, even laudable, at least among males; modesty rather than ambition is required of women. In others, more in the Baltic region, restraint in public behavior is deemed most appropriate. Such cultural dispositions are generative and fashioned by the emotion regimes that align with cultures. What works in given structural, geographical, and social contexts reinforce these dispositions and motivate people to take action, which by any rational calculation would be risky and potentially self-destructive. Nationalism heavily contributes to an affective disposition that has the capacity to bring individuals into a collective group despite the dangers that face a nation confronting an empire. Such dispositions solve the collective action problem that plagues rational choice theory.

All six republics in this study were multiethnic. Diversity in and of itself does not lead either to peace or violence. But the affective dispositions towards others, generated by history and experience, ambitions and senses of threat, not to mention the rhetoric and example of elites, do dispose people toward peace or violence. The optimistic conclusion of this chapter, then, is that diverse peoples can live together, as most have in modern history, but only when they feel secure in their homes, when their hopes and desires do not lead toward annihilation of the desires and hopes of others. Objective factors offer both walls and windows. It is how those walls and windows are imagined and felt that offers to some a bright and harmonious future and to others a dismal and disastrous collision with neighbors with whom they are fated to live.

33 On culture as thin coherence, see Sewell, *Logics of History*.

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11. Understanding Hesitancy: The Latvian Russophone Minority and Russia's Full-scale Invasion of Ukraine

Mārtiņš Kaprāns

Abstract: This chapter examines the hesitancy of Latvian Russophones in taking a clear stance on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Using survey data and theoretical insights from the spiral of silence theory, social identity theory, and the theory of cognitive dissonance, it explores the interplay of perceived social control, media trust, and group cohesion. Findings indicate that hesitancy is reinforced by low trust in media, informational self-isolation, and weak in-group consensus rather than explicit support for Russia. The chapter highlights the role of strategic ambiguity in navigating political pressures and identity dilemmas. These insights contribute to broader discussions on opinion formation and the complexities of ethnic minority positioning in geopolitically tense environments.

Keywords: spiral of silence, in-group consensus, cognitive dissonance, nonpositioning, Russophone identity

On February 24, 2022, Russia's transition from simmering conflict to all-out war in Ukraine created profound dilemmas for Russians settled in democratic European nations. These quandaries were especially pronounced in Latvia, which, in proportion to its titular population, hosts the largest Russian-speaking minority in the EU.¹ The invasion rallied the broader Latvian

¹ This research was supported by the project "Vectors of Societal Cohesion: From Cohesion around the Nation-state (2012–2018) to a Cohesive Civic Community for the Security of the State, Society and Individuals (2024–2025)" (VPP-KM-SPASA-2023/1-0002).

populace, sparking what Dovilė Budrytė terms a “vicarious identification with Ukraine.”² In contrast, the hostilities introduced a significant new layer of existential uncertainty for local Russophones. Political discourse and targeted policy initiatives in Latvia began displaying intensified symbolic antagonism toward the Russian language and cultural heritage.³

Beyond its immediate regional impact, Russia’s military offensive has profoundly influenced Latvia’s nation-building trajectory, particularly in relation to its substantial Russophone demographic. It revived deep-seated historical frictions and compelled diverse segments of Latvian society to reevaluate their sense of collective identity. Despite concerted efforts by the Latvian government and civil society to condemn Russia and stand in solidarity with Ukraine, most local Russian speakers have opted for neutrality.⁴ This chapter investigates the factors underlying their reluctance to align overtly with either side, illuminating how Latvian Russophone identity adapts amid international upheaval.

Public Hesitancy: Social and Cognitive Influences

Social science literature extensively explores the phenomenon of public hesitancy towards politically sensitive and polarizing issues, attributing this cautious stance to a combination of psychological, sociocultural, and informational factors. Specifically, public opinion scholars have well documented the tendency to avoid ideologically sharp positions. This is often discussed in the context of the spiral of silence theory, which suggests that individuals tend to avoid confrontation with the majority opinion by concealing their dissenting views.

The spiral of silence theory, as posited by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, arises from a prevailing climate of opinion in which certain beliefs and attitudes are dominant and perpetuated by various media.⁵ Individuals confronted with a conflicting climate of opinion may withhold their views, leading those with differing opinions to feel marginalized. Over time, the fear of social isolation can lead to the suppression and exclusion of oppositional opinion groups from public discourse. Along with this fear, another important

2 Budrytė, “A Decolonising Moment of Sorts.”

3 See Kaprāns, “Toppling Monuments”; Vohra, “Latvia Is Going on Offense”; Kuczyńska-Zonik, “Silent Protesters or Acceptors?”

4 Bergmane, “Latvia’s First Response”; LSM.lv, “Less Than Half of Russians”; Krumm et al., “Under Pressure.”

5 Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*.

assumption defining the spiral of silence is individuals' quasi-statistical sense, which "forms a picture of the distribution of opinion in their social environment and of the trend of opinion."⁶ To be sure, a quasi-statistical sense is stimulated and maintained by the communication ecosystem.

Could the prevailing attitudinal hesitancy among Latvian Russophones regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine be interpreted as a strategic choice to conceal pro-Russian views? Since the restoration of independence in 1991, Latvia has experienced a tumultuous climate of opinion, clearly reflected in the antagonistic discourse surrounding the status of the Russian language, historical interpretations of events in the twentieth century in particular, and Latvia's geopolitical orientation.⁷ This ideologically charged public space has significantly shaped the identity of Russian speakers, with various political forces exploiting identity boundaries and regime divides.⁸

In the past decade, changes in Latvia's opinion climate have set the stage for the social isolation of individuals explicitly supporting Putin's regime. Particularly after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the media landscape in Latvia has increasingly reflected what can be described as the securitization of identity boundaries.⁹ For instance, in 2022 all Russian-controlled media outlets were banned, and criminal proceedings were initiated against numerous individuals who glorified and justified crimes against peace and war crimes committed by Russia.¹⁰ Consequently, support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine has become a marginalized stance in public space. Considering the spiral of silence theory and the extensive history of interethnic relations in Latvia, this chapter proposes to test three related hypotheses about the impact of perceived social control and opinion climate on hesitancy towards the war:

- H_{1A}: Russian speakers who believe that linguistic discrimination is practiced in Latvia will exhibit a higher level of hesitation regarding Russia's invasion than other opinion groups.
- H_{1B}: Russian speakers who perceive that Latvians' attitudes toward them have worsened since 2022 will exhibit a higher level of hesitation toward Russia's invasion than other opinion groups.

6 Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence," 45.

7 See Muižnieks, *Manufacturing Enemy Images?*; Muižnieks, *The Geopolitics of History*; Cheskin, "Synthesis and Conflict."

8 Nakai, "The Influence of Party"; Duvold et al., *Political Culture*, 42–49; Pupčēnoks et al., "Microfoundations of Threat."

9 Kachuyevski, "The 'Russian World.'"

10 Andžāns, "Small Powers"; Liepiņa and Jemberga, "A Year of War."

- H₁C: Russian speakers who believe that freedom of speech is restricted in Latvia will demonstrate a higher level of hesitation towards Russia's invasion than other opinion groups.
- H₁D: Russian speakers who are not interested in what is happening in Ukraine and do not trust the information provided by the media about the war will show a higher level of hesitation than other opinion groups.

While the spiral of silence theory has attracted substantial scholarly attention and offers important insights into the mechanisms of social control and the formation of public opinion, its empirical effects have been contested.¹¹ In particular, it falls short of explaining the attitudinal processes and mechanisms of silence at the in-group level, where pressures from both in-group and out-group interactions intersect in more subtle ways. Therefore, I draw on the social identity approach, which addresses these conceptual gaps by expanding our understanding of how social influence and opinion climates operate within groups. This approach posits that group cohesion is influenced by members' willingness to acknowledge mutual similarities and their ability to maintain positive self-stereotypes and shared emotions. High cohesion results in stronger social influence on group members, which facilitates a more distinct separation from the values, norms, and behaviors of the out-group.¹² This mechanism underlies the peer effect, where the influence of group norms and identities can strongly dictate individual choices and opinions. However, the peer effect is not just a matter of passive conformity but an active process of engaging with group norms that individuals find meaningful and self-defining.

In contexts where the ethnic majority expresses strong, unified opinions, minorities may experience an increased pressure to conform to the majority viewpoint yet simultaneously feel a need to maintain distinct group identities. This dynamic can lead to what has been described as a "fragile consensus" within the minority group, as individuals navigate the tension between external assimilation pressures and the internal drive to reinforce their ethnic identity.¹³ As a result, ethnic minorities often exhibit a pattern of tentative or hesitant attitudes toward issues where the majority's views are clear and potentially oppositional as a way to mitigate potential intergroup conflicts and preserve a sense of group cohesion and distinctiveness.

Over the past three decades, the social identity of Latvian Russophones has been shaped within a complex relational framework, described by

11 Glynn and Huge, "Speaking in Spirals."

12 Turner et al., *Rediscovering the Social Group*; Turner, *Social Influence*.

13 Reicher et al., "The Social Identity Approach."

scholars as a “quadratic nexus” connecting kin-state, national minorities, resident state, and international institutions.¹⁴ The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a critical juncture for Russian speakers, who found themselves as minorities within a newly independent nation. Struggling to assimilate into an ethno-cultural-centric national identity, they began to form an alternative social identity centered around the Russian language, culture, and Soviet history. This period also saw Russia begin to play a significant role in fostering a sense of belonging among Russophones abroad.¹⁵

While the Latvian Russophone community has developed a shared awareness of the symbolic boundaries that separate it from the titular nation of ethnic Latvians, it has never been considered a consolidated social group. Over time, in-group differentiation has become more pronounced, manifesting in multilayered relations with the Latvian state and society, Russia, and the imagined Western world, as well as in diverse lifestyles and media practices.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the symbolic boundaries between Russian speakers and ethnic Latvians have proven to be quite flexible and porous in everyday life.¹⁷ Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has also fragmented the Russophone electorate, with the Harmony Party, which was long the most popular among Russian speakers, losing many of its supporters. However, the Russian language remains a stable, consolidating basis for this community, although bilingualism is increasingly prevalent among members of the younger generation. The strategic narratives propagated by Russia continue to reach Latvian Russophones in various ways, potentially fostering an alienated diasporic consciousness in certain segments.¹⁸

The transformation of social identity, which may have intensified in recent years, raises questions about the link between the cohesion of the Russophone minority and in-group influence. The uncertain positioning of Russian speakers towards the war in Ukraine could be seen as the result of a weak intragroup consensus, but it also reflects a certain logic of identity formation, which can be defined as marginalization.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the spiral of silence theory suggests that weak consensus and in-group fragmentation

14 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*; Smith, “Framing the National Question”; Pettai, “Explaining Ethnic Politics”; Cheskin, “Identity and Integration.”

15 Berg and Ehin, *Identity and Foreign Policy*.

16 Cheskin, “Identity and Integration”; Kaprāns and Mieriņa, “Minority Reconsidered”; Vihalemm and Juzefovičs, “They Say We Are All Zombies”; Hercberga, “How to Be Many.”

17 Ekmanis, “Host Land”; Kaprāns et al., *Starpkultūru stereotipi*; Platt, *Border Conditions*.

18 Bolt et al., *Kremlin Communication*; Hoyle et al., “Life through Grey-Tinted Glasses”; Hoyle et al., “Weapons of Mass Division.”

19 Cheskin, “Exploring Russian-Speaking Identity.”

may be indicative of various mechanisms of social control and silencing at play within different Russophone segments. These reservations inform my next hypothesis (H₂): Russian speakers whose immediate social environments lack a strong consensus about Russia's invasion are much more likely to exhibit a hesitant attitude towards the war in Ukraine.

The preceding hypotheses emphasize the social context of opinion formation. However, when considering a hesitant attitude, it is also crucial to account for the cognitive processes influenced by Russia's strategic narratives. This adjustment shifts the analytical focus to the interplay between an individual's prior knowledge and unfamiliar experiences. The theory of cognitive dissonance insists that people tend to establish internal harmony, consistency, or congruity within their opinions, attitudes, knowledge, and values. In line with this theory, one of the major ways a dissonance is reduced is by decreasing the importance of the elements involved in the dissonant relations.²⁰ As a result, ignorance and hesitancy emerge as dissonance reduction strategies. These strategies could be reinforced by selective exposure to information sources that confirm existing knowledge and attitudes and help to avoid those sources of new information which would be likely to increase the existing dissonance.

In the Latvian Russophone community there is notably strong support for Russia's geopolitical narratives.²¹ These narratives have been promoted since the early 2000s, coinciding with the onset of Putin's presidency of Russia and of its so-called compatriot policy.²² Occasionally, Russian propaganda has recycled Soviet-era claims, such as portraying NATO as the archenemy. In other words, there is a notable ideological legacy that has predated the present pro-Kremlin attitudes of Russian speakers towards Russia's global role.²³ Nevertheless, the 2022 full-scale attack on Ukraine—a military aggression geographically close to Latvia and widely condemned internationally—challenged this pro-Kremlin framework and may have yielded what Festinger called “identical dissonance in a large number of people.”²⁴ The magnitude of dissonance perhaps increased with the influx of thousands of Ukrainian refugees into Latvia, where many shared their traumatic experiences. This leads to the final hypothesis (H₃): Russian

20 Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 264.

21 See Kaprāns and Mieriņa, *Ideological Polarization*; Cherson and Estes, “Paradoxes of Minority”; Kaprāns, “Russia's Economic Narratives.”

22 See Kudors, *Russia and Latvia*.

23 Kaprāns and Juzefovičs, “Reconsidering Media-Centrism.”

24 Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 262.

speakers who generally support Russia's geopolitical narratives are likely to show greater hesitancy than other opinion groups.

Methodology

In this chapter I analyze quantitative data from two nationally representative surveys conducted by the research company SKDS in April/May 2022 and April 2023.²⁵ Each survey interviewed 2,021 respondents aged eighteen to seventy-five. Half of these respondents (1,016) were interviewed face-to-face at their residences, and the other half via a web survey. From the total sample, I selected a subgroup of respondents who identified their nationality as "Russian" or "other" and indicated their family language as either Russian or Russian and Latvian. This subgroup, referred to as "Latvian Russian speakers," comprises 1,515 respondents, split almost evenly between the two surveys.

I employed a binary logistic regression to analyze these data, focusing on the dependent variable of hesitancy towards Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, coded as "Neither one nor the other." The survey question assessing this attitude revealed a dominant hesitancy among the Russophone community (fig. 11.1). Interestingly, a similar level of hesitancy existed prior to the invasion, during discussions surrounding the annexation of Crimea and the Russia–Ukraine conflict, when support for Russia was significantly higher.²⁶

Demographically, the data show that noncitizens and materially deprived Russophones in Riga are more likely to support Russia, whereas younger Russian speakers, citizens, and residents of Latgale, the most Russophone region of Latvia, tend to support Ukraine ($p < 0.001$).

For hypothesis testing, I utilized various independent variables (see Appendix 1) to evaluate the influence of the climate of opinion: (1) perceived linguistic discrimination; (2) Latvians' attitudes toward the Russophone population after invasion; (3) freedom of expression on sensitive topics; (4) opinions on media objectivity regarding Ukraine; and (5) interest in events in Ukraine. Additionally, the study considers the influence of social environment through attitudes toward Russia's invasion as perceived by

25 The survey data are partially published in Krumm et al., "Under Pressure." I also worked with SPSS data files from the 2022 and 2023 surveys, which are not publicly available. The SPSS data files may be obtained from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

26 Kaprāns and Juzefovičs, "Reconsidering Media-Centrism," 170.

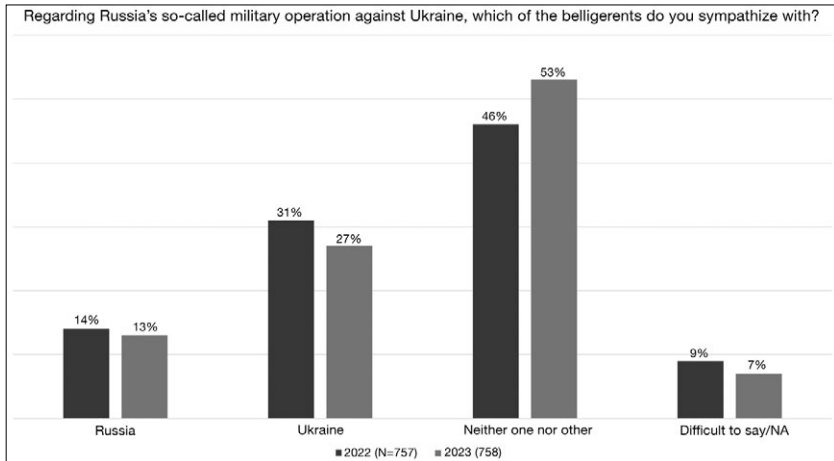


Figure 11.1. Aggregated data from the 2022 and 2023 surveys representing the responses of Latvian Russian speakers. Source: Krumm et al., "Under Pressure"; SPSS data files available from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Russophone respondents' closest social circles. The impact of Russia's geopolitical narratives is assessed by examining respondents' attitudes toward frequent claims in Russian propaganda about the invasion of Ukraine, and about the West and Latvia.

Three models of logistic regression explore these hypotheses separately, with the robustness of the findings tested in a comprehensive Model 4 that includes all variables. Each model calculates the odds ratio, with values above 1.0 indicating a positive impact and values below 1.0 showing a negative impact on hesitancy towards the invasion. All models control for sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, education, nationality, citizenship, socioeconomic status, employment, and place of residence, and also include survey waves to account for changes in attitudes over time. Each model meets the criteria of the Omnibus test and Hosmer and Lemeshow Test.

Results

To test the impact of the opinion climate on Russian speakers' hesitancy, regression Model 1 was developed. Demographic variables in this model indicate that women, residents of Latgale, the less educated, and notably older (age forty-five to seventy-five) and socioeconomically disadvantaged Russian speakers are more likely to form a hesitant opinion group when controlling for different opinion climate indicators.

Regarding specific opinion climate variables, the regression results show that Russian speakers who perceive linguistic discrimination in Latvia are 66 percent more hesitant towards the war, supporting the hypothesis on the effects of perceived linguistic discrimination (H1A). Additionally, support for the claim that Latvians' attitudes towards Russian speakers have worsened since the invasion increased significantly from 47 percent in 2022 to 68 percent in 2023. Those endorsing this view are also more likely to support Russia in the war ($p \leq 0.001$). However, Model 1 indicates that unlike generic perceptions of linguistic discrimination, the perceived deterioration of interethnic relations after February 24, 2022, does not significantly impact hesitancy. Thus, the hypothesis concerning this specific indicator of opinion climate (H1B) should be rejected.

To test the influence of perceived restrictions on freedom of speech, a two-step cluster analysis was utilized, classifying responses into three perceived social control clusters over freedom of expression: (1) high, (2) moderate, and (3) low social control.²⁷ Russian speakers feeling strong restrictions (high social control) are more likely to support Russia, while those perceiving fewer restrictions (low social control) tend to support Ukraine ($p < 0.001$). Yet, neither strong nor moderate perceptions of social control significantly increase hesitancy towards the war, leading to the rejection of hypothesis H1C.

The perception of media bias strongly influences hesitancy. A marked skepticism about the objectivity of media reporting on Ukraine—whether controlled by Russia or independent—triples hesitancy towards the war.²⁸ A low trust in media coupled with intentional ignorance about events in Ukraine significantly elevates hesitancy. These findings validate the hypothesis that Russian speakers uninterested in Ukrainian events and distrustful of media coverage exhibit greater hesitancy (H1D). Interestingly, similar results measuring the impact of media trust and ignorance of Ukraine could be observed in 2014 and 2017 when relatively high hesitancy towards the Russia–Ukraine conflict was also reported by Latvian Russophones.²⁹ A

27 All three clusters were well connected and separated from each other. The average silhouette value is 0.7, and the ratio between the largest and the smallest cluster is 2.26. The clusters were placed in a separate model, keeping the other independent variables from Model 1. More detailed information on this specific model is available upon request.

28 Based on the data on the perceived objectivity of the media reports about Ukraine, three clusters were created: (1) deniers of media objectivity, (2) media ignorers, (3) supporters of Russia's uncontrolled or independent media. This analysis was also conducted through a two-step cluster analysis. All three clusters are relatively cohesive and separated from each other. The average silhouette value is 0.5, while the ratio between the largest and the smallest cluster is 3.22.

29 See Kaprāns and Juzefovičs, "Reconsidering Media-Centrism," 176–79.

Table 11.1. Logistic Regression of Supporting Neither Russia nor Ukraine in the War

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
Gender (Male) Female	1,330	*						
Age (18–34)								
35–44	1,095		1,584	**				
45–54	2,430	***	2,256	***				
55–75	2,243	***	1,796	**				
Education (Higher education)								
Elementary/incomplete secondary	1,846	**			2,719	*		
Secondary	1,513				2,081	**		
Citizenship (Latvian)								
Noncitizen					516	*	387	*
Russian citizen					303	*	365	
Region of Latvia (Riga)								
Pierīga	1,245				771			
Vidzeme	1,220				844			
Kurzeme	1,454				1,865			
Zemgale	700				480			
Latgale	1,570	*			2,402	**		
Economic status (Middle class and rich)								
Poor or near poor	1,323		1,316		831		813	
Below middle class	2,077	***	2,431	***	1,749	*	1,819	*
Linguistic discrimination in Latvia (Disagree) Agree	1,666	**					1,149	
Latvians' attitude towards Russian speakers since the invasion (Improved)								
Worsened	692						664	
No change	880						935	
Media bias in reporting about Ukraine (Trust in independent media)		***						
Don't know/NA	3,344	***					2,172	
Low trust in all media	3,160	***					2,571	*
Interest in Ukraine (Interested) Not interested	2,898	***					2,110	*
Attitude within the closest social circle towards the war (Definitely sympathizes with the Ukrainian side)								
Sympathizes more with Ukrainian side, but there are also people who support Russia			2,267	**			1,560	
They are different—some support Ukraine, while others support Russia			14,555	***			7,373	***
More Russia, but there are also people who support Ukraine			3,339	***			532	
Definitely sympathizes with Russia			1,454				208	*
Neither one nor the other			120,406	***			220,820	***
Opinion on Russia's geopolitical narratives (Anti-Kremlin) Pro-Kremlin					6,939	***	7,005	***

***Sig. \leq 0.001, **Sig. \leq 0.01, *Sig. \leq 0.05, ~ Sig. \leq 0.1

Note: Only the demographic predictors that were significant in at least one model are reflected in the table. The model also controls for employment status, family language, and the survey year.

tendency to isolate from the media-driven informative environment typifies an apolitical and nonparticipating Russophone audience. Vihalemm and Juzefovičs suggest that in the context of mediatized conflict, this type of audience may exhibit nonparticipation either as a consistent behavior or as a strategic, deliberate withdrawal.³⁰

Model 2 highlights a pronounced peer effect on hesitancy towards the war. Russian speakers whose perceived closest social circles (e.g., relatives, friends, acquaintances) lack a strong consensus about Russia's invasion show a marked increase in hesitancy (H₂ confirmed). This effect is less characteristic among younger individuals, suggesting alienation and a potential generational shift in political attitudes.

Model 3 assesses the impact of cognitive dissonance on hesitancy. Clusters based on attitudes towards Russia's geopolitical narratives show that supporters of these narratives are significantly more hesitant (6.9 times) when justifying the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, confirming hypothesis H₃.³¹ The geopolitical narratives reveal significant internal differentiation within the Russian-speaking community, influenced by education, citizenship status,³² and economic well-being, with a notable geographical division in Latgale. Such in-group differentiation also sheds light on the social background of cognitive dissonance.

Finally, Model 4 consolidates the findings, showing that deteriorated Latvian–Russian relations after Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion and perceived linguistic discrimination do not significantly affect hesitancy (H_{1B} rejected). However, low media trust and ignorance about events in Ukraine continue to influence attitudes significantly. A very strong effect is also shown by the prevailing sentiments in the closest peer circles. Model 4 reinforces the argument that the weak consensus among certain Russophone segments helps to legitimize and reproduce hesitation about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Model 4 also indicates that cognitive dissonance may play a crucial role, with support for pro-Kremlin narratives increasing hesitancy sevenfold.

30 Vihalemm and Juzefovičs, "They Say We Are All Zombies."

31 By excluding Russophones who have no opinion about these claims from the two-step cluster analysis, I was able to create two mutually well-separated and cohesive clusters: (1) Supporters of Russia's strategic narratives and (2) opponents of Russia's strategic narratives. Silhouette measures of cohesion and separation 0.5. Ratio size between the largest cluster and the smallest cluster 1.05.

32 Latvia has a large group of noncitizens (175,401 people in 2023), comprised of individuals who moved to Latvia or were born in Latvia after the Soviet occupation on June 17, 1940, and who refused to go through naturalization after 1991 or did not pass the naturalization exam. Noncitizens are predominately a Russophone group; most of them identify as ethnic Russians.

Only citizenship and material conditions remain significant demographic predictors in Model 4. While Russophones with a higher relative material deprivation form the core of the hesitant opinion group, Russian-speaking noncitizens are more likely to support Russia ($p < 0.001$).

Overall, Model 4 offers a more nuanced perspective on the nature of Russian speakers' hesitancy. Informational self-isolation, along with support for pro-Kremlin positions, suggests that hesitation is primarily sustained by a low tolerance for dissenting views on the war. (Conversely, one might argue for a high tolerance if the hesitant attitude were to be explained by a high trust in independent media and an active interest in Ukrainian events.) This reinforces the argument that by choosing hesitancy, Latvian Russian speakers are attempting to resolve their cognitive inconsistency. Engaging with Ukrainian events and accepting independent media reports on Ukraine would likely increase, rather than decrease, their dissonance.

Discussion

Pierre Bourdieu has famously argued that “don't know” responses—and their variations—are the most important information supplied by opinion polls, as they illustrate the conditional probability and production of opinion.³³ Building on this insight, the present chapter has explored the conditionality of “hesitancy” by asking whether Latvian Russophones' persistent reluctance to take a clear stance on the Russo–Ukrainian War stems primarily from ignorance or from less visible mechanisms such as social control and cognitive elaboration.

One possible moderator examined here is the fear of social isolation among Russian speakers. In line with the spiral of silence theory, I hypothesized that the strong pro-Ukrainian consensus within the Latvian majority—including its political and cultural elite—and the legal penalties for justifying the war together create an opinion climate that discourages pluralism and fosters conformity. The swift and sustained condemnation of war apologists in Latvian public discourse, coupled with more stringent legal repercussions, has further isolated pro-Kremlin opinions. It is plausible that this isolation motivates some Latvian Russophones to assume a “neutral” stance of not supporting either side. However, the data used in this study caution against an overly simplistic reading: although many respondents sense that attitudes toward Russophones deteriorated after the invasion, this perception does

33 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 339–40.

not predict war-related hesitancy as a “strategy of silence.” By contrast, the belief in systematic discrimination against Russian speakers in Latvia exerts a more substantial influence. Indeed, the strongest predictors of hesitancy related to the Latvian opinion climate are low media trust and a general ignorance about events in Ukraine, both of which appear to help Russian speakers distance themselves from difficult moral choices concerning Russia’s war on Ukraine.

These findings also underscore the importance of social circles as a conduit for internal consensus within the Russophone community. A weak in-group consensus about the war exerts a robust, persistent peer effect on hesitancy, effectively modeling a shared “normal” stance. This hesitancy emerges from a tension between the out-group–defined (Latvian) opinion climate and a Russophone in-group whose stance on the war remains unsettled. Erving Goffman’s notion of a “primary social framework”—a background understanding of events shaped by collective will and aims—helps explain how weak consensus coalesces into a workable orientation.³⁴ Older Russophone cohorts may be especially prone to this hesitant framework, possibly reflecting their longer and more intensive exposure to Russian propaganda narratives.

It is worth noting that this study relies on respondents’ perceived social consensus, which aligns with the “quasi-statistical sense” described in the spiral of silence theory. My results suggest that many Latvian Russians see hesitation about Russia’s invasion as the dominant stance in their circles, a view likely reinforced by external information sources. In some cases, to avoid social isolation within their own community, Russophones may feel pressured to conform to this perceived norm. Thus, the spiral of silence may operate more powerfully within the Russophone community than in cross-community relations between Latvians and Russian speakers.

Not aligning explicitly with Russia’s invasion has, in some contexts, become a self-sufficient ideological position exerting its own form of social control. While limitations in the data prevented a deeper investigation into whether hesitancy serves to suppress more radical minority views in the Russophone milieu, the patterns observed in Model 4 indicate that a weak in-group consensus, low media trust, and avoiding news about Ukraine create an opinion climate conducive to hesitancy. Critically, these tendencies do not cluster in any distinct demographic group, hinting at their broader, more pervasive nature. The data here also cannot determine to what extent individual differences—in particular, a propensity toward

34 Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 22.

self-censorship—contribute to hesitation. The spiral of silence framework emphasizes situational and perceptual factors over such personality traits, but exploring these individual-level variables would illuminate whether hesitant Russophones align with Hayes et al.'s claim that “self-censors tend to be relatively shy and socially anxious, low in self-esteem, and worry about what others think of them.”³⁵

The strong influence of Russia's strategic narratives on Latvian Russophones likewise challenges a binary view of public opinion. Glynn and Huges note that public opinion is more aptly conceptualized as a continuum.³⁶ In the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, pro-Kremlin rhetoric informs many Russophones' worldview, yet the brutality of the invasion itself elicits a moral distancing that often reduces to “all sides are guilty” or “we are for peace.” This ambiguity—especially visible in Latgale—may reflect attempts to reduce cognitive dissonance. Nonpositioning functions as an exit strategy enabling individuals to manage cognitive inconsistencies and skirt the direct conflict between pro-Kremlin rhetoric and the on-the-ground realities of a cruel war. As Festinger argues, dissonance compels individuals to seek out like-minded peers who share the cognition they wish to sustain.³⁷ In this sense, dissonance not only fuels social bonding within the Latvian Russophone community but also underpins the pronounced peer influence that sustains hesitancy.

Interpreting the social implications of cognitive dissonance requires viewing Latvian Russophones' perspectives on the invasion as a form of social representation. According to Moscovici, social representations encompass dynamic systems of shared values, ideas, and practices that shape public discourse around disruptive events, such as wars.³⁸ The notion of “emancipated representation”³⁹ involves cognitive polyphasia—the coexistence of divergent cognitive styles within one group or individual.⁴⁰ Such polyphasia likely sustains a “moderately critical” Russophone identity in Latvia.⁴¹ Defined by its hybrid nature and the conditionality of symbolic boundaries, this identity navigates securitization, essentialization, and polarization discourses.⁴² Consequently, uncertainty about Russia's war on

35 Hayes et al., “Willingness to Self-censor,” 314.

36 Glynn and Huges, “Speaking in Spirals,” 290.

37 Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 265.

38 Moscovici, “Notes towards a Description,” 235.

39 Moscovici, “Notes towards a Description,” 221.

40 Voelklein and Howarth, “A Review of Controversies,” 434.

41 Kaprāns and Mieriņa, “Minority Reconsidered.”

42 Vihalemm and Juzefovičs, “How Baltic Russian-Speaking Audiences.”

Ukraine emerges as a natural outgrowth of such hybrid morality, creating space between the rival claims of Russia and the West (including Latvia). Within this space, overt support for either side is moderated by shared ignorance, apolitical detachment, opportunism, and the myriad voices of democratic polyphony.

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About the Author

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Appendix 1. Survey Questions

Survey questions	Scale	Hypothesis
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: There is discrimination in Latvia against people who do not know or have poor knowledge of the Latvian language?	Fully agree Rather agree Rather disagree Fully disagree Difficult to say	H1A
Taking into account your own personal experience and observations, has the attitude of Latvians towards the Russian-speaking population of Latvia changed since the Russian invasion of Ukraine?	Significantly worsened Slightly worsened Slightly improved Significantly improved No change	H1B
<i>In your opinion, can people in Latvia freely and without fear express their opinion on such issues at the moment?*</i> Express an opinion on various political issues Express an opinion about the ruling political parties and their leaders Express an opinion on various events in the history of Latvia, if it differs from the state's official position (for example, the question of whether the occupation of Latvia took place in 1940) Express an opinion about Russia and its military invasion of Ukraine, if it differs from the official position of the country	Definitely can Rather can Rather cannot Definitely cannot Hard to say/NA	H1C
<i>How would you assess how objectively such media is covering of what is happening in Ukraine?</i> Latvian public media (i.e., LTV and Latvian Radio) Russian federal mass media, such as Russian state TV channels Russian independent/opposition media Western media	Very biased Mostly biased Not very unbiased Completely unbiased Hard to say/no answer	H1D
To what extent are you interested in what is happening in Ukraine?	Very interested Rather interested Rather not interested Not at all interested Hard to say/NA	H1D

Survey questions	Scale	Hypothesis
Taking into account everything that you have observed, what is the general attitude of your relatives, friends and acquaintances towards the so-called Russian military operation or invasion of Ukraine? Which side has more of their sympathies?	Definitely Ukrainian More Ukrainian, but there are also people who support Russia They are different—some support Ukraine, while others support Russia More Russia, but there are also people who support Ukraine Definitely Russian Neither one nor the other	H2
<i>In connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the course of development of these events, various statements have been made in the society. Please rate to what extent you agree with the following statements.</i> The Russians and the Ukrainians are, in fact, one nation. Russia is fighting Nazism in Ukraine. Western countries and Ukraine threaten Russia's security. Ukraine is a US marionette. In essence, Ukraine is not a permanent state in its own right—it is a territory taken from Russia. Russia was entitled to use military force against Ukraine to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO. The biggest losers from sanctions against Russia are Western countries themselves.	Fully agree Rather agree Rather disagree Fully disagree Difficult to say	H3
<i>What would be your attitude towards Ukraine joining such an organization?</i> The European Union NATO	Very positive Rather positive Neutral Rather negative Very negative Hard to say/NA	H3
<i>To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i> Russia's military intervention to protect Russian speakers living in other countries is necessary and justified. Fascism is reemerging in Latvia.	Fully agree Rather agree Rather disagree Fully disagree Difficult to say	H3
Generally speaking, how do you assess the presence of foreign NATO troops in Latvia?	A good thing A bad thing Neither good nor bad Hard to say/NA	H3

*Data on this question were collected only in 2022.

IV.

Legacy of Violence

12. Anti-Jewish Violence in Interwar Lithuania: Pogroms without Genocidal Elements as a Precondition of the Holocaust?

Darius Staliūnas

Abstract: This chapter analyzes cases of mass anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania in the period 1920 to 1940. It argues that there was no intensification of such violence in interwar Lithuania. The number of pogroms did not increase compared to the nineteenth century, and there were no genocidal elements in the anti-Jewish incidents. Hence, new research is needed on the pervasiveness of antisemitic sentiments and ideology in Lithuanian society in the 1930s. Such research is needed to explain the active participation of Lithuanian society in the Holocaust.

Keywords: mass violence, blood libel, interwar period, antisemitism, Slabodka pogrom

This chapter asks whether the radical change with regard to anti-Jewish violence occurred in Lithuania before 1941 or not. Its main objective is to ascertain whether an escalation of anti-Jewish violence occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, and whether these interwar pogroms somehow presaged the violence of the Holocaust. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz argue that in Central and East Europe—which they call the “Shatterzone of Empires”—“the sea change” occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with regard to state-directed and communal interethnic violence, which became “more sustained and more brutal” from the late nineteenth century.¹ Christoph Dieckmann, one of the

1 Bartov and Weitz, “Introduction: Coexistence and Violence,” 4–5.

best researchers of the Holocaust in Lithuania, believes that the increase in antisemitic attacks in Lithuania in the 1930s can be related to the activities of rightist extremists. Anti-Jewish incidents between 1934 and 1939, according to Dieckmann, were very different than the pogroms of the tsarist period as they no longer consisted of peasants engaging in this violence, acting upon entrenched anti-Judaic beliefs, but were carried out by adepts of right extremism—officials, military officers, representatives of the liberal professions, and students.² Quite often when the acts of anti-Jewish violence in the 1920s and 1930s are mentioned in historiography, it is usually just the fact of violence that is stated, or violence is only described, but not analyzed.³ Also, it is important to note that Lithuanian researchers usually use sources only from materials collected by Lithuanian government agencies and the Lithuanian press.⁴ As we will see in this study, sources of this kind often reflect the official interpretation of events. They have generally minimized the extent of anti-Jewish violence, often placing the blame for incidents on the Jews themselves.

For the purposes of this study, a pogrom is understood as it has been defined by the German sociologist Werner Bergmann as

a one-sided and non-governmental form of social control, as “self-help by a group” that occurs when no remedy can be expected from the state against the threat which another ethnic group poses. The pogrom is different from other forms of control, such as lynching, terrorism, and vigilantism, in that the participants in a pogrom hold the entire out-group responsible and therefore act against the group as a whole, and also in that it usually displays a low degree of organization.⁵

In order to explain the reasons for collective violence, I shall analyze not just their pre-history, the composition of the group of offenders or publicly declared interpretations, but the course of the violence as well. Researchers on interethnic violence are increasingly more often searching for symbolic markers that reveal the intentions and worldview of the attacking side.⁶

2 Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 132–33.

3 Vareikis, “Žydų ir lietuvių susidūrimai”; Truska, *Lietuviai ir žydai*. The war pogroms is a separate case. Staliūnas, “The Military Pogroms.”

4 It should be noted that a “Jewish voice” also exists in the documents collected by the government—the evidence given by victims.

5 Bergmann, “Ethnic Riots,” 488. David Engel defined similar criteria for interethnic violence to occur. Engel, “What’s in a Pogrom?” 24.

6 For a theoretical approach, see Brubaker and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 441. One of the most recent publications using that approach is Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland*.

Most of the best known anti-Jewish excesses in Lithuania between 1920 and 1940 were no different than the pogroms that took place during the tsarist period, i.e., they had no genocidal elements, and they were usually triggered by accusations of blood libel (charging Jews with using the blood of Christians for their religious purposes). Only in the actions of the perpetrators from 1929 do we clearly see more modern motives based on alleged Jewish disloyalty to the Lithuanian nation-state.⁷ The structure of this chapter is based on a chronological principle. First, the pogrom of 1929 in Kaunas will be discussed, and then an analysis of the anti-Jewish events between 1934 and 1939 will be presented.

The 1929 Slabodka Pogrom

The pogrom of August 1, 1929, in the Kaunas suburb of Vilijampolė, then called Slabada (Slabodka in Yiddish), has been well documented. Much was written about the event in its immediate aftermath both in the Lithuanian and the foreign press, and evidence given by the victims and the accused has survived. Historical literature also tells us that the main motive for the mob to attack Jews was their identification with communists.⁸ Members of the paramilitary Riflemen's Union, of whom a significant number also belonged to the semi-legal pro-fascist organization Iron Wolf, began engaging in violent acts against Jews after the events of that same day in Šančiai, another Kaunas suburb, where communists and their sympathizers, who included, according to various sources, an absolute majority of Jews from Slabodka, tried to organize an "international Red Day celebration," which drew police sanctions supported by a number of workers.⁹ There are contemporaneous sources that refer to the police as violent,¹⁰ while other testimonies say that the police did not interfere with the perpetrators.¹¹

The nationalist press accompanied this demonstration with open threats. The semi-official newspaper of Iron Wolf, *Tautos kelias* (Path of the nation), noticed that

7 On anti-Jewish violence in nineteenth-century Lithuania, see Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day*.

8 Sužiedėlis, "The Historical Sources for Antisemitism," 132–33; Petronis, "Guarding the Honor of the Nation," 230.

9 Kriminalinės policijos žinios no. 35, Kaunas, August 5, 1929, Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (Lithuanian Central State Archives; henceforth LCVA), f. 394, ap. 2, b. 858, l. 287–89; 1-ter oygust in kovne, *Yidische shtime*, August 2, 1929, no. 180, 11.

10 Jewish complaint with thirty signatures, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 16.

11 Jewish testimonies, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 17–18.

among the communists there were hardly any Lithuanians, whereas the majority were people from minority groups. The future will show us whether they aren't just exploiting the tolerance of Lithuanians a little too much. Even the greatest patience does ultimately reach its end.¹²

However, the specific type of violence that played out in Slabodka remains unclear, and this aspect has not received the closer attention of researchers. The incident unfolded very late at night (between 11 pm and 1 am); thus, aside from the perpetrators who denied any guilt on their behalf and the victims themselves, there were no other witnesses to the events. Also, as the foreign Jewish and non-Jewish press announced, in August 1929 the Lithuanian government restricted printing information about the incident in Lithuanian newspapers and did not permit the import of foreign publications that had written about the Slabodka pogrom.¹³

Some of the foreign publications from this time had drawn quite a horrifying picture of the anti-Jewish violence. The Tel Aviv newspaper *Davar* stated that there were victims.¹⁴ Later, the same newspaper published a private letter with a story of how the riflemen had dragged Jews from their homes and beaten them in the presence of the police. One craftsman was alleged to have been so severely bashed that the blows had caused his skin to peel off and his muscles to rupture.¹⁵ The Yiddish-language newspaper *Frimorgn* published in Riga called the incident a "bloody pogrom."¹⁶ The *Jewish Daily Bulletin* announced that "armed fascists invaded Jewish homes, mistreating the inhabitants, beating them murderously."¹⁷ Later information in this newspaper mentioned twenty-seven injured people, backed by medics' confirmation, among whom were elderly people.¹⁸ The *Rigasche Zeitung*

12 "Darbininkai prieš komunistus," *Tautos kelias*, August 9, 1929, no. 32, 1.

13 "Halalei Slobodka," *Davar* (Tel Aviv), September 11, 1929, 2; "Ha-pra'ot be-Slobodka," *Do'ar Hayom* (Jerusalem), August 21, 1929, 3; "Judenpogrome in Litauen," *Libauische Zeitung*, August 17, 1929, no. 184, 4; "Anti-Jewish Excesses Continue in Lithuania as Official Denials Issued," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 11, 1929, 1437, 1; "Jewish Council on Minorities Rights Hears Report on Anti-Jewish Excesses in Lithuania," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 20, 1929, no. 1445, 4; "Konfiskirt un nit aroysgelozn 'frimorgn' in lite," *Frimorgn*, August 18, 1929, no. 190, 1; B. K., "Žydu pogromos Slabadoj," *Pirmyn*, August 15, 1929, no. 17, 14; "Lietuvoje," *Darbo balsas*, August 15, 1929, no. 8, 5.

14 "Halalei Slobodka," *Davar* (Tel Aviv), September 11, 1929, 2.

15 Sh. G., "Ha-pra'ot be-Slobodka (mi-tokh mikhtav prati)," *Davar*, October 7, 1929, 2.

16 "Di idishe velt-prese un der kovner pogrom," *Frimorgn*, August 15, 1929, no. 189, 1.

17 "Serious Anti-Jewish Excesses Occur in Lithuanian Capital," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 6, 1929, no. 1433, 1.

18 "Lithuanian Legation in Paris Denies Anti-Jewish Excesses Occurred in Kovno," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 16, 1929, no. 1442, 1.

asserted that a majority of the injured were older people.¹⁹ The *Libauische Zeitung* informed readers of a large number of injured Jews who ended up in hospital.²⁰ *Berliner Tagblatt*, an influential German newspaper, mentioned sixty-five Jews who were attacked, many of whom ended up in hospital.²¹ In 1932 when the court hearing was already underway, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency wrote that “a large number of Jews, old men and women and children, were set upon and cruelly beaten and injured.”²²

Witness accounts given during the court proceedings that were widely covered by the Lithuanian and foreign press no longer painted such a terrible picture. No one spoke about the dead, only about how Jews had been beaten—a fact that was not usually detailed outside of the court sessions in press releases.²³ According to the local newspaper *Yidishe shtime*, one witness stated he had heard not only men being beaten at night but also women’s voices crying out,²⁴ though no one said anything about violence acted out on children. Another portrayal of this incident which appears in the inquiry protocols of the participants conducted by the police immediately after the event in August 1929 indicated it was mostly the injured Jews who were questioned.

A total of twenty-nine people had been attacked, an absolute majority of whom were, as they alleged themselves, young or middle-aged men returning home from their evening’s entertainment or workplaces, even though a few of the victims were indeed older. In the presence of the police, and sometimes with their active involvement, the perpetrators, who had divided into groups—some of which numbered ten to twelve men—at first demanded to see the Jews’ passports, and having checked their documents, ordered them to run, whereupon sticks or other means were used to strike any Jews they caught up with.

19 “Judenkrawalle in Kowno. (Von unserem Korrespondenten.)” *Rigasche Rundschau*, August 5, 1929, no. 173, 2.

20 “Judenpogrome in Litauen,” *Libauische Zeitung*, August 17, 1929, no. 184, 4.

21 “Die Litauischen Pogrome,” *Berliner Tagblatt (Morgenausgabe)*, August 14, 1929 (excerpt from this newspaper), LCVA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 884, l. 109.

22 “Slobodka 1929 Pogrom: Trial of Participants Opened in Kovno,” *Daily News Bulletin*, May 24, 1932, vol. XIII, no. 122, 7.

23 Many newspapers wrote about the Slobodka pogrom: *Ha-olam* (London), *Ha-aretz* (Tel Aviv), *Davar* (Tel Aviv), *Yidishe shtime* (Kaunas), *Rytas* (Kaunas), *Lietuvos žinios* (Kaunas), *Dienos naujienos* (Kaunas), *Rigasche Rundschau* (Riga), *Libauische Zeitung* (Liepaja). Of all the publications mentioned here, the most detailed account of the court proceedings appeared in *Yidishe shtime*.

24 “Ershter tog fun slabodker prozes. Gelitene derzeylen shoyderliche protim,” *Yidishe shtime*, May 25, 1932, no. 118, 7.

We have to some degree conflicting testimonies of the victims. One version of the incident was in the victims' complaints. Here some of them mentioned that perpetrators beat them "without mercy" until blood appeared, etc.²⁵ Some policemen also testified to seeing bloodied Jews.²⁶ Another version of the incident was presented in which they were interrogated by police. Most of the attacked mentioned having received only one or two blows, and only a few said their beating had involved more strikes. Gershon Molochnik testified that when he fell over after being struck several times, the perpetrators ceased beating him and went away. According to official reports, of all the victims only two—Solomon Bloch and Yosel Aranovski—visited a doctor the next day; none of the others were recorded as having needed medical assistance. The attackers did not approach any women. Ente Pinkert, who was going home in a group, testified during the inquiry that some strangers had only bashed the men in her group. Some of the victims testified that the perpetrators searched them for weapons and some kind of proclamations. Only one case is known of the riflemen breaking into a private home and beating the owner.²⁷

These testimonies by the victims to the police might not be accurate with regard to brutality performed by the perpetrators, but they clearly show that the purpose was to demean Jews, to give a clear indicator of the expected social hierarchy.²⁸ The riflemen (aka, members of Iron Wolf) believed they had the right to stop Jews and demand to see their passports, and then to force them to run.²⁹

Moreover, this campaign had a distinct symbolic meaning. Rather than the data collected from the inquiries, there are the testimonials given in court which inform us that the perpetrators demanded on numerous

25 Complaint, August 10, 1929, and testimonies, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 16–18.

26 Leonas Karvelaitis's testimony, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 1.

27 LCVA, f. 394, ap. 15, b. 138, l. 279–358.

28 According to these sources, no looting or robbery was involved. Only one Jew complained how, after being searched, the offenders did not let him pick up a five *litas* note that had fallen: "Farendikt edus-farher af slabodker prozes. Zveiter tog fun prozes," *Yidishe shtime*, May 26, 1932, no. 119, 7; LCVA, f. 394, ap. 15, b. 138, l. 335, 354.

29 The Lithuanian oppositionist press claimed that the perpetrators demanded to see passports to be sure that the person they had stopped was indeed a Jew (A. Pauliukas, "Slabados ekscesininkų byla pasibaigė," *Rytas*, May 27, 1932, no. 100, 2; "Prieš žydus ar prieš komunistus?" *Dienos naujienos*, May 27, 1932, no. 118, 1), however, it is more likely that the riflemen carried out police functions in this way and were checking if people on the street had documents confirming their identity. Usually, Jews in society at this time different from Christians both visually and in terms of their language. When the rioters were brought before court, translators were needed as some of the victims could not speak Lithuanian. "Slabados ekscesininkų byla," *Rytas*, May 25, 1932, no. 99, 2.

occasions that the Jews they encountered would say that today was a “red day,” or would call a Jewish passport a “red passport,” thereby identifying all the Jews with communists.³⁰ Some policemen also testified that the perpetrators beat the Jews for being communists trying to throw the country into disarray.³¹ Both the police and the leadership of the Iron Wolf organization had some time earlier instructed their subordinates to keep vigil on the streets and prevent the dissemination of communist propaganda.³² Thus, the message from “above” was that the communist threat was real. Nationalistic Lithuanians saw the Jews first and foremost as propagators of communist ideology.

This national-political motive for the violence is also evident in an episode where the perpetrators felt sorry for one Jew and refrained from beating him because they found him to be carrying a copy of the Lithuanian-language newspaper *Lietuvos aidas*.³³ This Jew was excused as the rioters held him to be loyal to the Lithuanian nation-state because he was reading its semi-official press.

The reaction of Lithuanian government institutions was rather ambiguous. Incidentally, it should be stated from the very beginning that the approving stance displayed toward the offenders by police on duty on the evening of August 1, 1929, in Slabodka, and even their own involvement in the beating of Jews, was not in any way sanctioned by higher-ranked officers. Yet, the Lithuanian police was known for exhibiting certain Judeophobic attitudes. In the criminal police overview of the above-mentioned events in Šančiai on August 1, the people gathered at the meeting were identified as “*žydukai*” (the diminutive form of “*žydai*,” “Jews,” in Lithuanian), which carried a clear negative connotation.³⁴ Also, several days after the pogrom the police tried to collect evidence that the unrest in Slabodka was initially provoked by the Jews themselves.

30 “Angehoybn prozes vegn slabodker ekscesn,” *Yidishe shtime*, May 24, 1932, no. 117, 7; “Ershter tog fun slabodker prozes. Gelitene derzeylen shoyderliche protim,” *Yidishe shtime*, May 25, 1932, no. 118, 7; “Vilijampolės ekscesininkai teisme,” *Dienos naujienos*, May 24, 1932, no. 116, 1; “Vilijampolės ekscesininkų byla tęsiama,” *Dienos naujienos*, May 25, 1932, no. 117, 1; “Slabados ekscesų byloj tieson patraukta 17 žmonių,” *Lietuvos žinios*, October 1, 1931, no. 222, 2; “Slabados ekscesininkų byla,” *Lietuvos žinios*, May 24, 1932, no. 116, 5; “Slabados ekscesininkų byla,” *Lietuvos žinios*, May 25, 1932, no. 117, 1.

31 Leonas Karvelaitis’s testimony, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 1.

32 Povilas Vėjelis’s (Žičkus) testimony, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 1; Instruction from the headquarters of Iron Wolf to the groups in Kaunas, July 25, 1929, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 13, b. 131, l. 64.

33 “Slabados ekscesų byloj tieson patraukta 17 žmonių,” *Lietuvos žinios*, October 1, 1931, no. 222, 2; “Slabados ekscesininkų byla,” *Rytas*, 24 May 1932, no. 98, 2.

34 Kriminalinės policijos žinios no. 35, Kaunas, August, 1929, LCVA, f. 394, ap. 2, b. 858, l. 287.

The semi-official *Lietuvos aidas* newspaper, which gave broad coverage of the events in Šančiai, alleged the demonstration was organized “mostly by Jewish juveniles,” while the incident in Slabodka was not mentioned at all.³⁵ Some time later, the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* cited the Lithuanian envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the United States, Bronius Kazys Balutis, who denied that the pogrom had occurred and alleged that the police had arrested three Jewish communists caught throwing stones at Jews’ apartments.³⁶ In fact, on August 4 the police did arrest one Jew—Leib Gotlib, as one evening earlier, on August 3, when returning home with another two individuals, he was stopped for being drunk and disorderly, running a stick along fences and thus making a racket, which to many who heard the noise sounded like stones being rolled down a roof.³⁷ Thus, taking this case of minor hooliganism, the police and officials of Lithuania tried to create a story that Jews were themselves provoking untoward responses from the authorities in order to create the impression of being discriminated by the police. Around ten days later *Lietuvos aidas* finally acknowledged the fact of the incident during which “several completely innocent civilian Jews” were physically attacked, yet it tried to make the scale of the event as insignificant as possible, diminishing any credibility in identifying it as a pogrom.³⁸ A few days later, the police began interrogating the victims and the accused parties.³⁹ There were a number of reasons for this change in the official narrative.

At the beginning of September the minister of internal affairs dismissed those policemen who were suspected of being involved in the violence as well as the casually employed criminal police staff who took no measures to stop the violence. The minister also handed down various forms of punitive measures upon higher-ranked police commanders.⁴⁰ When he met with

35 “‘Raudonoji diena’ Lietuvoj,” *Lietuvos aidas*, August 5, 1929, no. 175, 1. The Lithuanian oppositionist press stated that the pogrom had been organized by government-supported fascists, riflemen, and members of Iron Wolf. “Pogromai Lietuvoj,” *Balsas*, September 10, 1929, no. 17, 783; B. K., “Žydų pogromos Slabodoj,” *Pirmyn*, August 15, 1929, no. 17, 14.

36 “Lithuanian Minister to U.S. Denies Excesses; Blames Communists,” *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 18, 1929, no. 1443, 1.

37 LCVA, f. 394, ap. 15, b. 138, l. 278, 279, 282–85, 289, 297, 311–13.

38 “Dvi opos,” *Lietuvos aidas*, August 12, 1929, no. 181, 1. The *Yidishe shtime* strongly criticized such an interpretation. “Ofitsiel vegn slabodke,” *Yidishe shtime*, August 15, 1929, no. 189, 10.

39 LCVA, f. 394, ap. 15, b. 138. *Frimorgn* reprinted this article, which initially appeared in *Yidishe shtime*: “Kovner ‘Idishe shtime’ vegn pogrom un vegn dem litvishn regirugs-blat,” *Frimorgn*, August 15, 1929, no. 189, 1.

40 Secret report from the minister of interior to the prime minister, September 6, 1929; Order no. 50 by the minister of the interior, September 6, 1929, *Lietuvos Mokslių akademijos Vrublevskijų*

journalists at the end of August, Prime Minister Augustinas Voldemaras informed them that the investigation was underway yet immediately noted that this was nothing like the anti-Jewish pogroms in Poland.⁴¹ Thus, in August the Lithuanian government did admit the event took place, yet it went to great effort to reduce its scale. These changes to the official interpretation could have been determined by various circumstances, including the organized actions of Jews. After the incident, Jews organized self-defense groups, but this kind of action was a short-lived response, which is why leaders of the Jewish community simultaneously looked to other measures. On August 3, as reported by the *Yidishe shtime*, one of the journalists from this newspaper visited Prime Minister Voldemaras twice, informing him of the events in Slabodka.⁴² The correspondent from this newspaper also visited and informed the leader of the Riflemen's Union, Antanas Žmuidzinavičius, of the incident, who stated that the union was in no way related to that anti-Jewish attack and promised to punish any specific riflemen if it became clear that they had participated in those attacks after all.⁴³ On August 10, thirty of the attacked Jews presented the government with a collective complaint.⁴⁴ As mentioned above, the foreign press had written extensively about this incident.⁴⁵ International and American Jewish organizations sent inquires to the Lithuanian government as well.⁴⁶

While legal action against the perpetrators continued, the desire of the Lithuanian political elite to reduce the perceived scale of the Slabodka incident probably contributed to the fact that the investigations dragged on. The investigation finally ended in 1931, with court proceedings beginning

bibliotekos Rankraščių skyrius (Manuscript Department of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences; henceforth LMAVB RS), F172–550, l. 1–6. The same documents: LCVA, f. 922, ap. 1, b. 3, l. 1–6.

41 "Premier prof. Voldemaras vegn di gesheenishn in slabodke," *Yidishe shtime*, August 30, 1929, no. 202, 7; "Ministerio pirmininko atsakymai spaudai," *Lietuvos žinios*, August 29, 1929, no. 195, 2; "P. ministerio pirmininko pašnekėsys su žurnalistais," *Lietuvos aidas*, August 29, 1929, no. 195, 1.

42 a., "Informirt premier vegn slabodker gesheenishn," *Yidishe shtime*, August 5, 1929, no. 181, 7. Both the prime minister and the minister of internal affairs alleged they did not have any information about anti-Jewish violence.

43 a., "Informirt premier vegn slabodker gesheenishn," *Yidishe shtime*, August 5, 1929, no. 181, 7.

44 Complaint, August 10, 1929, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 2, b. 11244, l. 16.

45 *Frimorgn* claimed that the Jewish press around the world was writing about the events in Slabodka: "Di idishe velt-prese un der kovner pogrom," *Frimorgn*, August 15, 1929, no. 189, 1.

46 "Jewish Council in Minorities Rights Hears Report on Anti-Jewish Excesses in Lithuania," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 20, 1929, no. 1445, 1; "Di idishe velt-prese un der kovner pogrom," *Frimorgn*, August 15, 1929, no. 189, 1.

in 1932. The court found twelve people guilty, even though accusations had been brought before seventeen people. The fact that the court hearing did ultimately take place and the perpetrators did receive actual penalties can be related to Voldemaras's dismissal from government in September 1929 and his becoming an opponent of President Antanas Smetona's regime: the conviction of Voldemaras's supporters was one of the ways of fighting the former prime minister.⁴⁷ Most likely suspecting this particular subtext to the court proceedings, the Jewish press, on the one hand, applauded the court's verdict, yet, on the other hand, it was also disappointed that only the executors of the allegedly well-planned incident were punished, and not its organizers, among whom Voldemaras was almost directly identified.⁴⁸

Finding themselves in the opposition, Voldemaras's supporters, much like certain other public groups such as the Union of Lithuanian Traders, Industrialists and Craftsmen, criticized the government for its overly tolerant attitude towards minorities and for its insufficient efforts in strengthening the role of Lithuanians in the nation-state. In the 1930s, all over Europe and in Lithuania as well, the influence of antisemitism as an ideology was increasing.⁴⁹ The next part of this chapter will look closer at the cases of mass anti-Jewish violence in the 1930s.

1934–39

Beginning in 1934, attacks against Jews, including mass incidents, increased in frequency in Lithuania, primarily in its western part—Žemaitija (Samogitia).⁵⁰ Very little information exists about certain incidents, so it is difficult to determine the reasons for and the scale of the violence. Still, various sources from this time provide evidence about some incidents, several of which are described here in greater detail.

The pretext for the pogrom in Telšiai on October 8, 1935, was at least several cases of blood libel in that region of Lithuania; however, the violence began only after some time had passed since the rumors about the

47 Sirutavičius, "Antisemitism in Inter-war Lithuania."

48 "Kovno, May 26th," *Daily News Bulletin*, May 28, 1932, vol. XIII, no. 126, 4. According to a policeman who had to observe the process, "intelligent Jews" who attended the court hearing had the same feeling, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 13, b. 49, l. 157–58. The report by this policeman also said that the judge did not allow anyone to talk about the Lithuanian government favoring such actions.

49 Mendelsohn, "Some Remarks," 80; Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 131.

50 Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 83–91.

kidnapping of a child, and later, a young woman, caused a conflict to erupt between the police and army recruits. A crowd of three to four hundred people who had gathered to free a drunken recruit arrested by the police began to attack Jews they encountered on the street and to throw stones at Jewish homes. Why did the incident, which at first glance had nothing to do with Jews but was between the police and a drunken army recruit, turn into an anti-Jewish pogrom? The crowd must have thought that once it had freed the recruit, it could now enact self-justice, something that government institutions had not allowed.

On September 24—two weeks before the pogrom—in Varniai, not far from Telšiai, several local Christians had demanded that the police join them in searching for a missing child and threatened to conduct searches on other people's property themselves, even without the participation of the police. A warning from the police chief that such action was punishable, had sufficed to prevent the incident from escalating. Later, the Telšiai district chief announced a proclamation denying cases of blood libel and urged the public to maintain peace. According to information collected by Lithuanian security and criminal police, "When people read the district chief's announcement, they grew even more angry at Jews and literally searched for a reason to begin attacking them."⁵¹ Nonetheless, the acts in Telšiai on October 8 were of a communal violence variety: smashed windows of Jews' houses and six injured Jews.⁵²

At the end of 1935—early 1936 there were more cases of anti-Jewish violence in Žemaitija, and even though the reasons or pretexts for these incidents are rarely identified in the surviving information, it is likely that the most important impulse was in fact the accusation of blood libel. It was probably for this very reason that during a fair held on January 2, 1936, in Varniai, not very far from where the child had disappeared several months earlier, local Christians used sticks and stones in an assault on Jews at the fair, forcing them all to run and hide.⁵³ In the summer of 1936 in Kretinga, also

51 Valstybės saugumo ir kriminalinės policijos Šiaulių apygardos biuletenis no. 228, October 9, 1935, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 4, b. 1548, l. 253.

52 On this pogrom, see also "Iš ko kyla incidentai," *Lietuvos aidas*, October 10, 1935, no. 233, 8; "Nesusipratimai Telšiuose," *Lietuvos žinios*, October 9, 1935, no. 231, 7; "Intsident un falshe klangen in telshiai. In telshiai angegrign einike idn," *Yidishe shtime*, October 10, 1935, no. 233, 7; "Anti-Jewish Riots Break out in Lithuanian City," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 16, 1935, vol. 1, no. 60, 5; "Lithuanian Churches to Ask Cessation of Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 24, 1935, vol. 1, no. 67, 3; "Lithuania Orders Probe of Anti-Jewish Riots," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 10, 1935, vol. 1, no. 81, 4; "Keno kiršinami žemaičiai," *Vakarai*, January 19, 1936, no. 19, 4; "Išaiškinta Telšių provokacija prieš žydus," *Apžvalga*, 1936, no. 2, 2.

53 Valstybės saugumo departamento biuletenis no. 40, January 9, 1936, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 88a, l. 40.

inspired by blood libel, young men “began to tease and push around Jews passing by on the street,” and later “started throwing rocks at houses where Jews lived and smashing windows.”⁵⁴ Yet no sources mention the duration of this incident in Kretinga. In April 1938, in the town of Viešintos in the Panevėžys district, a case of blood libel also developed into the smashing of windows of Jewish homes.⁵⁵

There was a different reason for the incident in Tauragės Naumiestis (Yiddish: Neishtot Tavrik) on May 3, 1939. Here, when a conflict broke out between two traders at a horse market, a Jew and a German, where it was the latter who was the victim, Germans and Lithuanians formed a gang of around two hundred men and “attacked Jews and bashed them on the street.” What is strange is that the Lithuanian State Security Department bulletin, from which our knowledge of the incident comes, does not mention any injured people, only the smashed windows of twenty-eight houses.⁵⁶ Thus if there were some Jews who experienced physical violence, the injuries must have only been minor.

Historical literature has thus far dedicated the most attention to the pogrom of June 18, 1939, in Leipalingis.⁵⁷ The pogrom began when a Jewish shop owner pushed a Lithuanian out of his premises who was not buying anything but just sheltering from the rain, who then accidentally cut his

54 Valstybės saugumo departamento biuletenis no. 195, July 21, 1936, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 88a, l. 155.

55 Vareikis, “Žydų ir lietuvių susidūrimai,” 173, 175.

56 The army units that arrived at the scene cleared out “those who were fighting” and arrested four people, two of whom were Germans, and two Lithuanians. Valstybės saugumo departamento biuletenis no. 104, Kaunas, May 3, 1939, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 186, t. 2, l. 90. A Gestapo officer took photographs of these events, which is why Vladas Sirutavičius suspects that the incident could have been inspired by Nazi Germany. Sirutavičius, “A Close but Very Suspicious,” 260.

57 The most important information on this incident is the file “Kvotos nuorašas dėl 1939 birželio 18 d. Leipalingio žydų pogromo įvykių įtariamais Žekas Viktoras, Ignatavičius Jonas, Dabrukas Antanas, Rudzikas Juozas ir kiti,” LCVA, f. 378, ap. 11, b. 206; Valstybės saugumo departamento biuletenis no. 137, Kaunas, June 19, 1939, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 158, l. 28–29. See also “Apgailėtinas įvykis Leipalingyje,” *Vakarinis Lietuvos aidas*, June 19, 1939, no. 308, 1; “Vos iz geshen in leipalingis,” *Folksblat*, June 20, 1939, no. 138, 5; “Bashtraft anteilnemer in leipalinger geshlegn,” *Folksblat*, July 18, 1939, no. 162, 5; “Gesheenishn in Leipalingis,” *Dos vort* (Kaunas), June 19, 1939, no. 138, 5; “Vos iz fargekumen in Leipalingis,” *Dos vort*, June 20, 1939, no. 139, 1; “Gesheenishn in Leipalingis,” *Yidishe shtime*, June 19, 1939, no. 138, 7; “‘Elta’ vegn di gesheenishn in Liepalingis,” *Yidishe shtime*, June 20, 1939, no. 139, 7; “Farendikt oysforshung vegn instident in leipalingis,” *Yidishe shtime*, June 21, 1939, no. 140, 7; “Baamter fun melukhe-shuts-departament in liepalingis,” *Yidishe shtime*, June 22, 1939, no. 141, 7; “Arum di gesheenishn in leipalingis,” *Yidishe shtime*, July 3, 1939, 7; “Shtrafn in tsuzamenhang mit leipalinger gesheenishn,” *Yidishe shtime*, July 12, 1939, 7; “Ver is bashtraft gevorn tsulib leipalinger gesheenishn?” *Yidishe shtime*, July 14, 1939, 6.

hand on a glass door, ran out into the street and started to shout, "Look, the Jews cut me!" It was not long before the crowd transformed this shout into a rumor alleging that "the Jews assaulted this person with a knife." The resulting incident stands out from other cases of anti-Jewish violence for the extraordinarily large crowd that participated. On that day around five thousand Catholics from the town and its vicinity had gathered for mass in Leipalingis; however, in one way or another the violent acts against Jews and their property were performed by a much smaller number of people.⁵⁸ The State Security Department bulletin reported that windows "were smashed by young men and children and women did not hold back from joining in."⁵⁹ However, according to the nature of this violence, the events in Leipalingis were barely any different from other incidents that took place in the 1930s. Even though the interrogator stated that it was only thanks to the police and several riflemen who helped them that they managed to hold back the crowd from storming into the shop owned by the Jew where the conflict began, and thus avoid the lynching of that Jewish family, there were only seven policemen present. Though they did fire into the air trying to stop the crowd, it was obvious that the police's authority had weakened. Ultimately the crowd was not determined to engage in even more radical actions, despite the fact that one of the perpetrators shouted "the Jews need to be slaughtered."⁶⁰ It is completely unlikely that the policemen, who were local inhabitants, would have started shooting at their Catholic neighbors. The perpetrators understood this perfectly well, as one of them claimed that the police "would still not shoot at the people."⁶¹ During this incident, lasting around one and a half hours, the crowd smashed the windows of all Jewish homes except for two that stood further away from the market square. As it was the local population involved in the violence, they knew very well where Jews lived in their town. The smashing of practically all of the windows of Jewish homes can be interpreted as the perpetrators' message that the Jews were collectively accountable for the actions of any one of the member of their community. Even though there were a few cases of property appropriation, including a bottle of vodka, it is obvious that looting was not the reason for the violence. The already cited State Security Department

58 A list of people to be punished for the events in Leipalingis on June 18 of this year (July 1, 1939), LCVA, f. 378, ap. 11, b. 206, l. 85–86. The list of suspects also included two Jews from one family in whose shop the incident began.

59 Valstybės saugumo departamento biuletenis no. 137, Kaunas, June 19, 1939, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 158, l. 29.

60 Copy of a ruling by the head of the State Security Police, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 11, b. 206, l. 91.

61 Copy of a ruling by the head of the State Security Police, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 11, b. 206, l. 91.

bulletin noted that “[t]he crowd that smashed the windows dissolved and each went their own way.”⁶²

The reasons for this pogrom are obvious at first glance. The direct impulse for violence was revenge for “Jews slashing a man with a knife.” One of the instigators, who belonged to the Riflemen’s Union, spoke to the crowd “about Lithuanian blood being spilt” and urged “getting back at the Jews.”⁶³ The situation where Jews allegedly “cut” a Christian “with a knife” probably found such resonance in the crowd that gathered not only because one of “their own” had been harmed, but also because of the associations with blood libel. Jews, slashing, blood—all are components of the superstition about ritual murder. Yet at the same time it is obvious that there were other, no less important, reasons leading to the transformation of a minor incident, ones that without a doubt would have been rather frequent, into an all-out pogrom.

The agitator-rifleman cited earlier “urged the crowd not to buy from Jews and not to sell them anything.”⁶⁴ Economic competition between the Lithuanians and Jews in Leipalingis had become quite fierce some time earlier,⁶⁵ and thus the economic antisemitic motive played an important role here. Antisemitic proclamations distributed in 1939 in various locations around Lithuania had as their main idea the fight against the supposed economic exploitation of Lithuanians conducted by Jews.⁶⁶ In its comments on the events in Leipalingis, the newspaper *Verslas* released by the Lithuanian Union of Traders, Industrialists and Craftsmen wrote about the Lithuanians’ “legitimate struggle led in the name of economic independence,” even though the incident itself was explained as “purely the affairs of the local population, having nothing in common with antisemitism.”⁶⁷

The political crisis that had gripped the Lithuanian state could have had some influence in these developments. The acceptance of Poland’s ultimatum in March 1938 to reestablish diplomatic relations and thus de facto

62 Valstybės saugumo departamento biuletenis no. 137, Kaunas, June 19, 1939, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 158, l. 29. Due to telephone connection problems police reinforcement arrived once the crowd had already dissipated.

63 Copy of a ruling by the head of the State Security Police, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 11, b. 206, l. 90. During the second Soviet occupation, this individual—Viktoras Žekas—was accused of catching Jews with his gang of riflemen in 1941, and later he guarded them, thus he did participate in the Holocaust; after a repeated investigation, he was acquitted and freed. Viktoro Žeko byla, Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (Lithuanian Special Archives; henceforth LYA), K-1, ap. 58, b. P-220.

64 Copy of a ruling by the head of the State Security Police, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 11, b. 206, l. 90.

65 For more on this aspect, see Mačiulis, “Žvilgsnis į vieno pogromo anatomiją,” 190–91.

66 There is a file with many such proclamations: LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 158.

67 “Dėl tautinės netolerancijos,” *Verslas*, July 1, 1939, no. 26, 3.

recognize Poland's control over Vilnius, and the loss of Klaipėda to Germany in March 1939, were testimony of a serious crisis in the nation-state, which also meant a decline in the government's authority.⁶⁸ It was not any specific criminal element or other marginal members of society who engaged in this violence, but the members of various organizations, i.e., people to whom the nation-state's welfare was important. If the Lithuanian government had clearly compromised its position, then the active public had to defend the nation-state from enemies, including the Jews. Links between the political crisis that had engulfed the state and the pogrom are evident from the rumors that spread after the incident in Leipalingis, where, allegedly, "Hitler had given Lithuania some kind of expensive aircraft for smashing the windows of Jews' homes in Leipalingis, and had a few Jews actually been knifed, then he would have returned the whole Klaipėda region to Lithuania."⁶⁹

Not only the information about the Leipalingis pogrom, but also other contemporary sources show that in the eyes of nationalist Lithuanians, the authority of the government was undermined not only because of the aforementioned issues of Vilnius and Klaipėda, but also because of the formal nondiscrimination against Jews. Here is how an informant of the Security Department described the mood of the radical right-wing group, the supporters of former Prime Minister Voldemaras, at the beginning of 1939:

The Voldemarists and activists are most dissatisfied with the president of the republic, A. Smetona. They call him none other than the king of the Jews. They agitate in this sense, pointing out that this government has not yet issued a single special law which touches more strictly on Jewish affairs and is more directed against them.⁷⁰

Conclusions

The number of cases of mass anti-Jewish violence in the Republic of Lithuania did not in the interwar period undergo a drastic change compared to the tsarist period. The cases that can be classified as pogroms are likely to be less than ten (including three wartime pogroms in 1919–20), not including

68 Mačiulis, "Žvilgsnis į vieno pogromo anatomiją."

69 Copy of a report from J. Lembergais to the head of the State Security Department, June 30, 1939, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 11, b. 206, l. 107.

70 Report by the informant of the Department of Security, February 17, 1939, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 13, b. 58, l. 47.

minor incidents recorded by government institutions or mentioned by the Jewish press. The largest number of incidents of which several developed into pogroms came in the period from 1934 to 1939. However, anti-Jewish violence in the 1930s was basically no different from the pogroms of the tsarist period: the main impulse to engage in violence was blood libel, spurred on by economic antisemitic motives, and we can only hypothetically suspect that there might have been some nationalistic motives as well. Incidentally, in the second half of the 1930s there were some anti-Jewish acts that did exhibit elements of defending the nation-state from perceived enemies (the vandalism of signs not in Lithuanian or the attacking of several Jews for their preference for the Soviet Union), however, such incidents did not develop into mass violence.⁷¹

In the 1930s the violence enacted against individuals did not lead to more serious injuries, and the perpetrators dedicated most of their energy to smashing windows of homes that belonged to Jews. These acts can be interpreted as both a means of intimidation or a reminder of the informal ethnic hierarchy. There were many other ways of causing material damage to Jewish property; however, smashing windows was the most spectacular measure. Glass being smashed had an immediate, double audiovisual impact. Also, the smashing of windows was an action that did not demand direct, physical contact with Jews, as even coming within close range of a Jewish house was not necessary. In other words, it was a kind of remote violence. One-off cases of other forms of property damage or the appropriation of lesser property do not change the general picture.

A certain amount of time had passed since the disappearance of the child and teenager in the Telšiai district in 1935 and the pogrom, while the relatively moderate nature of the violence and the fact that the crowd was not storming into Jewish homes to search for the allegedly kidnapped children would allow the hypothesis to be raised that blood libel could have only partly been a pretext for “putting Jews in their place.” After all, the belief in blood libel, i.e., thinking that one of the most important human values—life—was in danger, must have provoked very determined actions. Here we are faced with a specific revision of the ethno-confessional hierarchy—a kind of confirmation of the local social structure via a brief spell of violence that did not take any lives.

This is not to assert that the interwar pogroms did not exhibit new features and characteristics as compared to those of the tsarist period. The most important motive for the Slabodka pogrom of 1929 that drove the perpetrators

71 Vareikis, “Žydu ir lietuvių susidūrimai,” 176–78.

was the identification of Jews with communists, which implied labeling Jews as Lithuania's enemies. There were no national-political motives in the pogroms that took place up to World War I. The Slabodka pogrom was also an exception because of the nature of violence. Various contemporaneous sources show that violence against individuals, especially men, dominated this incident. Information on injuries is contradictory, but it is probably safe to say that there was no intention to kill.

Thus, there were relatively few cases of mass anti-Jewish violence in the interwar Republic of Lithuania. One, but not the sole explanation for the small number of mass anti-Jewish violent incidents in Lithuania is the role of the Lithuanian authorities. The government tried to block the outbreak of pogroms. Such an attitude depended on several reasons. Not all of the members of the ruling elite were of a Judeophobic persuasion. Also, pragmatic interests were at play—to avoid uncontrolled mass unrest and to always consider the international image of the state. Perpetrators were punished both by fines and arrest. On numerous occasions government officials or authoritative figures in society would make public announcements denouncing anti-Jewish violence and warning offenders of the penalties they would face.⁷² At the same time, as before, the government's position was to minimize the scale of the incidents and to moralize to Jews that they should not “raise the alarm about any alleged antisemitism,” because, according to *Lietuvos aidas*, “where else could Jews today find more peaceful living conditions than in Lithuania?”⁷³ We cannot say, however, that the ruling elite did not contribute to the emergence of anti-Jewish violence at all. The existence of an informal ethnic hierarchy, the attempts to minimize the scale of anti-Jewish violence, and the toleration of individuals with antisemitic attitudes in state service painted Jews as second-rate citizens, and in a certain way, created an atmosphere in which pogroms could occur.

The role of state authorities is also important in another perspective. In 1938 and afterwards due to many political crises that struck Lithuania (the Polish ultimatum, the loss of Klaipėda, the 1939 forced establishment of Soviet military bases, etc.) the government's authority had sharply declined in the eyes of nationally minded individuals. At the same time, during all these anti-Jewish incidents the police and other government representatives

72 Valstybės saugumo ir kriminalinės policijos Šiaulių apygardos biuletenis no. 228, October 9, 1935, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 4, b. 1548, l. 253; “Lithuanian Churches to Ask Cessation of Anti-Semitism,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 24, 1935, vol. 1 no. 67, 3; “Prie kurstymų bei ekscesų nebus pileista pareiškia Vidaus Reikalų ministras gen. Skučas,” *Apžvalga*, July 2, 1939, no. 25, 1.

73 V. Širvintas, “Tolerancija ir perdėtas jautrumas,” *Lietuvos aidas*, July 3, 1939, no. 340, 3.

went to every effort to stop the violence, and when they had prior information, they sought to stop incidents from developing in the first place.⁷⁴ Such acts were perceived by some Lithuanians as a support for Jews.

At the same time, antisemitic rhetoric underwent serious changes as compared to the period prior to World War I. In late 1939 on a street in Kaunas, someone left a message in the night, “Death to the Jews.”⁷⁵ In the same year, an antisemitic proclamation distributed in Mažeikiai categorically stated that “those who have right to live in Lithuania must see to its welfare, its independence and work for its benefit.”⁷⁶ In the late 1930s there were quite a few antisemitic proclamations that combined motifs of Jewish exploitation with the image of a Jew as a traitor of the Lithuanian nation-state.⁷⁷ Yet, there is still not enough evidence based on primary sources to prove such attitudes were increasing in the late 1930s. There was plenty of evidence that such ideas were circulating in society in the early 1920s. Back in 1923, an anonymous Lithuanian fascist association in a proclamation listed a majority of the antisemitic stereotypes about exploitative Jews and claimed Jews were the element demoralizing society, blaming them for just about all of Lithuania’s misfortunes: “The Jew Hymans gave our Vilnius away to the Poles, the Jews continue to interfere in joining Klaipėda to Lithuania, and the Jews are Russifying our country.”⁷⁸ After these accusations, a conclusion was then proposed—the place for Jews was Palestine.⁷⁹ Such radical ideas were not typical for Lithuanian discourse in the late nineteenth–early twentieth century.

It was much more difficult for the government to control the public mood and to stop the spread of antisemitic images than to put an end to mass violence. In the latter case as I have tried to show in this chapter, Lithuanian authorities performed rather well. After June 1941, however, there was no longer such a state, and there was great need for a scapegoat

74 The Jewish Telegraphic Agency wrote about how the pogrom in Viekišiai was stopped. “Lithuanian Pogrom Group Headed by Officials Broken Up,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, February 26, 1936, vol. 1, no. 170, 5.

75 Vareikis, “Žydų ir lietuvių susidūrimai,” 174.

76 Tėvynės Gelbėjimo Komitetas, Tautiečiai (Proclamation), September 13, 1923, LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 158, l. 3.

77 LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 158.

78 Paul Hymans, a Belgian diplomat who in 1921 under the authorization of the Council of the League of Nations mediated between Lithuania and Poland on how to solve the Vilnius question. At that time Klaipėda was already incorporated into Lithuania.

79 Lietuvos fašistų sąjungos Vykdomasis komitetas, tautiečiai! (Proclamation), LCVA, f. 1556, ap. 3, b. 211, l. 4.

that could be blamed for all the failures of the nation-state or suffering of a particular individual.

Finally, this study only partially answers the complex questions about the participation of a part of Lithuanian society in the Holocaust. The most important conclusion of this chapter is that we do not see an intensification of anti-Jewish violence in interwar Lithuania. This conclusion forces us to focus on the crises in the period from 1938 to 1941 and the need for a scapegoat that Lithuanian society was looking for. The Jews could easily have been the most suitable for this role. Added to this was the fact that in 1941 there was no longer a nation-state, which, even if with only pragmatic detachment, was nevertheless trying to prevent anti-Jewish violence, and the Nazis had turned the extermination of the Jews into state policy. Thus, in order to answer the question of why some Lithuanians voluntarily joined in the murder of their Jewish neighbors in the summer of 1941, we still need to conduct in-depth research on the spread of anti-Jewish sentiment in interwar Lithuania. Determining the dynamics of this sentiment will be a much more difficult task than the analysis of anti-Jewish violence described in this chapter.

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13. New Allies—Old Foes: Ethnic Relations on the Pages of the Lithuanian Press during the German Occupation, 1941–44

Stanislovas Stasiulis

Abstract: The vast majority of scholarly literature about Nazi propaganda is usually focused on Nazi Germany, occupied Poland, or France. At the same time, the language of hatred and antisemitic stereotypes used on a daily basis during Nazi occupation in the Baltic states have received relatively less attention. This chapter examines different images and stereotypes directed against the Lithuanian Jews, Poles, and Russians, and tries to answer the question of what role Lithuanian intellectuals and journalists played in providing these stereotypes in the press.

Keywords: Nazi occupation in Lithuania, propaganda, antisemitism, Lithuanian journalists, ethnic stereotypes

Introduction

Historiography about Nazi propaganda usually tends to focus on the techniques and content addressed toward German society during the years of the Third Reich. Scholars taking this approach, generally very detailed and in-depth, show how Nazis used old stereotypes to get into power and how these images were used against their enemies. However, a minority of studies about Nazi propaganda techniques in occupied Eastern Europe show that the situation there was completely different compared to Germany itself or the occupied territories in the West, where the press, cinema, and other forms of media were never completely controlled or taken over by the Germans. A growing number of studies on Nazi propaganda directed at the societies

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of occupied Eastern Europe show that the techniques and images used by the Nazis in their propaganda differed and depended on local preconditions and the changing situation on the Eastern Front.

One of the distinctive features of Nazi propaganda and its techniques in the East was that the level of antisemitism used in the press or other forms of media was much higher and vicious and lasted from the first to the last day of occupation. As Jan Grabowski emphasizes, due to the growing protests from abroad about the ongoing persecution of the Jews in the summer and fall of 1942, Nazi authorities decided to tone down their antisemitic rhetoric, while that was not the case in occupied Poland, where propaganda headquarters continued its antisemitic campaigns until the very end of the German occupation.¹

An even more complicated situation was in Ostland, where Germans were met with different political, economic, and social preconditions in the former Baltic republics and Belarus. In the territory of occupied Belarus, Germans were confronted with a shortage of local staff willing to collaborate and able to prepare materials in the local languages and who had no connections to communists or Jews.² The content of propaganda also differed and went hand in hand with developments on the front and the stages of the Holocaust in the territory of Belarus. According to Leonid Rein, unlike the images used in official Nazi propaganda, local collaborators often stressed the socioeconomic element over the national one. For this reason, Jews were referred to as “secondary enemies” after Poles and Russians. Later, as the situation on the Eastern Front was changing and with the beginning of the second wave of the annihilation of Belarusian Jews, this image was transformed to the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, which stressed that the removal of the Jews served both: the Belarusians and humankind as a whole.³

Unlike in Belarus, the three Baltic states met Germans as liberators from the Soviet yoke, and this image was later changed to seeing Germans as the defenders from the returning Red Army. However, the situation also differed in each of the Baltic states. As Kristo Nurmis has shown, German propaganda in occupied Estonia was quite successful due to the treatment of Estonians by German occupying authorities with respect, the promotion of local initiative in creating propaganda material, and manipulation through the use of censorship.⁴ Furthermore, most of the propaganda material was prepared

1 Grabowski, “German Anti-Jewish Propaganda,” 391.

2 Quinkert, *Propaganda und Terror*, 104.

3 Rein, “Every Jew Deserves the Gallows,” 231–33.

4 Nurmis, “Between Aspiration and Adaptation,” 247.

by Estonians themselves since the instructions and recommendations sent from Berlin or Riga were seen as nonapplicable to the Estonian mentality and conditions in the occupied country.⁵ Unlike Estonia, in occupied Latvia, the propaganda carried out by the Nazis did not have a sufficient effect on the population due to local distrust, Germans' negative attitudes towards national symbols, and the unequal treatment of Latvians.⁶

The question whether the Nazi propaganda was effective and how it worked in Lithuania is still the subject of ongoing research. However, scholars who have examined the aspects of German occupation and the Holocaust in Lithuania usually come to varying conclusions. The first group of authors stress that Lithuanian editors and journalists were only partly responsible for the content released in the press since everything was regulated and controlled by the German authorities.⁷ The second group argues that many Lithuanian journalists and editors spread antisemitism and the language of hatred through the pages of the press by their own will and conviction, even without encouragement from the German side.⁸ These authors underline that antisemitism and xenophobia were a part of the mood within society in occupied Lithuania and that they were used by the German authorities to reach their own goals.

Indeed, the question whether the contributors to the newspapers used antisemitic slogans and stereotypes prescribed to them by the German censors or whether these reflected the worldviews of the Lithuanian editors and journalists is worthy of more detailed research. In this chapter I argue that Lithuanian journalists and editors who wrote about ethnic relations had relative freedom to express their opinion, which usually coincided with the goals of German occupational authorities. Some authors openly expressed opinions and saw Lithuanians as Arians who, with the help of the Germans, would create a "Lithuania for Lithuanians."⁹ Furthermore, some Lithuanian authors and journalists were strong antisemites whose statements written in the press did not differ from those said or written privately. These images and stereotypes also belonged not only to individual authors but existed in Lithuanian society even before World War II and were also expressed

5 Nurmis, "Between Aspiration and Adaptation," 234.

6 Zellis, "Nacionālsociālistiskās Vācijas okupācijas režīma propaganda Latvijā," 222–23.

7 Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkurti Lietuvos valstybingumą*, 139; Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 233.

8 Bražiūnas, "The Darkest Page in the History of Lithuanian Journalism," 123–24; Venclauskas, "The Lithuanian Nationalists Party vs the Lithuanian Activists' Front," 227.

9 Ig. Taunys, "Lietuvių Nacionalistų Partija ir žmonių atrankos klausimas," *Panevėžietis*, November 21, 1941, no. 19, 1.

and spread by the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), established in Berlin on November 17, 1940, under the leadership of a former Lithuanian envoy to Berlin, Col. Kazys Škirpa, with the intention of reestablishing Lithuania's independence during the outbreak of the war between the USSR and Nazi Germany. However, at the same time, unlike their colleagues in occupied Estonia, Lithuanian journalists and editors had much more complicated relations with German censors and censorship, which was much stronger in occupied Lithuania.

To illustrate this argument, I will consider these pairs of questions: (1) How was the press under German occupation in Lithuania organized? How much freedom did Lithuanian journalists and editors have in their daily work? (2) What images about the varying ethnic groups in Lithuania were used? How they were constructed? In this regard, I will focus on Jews, Poles, and Russians—three main ethnic groups that were very often declared by the press as the main enemies of Lithuania.

Rules and Procedures: Censoring the Press in German-Occupied Lithuania

The first daily newspaper that appeared after the outbreak of the war between Nazi Germany and the USSR was *J Laisvę* (Towards freedom). Its first issue was printed on June 24, 1941, in Kaunas and was circulated for free. The new daily appeared without the approval of the Germans. It was published by the LAF, which organized the June Uprising against the retreating Red Army, declared the reestablishment of independence, and formed the Provisional Government. However, the ideology of the organization was strongly antisemitic, xenophobic, and ethnocentric, and this was visible in the pages of its newspaper. The Provisional Government also made efforts to control the press and to form public opinion by creating its own new institutions. At the beginning of July, members of the Cabinet were discussing creating a Ministry of Propaganda. Instead, however, the Board of Culture, Labor, and National Education was established. Its main functions were to oversee the media and cultural institutions as well as the activity of other political and social organizations.¹⁰

Other newspapers appeared slightly later and were approved by the German authorities. However, some periodicals also appeared under the leadership of the LAF or its subbranches, as was with the case of *Naujoji*

10 Anušauskas, *Lietuvos laikinoji vyriausybė*, 58–59.

Lietuva (New Lithuania). Its first issue reached readers in Vilnius on June 29 and was printed under the command of the Citizens' Committee of Vilnius City and Region. In September, when the LAF was liquidated, some of its periodicals continued to be published by the Lithuanian Nationalist Union (Lietuvių tautininkų sąjunga, LTS), as in the case of *Tėvynė* (Homeland), published in Šiauliai, and *Žemaičių žemė* (The land of the Samogitians) in Telšiai. The LTS also started a new one, *Panevėžio Apygardos balsas* (The voice of the Panevėžys district). The LTS had a pro-German political orientation and declared its willingness to create a "Lithuania for Lithuanians," but in December 1941 it was also closed by the German authorities. Already established newspapers, however, continued to operate and were published regularly.

During the first week of the war, articles and periodicals were checked and approved by the Kaunas city military commandant's office and its Press Department, which also oversaw the liquidation and seizure of assets of the Soviet press and propaganda institutions, such as the editorial office of the communist daily *Tiesa* (The truth), supervised radio stations in Vilnius and Kaunas and also the Lithuanian news agency Elta, and performed censorship functions.¹¹ However, on June 30, German military field commandant General Pohl issued the first decree regulating the press and editorial offices. It stipulated that all publications printed in any language could be released only after prior censorship and review by the press office of the Propaganda company (Propagandastaffel) at the German military field commandant's office.¹² In July, when the Germans introduced a civil administration in the occupied Eastern territories and formed Ostland, the Propaganda Department was established in Riga, with branches in Kaunas and Vilnius and press services in the smaller cities. The main functions of these institutions were censorship, supervision of the local press, and preparation of guidelines for editorial offices.¹³

The control of the press deepened after the liquidation of the Lithuanian Provisional Government. On August 14, 1941, the Germans closed

11 A letter by the Kaunas military commandant and the head of Press Department regarding the establishment of the commission to take over the assets of the editorial office and administrations of the newspaper *Tiesa* (The truth), June 27, 1941, Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (Lithuanian Central State Archives; henceforth LCVA), f. R-1444, ap. 2, b. 2, l. 9; Tasks for officers of Kaunas military commandant's office, June 29, 1941, LCVA, f. R-1444, ap. 2, b. 1, l. 4; The agenda of the press officers meeting, June 30, 1941, LCVA, f. R-1444, ap. 2, b. 2, l. 11.

12 An order of the German military field commandant to the Kaunas military commandant, June 30, 1941, LCVA, f. R-1444, ap. 1, b. 12, l. 1.

13 Bražiūnas, "Legalios spaudos ir valdžios santykis," 204–5.

the Lithuanian news agency Elta and replaced it with the subdivision of the DNB (Deutsches Nachrichtebüro), which provided information about international politics and the war, and, in most cases, ordered the publication of all the material sent to editorial offices.¹⁴ Another regulation for the publishing houses and editorial offices appeared on December 22, 1941, which underlined that all printing houses must get written permission to continue their activities and must present two copies of each printed publication.¹⁵ The later regulation shows that each issue of the newspaper was checked twice: before it reached the printing house and after it was printed.¹⁶ Finally, another order, issued on September 23, 1942, by Adrian von Renteln, general commissioner of occupied Lithuania, created the Press Union—a tool in German hands to control the local press and printing houses, including press administration, both politically and financially.¹⁷

The practical guidelines prepared by German propagandists depended not only on the messages which used to be transmitted in the press but also on the ethnic groups to which they were addressed. This situation was especially vivid in Vilnius, where *Naujoji Lietuva* had relatively more freedom to express opinions and form its own content, while the Polish-language daily *Goniec Codzienny* (Daily messenger) usually only reprinted news and messages from German press releases. The same applied to *Bielaruski holas* (Belarusian voice), which was totally controlled by the Germans and served as a trumpet to spread negative images and stereotypes among the Belarusian citizens of the city about the former Polish and the Soviet rule.¹⁸

The relations between the Lithuanian editors and the German censors were arduous and intense, as both parties distrusted one another. The disappointment went further when the Germans produced very detailed, sometimes even meticulous and exaggerated, guidelines for editors and journalists; these included a request not to use the word “capital” in articles about Vilnius, or the words “Lithuania” and “Lithuanians,” and instead use

14 Bražiūnas, “Legalios spaudos ir valdžios santykis,” 210.

15 “Anordnung zur Regelung des Verlag und Druckwesens,” *Amtsblatt des Generalkommissars in Kauen*, December 28, 1941, Jg. I, 267–68.

16 In the case of *Naujoji Lietuva*, the Germans asked Jews to translate the printed issues of the newspaper. Translations were made by the members of the “Paper Brigade,” mostly Zelig Kalmanovich, Dr. Dina Jaffe, and Dr. Jacob Gordon. See Fishman, *The Book Smugglers*, 72. These translations are located at the Judaica Research Center at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Central State Archives, the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, and Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History.

17 “Verordnung über die Errichtung des Wirtschaftsverbandes Druck,” *Amtsblatt des Generalkommissars in Kauen*, December 31, 1942, Jg. II, 844–49.

18 Bražiūnas, “Legalios spaudos ir valdžios santykis,” 205–6.

“Ostland” and “we” (thus seeking to avoid conflict between Lithuanians and Poles, particularly in Vilnius), and that the names of the German officers appear in German form, etc.¹⁹ These requests from the Press Department showed that unlike most Lithuanian political leaders at the time, the Germans were not thinking of granting statehood to Lithuanians but, from the very beginning, used a colonial approach and language which was provided and used in the press.

German censors also forbade publishing any translations from German newspapers or ideological books such as *Mein Kampf* without permission and written approval.²⁰ This specific requirement appeared when the editors of *Naujoji Lietuva* translated and republished an article from the official SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* which stressed that the territories in the East would be colonized and Germanized after the war.²¹ This situation caused a conflict between the Lithuanians and the Germans. At the same time, it illustrates that editors could ignore the censors without being severely punished for writing between the lines or publishing material that was seen as inappropriate from the standpoint of the German propaganda demands. In this case, the editorial staff was asked to publish an apology, stating that as a result of a bad translation, the article was misunderstood.²² However, this situation also raises the question whether the statements expressed in the press were dictated solely by Germans or correlated with personal opinions and worldviews made by Lithuanian authors and journalists.

In his memoirs, former acting prime minister of the Provisional Government Juozas Brazaitis underlined that the daily newspaper *Į Laisvę* published German material but only in the scale sent by DNB.²³ Indeed, newspapers reprinted much material sent by DNB, republished articles from the German press about German soldiers' experience on the Eastern Front, or translated speeches by Hitler, Goebbels, and other Nazi party officials. However, it would be wrong to maintain the image that antisemitic content merely reflected the German antisemitic language while Lithuanian journalists

19 A letter from the censor to the editorial office of *Naujoji Lietuva*, May 24, 1944, LCVA, f. R-639, ap. 1, b. 21, l. 22; Diary of Rapolas Mackonis, Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (Lithuanian Special Archives; henceforth LYA), f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 20317/3, l. 1-71; A letter from the DNB to the editorial offices, April 13, 1942, LCVA, f. R-639, ap. 1, b. 6, l. 11.

20 Order by the German Propaganda Department in the General Commissariat in Kaunas, September 24, 1942, LCVA, f. R-639, ap. 1, b. 6, l. 10.

21 “Germanizuoti?” *Naujoji Lietuva*, September 10, 1942, no. 214, 2; Diary of Rapolas Mackonis, LYA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 20317/3, l. 2-225.

22 “Germanizuoti?” *Naujoji Lietuva*, October 8, 1942, no. 238, 1.

23 Brazaitis, *Vienų vienai*, 123-24.

only repeated it. There were many cases when opinions expressed publicly represented the same worldview which was also stressed privately.

More detailed information left by the contributors and the staff members of *Naujoji Lietuva* allows us to compare the personal thoughts and the statements published in the newspaper. One of the leading figures who stood behind this newspaper was Rapolas Mackonis (1900–1982), a journalist and writer who was also among forty-six Lithuanian intellectuals arrested and deported to Stutthof concentration camp in 1943 for the failed mobilization of Lithuanians to the SS legion. A diary written by Mackonis reveals not only daily tasks met by the press under German occupation but also his opinion regarding other ethnic groups in Vilnius and elsewhere in Lithuania. On August 25, 1941, he made an entry in his diary expressing his opinion about the ongoing massacres of the Lithuanian Jews. The diary entry has the same features as expressed in the newspaper articles:

Every day we hear more and more about the indiscriminate settlement with the Jews. Were it happening in one town or another, we might call it a prank or hooliganism. But when it comes to settling with the Jews all over Lithuania, cleansing them is a historical necessity. For centuries, the Jews have possessed the body of Lithuania like lice. [...] But the moment of disinfection has arrived, and it is being done without any thought as to what will come of it.²⁴

Rapolas Mackonis was not the only one expressing an antisemitic and xenophobic worldview in the diaries. Another contributor to *Naujoji Lietuva*, secretary-general of the LTS Zenonas Blynas also wrote a diary recording his thoughts about the political situation, daily life, and rumors spread over the country. He also expressed his opinion about the ongoing massacres of Lithuanian Jews and declared that “it is better that Jews are killed, not Lithuanians.”²⁵ At the same time, he was disgusted by the fact that Lithuanians participated in the massacres: “I hate the fact that Lithuania is becoming a morgue, necropolis, [...] that we are shooting others, that we are becoming only paid executioners.”²⁶

Another case was Vytautas Reivytis, director of the Police Department, who also was a chief editor of the short-lived magazine *Policija* (The police). On its pages the magazine noted the admiration of Nazism and declared

24 Diary of Rapolas Mackonis, LYA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. 20317/3, l. 1-61-62.

25 Blynas, *Karo metų dienoraštis*, 77.

26 Blynas, *Karo metų dienoraštis*, 258.

that the Jews were a criminal nation.²⁷ Reivytiš did not keep a diary, but on August 16, 1941 he issued a secret circular that ordered precincts to gather all the Jews in their disposition for “transportation to the camps,” which had a fateful role in the destruction of Lithuanian Jews.²⁸

These examples show that at least some journalists, editors, or contributors privately shared the same views declared publicly on the pages of the press without any manipulation or agitation from the German side. Furthermore, the language and the terminology used to describe other ethnic groups were the same as seen in the press, i.e., they used dehumanized phrases and language or biological terms and words to describe Jews and other ethnic groups—a frequent feature in the periodical press.

“Lithuania without Jews”: Initiating the Genocide

The intensity of antisemitic propaganda in the Lithuanian press went through different stages, but the most extreme antisemitic campaign was during the summer and the fall of 1941, when approximately 146,000 to 156,000 Lithuanian Jews were exterminated across the country.²⁹ To initiate and justify ongoing massacres the press relied on the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, which was not only the essence of the Nazi propaganda but also existed in Lithuanian society even before the war.³⁰ This stereotype was also exploited by the LAF, which stated in its leaflets and declaration documentation that “communism is a tool of international Jewry to control and oppress the nations.”³¹ These exact words were repeated by the LAF newspaper *Į Laisvę*, which stressed that “Jewish buddies of the Bolsheviks for whom communism was the best tool to exploit and rule others are also running head over heels. This is because Bolshevism and Jews are one and the same inseparable thing.”³² *Naujoji Lietuva* even went further and called on readers to annihilate the Jews: “Down with communism,

27 Taunys, “Nusikaltėlių tauta,” *Policija*, November 1943, no. 1, 13–14.

28 Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder*, 147–56; Sužiedėlis, “Foreign Saviors,” 349.

29 Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder*, 279.

30 According to a staff member of the US embassy in Moscow who traveled to Lithuania just three months before the outbreak of war, the Soviet administration was described among Lithuanians as the “Jewish Government.” Senn, “Lithuania in March 1941,” 153. About the anti-Semitic stereotypes during the Soviet occupation, see Sužiedėlis, “Listen, the Jews Are Ruling Us Now.”

31 Kazys Škirpa, “Kovok! Pastangos gelbėti Lietuvą 1939–1941 m.,” LCVA, f. 1398, ap. 1, b. 3, l. 225. Manuscript written by Kazys Škirpa; its content is discussed in Sužiedėlis, “Neighbors, Rivals, Enemies, Victims.”

32 K. P., “Priespaudą numetant,” *Į Laisvę*, June 24, 1941, no. 1, 1.

down with Jews! New Lithuania, having joined Adolf Hitler's New Europe, must be clean from the mud of Jewish communism. [...] [T]o annihilate Jewry, and with this, communism is the first task of New Lithuania."³³

The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism was exploited in countless articles about the Soviet occupation, depicting Lithuanian Jews as the primary exploiters of Lithuanians and the main collaborators with the Soviet regime. The same myth was combined with older stereotypes and conspiracy theories, such as in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.³⁴ According to one editorial, communism and the Soviet Union are incarnations of what is written in the *Protocols*:

Bolshevism is ruled not by Skriabin (Molotov), not by Dzhugashvili (Stalin) but by the Jews: Beria (NKVD is in his hands), Kaganovich, Finkelstein (Litvinov), Mikoyan and others. There is no doubt that they belong to the International Kahal of the Elders of Zion, which implements its will in annihilating nation after nation.³⁵

It should be underlined that referring to the *Protocols of the Elders of the Zion* is another peculiarity between Nazi Germany, Nazi-occupied Western Europe, and the occupied territories in the East. Unlike in occupied Western Europe or Germany itself, where the *Protocols* were seen by society as a forgery and were used very infrequently, in occupied Lithuania the narrative of Bolshevism as the secret primary tool of world Jewry to dominate the world was a propaganda element expressed in numerous articles.³⁶

Another noteworthy image used to describe Jews was a cliché taken from official Nazi propaganda—that the Western allies offered their hand to the USSR in the fight against the Third Reich because the Jewish plutocracy ruled countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. This stereotype was used very often in articles about domestic politics in the United States and the United Kingdom, in commentaries on the statements made by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, and in the news providing details about the ongoing war and the military situation at the front.³⁷

33 P. L., "Lietuva be žydų," *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 4, 1941, no. 6, 1. The same encouragement could be found in several other articles and newspapers; see Vytautas K. Labunaitis, "Mūsų tautos priešai," *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 12, 1941, no. 13, 4; "Apvalyti lietuvių tautą nuo grybo," *Į Laisvę*, July 5, 1941, no. 11, 1; "Kartą visiems laikams," *Tėvynė*, July 13, 1941, no. 2, 1.

34 J. P., "Žydai ir masonai," *Naujosios Biržų žinios*, September 20, 1941, no. 9, 3.

35 K. Liekys, "Kas yra demokratija," *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 31, 1941, no. 29, 1.

36 Bytwerk, "Believing in 'Inner Truth,'" 223.

37 "Raudonajai barbarybei žlungant," *Į Laisvę*, July 2, 1941, no. 8, 1; "Žydija, bolševizmas ir plutokratija turi būti sunaikinti," *Į Laisvę*, July 11, 1941, no. 16, 1; "Tai mūsų gyvybinis reikalas," 4;

In addition, antisemitism in the newspapers was also spread by special irregular columns. *Naujoji Lietuva* had a column entitled “From the History of Lithuanian Antisemitism,” which included texts about Jews excerpted from works written by Lithuanian public figures and intellectuals such as Vincas Kudirka, author of the words to the Lithuanian national anthem, priests Juozas Šnapštys-Margalis and Adolfas Sabaliauskas, or Motiejus Valančius, the Catholic bishop of Samogitia.³⁸ These excerpts, written in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, described Jews as exploiters, swindlers, morally corrupt, and the main competitors with Lithuanians for trade and business.³⁹ Another column, “The Facts Speak,” appeared in the weekly *Ūkininko patarėjas* (The farmer’s adviser), which also promoted the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism and depicted Jews as the exploiters of the Lithuanian nation. The authors of this column went even further, accusing Jews of sexually abusing Lithuanian women.⁴⁰

The antisemitic stream peaked when the Germans and local Lithuanian administration officials began to issue restrictions on Jews. In July 1941 Jews were ordered to wear yellow star badges on their chests and backs. They were permitted to shop only in certain stores and only between 4 pm and 6 pm and were banned from using sidewalks or walking in the central streets and parks. In August and September, ghettos in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, and Švenčionys were established. Newspapers published these restrictions and simultaneously expressed the opinion that the changes introduced by the German and the Lithuanian authorities had a “positive outcome.” Numerous articles underlined that the labeling of Jews and their isolation in the ghettos “allow for the Gentiles to know who to watch out for,” and stressed that Vilnius “is becoming clean and cozy as a churchyard in a Lithuanian village, supervised by the good and attentive priest.”⁴¹ Most importantly,

K. M., “Kartu žygiuoti, kartu mušti,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 18, 1941, no. 18, 1; “Didžiausias visų laikų karas,” *Tėviškė*, January 4, 1942, no. 1, 2; “400 milijonų frontas,” *Naujosios Biržų žinios*, January 13, 1942, no. 1, 2.

38 “Nuo amžių lietuviui teko kovoti su žydais,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 12, 1941, no. 13, 4; “Žydai,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 17, 1941, no. 17, 4; “Žydai,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 19, 1941, no. 19, 3–4; “Žydai norėjo papirkti vyskupą Valančių,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 26, 1941, no. 25, 2; “Vysk. Valančiaus mintys apie žydus,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, August 17, 1941, no. 43, 5.

39 Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day*, 69–76.

40 “Žydų viešbučiai,” *Ūkininko patarėjas*, July 18, 1941, no. 4, 6; “Faktai kalba,” *Ūkininko patarėjas*, July 18, 1941, no. 4, 6; “Pasisaugokite, moterys!—Jis jau ateina,” *Ūkininko patarėjas*, July 25, 1941, no. 5, 5.

41 “Žmonės su geltonomis žvaigždėmis,” *I Laisvę*, August 2, 1941, no. 35, 7; Vm., “Naujas vaizdas sostinės gatvėse,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 9, 1941, no. 10, 3; Stp. Šetkus, “Vilniaus gyvenimas ir darbas,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, September 21, 1941, no. 73, 2.

the exclusion and isolation of the Jews was seen as an opportunity and an open window for Lithuanians to get business, industry, and trade into their hands.⁴² One article concluded, “Finally, we will see a town without Jews, a market without Jewish swindlers, purchases without haggling.”⁴³ Announcements of new prohibitions and articles about the isolation of Jews into ghettos went with the warnings not to help the victims of the Holocaust. Those who bought food for Jews or tried to rescue the victims were named publicly, called traitors of the Lithuanian nation, or described as profiteers.⁴⁴

The antisemitic images discussed above were also used during the later years of Nazi occupation; however, they did not appear in 1941. The intensity of antisemitism on the pages of the press arose not only from the need to justify and encourage the mass murder of Lithuanian Jews during the second half of 1941, but also from the economic and military demands and the situation on the Eastern Front, which required more attention from the Germans. Later propaganda campaigns were mainly focused on agriculture and food demands, health, and the mobilization of men to the Eastern Front, while at the same time occasionally repeating the images discussed above.

Lithuanians as a Titular Nation? Relations with Poles and Russians

While the largest and the most intensive campaign of hatred in the Lithuanian periodical press was focused on Lithuanian Jews, other ethnic groups were also attacked. Some Lithuanians argued that Lithuanians were also Aryans, and that as the titular nation in their own homeland, together with Nazi Germany they were creating a new Europe based on laws centered on ethnicity.⁴⁵ These views were presented not only in the numerous articles where Poles and Russians were depicted as the main enemies of the

42 Stp. Vykintas, “Pozityvia linkme,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 17, 1941, no. 17, 1.

43 “Žydai sutvarkyti,” *Į Laisvę*, August 4, 1941, no. 36, 4.

44 “Turgeliuose netrūksta žydams padėjėjų,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, September 13, 1941, no. 66, 3; “Kas yra?” *Į Laisvę*, October 25, 1941, no. 107, 1; J. Pavasaris, “Kovokime su spekuliantais ir išnaudotojais,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 8, 1941, no. 9, 3; “Gana žydberniavimų!” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 14, 1941, no. 14, 3. The same images were also applied to those who spoke or helped POWs. See “Nesikalbėti su belaisviais,” *Į Laisvę*, July 19, 1941, no. 23, 7.

45 “Tautinio darbo gairės,” *Naujosios Biržų žinios*, July 26, 1941, no. 2, 1; “Už sveiką lietuvišką žmogų,” *Į Laisvę*, July 29, 1941, no. 31, 4; “Tautos garbė—Tėvynės gerovė,” *Tėvynė*, August 11, 1941, no. 6, 1; “Galvokime rasiškai,” *Į Laisvę*, October 24, 1941, no. 106, 1; “Lietuvių Nacionalistų Partija ir žmonių atrankos klausimas,” *Į Laisvę*, November 11, 1941, no. 120, 4.

Lithuanian nation—alongside Jews—but also in the meetings and statements of the Lithuanian administration. On July 16, 1941, the head of the police of Alytus district declared that Lithuanians and Germans were first-class citizens, Poles and Russians second-class, with Jews the last among all nations.⁴⁶

These exact words were repeated by the representatives of the LAF in Vilnius, who in a statement stressed that the city should be cleaned of the merciless element alien to the city and the entire Lithuanian nation.⁴⁷ The conflict with Poles and Russians was marked by historical precedents and was especially evident in Vilnius, where most of the inhabitants were Poles; Russians were the third largest ethnic group in the city after Jews, and Lithuanians were one of the smaller minorities in the city.⁴⁸ Poles and Russians were described as colonizers who had no relations with Lithuania and were alien to Lithuanians and their culture. According to one editorial, Russians were colonizers from the times of the tsarist Russian Empire, were uneducated and never loyal to Lithuanians, always siding with Lithuania's oppressors. At the same time, Poles were depicted as relics of feudal times who in earlier decades never joined the Lithuanian side in everyday cultural or economic work, even if they were reminded of a common glorious past shared by Poles and Lithuanians in the Kingdom of Poland and the Lithuanian Grand Duchy. The article concluded with a call to violence: Poles and Russians, alongside the Jews, were the “mushrooms of our nation which must be cut down as soon as possible.”⁴⁹

The images of Poles as the enemy was also rooted in the interwar conflict regarding the Vilnius question, a territorial conflict between Lithuania and Poland in the interwar years over the control of Vilnius and Vilnius area, which was held by Poland. The Poles were portrayed as imperialists, oppressors, and persecutors of Lithuanians and Lithuanian culture in Vilnius city and the surrounding region.⁵⁰ Interwar Poland was depicted as a creation of the failed system of Versailles, which enslaved thousands of Lithuanians, Germans, Ukrainians, and Belarusians under the rule of Poles without granting them basic rights.⁵¹ Distrust and animosity were expressed not only towards the Poles who lived in Lithuania before the

46 Brandišauskas, *1941 m. Birželio sukilimas*, 198.

47 “Žodis vietos gyventojams,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, September 20, 1941, no. 4, 1.

48 According to data from 1939, Vilnius had 195,000 inhabitants: 128,000 Poles, 54,000 Jews, and more than 7,000 Russians. See Stravinskienė, “Vilne–Wilno–Vilnius,” 75.

49 “Apvalyti lietuvių tautą nuo grybo,” *I Laisvę*, July 5, 1941, no. 11, 1.

50 “Tėvynė apie lenkus,” *Naujosios Biržų žinios*, August 23, 1941, no. 6, 2. On the Vilnius region in the interwar period, see the chapter in this volume by Tomas Balkelis.

51 “Išvadavimo sukaktuvės,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, September 20, 1941, no. 72, 1.

war but also war refugees from Poland. The Lithuanian-language press underlined that the war refugees from Poland, as well as local Poles, should leave for Poland.⁵² Another image of Poles was directly related to the war and the fact that the Polish government in exile formed after the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the USSR in September 1939 was located in the United Kingdom and fought against Nazi Germany. For this reason, Poles were called an untrustworthy element, agents, plotters, and gossipmongers who spread rumors about the upcoming defeat of the German Army in war.⁵³

Unlike stereotypes about Poles, images of Russians were more varied. As described above, local Russians were seen as colonialists, while those who lived within the prewar borders of the USSR were very often portrayed as victims of communism. Russians were usually described as embracing imperialistic thinking or fatalism. According to Antanas Bružas, a journalist who worked at the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union before the war, Russians as a nation have a dangerous temper formed by a lack of connection with Western culture and rule and by the exploitative nature of tsarism. According to Bružas, these were the reasons Russians suffer from a megalomania that does not allow them to raise questions about how to create a better and happier life for themselves within their own borders, but instead to seek to expand within neighboring countries.⁵⁴ Other authors argued that Russians had lost the connection with religion and Christianity and that for this reason were now ruled by the Bolsheviks:

The Russian nation is not Bolsheviks. However, they no longer believe in God. [...] Nothing is left for them but to tolerate destroyers who killed God. And they tolerate them with oriental fatalism. [...] They underestimated the fact that the psychology of Lithuanians is completely different from the psychology of the Russian muzhik.⁵⁵

Sometimes Russians were blamed for collaboration and the Soviet occupation, but these instances were rare.⁵⁶ Instead, they were usually described

52 "Apvalyti lietuvių tautą nuo grybo," *Į Laisvę*, July 5, 1941, no. 11, 1.

53 Vincas Vilkas, "Laisvė ir kūrybinio darbo sąlygos," *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 12, 1941, no. 13, 3; Gašlūtis, "Ak, tie intrigantai," *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 19, 1941, no. 19, 5; Vilnenis, "Didelis dalykai ir [...] svaičiojimai," *Naujoji Lietuva*, August 23, 1941, no. 48, 1; "Melas ir tiesa," *Naujoji Lietuva*, December 21, 1941, no. 150, 1.

54 Ant. Bružas, "Bolševikiško imperializmo galas," *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 11, 1941, no. 12, 2.

55 J. Brazauskas, "Bolševizmas ir lietuviai," *Naujoji Lietuva*, April 26, 1942, no. 98, 3.

56 "Pagaliau...," *Į Laisvę*, June 27, 1941, no. 4, 1; Ar., "Nedėkingieji," *Tėviškė*, March 20, 1942, no. 12, 6. The press also asked the readers not to blame Lithuanians who collaborated with the Soviet

as victims of Judeo-Bolshevism. The press underlined that “Russians saw how Jews destroyed their culture and life but were powerless and had no support.”⁵⁷ Other articles noted that, like other nations, Russians were waiting for the liberation from the slavery of Judeo-Bolshevism.⁵⁸ This distinction between local Russians and those who lived within the borders of the USSR was made due to the guidelines of the German authorities, which underlined that articles against the Soviet Union should not portray Russians or other nations under the rule of the Soviets as the enemy but as nations oppressed by Judeo-Bolshevism and that the Germans had come as liberators and as friends.⁵⁹

The stereotypes and images about Poles and Russians discussed in this chapter were mainly used at the beginning of the German occupation, when the euphoric mood within Lithuanian society corresponded with the slogan “Lithuania for Lithuanians.” Later, the language of hatred against these two ethnic groups, as well as against Jews, was used irregularly. However, this was also because German authorities were focused on the economic and material exploitation of the country to help them pursue the war and were not interested in ethnic conflicts (except against the Jews), which could cause instability or cast doubt on their expected victory on the Eastern Front.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Approximately forty newspapers and magazines were printed in German-occupied Lithuania. Most of them reached readers under the initiative of the LAF and its subbranches across the country. However, on June 30, 1941, Germans introduced censorship and gradually took control of the press after the liquidation of the Provisional Government, the LAF, and later the LTS.

authorities. Usually they were described as degenerates, lacking political conscience, or deluded by the Jews. See “Mūsų kelias—su Naująja Europa, mūsų darbas—Naujajai Lietuvai,” *I Laisvę*, July 1, 1941, no. 7, 1; “Kurti Naująją Lietuvą,” *I Laisvę*, July 11, 1941, no. 16, 4; “Kaip aš buvau tapes žydų-komunistų tarnu,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 12, 1941, no. 13, 4.

57 Juoz. V-kas, “Žydų klausimu,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, July 12, 1941, no. 13, 4.

58 “Krenta bombos ant Maskvos,” *Naujosios Biržų žinios*, July 26, 1941, no. 2, 2–3; J. P., “Skurdo ir nevilieties aplinkos žmogus,” *Naujosios Biržų žinios*, October 11, 1941, no. 12, 2; P. Varūnas, “Nelaimingos rusų tautos budeliai,” *Naujoji Lietuva*, January 23, 1942, no. 19, 2.

59 “Suggestions and Guidelines for Magazine Articles against the Soviet Union,” *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, June 27, 1941, no. 113, 3–4, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/zeitschriften-dienst8.htm>.

60 Bubnys, “Etniniai santykiai,” 94.

German censors allowed the publication of press releases produced by the DNB and the republishing of material printed in other German newspapers with the approval of their propagandists. They gave strict orders and guidelines how to write about the ongoing war against the USSR and how to comment on the situation in an occupied country. It would be wrong, however, to say that the content published in the press was solely produced and dictated by Germans. In fact, the articles, statements, and even fictional stories published in the press were created mainly by Lithuanian editors, journalists, and correspondents. Furthermore, in some cases, the images and stereotypes used in the press represented not only the antisemitic language used in Nazi propaganda but also reflected the authors' privately expressed worldviews.

The most intensive propaganda campaign in occupied Lithuania was directed against the Lithuanian Jews. It lasted from the beginning of the war until the end of the Nazi occupation, but its peak coincided with the period of the most intensive shootings of Lithuanian Jews during the summer and fall of 1941. The press used both the stereotypes and images borrowed from official Nazi propaganda, primarily the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, as well as exposed older ones used in Lithuanian antisemitic literature created in the second half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. All these stereotypes existed in Lithuanian society even before the war and Nazi occupation, and they were also very frequently used in the ideological documents produced by the LAF.

The language of hatred in the press was directed not only against Jews but also against other ethnic groups in the country, especially Poles and Russians, who were often portrayed as colonialists and alien to Lithuanians and Lithuanian culture. Historical preconditions and prewar conflicts mostly determined the stereotypes and myths against Poles. Ethnic stereotypes against Poles were mainly based on the prewar conflict about the Vilnius question, while Russians were seen as relics of the tsarist empire. However, the image of Russians was more varied and depended not only on the authors' worldview but also on German demands. Usually, Russians who lived within the prewar borders of the USSR were shown as victims of a Judeo-Bolshevist plot, which was also portrayed in official Nazi propaganda. The same views were used in articles about the 1940–1941 Soviet occupation of Lithuania, in which Russians and Lithuanians, unlike Jews, were rarely blamed for collaborating with occupational authorities.

While ethnic conflicts in occupied Lithuania had their historical preconditions and roots, German authorities tried to manipulate the ethnic groups or find a consensus between them (except for the Jews). This strategy was based on their war demands, which were directed toward exploiting the occupied

country and local population. However, the press was a powerful tool for Germans to organize various campaigns according to their ideological thinking and economic needs. It was also an outlet for the local population to openly express their hatred for the loss of statehood, and this centered on sentiments directed not against Lithuanians who had collaborated with the first Soviet occupation, but mainly against Jews, who were victims of both Soviet and German occupational regimes.

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14. The *Habitus* of Holocaust Reckoning during the Thaw in Soviet Lithuania

Violeta Davoliūtė

Abstract: Soviet discourse generally obscured the Jewish aspect of the Holocaust within the anti-fascist narrative. But in Lithuania during the Thaw, this pattern was broken by several Jewish poets and writers, sometimes in collaboration with non-Jewish colleagues. While Jews and Gentiles in Lithuania experienced the German occupation from radically different subject positions, and while antisemitism clearly persisted in the postwar era, an incipient process of historical reckoning can be traced among a small group of multiethnic cultural elites underpinned by shared cultural codes, personal memories of war, and the post-genocidal built environment. Surveying works of literature and cinema, this chapter suggests that the process of reckoning with the Holocaust emerged from a distinct *habitus* or community of affect.

Keywords: genocide, memory, reckoning, trauma, locality

Introduction

Although the Holocaust is widely recognized to have a universal significance, the universalization of its meaning, as argued by Jeffrey Alexander, “has been primarily confined to the West.” In a landmark paper entitled “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals,” Alexander claims that sensibility towards the Holocaust as the most tragic event in Western history depends on a “symbolically generated, emotionally vicarious participation in the trauma drama of the mass murder of the Jews,” and that the degree of participation varies strongly across the globe. The memory of the Holocaust,

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he concludes, is much more pronounced in Western Europe and North America than elsewhere.¹

Scholars seeking to characterize the specificities of Holocaust remembrance in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have tended to emphasize its supposed absence, creating a gap between East and West that has diminished, to a degree, since the end of the Cold War thanks to the process of European integration. As explained by Jelena Subotić, the memory of the Holocaust in communist societies was absorbed by the broader narrative of World War II as a triumph over fascism. The uniqueness of Jewish suffering, she claims, was not recognized, because the binary geopolitics of the time isolated the East from the Holocaust narrative as it formed in the West.²

With more specific reference to the USSR, Zvi Gitelman gives several reasons why the Soviets tended to ignore or downplay the Holocaust. First, they were reluctant to raise the sensitive issue of collaboration of the local population with the Nazis as incompatible with the myth of the united front against fascism. Second, they were reluctant to give Soviet Jews reason “to question the viability of their continued coexistence with neighbors whose parents and grandparents had murdered members of their families.” In addition to drawing attention to antisemitism, they feared that attention to the particularity of the Jewish genocide would anger other nationalities like Russians or Ukrainians who had suffered a greater absolute number of casualties.³

Gennady Estraikh emphasizes the pervasive role of ideology in the shaping of Soviet memory. There is no point even looking for such words as “Holocaust” or “Shoah,” he writes, because these terms emphasize the particularity of Jewish suffering. According to Soviet doctrine, Jewish suffering was simply part of general suffering. However, this doctrine was not enforced consistently, and one could find several works of literature and art that broke the rules, like the short stories of Icchokas Meras (1934–2014) or the reconstructed diary of Masha Rolnikaitė (1927–2016).⁴ Arkady Zeltzer reinforces this position, noting that “the likelihood of a book on Jewish matters being published in the USSR at the time was unpredictable.”⁵

This chapter builds on these observations and argues that the Thaw in Soviet Lithuania was not simply a permissive, but a productive environment for

1 Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals.”

2 Subotić, “Political Memory, Ontological Security.”

3 Gitelman, “Internationalism, Patriotism and Disillusion.”

4 Estraikh, “The Holocaust’s Instrumentalization.” The works of Meras and Rolnikaitė will be discussed in detail below.

5 Zeltzer, “The Cold War and Holocaust Memorialization.”

writers and artists seeking to reckon with the legacy of the Holocaust, albeit within the confines of communist ideology. The process of de-Stalinization launched by Nikita Khrushchev did not revise the goal of Sovietization through individual and social transformation. Instead, Khrushchev hoped to revive popular support for modernization, to trigger reforms from below. The cultural Thaw was not anti-Soviet in inspiration but aimed rather at creating an authentic, grassroots Soviet culture.⁶ In this context, the agents of remembrance were not only Lithuanian Jews, but included several non-Jewish members of the creative intelligentsia whose work was also informed by personal memories of war and the shared cultural codes of the Thaw.

This chapter uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to draw a link between macro-sociological factors like "cultural codes" and the micro-sociological interactions among individuals. *Habitus* is a "feel for the game" or a set of "dispositions acquired through experience" that endow the actions of a group of people, like Jews and Gentiles in postwar Lithuania, to act with a degree of cohesion despite their differences.⁷ During this brief period, which ended with the emigration of many Lithuanian Jews to Israel after 1967, a small but leading group of Jewish and Gentile cultural elites acted upon a shared impulse, often in direct collaboration with one another, to make sense of the Holocaust, along with other traumatic episodes of recent history.⁸

This argument is developed in three parts. First, I show how the post-Stalin Thaw, by introducing new criteria of cultural authenticity such as sincere self-expression, triggered an outpouring of local, grassroots memories and narratives that were in tension with ideological narratives of the war. The intense mediatization of high-profile war crimes trials held in the 1960s also stimulated discussion and revived personal memories that were channeled into the public sphere.

Second, I focus on how Jewish Lithuanian writers such as Icchokas Meras and Masha Rolnikaitė, among others, published popular literary works where the Jew is not simply a victim of atrocity, but the protagonist of a narrative,

6 Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 25.

7 Bourdieu, *In Other Words*.

8 Over 90 percent of the prewar population of two hundred thousand Jews in Lithuania were killed in the Holocaust. By the end of 1945, an estimated ten thousand Jews resided in Lithuania. Of these, four-fifths had returned to Lithuania from evacuation to the Soviet interior, while one-fifth had survived the war in Lithuania as partisans or in hiding. By 1959, the Jewish population had risen to a postwar peak of 24,672, the majority of whom were in-migrants from other parts of the USSR. This number fell to 14,703 by 1979, the result of a wave of emigration from 1967 until the early 1970s. Atamuk, *Juden in Litauen*, 297–98, 314–15.

exercising agency. Moreover, these narratives depicted the fraught relations between Jews and their neighbors in the context of communal genocide and the role of locals in the commission of atrocities.

Finally, I note that the Thaw-era revival of Holocaust reckoning often involved significant collaborations between Jewish and non-Jewish members of the postwar creative intelligentsia in literature and the cinema. As illustrations, I extend this survey beyond literature to highlight the way in which two films—*Du mažame miestelyje* (Two in a small town, 1965) and *Birželis, vasaros pradžia* (June, the beginning of summer, 1969)—revisit post-genocidal spaces, the small towns, the former shtetls, of provincial Lithuania.

I. The Holocaust in Lithuania and the Thaw

The Soviet memory of the “Great Patriotic War” was forged and reformed by massive propaganda campaigns initiated long before the end of the war, and which continued long afterwards.⁹ Under Stalin, this narrative emphasized the heroism of the Red Army, Stalin’s personal leadership, and the mass resistance of the civilian population under Nazi occupation. But with the onset of de-Stalinization in the late 1950s, the narrative of Soviet triumph over fascism began to include a certain space for the diversity of wartime experience and greater attention to the suffering of victims and their personal experience.¹⁰

Khrushchev’s Thaw was marked by the release of new evidence into the public domain. The Secret Speech triggered and legitimized the (selective and carefully controlled) expression of local and personal memories across the USSR.¹¹ With the aim of rejuvenating Soviet ideology, “sincerity” was upheld as the highest criterion of “authenticity,” and personal memories of war emerged as a significant motif in Soviet literature and cinema.¹²

In the newly incorporated Western borderlands of the USSR, such expressions could hardly exclude references to events that were difficult to reconcile with the generally accepted narrative, like the widespread accommodation of the population to the German occupation authorities,

9 Dobrenko, “The Art of Hatred.”

10 Kopusov, “The Rise of Memory.”

11 Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 25.

12 Rutten, *Sincerity after Communism*; Woll, *Real Images*; Youngblood, “A War Remembered”; Baraban, “The Fate of a Man”; Kaganovsky, “Postmemory, Countermemory.”

the racially motivated annihilation of the Jewish community (as distinct from other Soviet citizens), or the armed anti-Soviet struggle that continued after the surrender of Germany to the Allies.¹³

Thaw-era representations of the war in Soviet Lithuania were thus caught in this tension between the traditional strictures of official discourse and the lyrical, modernizing impulse to share authentic memories of personal experience. For example, Soviet propaganda heaped praise on the “Soviet Lithuanian nation” for their resistance to German occupation, highlighting the exploits of the few ethnic Lithuanians who fought for Soviet partisan units—stories that were exaggerated in themselves and bore little relation to the lived experience of the majority.

Archivists, historians, writers, and artists were tasked by the Soviet authorities with presenting evidence that prominent members of the anti-Soviet resistance were guilty of atrocities.¹⁴ But even while the ideological aim of this anti-fascist campaign was to vilify all anti-Soviet forces, to minimize or externalize the involvement of local residents as German collaborators and lump the majority into the category of the heroic Soviet people, the act of documenting the crimes of perpetrators created an opportunity to highlight the Jewish identity of most of the victims. For example, a two-volume collection of documentary materials published in 1965 and 1973 titled *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje (1941–1944)* (Mass murders in Lithuania, 1941–44) lists the names and quite explicitly marks the Jewish identity of most victims.¹⁵

One can also find explicit references to Jewish suffering in a series of propagandistic works of historical nonfiction called *Faktai kaltina* (Facts accuse). For example, in stories by Vladas Jasinskas on the experience of war in the town of Kupiškis one can see the following episode:

In the rear of the column, his bare feet in galoshes, a grey haired, half-blind old man is dragging his feet. This is Ickus Erlichas, the poorest Jewish man in town. Next to him, holding onto his thumb, his four-year-old grandson is stumbling along, his legs getting caught in a shirt far too large for him. [...] With his hand pressed to his heart, the old man whispers the words of a prayer. [...] Suddenly, the old pious grandpa feels incredible courage, stops and rapidly starts whispering random words of prayer. [...] “Shema,

13 Weiner, “The Empires Pay a Visit.”

14 Jurkutė, “Soviet Manipulation.”

15 According to historian Gintarė Malinauskaitė, this volume is recognized as among the first important historical studies of the Holocaust published in Lithuania. Malinauskaitė, “Holocaust Narrative(s) in Soviet Lithuania.” 100 Erslavaitė et al., *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje (1941–1944)*.

Israel!”—a harsh shout breaks out of his chest. [...] Breathing heavily, the servant of the fascists Graičiūnas leaps at him: “I will kill you!” he howls, grabbing his pistol. The old man slowly turns towards the murderer and looks at him with his sad eyes. Then, as if feeling no fear, he turns away. [...] Graičiūnas, enraged, shoots the old man, who falls face down into the dust.¹⁶

A careful maneuvering between ideology and fact is also evident in popular historical publications based on personal accounts of wartime experience like *Mirties fortuose* (In the forts of death) by Holocaust survivor Mejeris Eglinis-Elinas, published in 1958.¹⁷ In his short book, he explains that although Soviet reality is “rapidly moving towards the future, it is also important to turn to the past.”¹⁸ Wrapped in a narrative praising the anti-fascist exploits of the “Soviet Lithuanian nation,” the author also describes the specific suffering of the Jewish community, referring briefly to the torture and murder of rabbis, the rape of Jewish women and girls, and the escape of famous “burner” brigade from the Ninth Fort.¹⁹

Non-Jewish authors like Juozas Bulavas (1909–1995)—a Soviet academic functionary and a legal scholar—also sought to convey the Jewish identity of the victims of the genocide, pushing against the limits of ideology.²⁰ In this respect, a collection of testimonies of Jewish rescue initiated by Sofija Binkienė and published in 1967 on Gentiles who rescued Jews is perhaps the most consequential work of Holocaust documentation produced as a result of collaborative Jewish and non-Jewish efforts during the Thaw in Soviet Lithuania.²¹ A famous rescuer in her own right, Binkienė initiated the gathering of testimonies, memoirs, and documents in the early 1960s, and succeeded in generating a network of enthusiasts who contributed to the cause. As noted by one of the contributors:

16 Jasinskas, *Šūviai saulėteky*, 21–22. Translated into English by the author.

17 Mejeris Eglinis-Elinas (1910–2000) was a Jewish survivor of the Kaunas ghetto whose younger brother perished in 1944.

18 Eglinis-Elinas, *Mirties fortuose*, 8.

19 The book by Eglinis-Elinas was followed by additional accounts of the atrocities that took place at the Ninth Fort. See Elinas and Gelpernas, *Kauno getas ir jo kovotojai*; see also Kondratas, *IX Fortas*. In contrast to the previous two texts, this description mentions Jewish victims only in passing.

20 Bulavas, *Vokiškųjų fašistų okupacinis Lietuvos valdymas*.

21 Binkienė, *Ir be ginklo kariai*.

Binkienė called and asked me for help. I found documents and people willing to talk. I traveled across Lithuania to meet Jews and Lithuanians. There were many difficulties, people were afraid to talk. They were not sure how the government would react. They were not sure how they should talk about this.²²

The book included a contribution by Icchokas Meras with the following remark: “I recite like a prayer the names of those people who during fascist occupation in the town of Kelmė and the surrounding area were hiding and rescuing Jewish children, me among them.”²³ It was also supported by several non-Jewish Lithuanian writers of the Thaw generation, such as Algimantas Baltakis (1930–2022), Vytautas Bložė (1930–2016), and several others, as well as a patron of sorts for the Lithuanian “Thaw generation” Eduardas Mieželaitis (1919–1997), winner of the Lenin Prize for literature.

For example, Bložė contributed a poem to the collection with the following lines:

They were shooting women from whom my mother bought flour and salt; the boys with whom I was exchanging postal stamps and pigeons. [...] I do not want them ever to speak my language, to walk on my grass, to read my poems.²⁴

There were also grassroots initiatives to compile lists of murdered Jewish victims, like the one from Kupiškis, assembled by the local nurse and cultural activist Stefanija Glemžaitė (1891–1985) and her supporters.²⁵

Holocaust remembrance during the Thaw was also stimulated by the mediatization of the “second wave” of war crimes trials, during which many Lithuanians were convicted of war crimes, including some prominent émigrés living in the United States who were convicted in absentia. As befitting the climate of the Cold War, the trials were publicized and framed in an ideological discourse of anti-fascism and anti-imperialism that tended to shift the responsibility of local participants in the Holocaust to foreign actors, externalizing responsibility and memory of the events.²⁶ The media-

22 Binkienė, *Ir be ginklo kariai*.

23 Meras “Apie didvyriškumą,” 282.

24 Binkienė, *Ir be ginklo kariai*, 212. Translated into English by the author.

25 Šlioma Kurliandčikas, quoted in “Apdovanotieji žydų gelbėtojai— Binkienė Sofija—‘Ir be ginklo kariai,’” Issigelbejesvaikas.lt, <http://www.issigelbejesvaikas.lt/mobile.php?id=1834>.

26 Malinauskaitė, *The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials*.

tization of the trials was aimed as much at foreign as domestic audiences.²⁷ On the global stage, in the wake of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961, the Soviets sought to demonstrate that they alone among the world powers were genuinely concerned with historical justice, while German and German-allied war criminals lived freely in the Federal Republic of Germany and the US, without any fear of prosecution.²⁸

Propaganda aside, the trials presented much evidence of real crimes, generating convictions that have by and large been upheld in post-Soviet Lithuanian courts.²⁹ Indeed, the Soviet trials both called upon and animated personal memories of the Holocaust as it was experienced in the Lithuanian provinces where most of the postwar cultural elites were born and raised. As distinct from the later process of genocide in Central, Western, and Southeastern Europe, where Jewish populations were deported to the sites of industrial killing, the initial phase of the Holocaust in the USSR took place “on the spot”—on the streets, in town squares, and in nearby forests. Two decades after the events, the communal violence of the Holocaust was still very much in living memory. Small towns across the country were “marked” in the memory of those who lived in them by the sudden absence of previously vibrant Jewish communities, which constituted a significant minority (and often a majority) of the town’s population. Even if the Jews were gone, their homes, former shops, synagogues, and streets were now inhabited and possessed by their non-Jewish neighbors. Certain representations of the murder of Jewish communities had trickled into published literature even before Stalin’s death; for example, in Halina Korsakienė’s 1949 collection of short stories *Gimtąjam mieste* (Hometown), which portrays the destruction of the Jewish community in the town of Biržai. Such references, however, were very few and far between.³⁰

Many non-Jewish members of the cultural intelligentsia were direct witnesses to the genocide in their native locales as children or youngsters. Some were traumatized by this exposure to extreme violence.³¹ To be sure,

27 Leiserowitz et al., *Making Justice Visible*.

28 Cantorovich, “Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial”; Weiss-Wendt, “Estonian Perpetrators of the Holocaust.”

29 Malinauskaitė, *The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials*; Holland, “The Art of Retribution.”

30 Notably, one of the stories in this collection—“Vienu šūviu” (“In one shot”)—conveys the persecution through the eyes of a Jewish protagonist, a local doctor, who is shot to death after attending to the sick child of the local administrator. Korsakienė, *Gimtąjam mieste*, 23–32.

31 The actor Laimonas Noreika (1926–2007), the writers Vytautas Petkevičius (1930–2008) and Marcelijus Martinaitis (1936–2013), the artist Antanas Kmieliauskas (1932–2019), and others would later give oral testimonies to their experiences. These interviews are included in the Lithuania Documentation Project collection housed at the United States Holocaust Memorial

the subject position of these Lithuanian bystanders was radically different from that of the Jewish targets of Nazi genocidal policy. Nevertheless, the premise of this chapter is that the experience of communal violence constituted a “shared” experience, if only as a subject of common reflection among the creative intelligentsia of postwar, Soviet Lithuania during the Thaw. Living in the same post-genocidal locale and speaking the same “language” of progressive humanism generated a *habitus* or, to draw on the term used by Ronald Suny in this volume, affective disposition, that encouraged a reckoning with a traumatic legacy that was not adequately addressed in the prevailing discourse of anti-fascism.

II. The Return of Jewish Memory

The Thaw in Soviet Lithuania was marked by what several scholars have called a Jewish literary renaissance.³² And as befitted the culture of the Thaw, this literature included several significant works of autobiography and autobiographical fiction published in outlets intended for young readers and pertaining to the war years. As noted above, Holocaust survivors Icchokas Meras and Masha Rolnikaitė broke new ground in introducing new protagonists conveying their experience of the war—a Jewish boy faced with communal genocide and a girl struggling to survive in a ghetto—that had not yet been seen in Soviet literature.³³

The vanguard role of Lithuanian Jewish writers in tackling the memory of the Holocaust can be explained by several factors. The cultural impact of de-Stalinization was magnified in Lithuania by the strength and cohesion of the national communist cadres.³⁴ The head of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Antanas Sniečkus (1903–1974), exercised relative autonomy from Moscow, especially in matters concerning the economy and culture, and was known to have close personal friendships with several Jewish communist revolutionaries.³⁵

Museum. Born and raised in the village near the town of Raseiniai, Martinaitis recalled how during the late 1950s, when he worked in the regional newspaper of Raseiniai, he started gathering materials about the Jewish genocide in the area, counting how many Jewish people were killed in Kalnujai, in nearby Žieveliškės, and other small nearby locations. Martinaitis, “Oral History Interview with Marcelijus Martinaitis.”

32 Levin, “The Short-lived Revival of Yiddish Culture”; Atamuk, *Juden in Litauen*, 223–28; Barnai, “Žydai sovietinėje Lietuvoje.”

33 Meras, *Geltonas lopas*; Rolnikaitė, *Turiu papasakoti*.

34 The background to this is described in the chapter in this volume by Vldas Sirutavičius.

35 Tininis, *Sniečkus*; Ėmužis, “Sovietų Lietuvos valdantysis elitas 1944–1974.” It is also worth noting that Antanas Sniečkus’s wife, Mira Bordonaitė, came from a Jewish family. According to

Moreover, if the Thaw is generally thought to have ended with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the period of relative liberalism lasted in Lithuania until the self-immolation of Romas Kalanta in 1972. To be sure, the communist authorities implemented antisemitic policies and campaigns initiated from Moscow against cosmopolitanism, purported doctors-saboteurs, currency speculators, Zionism (including the use of Hebrew in education and literature), and Israel. However, as noted by Justas Stončius, the relatively strong position of Jews in the cultural and political *nomenklatura* in Soviet Lithuania tempered the effect of these campaigns.³⁶

Thus, five years before Yevgeny Yevtushenko published *Baby Yar* (1961), Icchokas Meras would publish what is likely the first post-Stalin personal testimony in the USSR to the Holocaust in the form of two short stories serialized in a Lithuanian magazine for youth, *Jaunimo gretos*.³⁷ Meras, who was saved by poor Lithuanian farmers in the western region of Lithuania, based his stories “Pirmasis sniegas” (“First snow”) and “Aulinukai” (“Boots”) on the experience of a Lithuanian Jewish boy and his family. While studying as an engineering student in Kaunas in the mid-1950s, Meras had already made several attempts to publish these stories but was repeatedly rejected: “I approached thick and thin journals and newspapers but was rejected everywhere. The editors would look at my stories and say, ‘They are not bad but ... no,’ without any explanation.”³⁸ After the breakthrough publication of these first two stories in *Jaunimo gretos* the situation changed, and these and other stories on his experience of the Holocaust were included in Meras’s first book, *Geltonas lopas* (Yellow patch).³⁹

These first published texts are significant not only for the entry of the new protagonist in the narrative of World War II and for the depiction of the Jewish experience, but also for the depiction of local collaboration and the direct involvement of non-German locals in the violence. For example, one story is framed by a Jewish boy’s encounter with a young local Lithuanian collaborator, the son of the town’s postman—a gymnasium pupil who “sang disgusting songs about Jews” before the war, and who “threw my

Sniečkus’s daughter, Marija Sniečkutė, her mother knew Yiddish, and she sometimes heard her speaking it with the older Jewish women. However, she was raised as an “ordinary Lithuanian girl” with a lot of silences surrounding both sides of her relatives and eventually had to search for the information about her Jewish family from the archives. Personal communication with Marija Sniečkutė, Vilnius, November 20, 2023.

36 Stončius, *Neapykantos ribos*.

37 Mačianskaitė, *Icchokas Meras*.

38 Meras, “Oral History Interview with Itzchak Meras.”

39 Meras, *Geltonas lopas*.

books into the dirt and stomped on them.” The narrator sees his young Lithuanian neighbor planting a bottle with inflammable liquid in the yard of his Jewish neighbor—a bottle which would later serve as a “proof” of Jews hiding explosives. The story continues with the violent beating of the father and the elderly neighbor Mendel right in front of the terrified narrator, his mother and his sister. The story ends with executioners forcing two wounded Jewish men towards the Jewish cemetery and a Lithuanian youth with a white armband, a sign of the Lithuanian collaborationist self-defense forces, smacking the narrator on the head with a revolver.⁴⁰

Reflecting upon this period, Meras explains how he was pushing against the limits of Soviet official discourse: “It was not permissible to write about Jews—one was not permitted to write that Jews were being killed. In general, a Jew could not be the protagonist of a story.”⁴¹ Meras points out the support he received from Jonas Lapašinskas (1923–1997), the editor-in-chief of *Jaunimo gretos*.⁴² He recalls how Lapašinskas was extremely frank, saying:

Look, your stories are good, and I would publish them. But it is forbidden, you know. It is forbidden to write about Jews. I must talk to the board of editors. If I get their support, then I will talk to the Central Committee [of the Communist Party of Lithuania].⁴³

Meras explains how the initial publication of these stories in Lithuania opened the door for this topic and the publication of his works in Lithuania and later throughout the USSR and beyond, including in other languages:

And this is how my first book emerged. It was written in Lithuanian. It could not have been published in any other language. In any other language it could appear only after it had become a literary fact, a fact of Soviet literature. Until then, all the restrictions applied. But once a book had been published somewhere in the USSR, it was much easier to justify further publication elsewhere. [...] One could say: “Look, such a book already exists, it is already a literary fact, and so....” So in this sense I

40 Meras, *Geltonas lopas*, 5–11. In later interviews, Meras would explain that these stories reflected his personal experience in the town of Kelmė and the surrounding areas.

41 Meras, “Oral History Interview with Itzchak Meras.”

42 Jonas Lapašinskas, a poet and Soviet literary functionary, was born near the town of Rokiškis, which had a large Jewish community before the war.

43 Mačianskaitė, *Ichokas Meras*, 10–24.

am grateful. [...] [I]f I had lived in Moscow or, especially, in Kyiv, it is very likely that none of my works would ever have been published.⁴⁴

Meras refers to this publication as his entry ticket to membership in the Writers Union, a status that enabled him to work as a writer full time along with significant social and material benefits. It also enabled the publication of his other works on the topic of the Holocaust, including his most famous work, *Lygiosios trunks akimirka* (published in English as *Stalemate: A Novel*) about the Vilnius Ghetto, which brought Meras fame across the USSR and internationally.⁴⁵

Several scholars point to the publication of *Turiu papasakoti* (I must tell), the diary of Masha Rolnikaitė, a survivor of the Stutthof concentration camp, first published in 1963 in Lithuanian. According to Anja Tippner, the publication of this work was possible only because of Lithuania's position on the periphery of the USSR and the classification of the work as intended for young readers.⁴⁶ Described as "one of the most important authors on the Holocaust in the USSR," Rolnikaitė also wrote three novels thematizing the Jewish genocide. As noted by Anika Walke, the diary and subsequent works broke the "double silence" that reigned over the destruction of the Jews as well gendered and sexual violence against Jewish and non-Jewish women.⁴⁷

The narratives of other Jewish survivors would also pave the way to the literary production of the mid-1960s, such as Mejeris Eglinis-Elinas's collection of short stories *Penkios minutės po vidurnakčio* (Five minutes after midnight) with its shocking story "Paskutinysis" ("The last one") about the last remaining Jewish witness. In this story a Jewish man named Mendel, having miraculously survived the massacre in his small town, hides alone for three years in the nearby forest and in the end is captured by the retreating Germans.

The horrible night came pressing upon the world like a heavy load of lead. Mendel was meandering around, waiting for the wolves, dreaming

44 Meras, "Oral History Interview with Itzhak Meras." Notably, the opening page of *Yellow Patch* also includes a poetic stanza by the above mentioned "patron" of the younger writers at the Soviet Lithuanian writers union, Eduardas Mieželaitis (1919–1997). This publication, like the other texts representing the experience of the Holocaust, was implicitly or explicitly supported by sympathetic members of the cultural elites who associated with the Thaw era reforms and transformation.

45 Meras, *Lygiosios trunks akimirka*; Meras, *Stalemate*.

46 Tippner, "Conflicting Memories, Conflicting Stories."

47 Walke, "'To Speak for Those Who Cannot.'" Notably, Rolnikaitė also wrote a film script. "Kerštingos dienos" ("Days of revenge"), which deals with the impact of war in private family relations. However, the script was never made into a film.

to join them and attack the people who were afraid to take him in, those who saw and remained silent. [...] People who continued eating at the wooden tables made by him, sleeping in the lacquered beds he assembled for them. [...] Where are they, all these people?⁴⁸

Hiršas Ošerovičius (Hirsh Osherovich, 1908–1994) also contributed to Jewish remembrance of the Holocaust in Soviet Lithuania. A native of Panevėžys (Ponevezh), a town with a flourishing prewar Jewish population, he was evacuated in June 1941 and spent the war in Kazakhstan, while his wife, Riva Ošerovičienė-Šmuklerytė, spent the war years hiding in Kaunas and was in close contact with the networks of various rescuers, including Binkienė's. Ošerovičius was arrested after the war, tried, and sentenced to ten years for alleged Zionist activity and deported, returning to Lithuania in 1956. His reintegration to the Writers Union was supported by the younger members of the Lithuanian Writers Union and Mieželaitis.

During the Thaw, Ošerovičius published several works that deal explicitly with the experience of the Holocaust. For example, the collection of poems *Pažinimo medus* (Knowledge honey) contains the poem "Moloch." In his first and only book published in Russian, *Moi dobryj klijon* (My good maple), there is an epic poem, "Icik Even," in which the main lyrical hero is a Jewish tailor who loses his wife and six children. Ošerovičius also published several poems dedicated to Lithuanian rescuers, including Sofija Binkienė and Ona Šimaitė. Similar motives of Jewish suffering are picked up in his other collections of poems, translated into Lithuanian by the above-mentioned Lithuanian poets of the 1930s generation, Algimantas Baltakis, Justinas Marcinkevičius, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, and others.⁴⁹

III. The Small Town as a Post-Genocidal *Habitus*

One of the notable features of the cultural milieu of the period was the close collaboration of writers with filmmakers in the newly established Lithuanian film studios. Writers served as authors of film scripts, advisors, editors, and other roles. During the Thaw, the Lithuanian Film Studio produced an outsized share of the Soviet movies that thematized the Holocaust in an

48 Eglinis-Elinas, *Penkios minutės po vidurnakčio*, 172.

49 Ošerovičius, *Pažinimo medus*; Ošerovičius, *Šventoji kasdienybė*. For an overview of the different positions of Lithuanian Jewish writers during the Soviet period, including the Thaw, see Ivanauskas, "Lithuanian Jewish Writers' Career Paths during the Soviet Period."

oblique manner, and these films were produced through the active collaboration of Jewish writers like Meras and Grigorijus Kanovičius (1929–2023), with famous Lithuanian film directors such as Vytautas Žalakevičius (1930–1996), Raimondas Vabalas (1937–2001), Almantas Grikevičius (1935–2011), and others.

In her study *The Phantom Holocaust*, Olga Gershenson shows how the films *Kanonada* (Cannonade, 1961), *Žingsniai naktį* (Steps in the night, 1962) and *Ave, Vita!* (1969) depict a “Holocaust without Jews,” i.e., events associated with the Holocaust, like the forced march of a column of men to be shot, but with only a few oblique markers of the Jewish identity of the victims.⁵⁰ Ultimately, realist representations of the Jewish particularity of the Holocaust did not make it to the screen, but this does not mean that the issue was not addressed internally.⁵¹ For example, during the meeting of the arts council (*meno taryba*) for *Žingsniai naktį*, where the selection of actors and decorations for this movie was discussed, theater director Juozas Miltinis angrily pointed out that it was Jews and not members of Komsomol who escaped from the Ninth Fort.⁵²

Nevertheless, the cinema offered the cultural elites with alternative means of reckoning with the past. Instead of socialist realist representations of historical events, the New Wave cinema spreading across Europe was experimenting with ways of tracing the presence of the past in the present. Alain Resnais in *Nuit et brouillard* (1956) films the empty barracks of Auschwitz, drawing attention to scratches in the ceiling made by former inmates with their fingernails. Instead of trying to represent past events directly using fictional reconstructions of the past, Resnais introduced an indirect mode of historical representation into the tradition of Holocaust films. The temporal dimension is transposed onto the spatial plane; the past is inscribed in the landscape of the present as footprints, traces, and remains.

This method of invoking the memory of trauma through the visual representation of indexical or somatic signs of the past is employed in two films produced in Thaw-era Lithuania. As alternative and powerful means of representing the inescapable return of the repressed memory of communal genocide, the films *Du mažame miestelyje* and *Birželis, vasaros pradžia* both thematize the bleak milieu of post-genocidal small towns—former

50 Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust*. Gershenson also analyzes screenplays like “Gott mit uns” (1961) by Kanovičius and Žalakevičius, which was rejected by the censors and never produced, though it was published in the Soviet Lithuanian literary journal *Pergalė* in 1961.

51 See also Stončius, “Soviet Movies as a Palimpsest of the Holocaust Memory”; Toleikis, “Repress, Reassess, Remember”; Chertok, “Jewish Themes in the Soviet Cinema.”

52 “Meninio filmo režisūrinius scenarijus,” LLMA, f. 29, ap. 1, aps. vien. 171, 124.

shtetls—as a means of triggering the return of the repressed memory of communal genocide.

Du mažame miestelyje (Two in a small town) is a short film made for television, commissioned to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II and the reintegration of Lithuania into the USSR. It was based on a short story by Algirdas Pocius (1930–2021), published in *Tiesa* in December 1962 to propagandize the ongoing trials of war crime perpetrators and later included in his collection of short stories, *Verpetas* (Vortex).⁵³

A full-length feature film, *Birželis, vasaros pradžia* (June, the beginning of summer), is well known today and is considered one of the greatest Lithuanian films of the period. At the time of its production, however, it was heavily censored and given a highly restricted circulation.⁵⁴ The script writer Icchokas Meras and director Raimondas Vabalas were deeply and even mutually implicated in the memory of war insofar as Meras's father, Jehuda Meras, was murdered in 1941 with the participation of the local Lithuanian activists. Vabalas's father, Alfonsas Vabalas-Budrys (1909–1948), a native of the small town of Kybartai, was an anti-Soviet partisan who committed suicide while trying to escape arrest.⁵⁵ These two cinematic works stand out for their unconventional themes and aesthetics, evoking the popular theme of historical reckoning with the experience of the war through face-to-face encounters in the present between victim and perpetrator.

The plot of *Du mažame miestelyje* can be summarized as follows. A man called Jokimas Kunteris settles in the unnamed small town immediately after the end of the war. After several years, a newcomer to the town named Tenys sits down for a shave. Having a closer look at the barber's face, Tenys turns pale and, visibly unsettled, rushes out of the shop. The barber muses to himself that Tenys seems familiar, probably from the war. From then on, the two men run into each other from time to time, but Tenys avoids contact, leaving Kunteris suspicious.

Meanwhile, the newspapers report on the trial of a group of war criminals. Kunteris is anxious because he served in the same police unit as several of the accused and fears he too may be unmasked. Kunteris is terrified that he will be reported to the authorities. He goes to kill Tenys but is overpowered by his intended victim. The physical confrontation is followed by a personal dialogue between these two men. It turns out that Kunteris and Tenys were

53 Pocius, "Du mažame miestelyje"; Pocius, *Verpetas: apsakymai*.

54 Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, "Brežnevinio sąstingio."

55 https://www.genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/Atmintinos_datos/2013/201306_vabalas_biog.pdf.

both at the Seventh Fort: Kunteris among the shooters and Tenys among the victims.⁵⁶

The film digressed from Pocius's short story in at least two ways. First, the opening credits to the "many thousands of Jews and communists killed at the Seventh Fort" highlights the distinct status of Jews during the occupation. Second, the film includes a cameo appearance by a third protagonist, not present in the original story, a chance visitor to the bar where an anxious Kunteris sits for a drink. Played by the well-known actor Stepas Jukna (1910–1977), who was frequently cast in Jewish roles, this character is ostensibly Jewish.⁵⁷ As noted by Gershenson, the inclusion of Jewish characters to make oblique reference to the Holocaust is evident in other Lithuanian war films of the time.

In effect, *Du mažame miestelyje* stages an encounter between a perpetrator (a shooter) with a Jewish survivor in a small town, the site of traumatic violence. The uncanny appearance of the Jewish protagonist is accentuated by the visual presentations of the town: bleak and empty, with long shadows and the grating sound of footsteps, generating an anxious, unsettling atmosphere. Overly long scenes of the protagonists following one another along an empty street or gazing at each other through windows create tension, highlighting the built environment as an indexical reference to a post-genocidal space.

Like *Du mažame miestelyje*, the action of *Birželis, vasaros pradžia* is confined to a small provincial town. It is a snapshot of daily life in a period of twenty-four hours. The narrow focalization of the film is described by the scriptwriter Meras and the director Raimondas Vabalas as a means of addressing "the responsibility of the individual to himself, to society, to his times." The focus on the conscience of the subject in the present is explicitly linked by the authors with the concern exhibited in their recent works with the relationship of the past to the present, explored in works such as Meras's Holocaust-themed novel, *Lygiosios trunka akimirka* (Stalemate), as well as the films *Žingsniai naktį* and *Kanonada*, about the escape of prisoners from the Ninth Fort and directed by Vabalas.⁵⁸

On the surface, *Birželis, vasaros pradžia* follows a typical Khrushchevian "production" plot with the sincere local engineer as a positive modern hero,

56 One might even speculate that the story blurs the historical roles of Lithuanians as bystanders or perpetrators in the Holocaust and Jews as victims by giving a foreign—Germanic, possibly Jewish—sounding name, Kunteris, to the shooter, and a Lithuanian surname, Tenys, to the victim.

57 Gershenson, "The Holocaust on Soviet Screens"; Davoliūtė, interview with Dagna Juknaitė.

58 Ichokas Meras and Raimundas Vabalas, Vilnius, 1968. LLMA, f. 29, ap. 2, b. 666, 26–29.

a Lithuanian man named Stasys Jurgaitis. He is a young director of an old sawmill that employs almost everyone in the town. The office for central planning sends a “boss” to the town with the objective of expanding the sawmill to create an enormous plant, which would require the destruction of the old town and its architectural heritage. If the expansion is rejected, the sawmill will be shut down, and the residents will be displaced, dooming the town to oblivion. The drama thus centers on the struggle of Jurgaitis against the expansion: “Not man for the factory,” he asserts, “but the factory for man.”

Thus, at first glance, the film is governed by the logic of socialist realism, in which progress is challenged by obstacles that should be overcome by protagonists ascending the ladder of class consciousness, tempered by the “human face” of the Thaw. The film has positive characters—the young engineer and an aspiring actress Laima, and negative ones—a Catholic priest, with many secrets and his friend, Doctor Balys, an alcoholic who fails to provide emergency treatment to an injured worker and uses corrupt means to cover up his criminal negligence.

Evaluations of the film commissioned by Goskino, the central Soviet state film agency, professed, however, utter confusion regarding the character and plot development. One evaluator, the illustrious Soviet actor Lev Arnshtam, noted and condemned the gloomy and depressing atmosphere of the town. Each of the characters, he said, regardless of their valency as positive or negative, seemed to incarnate despair. Not even the main hero seemed capable of executing his progressive mandate. Arnshtam wrote of the film:

A small Lithuanian town. I do not know Lithuania, but I can imagine that there is such a town like the one described by the authors, a town suffering from insignificance, a town whose fate depends entirely on a construction project. But even if such a miserable town existed, must the people who live in it necessarily mirror this quality? It is hard to believe. I feel like the authors are affecting sadness, turning it into an aesthetic.⁵⁹

This existential mood of nausea and despair would not be countenanced by the censors, who shelved the film even after attempts were made to adapt the script. *Birželis, vasaros pradžia* would be rediscovered by critics

59 Lev Arnshtam, “O scenarii: Iun’, nachalo leta,” LLMA, f. 29, ap. 2, b. 666, 38–40.

in the post-Soviet period and is now heralded as one of the best Soviet Lithuanian films.⁶⁰

The critical attitude of Arnshtam relies on the premise that the film is indeed to be read as a future-oriented “production” narrative, whereas the film’s authors clearly indicate that the film had a retrospective, contemplative orientation towards the traumatic legacy of the past in the present, a point made explicitly in the opening scene of the film, where a man walking into the town passes a commemorative sign with the dates marking the beginning and end of World War II in the USSR.

Notably, the film was shot mainly in the town of Kriūkai, on the Nemunas River, with some segments filmed in the town of Tytuvėnai, less than twenty kilometers from Meras’s native “small town” of Kelmė—the location where his parents were murdered. Each of these towns had flourishing Jewish communities which suffered total annihilation. The use of these historical locales as the backdrop to the action of a progressive narrative transforms them into “non-sites of memory” looming behind the events, offering a mute explanation for the psychological baggage carried by the protagonists.⁶¹

The uncanny presence of the past is especially visible in one scene of the film. The residents of the town are assembled at a banquet, listening to music and interacting with one another. In the middle of multiple conversations, the camera turns to a strange man, not seen before in the film, with black hair and unusually thick spectacles. The man stands apart from the guests at the banquet by his appearance and demeanor. Given the metonymic moniker of “Spectacles” in Meras’s script, the man is silently gazing at the participants, especially at the corrupt doctor. The intensity of the stranger’s stare is magnified when the camera zooms into his bespectacled eyes.

After a few uncomfortable attempts to engage this silent “other” in conversation, the doctor gets up and leaves the room, sweating from anxiety. The scene is strikingly like the one in *Du mažame miestelyje* described above, where the perpetrator reacts to a chance encounter with an “ostensible Jew” in the setting of the small town. Indeed, the man with glasses and black hair was played by a well-known Jewish actor who also played one of the inmates who escaped from the Ninth Fort in *Žingsniai naktį* (Steps in the night).

60 <https://www.lkc.lt/en/film-promotion/lithuanian-film-heritage/june-the-beginning-of-summer-34>.

61 Sendyka, “Sites That Haunt.”

The appearance of this strange man and his uncanny gaze has no apparent connection to the plot. It serves instead like the haunting presence of some other story, a story not told and yet implicitly rooted in the setting. The insertion of this snapshot of everyday life in the small town of Lithuania is clearly a conscious and purposeful act of the scriptwriter and director, insofar as it survived several revisions of the film. Without seeking to represent the past directly, the filmmakers found an alternative and powerful means of representing the traumatic presence of the memory of communal violence and the Holocaust.

Conclusion

Although the Jewish particularity of the Holocaust was muted by communist ideology, it is increasingly clear that top-down, ideological narratives of the war did not completely silence the expression of personal experience and memory. Claims that Holocaust memory was “absent” in the USSR are deaf to the diversity of memorial forms and obscure the agency of grassroots actors trying to make sense of the Holocaust.⁶²

In the liberal and modernizing period of the Thaw, Lithuania enjoyed marginally greater ideological freedom. In the newly acquired western territories of the USSR, the recent experience of the Holocaust was very much part of living memory. As such, while the propaganda of the Thaw period was intended to discredit the “bourgeois nationalists” by revealing their implication in war crimes, the drive to encourage the expression of personal memory uncovered events that were dissonant with official historical discourse.

The distinct *habitus* of Holocaust remembrance was shaped by several distinct features. First, a relatively liberal environment for cultural expression was created by the accommodating stance of the national communist leadership, effectively extending the duration of the post-Stalin Thaw in Lithuania. Second, even while anti-fascist narratives served to generalize and externalize responsibility for genocide, the Thaw-era discourse of sincerity and humanism reinforced the process of reckoning with the local experience of war and occupation. Third, the publication of literary and legal testimony to war crimes and collaboration rekindled individual memories of communal violence shared by Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors alike.

62 Kichelewski, “Making Sense of the Holocaust.”

Du mažame miestelyje (Two in a small town, 1965) and *Birželis, vasaros pradžia* (June, the beginning of summer, 1969) reify the concept of a shared *habitus* of Holocaust remembrance by representing the small towns of postwar Lithuania as non-sites of memory, where recent past Jewish life and death are palpably and disturbingly absent.⁶³ Taken together, the films, autobiographies, stories, and poems surveyed in this chapter attest to a significant, early and little recognized episode of Holocaust reckoning. The collaborative effort of Jewish and non-Jewish Lithuanians points to a surprising level of interethnic collegiality and cosmopolitanism, if only among a small subset of the creative intelligentsia. With the emigration of most Jewish Lithuanians in the 1970s, later Soviet Lithuanian representations of World War II would fall in line with the broader Soviet pattern of ethno-national martyrology.⁶⁴

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V.

State of the Field and Pointing the Way Forward

15. Ethnic Relations in the Baltic Region: Complexity and Coexistence

Toivo U. Raun

Abstract: This chapter focuses on insufficiently explored aspects of ethnic relations in the Baltic region. More emphasis on a comparative approach, weighing tendencies toward convergence versus divergence, could yield particularly useful insights. The impact of multilingualism in both rural and urban settings along with the crucial role of Western Christianity, especially Protestantism with its stress on literacy and education, deserves more attention at the grassroots level in order to help unravel the complexity of the sociolinguistic process taking place across centuries. The changing demographic situation in modern times needs more detailed and nuanced treatment, as the opportunities for population movement and migration increased rapidly by the second half of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Baltic states, assimilation, multilingualism, social mobility, migration

The Baltic region, understood here in the main as the territories of the Baltic states that achieved restored independence in 1991 after five decades of Soviet occupation and misrule, is a particularly interesting area with regard to the complexity of ethnic relations, both at the present time and in the more distant past. Among the current twenty-seven members of the European Union, Estonia and Latvia, as a result of Soviet rule, rank near the top in ethnic diversity, and Lithuania—although more homogeneous—continues to bear hangovers from past complexity. The great European debate regarding the future of ethnicity and separate nationalities that figured prominently in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remains

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unresolved, but the three majority Baltic peoples—despite their overall small and declining numbers—have successfully asserted their right to be recognized as worthy and distinctive partners in the European and human community. As predicted, in the twenty-first century substantial numbers of smaller nationalities are disappearing, but large nations (as well as their native languages and cultures) will not be the only ones to survive. In view of the ethnic diversity of the region, the dangerously limited and declining size of the titular nationalities, and their vulnerable geopolitical location, the Baltic case offers especially useful opportunities for evaluating and exploring the unavoidably complicated and challenging nature of ethnic relations.

When do ethnic relations become an issue in the Baltic region? It can be argued that as long as serfdom remained the dominant social and economic institution in a land based almost solely on agriculture, the ethnic roots and background of the peasant underclass did not really matter. The key liberating and history-moving event was the emancipation of the serfs, beginning with the small number of Lithuanians located in Napoleon's Duchy of Warsaw (the Suvalkija region) in 1807, continuing with the Estonians and Latvians in the Baltic provinces in 1816–19, and finally including the Latvians in Latgale as well as the great majority of the Lithuanians, scattered in several tsarist provinces, both in 1861.¹ To be sure, this massive piece of fragmented social engineering in the first six decades of the nineteenth century did not come about out of thin air and was prepared by both local and European-wide developments such as the Baltic version of the Enlightenment in the last decades of the eighteenth century as well as the useful coincidence of a reform-minded tsar in St. Petersburg in Alexander I in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In the past two hundred years or so the various peoples living in the Baltic region have become increasingly aware of their ethnicity, while the political world in which they lived was being dramatically transformed several times. Four clear-cut periods stand out since the early nineteenth century: (1) over one hundred years of tsarist rule coupled with increasing mobility, both social and physical, as well as growing interethnic contact, culminating in the end with imperial Russian collapse in war and revolution; (2) a brief, but crucial interwar independence in the 1920s and 1930s in which the majority nationalities grappled with how to integrate non-natives and facilitate smooth ethnic relations; (3) half a century of Soviet occupation that was traumatic and difficult, but lacked the ability and means (both under Stalin and later) to force massive assimilation; and (4) the past three postcommunist decades that have

1 Sužiedėlis, *Historical Dictionary of Lithuania*, 262–63; Plakans, *The Latvians*, 81.

also been challenging for the Balts, as they sought ways to deal with the complicated Soviet legacy in ethnic relations. Because of its unprecedented destructiveness, World War II, under both Nazi and Soviet rule, could well be seen as a separate subperiod.

The following remarks offer suggestions for how and where to expand and further explore the nature of ethnic relations in the Baltic region. They focus especially on key questions and issues that could use more complete and convincing answers. The ethnic complexity of Baltic societies in the recent past must be taken as a given, but such a situation does not necessarily preclude peaceful and even productive coexistence. Although medieval and early modern times in the Baltic witnessed periodic and powerful devastation by war, disease, and hunger, the past two centuries have been much more stable and marred only in the main by two world wars and the brutally violent forces they unleashed. In seeking to provide greater depth and range to scholarly studies of Baltic ethnic relations, it is also important to place more emphasis on a comparative perspective in assessing the experience of both the majority and minority peoples in all three instances than has been the case up to now. Perhaps understandably, in view of the Baltic fixation on the theme of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian ethnic survival, there has been too much of a tendency to focus on the fate of individual nationalities in isolation. A more robust comparative perspective could offer new insights while also helping to disclose more clearly what is distinctive in each case. What is particularly attractive in the comparative approach to Baltic history is the opportunities it provides for revealing both larger trends common to all three cases as well as features particular to each one. In the earlier centuries the Lithuanians trod their own path, but modern times have witnessed an increasing convergence of Baltic history while also retaining various distinctive characteristics.

Perhaps more than with regard to other approaches, a sociolinguistic perspective has received insufficient attention in studies of the Baltic experience. To be sure, we have numerous excellent purely linguistic works that focus on Estonian as an outlying non-Indo-European language and on Latvian and Lithuanian as the only surviving Baltic tongues in the Indo-European family. At the same time useful sociological surveys range in coverage from societies still based on premodern social categories (Ger. *Stand*, Russ. *soslovie*) to ones populated by modern urban and rural social classes. What is missing is sufficient concern about how the interaction of linguistic and social modernization has taken place. Specifically, how did the former Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian peasant tongues become competitive in the linguistic marketplace and capable of survival in a world

dominated by well-established and widely used *Kultursprachen* such as German, Russian, and Polish? To what extent was this an “internal” achievement by Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian intellectuals (and peoples) who had native command of their evolving mother tongue? To what extent was it the result of the dedication and efforts of well-meaning non-natives who sought to preserve and perhaps even help to develop a unique piece of the overall human experience? As socioeconomic modernization was taking place in the Baltic region from the mid-nineteenth century on and as the languages of the majority Baltic peoples gradually became fully capable as “cultured” means of expression, what role did multilingualism, i.e., the ability to communicate with ease in more than one language, play in the evolution of ethnic relations in an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse society, particularly in the urban sector? The complexity of the linguistic climate in the Baltic region is suggested, for example, by a common advertisement posted in the Estonian press in the late tsarist decades which cites command of the “three local languages” (“kolm kohalikku keelt”), i.e., German, Russian, and Estonian, as important and indeed necessary skills that were possessed by the job seeker who placed such an advertisement.²

A related point is visible in the sphere of education and its role in making a given nationality competitive and its language and culture attractive in an intellectual world dominated by the traditional ruling nationalities in the Baltic region. The impact of education has long been recognized by scholars for its crucial contribution to Baltic social modernization, and excellent studies of individual ethnic groups abound. Here, once again, more application of a comparative approach could be revealing and insightful. In many ways the success of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian native-language education in establishing itself—from the elementary school level to the university—remains remarkable. How was it possible, despite all the disadvantages presented by the looming threat and partial implementation of cultural Russification, Germanization, and/or Polonization and especially the large-language bias of the dominant nationalities, for the Baltic peoples to make substantial pedagogical advances over time? To be sure, secondary and higher education using the Baltic tongues as languages of instruction was only possible with the coming of independence, but the goal of native-language education at increasingly higher levels had been present for decades before that.

In all three Baltic cases the practice of Western Christianity, both Catholicism and especially Protestantism, in promoting literacy had in earlier

2 Ariste, “Kolm kohalikku keelt.”

times already laid the basis for young Baltic peasants to take advantage of expanding educational opportunities in the nineteenth century.³ Although the Lithuanians, as Catholics, lagged behind the Estonians and Latvians in literacy levels according to the 1897 census, they were still well above the all-Russian average, and the Baltic region as a whole formed a unique corner of the Russian Empire with regard to reading ability. The 1897 census did not query the population on writing ability and limited its survey to reading skills, but here the Baltic peoples clearly stood out (see table 15.1).⁴

Table 15.1. Reading Skills of the Baltic Peoples in the Russian Empire in 1897 ↵

	Total	Male	Female
Estonians	94.1	93.8	94.4
Latvians	85.0	84.8	85.3
Lithuanians	48.4	49.3	47.6
Russians	29.3	44.9	14.7
Total Russian Empire	27.7	38.6	17.0

Note: Percentage of readers among those over the age of ten.

Source: Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 407, table 9.

A striking accomplishment by all three Baltic nationalities by the end of the nineteenth century, as measured in the all-Russian census, was achieving equal reading levels among both genders. A fascinating question that deserves further study is the extent to which education—at all levels—succeeded as a vehicle for promoting genuine integration and peaceful ethnic relations, including encouraging voluntary multilingualism, in each of the four periods identified at the beginning of this chapter.

An important phenomenon that has already received considerable attention in the scholarly literature is mobility, both physical and social. Nevertheless, much more could be done. The post-emancipation decades witnessed a newfound flexibility that provided Baltic peasants with wide-ranging opportunities for employment in new jobs and professions, both in the Baltic region as well as beyond. Nearby St. Petersburg was especially attractive, and by the second half of the nineteenth century massive emigration, which was not necessarily permanent, was taking place to the more remote parts of the Russian Empire as well as—in the Lithuanian case—to the United States. All of these contacts involved new types of connections

3 Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" 29–30.

4 Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 407.

in ethnic relations. A key question that requires more in-depth research is the relationship between upward social mobility and cultural assimilation. Regarding earlier times, all available evidence suggests that socially rising Baltic natives inevitably assimilated to the higher culture (German or Polish) of the day.⁵ In the nineteenth century the dominant elites, now joined by Russians of the same social status who were increasingly coming to the Baltic region, remained convinced that upwardly mobile Balts of peasant origin would continue to be fully integrated into one of the available high cultures, and thus there was no need for any sort of activist policy to hasten this process, although the tsarist government made various half-hearted and failed attempts at cultural Russification that actually backfired and contributed to counterproductive results. In fact, the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were greatly aided in achieving their goal of native ethnic consolidation by the ongoing Russian–Polish and Russian–German struggles for cultural hegemony in the Baltic region during the final century of the Russian Empire. In this situation the tsarist regime simply lacked the means and perhaps the will to carry on a two-front cultural war at both the upper and lower levels of society.

Although ethnic diversity and the multicultural nature of Baltic society have been stressed so far, binary relationships among individual ethnic groups should not be neglected as an object of study. Ethnic relations between two peoples or nationalities, typically speaking different native tongues, remain one of the most basic forms of human contact. These relations can be highly hierarchical and unequal, or they can be more horizontal, involving two groups or nationalities of relatively equal status in a given society. In the Baltic case there is a long history of cultural and social domination by German- and Polish-speaking elites over the Estonian-, Latvian-, and Lithuanian-speaking masses. However, as the Baltic natives began to assert themselves in the first half of the nineteenth century, the relationship with the traditional elites became increasingly complex and nuanced. Regarding the Baltic Germans, what is needed is more in-depth study of the evolution of their attitudes regarding Latvian and Estonian prospects for development. The majority Baltic German view clearly remained dismissive, but that may not have been decisive. What may have mattered most was the role of individual intellectuals and supporters⁶ as well as the models the Baltic Germans unintentionally provided for Latvian and Estonian maturation as modern nationalities, e.g., homeland-wide song festivals and large numbers

5 Plakans, *The Latvians*, 449.

6 Jürjo, "Eestlaste rahvuslik ärkamine," 207–12.

of grass-roots organizations, such as voluntary associations focusing on cultural, social, and economic goals. In comparison, the Lithuanian–Polish relationship shows both similarities and differences. The starkly unequal socioeconomic and political relationship was highly parallel to the one in the Baltic provinces, but the Polish position in Central and Eastern Europe was much stronger and enduring, complicating ties even as recently as the postcommunist period.⁷

Examples of understudied horizontal connections are the Estonian–Latvian and Lithuanian–Latvian ones, which have largely been ignored despite their increasing importance from the mid-nineteenth century on. Although the Latvians and Estonians were subject to virtually identical Baltic German rule over the course of some seven centuries, the lack of a linguistic or ethnic connection militated against the development of close ties between these two peoples. Further stumbling blocks were disagreement on assignment of blame for the success of the Baltic German conquest in the thirteenth century as well as the Latvianization of the Livonian people, a small Balto-Finnic nationality, over the course of centuries and their near disappearance by modern times.⁸ However, by the mid-nineteenth century the growing number of Estonian and Latvian intellectuals had discovered each other and increasingly learned to cooperate. Similarly, despite ethnic and linguistic ties, Lithuanians and Latvians had had largely contrasting historical experiences and remained separated from each other. However, growing Latvian activism came to serve as an important model for the Lithuanian national movement in the post-1863 decades, especially as an antidote to tsarist repression.⁹ It is noteworthy, however, that the concept of a dual Latvian–Lithuanian autonomous region achieved little resonance among ethnic Lithuanians during tsarist times.¹⁰

A related topic is the comparison of the roles played by the elites and masses of a given nationality in their relations with other ethnic groups. Laying the basis for a national awakening in each of the three Baltic cases, a crucial development proved to be the emergence of an educated elite, culminating in the appearance of an intelligentsia as a conscious social group, which increasingly reached out to the masses of the population who spoke the same language. Because of the excellent levels of literacy, initially mainly limited to reading ability, the intelligentsia did not need to be very

7 Burant, "Overcoming the Past."

8 Raun, "Latvian–Estonian Cultural and Political Contacts," 66–67.

9 Pivoras, "The Role of Latvian Nationalism," 572–77.

10 Miknys and Staliūnas, "Das Dilemma der Grenzen Litauens," 206.

large since it could communicate through increasingly available publications, including a native-language press as well as explosively expanding numbers of books and brochures, at least in the Latvian and Estonian cases, especially in the final decades of the tsarist era.¹¹ Unavoidably, entangled with the Polish resistance to tsarist rule, the Lithuanians faced unique challenges such as the forty-year ban on use of the Latin alphabet (1864–1904) in the Russian Empire and the banning of public song festivals during tsarist times, but—strikingly—following subjection to much discrimination and lagging behind their northern neighbors in various aspects of development in the second half of the nineteenth century, they largely caught up through rapid advances, especially achieved during the Revolution of 1905 and its aftermath.¹² With regard to the more recent past, e.g., life under three different political systems over the course of one hundred years, applying a comparative approach to evaluating the role of elites and masses in ethnic relations in the Baltic region could be especially useful.

Yet another insufficiently explored factor in the study of ethnic relations in the Baltic region is the role and significance of demographic trends. Unfortunately, our access to any kind of reliable information from earlier centuries is strictly limited, but by the nineteenth century more extant versions of sources such as soul revisions and parish registers along with modern-day censuses afford new opportunities for insight into a wide range of population processes. What inclusion of appropriate demographic analysis provides for the evaluation of ethnic relations is a crucial social context that needs to be borne in mind, but one that often remains only superficially addressed. The three Baltic cases are further complicated by the fact that a clearly defined separate territory or administrative unit in which the titular nationality dominated in numbers did not exist before the twentieth century. Looking back in history, it is perhaps not surprising that the relative position of the Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians with regard to population has probably not changed since the thirteenth century, although these numbers may not have been very far apart some eight hundred years ago.¹³ At any rate, despite their later small numbers, ethnic Lithuanians were sufficiently numerous in earlier times to play a major role in medieval central and eastern Europe. For the past two centuries there is

11 Raun, "The Development of Estonian Literacy," 122–23; Antik, "Eestikeelse raamatu ja brošüüri," 294–96.

12 Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, 59–63; Jansen, "Baltic Nationalism," 149; Staliūnas, "Ethnopolitical Tendencies in Lithuania," 98–99.

13 Kahk and Tarvel, *An Economic History of the Baltic Countries*, 12–13.

a wealth of material in censuses and other sources that provides detailed information on such phenomena as fertility, mortality, intermarriage, and in- and out-migration, among other things. It is striking that population trends among the Latvians and Estonians have remained highly parallel, suggesting perhaps a certain influence by the Baltic German ruling elite, especially the clergy. Yet, is noteworthy that in the more recent past nearly all available evidence indicates that Latvians have been roughly twice as likely to engage in ethnically mixed marriages as Estonians.¹⁴ What happens with the offspring of these marriages? What nationality (or nationalities) do they choose? Without a doubt, in modern times the Baltic region has witnessed two contrasting population scenarios, the Estonian–Latvian one (early demographic transition and thus inability to recover from World War II and Stalinism) versus the Lithuanian one (considerably higher birth rates for much longer).

Along with the distinctive natural population movements in the Baltic area it is particularly important to bear in mind the role of migration trends and their impact on ethnic relations. With the new passport law in 1863 Baltic peasants, whether just emancipated or liberated decades earlier, finally gained freedom of movement. This meant full participation in massive urbanization during the last five decades of tsarist rule by the Estonian and Latvian peasantry, resulting in Estonians becoming a majority (52 percent) of the population of Tallinn by 1871 and Latvians a plurality (45 percent) of Riga (among the largest cities in the entire Russian Empire in 1913) by 1897, seeing the Latvian share of Riga's population nearly double in the three decades after 1867.¹⁵ Here, once again, the Lithuanians followed a different path, forming only 2 percent of the population of Vilnius as late as 1897¹⁶ and 7 percent in Kaunas and thus remaining much more rooted in the countryside than their Baltic neighbors, a tendency no doubt enhanced by the more favorable land acquisition policies of the tsarist regime in the Lithuanian lands. The situation in Lithuania changed with the coming of interwar independence, as urbanization finally took off, while it continued to expand in Latvia and Estonia. However, Soviet rule brought new differences in Baltic migratory patterns as Lithuania managed to avoid the enormous ethnic Russian and other East Slavic immigration that hit Latvia and Estonia. This is doubtless the most enduring social legacy of the Soviet era in the northern two Baltic states, as the Russians and largely Russified other East

14 Raun, "Ethnic Relations and Conflict in the Baltic States," 170.

15 Palli, "The Population of Estonia," 93; Skujenieks, *Latvija: Zeme un iedzīvotāji*, 268.

16 Weeks, "Jews and Others in Vilna–Wilno–Vilnius," 83.

Slavs still form about a third of the total population in each case. After three decades of postcommunist recovery and largely successful reintegration into the Western world and its major institutions, Estonia and Latvia continue to face the challenge of how to encourage cordial ethnic relations among all nationalities and bring about the domestic integration of as many Soviet-era immigrants and their offspring as possible.¹⁷

One more factor in the demographic realm that deserves more emphasis by scholars is the location and distribution of the ethnic groups in the Baltic region. What kinds of opportunities have there been in actual fact for interaction among the various peoples and nationalities in the past two centuries after ethnic consciousness begins to matter? Until the second half of the nineteenth century when freedom of movement became available even to those on the lowest rungs of the social ladder, any extensive interaction among ethnic groups remained limited to the minimal urban population. In the countryside a tiny German- or Polish-speaking elite had limited contact with the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian peasantry who overwhelmingly dominated in numbers in the rural areas. As noted above, the late tsarist period witnessed the emergence of urban proto-melting pots in which the Latvians and Estonians strongly participated while the Lithuanians temporarily lagged behind. With the growing Russian urban presence in these years communication through multilingual means became more and more common in the Baltic lands.

Unsurprisingly, the first independence era revealed similar residential patterns in all three states with the titular nationalities showing a growing presence in the capital and other larger cities. Non-natives in relatively small numbers joined them, but—interestingly—were able to maintain their traditional position in border areas such as eastern Estonia, Latgale, and southern and eastern Lithuania.¹⁸ In the Soviet and postcommunist eras the parallel Estonian and Latvian experiences have continued, fueled especially by very similar East Slavic in-migration,¹⁹ and all three countries appear to have reached a kind of stabilized urban maximum of roughly two-thirds of the entire population in the recent past. Population decline since around 1990, a result of both negative natural increase and emigration among all nationalities, has strikingly prevailed in the post-Soviet decades in all three Baltic cases. The capital cities of Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius initially also lost population as many non-Balts emigrated in the 1990s, but in recent years

17 Muižnieks, "Introduction," 7–8.

18 Reiman, "Rahvused Eestis," 353–55.

19 Mežs, *Latvieši Latvijā*, 3.

they have made progress toward stabilizing the situation. Without a doubt they have remained the main centers for interactive multiethnic contact, as they bring together an increasingly diverse range of peoples. Residential patterns in these largest of Baltic cities and the extent to which ethnic groups living there are moving toward more integrated or segregated lives are especially important and useful topics for further study.

Among the key factors that influence ethnic relations between nationalities in a given society is the issue of status. As we have seen, despite their strong demographic presence in their traditional homelands in the tsarist era the great majority of the Baltic peoples remained at the lower levels of the social hierarchy of the time. In fact, numbers did not count for much at all, as shown by the hegemonic position of the tiny German- and Polish-speaking elites until nearly the end of the Russian Empire. A major success of the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian national movements was the improvement of the standing of their conationals in late imperial Russian society, including outside the Baltic region in key locations like St. Petersburg or Moscow. With the establishment of independent states in their name following tsarist collapse the Baltic peoples received a huge boost to their status and suddenly faced the challenge of how to treat the now defrocked traditional non-Baltic elites. Under post-Stalin Soviet rule the three Baltic SSRs and their majority, titular nationalities were ostensibly equal partners, but not in practice, especially in Latvia and Estonia, where the share of the native population fell to dangerously low levels by 1989 (52 percent and 62 percent, respectively). However, in hindsight, it is clear that in spite of powerful central government pressure applied during half a century of Soviet control the Balts held their own and remained overwhelmingly loyal to their mother tongues. In the postcommunist decades Estonia and Latvia have raised the ethnic Estonian and Latvian proportions of the population (69 percent and 63 percent, respectively, and Lithuania (85 percent) has continued to maintain a dominant native position. The major challenge remains the substantial and segregated Russian-speaking population in the largest cities like Riga and Tallinn, where other non-Balts, for example, are still vulnerable to assimilation to the Russian language and culture.²⁰ The powerful impact of changes in status in postcommunist Baltic societies and how to reconcile the interests of majority and minority nationalities also needs to be an ongoing topic of scholarly research.

One final subject that deserves more in-depth study with regard to Baltic ethnic relations is the whole issue of the borderlands and zones that display

20 Raitviir, *Rahvuste Tallinn*, 35.

a distinctive character in comparison to the mainstream experience in each of the countries. If the titular ethnic groups dominated in numbers in most of their homelands in both premodern and modern times, the situation in the border areas—looking especially toward the east and south—was often strikingly different. In terms of protecting their traditional lands the Estonians had the advantage of a water border all the way from the Gulf of Finland to the southern edge of Lake Pskov. Here developed the unique Seto minority who spoke, depending on the interpretation, a distinctive dialect of Estonian or a separate Balto-Finnic language while practicing Eastern Orthodoxy. In southeastern Latvia the extensive land border in Latgale at a historical meeting point of several ethnic groups and religions created another striking mix in which in many places ethnic Latvians (here overwhelmingly Catholic, not Lutheran) only formed a minority. The most complicated situation has undoubtedly been the case of Lithuania, where the exposed border zones have been the most extensive and where the current and historical capital of the state is itself located in an important borderland that as late as the 1920s and 1930s was part of Poland. The huge contrast in territory between the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the post–World War I ethnically defined state remains remarkable.²¹ Historically, the Baltic encounter with the East Slavs constituted a major challenge, one that they were in the main able to stave off. Regarding the intra-Baltic borderlands between Estonia and Latvia, on the one hand, and Latvia and Lithuania, on the other, relations in the modern era have generally been peaceful, reflecting perhaps an increasing awareness of the opportunity and need to cooperate for mutual benefit.

Looking back at the past two centuries and indeed earlier as well, it is clear that the Baltic peoples have faced a range of challenges in their ethnic relations, especially with their more numerous and powerful neighbors. Nevertheless, the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians have survived and even come to flourish in a number of ways in recent times. How have they been able to do this? Despite their small numbers, including nearly catastrophic situations including as late as the early eighteenth century, the Balts have managed to maintain a critical mass of population below whose number they never fell, allowing them to survive such twentieth-century body blows as the two world wars and Stalinism. Of course, World War I was a double-edged sword since it allowed them to achieve independence in the first place. The Western Christian Church in the Baltic area, whether Lutheran or Catholic, was dominated by outsiders for most of its existence, but in spite of a definite

21 Petronis, *Constructing Lithuania*, 23.

arrogance toward the Baltic natives, the Churches also encouraged literacy and valued at least a modicum of education, even for the Baltic peasantry. Although political and socioeconomic inequality prevailed for centuries in the region, by the nineteenth century individual Baltic intellectuals increasingly grasped the usefulness of the available models for development offered by the existing traditional elites. As they began to modernize, the Baltic peoples were aided by the dismissive attitude of the German, Polish, and Russian ruling classes who simply did not take the Balts seriously as a threat to their power in the region. A few doses of luck were also highly useful, including especially the inadvertent establishment of a ready-made officer corps for nascent Baltic armies by the tsarist demands for prosecuting World War I as well as the impending collapse of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Interwar independence was brief, but productive, and allowed the final consolidation of fully formed nations that were able to cope with oncoming war and Stalinism. In the postcommunist decades, having learned from their failed foreign policies in the 1920s and 1930s, the Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians successfully sought membership in the European Union and NATO as quickly as possible, and they displayed a newly found ability to cooperate among themselves as well.

In conclusion, although much has already been achieved in the study of ethnic relations in the Baltic region as defined here, this crucial topic awaits further research in both range and depth. As suggested above, especially of interest are a wide range of issues in social and cultural history, particularly ones that seek to break down barriers between traditional divisions of historical study. Multilingual communication in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the modern era, supported and enhanced by rapidly expanding educational opportunities, has had a dynamism of its own in fostering and deepening ethnic relations. As modernization took off following the abolition of the centuries-long stifling institution of serfdom, mobility—as both a social and physical phenomenon—burst onto the scene and made possible new forms of interaction in both urban and rural environments. The varying political context of the past two centuries (fading tsarism, two separate attempts at independent democratic states and societies, and Soviet occupation and failed rule) must also be borne in mind as a key factor influencing opportunities for contact among peoples and nationalities. The ethnic composition of the Baltic region has become increasingly diverse in modern times, adding to the complexity of relations among different ethnic groups. However, with relatively few unfortunate and indeed disastrous exceptions, peaceful coexistence has served as the norm among modern nationalities in the Baltic region.

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About the Author

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16. Scholarly Research on Ethnic Relations in Estonia and Latvia: A Retrospective Overview

Vello Pettai

Abstract: This chapter provides an overview of the study of ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia over the last thirty years. It offers a heuristic model about how to understand the academic field writ large, characterizing it across three main focal points: attitudes and mobilization, policies and institutions, and external actors and geopolitics. It argues that the field has evolved largely from one focal point to another, and that each shift represents an interaction between how one focal point sets the stage for the next one. The chapter is intended as a literature analysis for both early stage and more established scholars to gain perspective on how scholarship on this topic developed.

Keywords: minority integration, kin-state relations, Russian-speaking minorities

Ethnic diversity has historically been an overarching reality in the Baltic states. Through the presence of Baltic Germans, Poles, Russians, Jews, Swedes, and many other groups, the Baltic nations have for centuries epitomized both the best and worst of how to accommodate ethnic minorities and deal with diversity management. From the progressive and accommodative nature of ethno-cultural autonomy for minorities that was pioneered in the 1920s to the stigmatization and pogroms against Jews shortly before the Second World War, there have been both highlights and indignities in connection with how ethnic relations have evolved. As a consequence, the topic has also pervaded academic research on the region. Indeed, following

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the reemergence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as independent states in 1991, scholarly interest grew even more, as many observers perceived that the future of these societies would depend greatly on how ethnic relations—now in a new, post-Soviet constellation—would be managed.

Ethnic relations were seen as a challenge since they constituted a crossroads of numerous, often highly fraught phenomena at once. These included the nationalism that had propelled the Baltic peoples to challenge the USSR in the late 1980s and ultimately precipitate the latter's collapse. At the same time, ethnic relations brought into play geopolitics with the question of how neighboring states (including kin-states like Russia or Poland) would see this shift in political power. International law and more narrowly minority rights law was, of course, one point of reference for dealing with these changes, but this was far from a definitive or binding source of authority. Soon enough, European integration (and EU accession) became a more proximate framework for monitoring and navigating ethno-political change. The steady scrutiny and financial support from European institutions would often serve to ease the more complicated issues. Yet, ethnic relations were also a human phenomenon relating to sociolinguistics and how individuals interact across different languages in society. Ultimately, this interaction would determine the degree to which there was successful or unsuccessful minority integration. In sum, one can see how quickly the notion of ethnic relations opens up a wide array of challenging issues.

This chapter will review post-1991 scholarship on ethnic relations in the Baltic states with a view to doing two things. First, it will present a heuristic model about how to understand the big picture behind the academic study of "ethnic relations." We will see that the broad array of scholarly works around "ethnic relations" writ large can be better understood if we look at how these studies have revolved around three main focal points: policies and institutions, attitudes and mobilization, and external actors and geopolitics. Moreover, these focal points do not represent mere categories into which different studies can be pigeonholed. Rather, we will see that most studies actually speak to causal connections between pairs of these focal points. Hence, different scholarly works can be said to elucidate questions like: How do attitude shifts and mobilization lead to policy and institutional change? Or, How does policy and institutional change precipitate external actor intervention and geopolitical tension? Or How do external actors and geopolitics also influence policy change? In all, four such interactive connections will be profiled. Further, the heuristic model and its connections will help in generating a temporal paradigm regarding research on ethnic relations in the Baltic states over the last thirty-five years. The chapter will argue that

the evolution of the field has followed the way in which events in the region have shifted from one connective axis to another. Whereas scholars first sought to understand how the nationalist sentiment and mobilization of the late 1980s could lead to very dramatic policy and institutional changes in the early 1990s, they subsequently turned to how these changes were met by external actors and geopolitical forces. Thereafter, we can see how academic focus turned to the types of institutional change that took place within the Baltic states as a result of this external attention. Finally, we observe a turn to the study of attitudes and sentiments, particularly in the wake of the pervasive spread of “integration” as a normative policy framework in the region.

In this respect, the chapter will not profile the ethnic relations themselves, but rather will aim to provide a state-of-the-field overview that will be useful for scholars (both early-stage and more established) to understand the evolution of the topic as well as identify remaining gaps or emerging areas. At the same time, anyone who has examined this realm will know that across the Baltic states Estonia and Latvia constitute a very particular constellation of ethnic politics owing to their large Russian-speaking minorities (up to 30 percent). Meanwhile, Lithuania has a more limited ethno-political dialectic, since its minority population is smaller overall (around 15 percent) and is in turn divided roughly evenly between Poles and Russians.

As a consequence, one will often see that scholarly works have concentrated on substantive phenomena related to ethnic relations more than on the geographic trinity of the Baltic states. To be sure, overarching reviews of the region exist, but it can be difficult to make the different cases speak to each other, precisely because the three analytical elements laid out above are in fact profoundly different across Estonia/Latvia, on the one hand, and Lithuania, on the other. In order to provide as cogent an analytical perspective as possible, this chapter will therefore limit itself to the cases of Estonia and Latvia. We will see that the scholarly study of ethnic relations in these two countries has had a very special dynamic over the last three decades.

Developing an Analytical Perspective

To say that a chapter like this should summarize the progress made in the study of ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia since 1991 is to exude an unhealthy degree of epistemological hubris. Firstly, the very notion of “progress” in the social sciences is a tenuous one. This is because social

science is mostly a retrospective science that seeks to explain trends or events after the fact. Moreover, the challenge with social science is that the background conditions for any particular relationship are constantly changing, such that instances where we thought a certain relationship might hold eventually turn out differently because environmental circumstances like patterns of social communication, societal values, underlying economic forces, or other structural parameters have changed. The sand is often shifting underneath our feet even as we seek to get a firm hold on where our world is going.

An important consequence of this fact is that we cannot view any analysis of scholarly research as a march of progress, even if we believe that scholarship should always concentrate on first reviewing existing “gaps in our knowledge” and then help to fill those lacunae. Moreover, research may frequently take very pronounced normative-theoretical “turns” (affective, constructivist, discursive, etc.), meaning that it’s not even about the fact that surrounding conditions change, but that we choose to put on different glasses and attempt to see different things entirely, and that such research may be equally valid in terms of scientific contribution.

Lastly, any analysis of ethnic relations is always a profoundly normative issue. If two groups are pitted against each other, any analyst inevitably will have some kind of perception of where “justice” appears to lie between them. Is it a matter of one group’s quest for national self-determination or another’s struggle for minority rights? It is, of course, easy to say that both sides should have their claims respected or a willingness to compromise should prevail. But all researchers implicitly set a normative baseline against which certain facts then become either natural or an aberration. For example, for some, national language legislation may be a positive instrument for societal integration, while for others it is a sign of repressive nationalism. It is very difficult to judge scientific progress across such divergent interpretations.

In sum, this chapter will not be a positivistic assessment of advances in the study of ethnic relations in the Baltic states. However, it does rest on a dataset of nearly two hundred published works on ethnic relations in the Baltic states broadly defined. These studies derive from a range of disciplines: political science, law, sociology, anthropology, international relations, economics, media studies. The complete bibliography can be accessed online.¹ The objective of the analysis will not be to categorize or tally these works, but to see how they can be characterized as an evolving phenomenological whole.

1 <https://www.ecmi.de/research/special-research-themes/ethnic-relations-in-the-baltic-states>.

Deriving an Analytical Model

When we first mention the notion of “ethnic relations,” we often relate the phenomenon to sociological approaches: How do people feel about individuals from another ethnic group? What do they think about how different groups are getting along? On the one hand, this can be purely ethno-cultural. For example, how do people relate to other cultural habits or a different language encounter? Additionally, ethnic relations can be about people’s perceptions of where one group stands toward another. Which group is seen as being disadvantaged or more dominant? In this case, the phenomenon becomes more structural in nature.

On the other hand, many of these perceptions and sentiments may become embedded in politics: how political elites contribute to either the celebration or stigmatization of cultural difference; how they prime individuals to act in one way or another; how they articulate (or frame) broader power relations between groups; how they undertake and succeed with social mobilization based on these articulations; how they capture levers of political power to enact policy to change the situation; and what they actually change in terms of policy. All of this becomes part of a continual loop of interaction that structures and restructures the way in which day-to-day relations are seen. In particular, this political transmission belt affects the institutions and policies that will determine authoritative rules for ethnic relations, be it in terms of culture, language, legal rights, education, or socioeconomic advancement. Policies and institutions become a second pole of ethnic relations.

Lastly, there is the external dimension, i.e., the opinions and power of other states (especially kin-states) and of the international (European) community. Both sets of actors set the stage for how attitudes evolve (possibly toward ethnic mobilization) and how policy and institutions change (toward greater accommodation or coercion). First and foremost, international actors interact with the power holders of policy and institutions, seeking (usually) to moderate the stance of the latter on ethnic relations. They may also seek on occasion to influence directly the attitudes, sentiments, and mobilization of average individuals. In any case, the full scope of ethnic relations includes influences that come outside the state in question.

The model can be visualized as in figure 16.1, where the three realms of ethnic relations are related via certain interactive processes (politics, international relations, or internationalization/Europeanization).

The order in which the elements of the analytical model in figure 16.1 were presented mirrors very much the sequence in which scholarship on ethnic

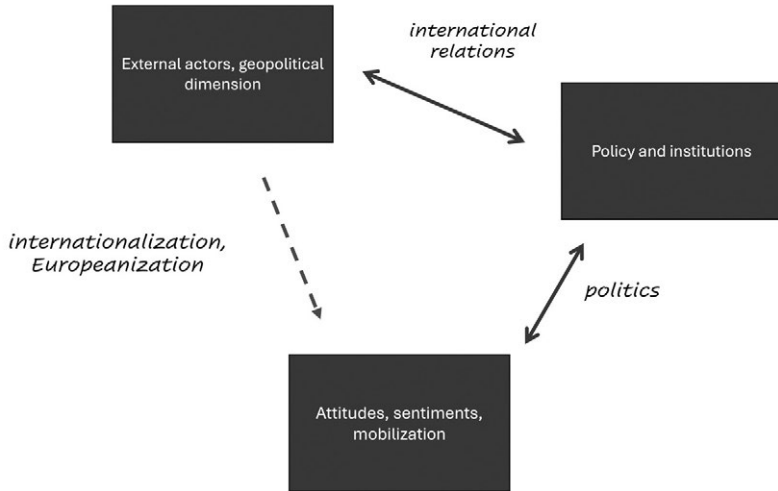


Figure 16.1. A model of ethnic relations. ↵

relations in the Baltic states has also evolved. In the sections that follow, we will trace these successive waves as depicted in figure 16.2. Starting from a preliminary focus on what could be described as sentiment change and mobilization among the titular Baltic peoples the late 1980s and early 1990s, we will see scholarship turning to the study of policies and institutions (line 0). Thereafter, we will examine the analytical shift toward understanding the geopolitical importance of the new ethno-politics of the region (line 1) along with how external actors impacted on policies and institutions (line 2). Lastly, we will consider scholarship on how new ethno-political policies and institutions were changing the attitudes and sentiments among both majorities and minorities (line 3). Again, neither this model nor its analytical sequence claims to be a definitive summary of research in the field. But it will hopefully help to identify the domains in which scholars have coalesced at different periods of time.

Triggering a New Era

It is no secret that the current scholarly focus on ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia got its start with the emergence of the Baltic nationalist movements in the late 1980s, and in particular how Estonians and Latvians themselves problematized the state of ethnic relations at the time. This period of scholarship is denoted as “0” in figure 16.2, since it could in some respects be seen as a prehistory to the contemporary era of ethno-politics.

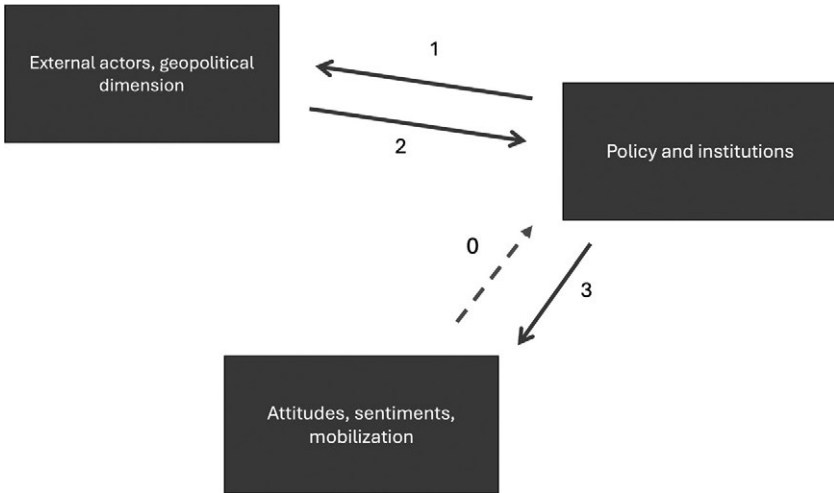


Figure 16.2. The sequence of research on ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia. ↵

There was certainly little that presaged the advent of such extensive political mobilization, epitomized (among other things) by the Baltic Chain from Tallinn to Vilnius in August 1989. Scholarship was very much in the observer role, seeking to put events in some kind of historical context, but without knowing exactly what to predict or expect from the steady crumbling of the Soviet Union. There was trepidation about how the Baltic states would be able to push their claims vis-à-vis Moscow. As Rein Taagepera put it in July 1989, “Might versus right is a mix fraught with danger.”² Moreover, the ability to do research in the Baltic states at this point in time was severely limited, requiring a Soviet visa for Western scholars, but also very difficult for Baltic researchers in situ given limited resources and oftentimes personal involvement in the events themselves. Social scientists like Marju Lauristin (as one of the leaders of the Popular Front of Estonia [Eestimaa Rahvarinne]) come to mind.

The predominant characterization of ethnic relations during this period revolved around elucidating the sense of Baltic grievance not only with Soviet rule, but also its perceived policy of Russification. Data and facts were mustered to show how Moscow-sponsored labor migration to the Baltic states had precipitated dramatic change in the ethno-social landscape of these countries.³ Stark imbalances existed among Russian speakers in

2 Taagepera, “Estonia in September 1988,” 186.

3 Dreifelds, “Immigration and Ethnicity in Latvia”; Vetik, “Ethnic Conflict and Accommodation”; Kirch and Kirch, “Search for Security in Estonia.”

terms of their proficiency in the titular national languages. This morphed into a general feeling of ethnic inequality and deprivation among Estonians and Latvians. Scholarship readily conveyed these sentiments by reporting data from the first uninhibited public opinion surveys.⁴ These sought to show how ethnic relations were burdened by many Soviet-era legacies.⁵

As figure 16.2 indicates, however, the outpouring of sentiment and the surge of mobilization would lead to concrete change in policies and institutions. On top of the reattainment of independence itself, ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia would be fundamentally altered through the implementation of a restorationist citizenship policy that accorded automatic citizenship only to those who could demonstrate a link to the pre-1940 republics. Since the vast majority of Russian speakers in these two countries had settled or were born there after the Soviet takeover, this policy created an unprecedented, mutually compounding ethno-legal cleavage. In 1997, Latvia had upwards of 665,000 noncitizens, amounting to around 27 percent of the population.⁶ If the vast majority of these were either ethnic Russians, Belarusians, or Ukrainians, and the total number of these Slavic minorities in the population was approximately 860,000, then the overlap between ethnicity and legal status meant that nearly 80 percent of the minority population did not have Latvian citizenship. Similarly in Estonia, various public opinion surveys that asked respondents about their citizenship status reported as few as 17 percent of ethnic Russians claiming they were citizens of Estonia.⁷

Scholars chronicled these changes often with a sense of unease. Kask was the first to bring a very thorough overview of how citizenship and residency rules were debated in the Estonian parliament between 1991 and 1993.⁸ He accentuated the degree of “national radicalization” that had led to the triumph of the restorationist policy. Visek echoed this interpretation, noting that many saw Estonia’s restrictive citizenship legislation as aimed at facilitating a “velvet deportation” of Russian speakers.⁹ Ultimately, many scholars noted that while the policy was problematic politically, it

4 Karklins and Zepa, “Religious-Centered, Multiethnic Societies”; Rose and Maley, “Nationalities in the Baltic States.”

5 Rudenshiold, “Ethnic Dimensions in Contemporary Latvian Politics”; Evans, “Ethnic Schism and Consolidation”; Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and the Transition to Democracy*; Jubulis, *Nationalism and Democratic Transition*.

6 Naturalizācijas pārvalde, “Iedzīvotāju skaits.”

7 Rose and Maley, “Nationalities in the Baltic States.”

8 Kask, “National Radicalization in Estonia.”

9 Visek, “Creating the Ethnic Electorate.”

had a certain degree of legal legitimacy and it was de facto accepted by the international community.¹⁰ As one author declared,

Although the original intent of the recent citizenship and aliens legislation may be suspect under international law, the amended laws ultimately do conform to international norms in their result. The real test will be their implementation. It remains to be seen whether the Russian-speaking population will be integrated or excluded, but Estonia and Latvia have given strong indications that they intend to fulfill their obligations under international law.¹¹

As Estonia and Latvia settled into this new structure of ethnic relations, researchers aimed to bring more conceptual clarity to what was emerging. Some scholars sought to reprise the concept of cultural autonomy for national minorities, as it had been developed in Estonia and Latvia in the interwar period. But over the years this model faded from view.¹² Within political science literature, regimes such as “ethnocracy” had long been identified as a type of preponderance of one ethnic group over another. However, the Estonian and Latvian cases were not explicitly ethnic in character; their ethno-political divides had been created by citizenship legislation, not openly ethnic criteria. Moreover, the basic principles of liberal democracy continued to operate. It was for this reason that scholars turned to other models. Coincidentally, a similar conceptual debate about imbalanced ethno-politics had emerged in Israel with respect to that country’s Jewish majority and Arab minority. Lustick’s notion of “ethnic control” that spoke of how the Israeli regime had developed a three-pronged policy of segmentation, dependence, and co-optation toward its Arab minority seemed to characterize very well the manner in which Estonia and Latvia had used citizenship (and many other policies) to gain a preponderant handle over politics for their titular majorities.¹³ Meanwhile, other Israeli scholars such as Smootha fleshed out the notion of “ethnic democracy” to describe the almost oxymoronic nature of a multiethnic society with a liberal democratic

10 Barrington, “Nations, States, and Citizens”; Barrington, “The Domestic and International Consequences of Citizenship”; Barrington, “The Making of Citizenship Policy”; Chinn and Truex, “The Question of Citizenship in the Baltics”; Hughes, “‘Exit’ in Deeply Divided Societies”; Van Elsuwege, *From Soviet Republics to EU Member States*, ch. 6.

11 Skolnick, “Grappling with the Legacy of Soviet Rule,” 389.

12 Lagerspetz, “Cultural Autonomy of National Minorities”; Poleshchuk, “Russian National Cultural Autonomy in Estonia”; Smith, “The ‘Quadratic Nexus’ Revisited.”

13 Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State*.

system dominated by a single ethnic group.¹⁴ These insights led to a wave of studies attempting to interpret Estonia and Latvia in this conceptual light, including direct collaborations between Israeli and Baltic scholars.¹⁵ In a retrospective look at the usefulness of ethnocracy as a conceptual framework, Agarin voiced a frequent critique of these approaches:

[R]egardless of their political institutional design, democratic or otherwise, liberal or corporatist, all political landscapes are ethicized to a degree requiring individuals of minority backgrounds to accept rules of the game established by the majority population in order to join in and compete with the majority.¹⁶

Hence, to some degree, the Baltic states were no different than any other European nation-state. Nonetheless, in relation to Estonian and Latvia, Agarin professed, “I can only reiterate my impression that an ethnocratic mode of governance is still the order of the day.”¹⁷ Interestingly, a similar conclusion was professed in 2024 by a new generation of analysts looking at Estonia’s political development.¹⁸ They characterized Estonia’s treatment of stateless as if they were a “disposable population” and that much of the country’s ethno-nationalism has been underpinned by neoliberal ideology and orientalist logics.

Ethno-political Change as Geopolitical Challenge

The question of whether these ethno-political transformations were taking Estonia and Latvia dangerously or unacceptably outside the European democratic mainstream quickly became the basis upon which scholarship also began to examine how changes in policy and institutions regarding ethnic relations in the Baltic states were affecting geopolitical relations with external actors (line 1 in fig. 16.2). From an international relations perspective ethno-political change in the Baltic states soon came to be

14 Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy.”

15 Pettai, “Emerging Ethnic Democracy”; Commercio, “Systems of Partial Control”; Pettai and Hallik, “Understanding Processes of Ethnic Control”; Smooha and Järve, *The Fate of Ethnic Democracy*; Smith, “The Ethnic Democracy Thesis.”

16 Agarin, “Extending the Concept.”

17 Agarin, “Extending the Concept,” 94.

18 Norberg and Norberg, “Estonia’s ‘Return to Europe.’”

characterized as a “security dilemma”¹⁹ or as an area for European “conflict prevention.”²⁰ The issue was important not only from the standpoint of whether these countries were adhering to European norms on minority rights, but also whether the fact that the central minority undercut by these changes was Russian speaking would inevitably bring the Russian Federation as a neighboring superpower into the quandary.

In this context, ethnic relations came to be examined in terms of whether European and international institutions could serve as effective regulators of ethno-political excesses primarily through means of diplomatic negotiation, “norm socialization,” and/or “conditionality”—especially at moments when a given country was seeking admission into a European organization.²¹ Estonia and Latvia became important test cases for how these institutions would respond.²² One new framework for such mediation was the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Numerous studies of the HCNM’s effectiveness in stemming a number of ethno-political crises in Estonia and Latvia were published.²³ These scholars found that the HCNM was not a godlike force that could call to order ethno-political conflict; at the same time, on occasion the institution’s quiet diplomacy was effective. This was especially the case during Latvia’s protracted efforts to adopt a final citizenship law in 1994–95.²⁴ Equally important was the creation of long-term OSCE observer missions to Estonia and Latvia, which would be tasked with providing continual information about ethno-political developments to the organization’s central headquarters in Vienna. Birkenbach noted that these missions had a multidimensional role to play across the international field. They were not simply “a doctor for a specific client, but more an advisor to the whole family.”²⁵

Over time, however, researchers became less and less sanguine about how the broader process of conditionality prior to Baltic accession to European

19 Lind, “Is the Russo-Phone Minority”; Aalto, “Revisiting the Security/Identity Puzzle.”

20 Khrychikov and Miall, “Conflict Prevention in Estonia.”

21 Kelley, *Ethnic Politics in Europe*; Hughes and Sasse, “Monitoring the Monitors”; Kochenov and Agarin, “Expecting Too Much.”

22 Hogan-Brun and Wright, “Language, Nation and Citizenship”; Galbreath, “From Nationalism to Nation-Building.”

23 Zaagman, “Conflict Prevention in the Baltic States”; Poleshchuk, *Advice Not Welcomed*; Sarv, “Integration by Reframing Legislation”; Dorodnova, “Challenging Ethnic Democracy”; Hansson, “The Latvian Language Legislation.”

24 Muiznieks and Kehris, “The European Union, Democratization”; Galbreath, “The Politics of European Integration.”

25 Birckenbach, “Half Full or Half Empty?” 76.

institutions would impact on ethno-politics.²⁶ There was dismay in the mid-1990s, when the Council of Europe did not substantively question Estonian citizenship policy and only mildly influenced Latvia's policy, when admitting the two countries into this club of democracy and human rights.²⁷ The next disenchantment came with the European Union's decision both to start membership negotiations with Estonia and Latvia in 1997 and 1999, respectively, and, ultimately, to admit those countries as members without any serious revision of their citizenship, language, or other ethno-political policies. Scholars studying these developments used the Baltic cases effectively to see whether European institutions were going to have a new effect on ethnic relations in the post-Cold War era.²⁸ Ultimately, however, European conditionality proved to have very limited effects on what constituted the core of the ethno-political transformation in Estonia and Latvia.²⁹ One scholar even concluded that the admission of Estonia and Latvia to the EU was above all a political, not a norm-based decision within the realm of minority rights.³⁰ Agarín and Regelman echoed this view, concluding that "European monitors did not question domestic sovereignty over policymaking, leaving it up to national political actors to devise and implement policies perceived appropriate domestically."³¹ Similar disillusionment was expressed in relation to whether norm diffusion through the European integration had helped to change attitudes among elites about minority protection.³² Even a later study examining Estonian political development over a period of twenty-five years found that "despite a long-term norm diffusion regarding minority rights and integration there is little self-transformation within the political elite as narratives of the Other [i.e., the minority] are downplayed."³³

The other external dimension to Estonian and Latvian ethnic relations that preoccupied scholars during the 1990s was the potential role to be played by Russia.³⁴ Relatively quickly after the reestablishment of Baltic

26 Agarín, "Nation-states into Nationalising States," 48.

27 Pettai, "Estonia and Latvia."

28 Morris, "EU Enlargement and Latvian Citizenship Policy"; Galbreath, "The Politics of European Integration"; Galbreath, "European Integration through Democratic Conditionality."

29 Kochenov, "Pre-accession, Naturalisation"; Budryte, *Taming Nationalism? 201–2*.

30 Kochenov, "Commission's Approach to Minority Protection."

31 Agarín and Regelman, "Which Is the Only Game" 445.

32 Steen, "Accessioning Liberal Compliance?"; Schulze, "Estonia Caught between East and West."

33 Sjöstedt, "Beyond Compliance," 171.

34 Merritt, "A Geopolitics of Identity"; Galbreath and Lašas, "The 'Baltic' Factor in EU–Russian Relations."

independence, Russian Federation president Boris Yeltsin made it clear that a withdrawal of the remaining Soviet (now Russian) troops in Estonia and Latvia could be made contingent on more amenable minority policies being adopted in these two countries. Simonsen profiled in detail the twists and turns of this confrontation between Moscow and Tallinn/Riga up to the final departure of these troops in August 1994.³⁵ Although, ultimately, Simonsen did not see much consequence to Russia's threats, this was only one form of influence the Kremlin could yield. Another one was the impact of distorted rhetoric, disinformation, and outright propaganda spread by Russian officials and media channels, studied thoroughly by Rislakki.³⁶ Meanwhile, Schulze examined in detail the degree to which parliamentary debates in Estonia and Latvia included references to Russia when considering ethno-political issues.³⁷ She found that Russia served as both a "brake and motor for inclusion." Never were Russia's demands on the Baltics cited as an official reason for adopting more accommodative reforms. But the shadow of Russia was often used by nationalists to reject the need for any concessions.

In broad terms, the focus by different scholars on how Estonia and Latvia were interacting with these external actors eventually coalesced around an increasingly structured model of how to understand the overarching dynamics of ethnic relations in the region that drew on the famous framework of "triadic nexuses" developed by Rogers Brubaker.³⁸ The constellation of Estonia and Latvia as nationalizing states, their Russian-speaking populations as national minorities, and Russia as an external kin-state corresponded to Brubaker's original theory perfectly. Indeed, David Smith soon used the Baltic cases to expand the theory into a "quadratic" formation, arguing that the international community and, in particular, European institutions were acting as a fourth pole in the relationship.³⁹ Pettai, meanwhile, argued that the situation could best be seen as a pyramid, where international institutions were trying to mediate from the top across all three of the intertwined parties below.⁴⁰ Soon, the quadratic nexus model was employed more thoroughly: by Cheskin to study Russian minority identity across the Baltic states;⁴¹ by Kallas to understand the dynamics of ethnic relations in

35 Simonsen, "Compatriot Games."

36 Rislakki, *The Case for Latvia*.

37 Schulze, "Does Russia Matter?"

38 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.

39 Smith, "Framing the National Question."

40 Pettai, "Explaining Ethnic Politics."

41 Cheskin, "Identity and Integration."

Estonia;⁴² and by Schulze in her study of strategic frames and ethnic politics in Estonia and Latvia.⁴³

Integration as a New Paradigm

Another realm where scholars have seen a degree of European and international influence on Estonian and Latvian ethno-politics (line 2 in fig. 16.2) relates to the launching of official minority integration policies in the two countries as of the late 1990s and the early 2000s.⁴⁴ In point of fact, the integration policies in both states got started very much on their own terms. In Estonia, a number of social scientists (eventually known informally as the Vera group) started organizing regular seminars on ethnic relations and integration in 1996–97.⁴⁵ These exchanges served as the basis for mapping out the first policy principles in 1999.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, in Latvia integration policy was spurred in 1995 through the creation of a state program for Latvian language learning that aimed to address the stark linguistic divides in the country.⁴⁷ In this respect, European organizations never actually required Estonia or Latvia to initiate such programs; however, they did readily support their implementation, both with words and considerable financial support.⁴⁸

Scholarship about these policies emerged gradually. A number of normative analyses attempted to relate the emerging Estonian and Latvian conceptions of integration to Western concepts such as multiculturalism or diversity management.⁴⁹ Vetik argued (based on a close reading of Estonia's initial integration documents) that the country was headed toward a model of "democratic multiculturalism," although his analysis drew little from the original precepts of this concept introduced by Will Kymlicka or Charles Taylor.⁵⁰ Meanwhile in Latvia, scholars attempted to interpret the notion

42 Kallas, "Revisiting the Triadic Nexus."

43 Schulze, *Strategic Frames*.

44 Feldman, "Estranged States."

45 Heidmets, *Vene küsimus ja Eesti valikud*; Lauristin, *Mitmekultuuriline Eesti*.

46 Pettai, "Prospects for Multiethnic Democracy."

47 Zepa, "Citizenship, Official Language, Bilingual Education."

48 Pettai and Kallas, "Estonia: Conditionality in a Legal Straightjacket."

49 Lauristin and Heidmets, *The Challenge of the Russian Minority*; Zepa, "Integration Policy in Latvia."

50 Vetik, *Democratic Multiculturalism*.

of integration as a way of overcoming “alienation” in society and creating a more encompassing civic consciousness.⁵¹

Feldmann brought an important insider’s view to this process by carrying out an extensive period of participant observation within the Non-Estonians Integration Foundation or the initial administrative body created to implement Estonia’s integration policy.⁵² He saw in the government’s actions a clear attempt to incorporate Russian speakers into a predominantly Estonian nation-state, and not an effort at creating a more multicultural Estonian society. Moreover, he maintained that Western countries were largely acquiescent in this endeavor, since they tended to see a strong Estonian nation-state as a better guarantor of regional security.⁵³ Hence, in Feldman’s view, Estonia’s policy was very much par for the course, since it actually reflected the implicit preferences of both Estonian and European policymakers. Lastly, many scholars noted that the integration policies were essentially top-down phenomena, lacking substantive input from the Russian-speaking minority itself.⁵⁴ In fact, according to Feldman, this problem was mirrored even in the academic community, where mainly ethnic Estonian and Latvian scholars predominated.⁵⁵

Over the years, both Estonia’s and Latvia’s integration policies evolved and matured. More systematic support programs were developed, and institutions strengthened. The substance of the policies was also often deepened. But for some scholars, the general ethnic-majoritarian approach remained the same. In a pair of analyses for an overarching volume on minority integration in Central and Eastern Europe, Agarín and Malloy were unequivocally critical of Estonia’s and Latvia’s policies. With regard to Estonia, Malloy found that “[a]s much as the framers of the [2000 integration program] have tried to make it look like a strategy for fostering multiculturalism-as-ideology, they essentially gave minorities only one choice, namely assimilation.”⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Agarín concluded, “[T]he Latvian programme was an ambivalent effort to co-opt non-Latvians willing to improve their access to resources by participating in community life on the terms imposed by the dominant group.”⁵⁷

51 Pabriks et al., *Sabiedrības Integrācija*.

52 Feldman, “Culture, State, and Security in Europe”; Feldman, “The Trap of Abstract Space.”

53 Feldman, “Stabilizing Estonia.”

54 Cianetti, “Integrating Minorities in Times of Crisis.”

55 Feldman, “The Challenge of the Russian Minority.”

56 Malloy, “Social Cohesion Estonian Style,” 239.

57 Agarín, “Cooptation as Integration?” 220.

Assessing Integration

A final turn in the study of ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia relates to the emergence of what could be called a cottage industry of scholars examining and measuring the success of integration over time (line 3 in fig. 16.2). Be it in terms of naturalization rates, language acquisition, political attitudes, social relations, media consumption, or economic well-being, the notion of integration was now parceled into distinct realms that could be continually tracked. Monitoring frameworks became the order of the day with social scientists developing comparative indicators derived both from public opinion surveys as well as policy-based statistics.⁵⁸ These studies, indeed, found notable progress emerging by the 2010s and beyond.⁵⁹ However, other studies pointed to persistent alienation among Russian speakers. Using data from the New Baltic Barometer, Agarin concluded that “minorities’ disaffection with politics results from a perceived inability to influence politics or to see political institutions responding to their grievances.”⁶⁰ Some years later, Agarin and Nakai found in relation to Latvia that the strongest predictor of dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy was attitudes toward ethno-nationalist state-building, meaning irrespective of ethnicity. “The more emphasis there is on a national language and loyalty to the state, the more dejected a person will be from the contemporary political process.”⁶¹ Birka, meanwhile, provided an additional perspective, examining the degree to which Russian speakers in Latvia were developing a sense of belonging to the country alongside the possibility of maintaining a sense of identity with Russia. Her conclusion:

Feelings of attachment to Russia did not consistently correlate with the cognitive perception of Latvia as homeland amongst those surveyed. Thus, for a respondent it was possible to express feelings of attachment to Russia and still identify the territory of Latvia as homeland.⁶²

Other studies also found a more differentiated picture emerging.⁶³ Using survey data from both Estonia and Latvia, Vihalemm and Kalmus found

58 See the biennial “integration monitoring” reports put out by the Estonian government since 2000. For Latvia, see Muižnieks, *How Integrated Is Latvian Society?*

59 Karklins, “Integration in Latvia.”

60 Agarin, “Resident Aliens?” 340.

61 Agarin and Nakai, “Political Dejection in a Divided Society,” 536.

62 Birka, “Expressed Attachment to Russia,” 9.

63 Vihalemm et al., “Russians in Estonia.”

that generational differences within the Russian-speaking communities were clearly growing.⁶⁴ Through the effect of postindependence socialization, greater consumer culture and exposure to the West, younger people had notably different worldviews than older members of the minority. Nevertheless, the prospect for greater social mobility for Russian speakers in the two countries was limited. According to Vihalemm and Kalmus, the “reproduction of social deprivation among members of the minority group is already embedded in the process of cultural transmission.”⁶⁵ In an interesting combination of analytical models, Kaprāns and Mieriņa found that ethnic Russians’ feelings about ethnic identity depended very much on their beliefs about the other three components within the “quadratic nexus,” i.e., Latvia, the EU, and Russia.⁶⁶ Moreover, legal status and generational belonging influenced very much perceptions toward these other reference points. Lastly, Cianetti argued that expanding integration has caused other dilemmas.⁶⁷ Calling this the “presence-polarization” thesis, she claimed that accommodation seemed to happen more often when minority mobilization was less palpable. Greater minority presence, meanwhile, led sometimes to increased polarization.

From a policy point of view, one of the central objectives of both Estonian and Latvian integration measures has been to increase levels of national language knowledge among Russian speakers. Scholars in this realm initially tracked the evolution of formal language legislation.⁶⁸ Later, however, sociolinguists have predominated in the study of actual language learning and language contact.⁶⁹ Many have tried to ascertain whether David Laitin’s original prediction that Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia would succumb to a process of “competitive assimilation” has materialized.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, looking at language attitudes, Zepa, Kļave and Šūpule found that “over the years the language discourse has not changed significantly. Each language community has its dominating language discourse.”⁷¹

64 Vihalemm and Kalmus, “Cultural Differentiation.”

65 Vihalemm and Kalmus, “Cultural Differentiation,” 111.

66 Kaprāns and Mieriņa, “Minority Reconsidered.”

67 Cianetti, *The Quality of Divided Democracies*.

68 Raun, “The Estonian SSR Language Law”; Tsilevich, “Development of the Language Legislation”; Järve, “Two Waves of Language Laws”; Ozolins, “The Impact of European Accession.”

69 Priedīte, “Surveying Language Attitudes”; Ehala, “Russian-Speakers in the Baltic Countries”; Lazdiņa and Marten, *Multilingualism in the Baltic States*.

70 Laitin, *Identity in Formation*; Pisarenko, “The Acculturation Modes of Russian Speaking Adolescents.”

71 Zepa et al., “Russian–Latvian Language Conflict.”

Slow change has also been observed in the realm of minority language education. Ever since re-independence, debate has persisted in both Estonia and Latvia about whether to maintain the Soviet-era parallel system of Russian-language primary and secondary schooling.⁷² Many scholars saw this as an impediment to integration, allowing separate sociolinguistic societies to be perpetuated, while others felt this was an opportunity to develop multicultural educational models.⁷³ As a way of deciding these issues, some researchers sought to determine whether the quality of education was different in these schools.⁷⁴ In turn, some of these results have been used to argue that Russian-language schools should, in fact, be transferred to the national languages—a move which both Estonia and Latvia fully undertook in 2022.⁷⁵ This has posed some municipalities, schools, teachers, and parents with difficult choices.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The challenges of ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia are far from over. On the one hand, many of the seemingly settled areas (like legislative frameworks or international relations) will still continue to evolve, especially when amendments are adopted.⁷⁷ Moreover, integration itself will be a long-term process, lasting surely for the next couple decades as generations shift. On the other hand, there are areas where notable change seems not to have happened. Memory politics is one. Following the shock of the Bronze Soldier crisis in Estonia in 2007, a wave of studies attempted to map out dimensions of collective memory among Russian speakers.⁷⁸ Given Vladimir Putin's ever more aggressive use of Soviet memory for his regime legitimation, these divides are likely to persist. One can also expect a rise in securitization studies of the Russian-speaking minorities as long as fundamental geopolitical

72 Karklins, "Ethnic Integration and School Policies."

73 Pedersen, "A Search to Merge"; Silova, *From Sites of Occupation to Symbols*.

74 Austers et al., *Daudzveidība ienāk latviešu skolās*; Lindemann, "The School Performance of the Russian-Speaking Minority."

75 Pettai, "Educational Reform in Estonia and Latvia."

76 Cianetti, "Representing Minorities in the City"; Koreinik and Klaas-Lang, "Linguistic Repertoires and Teacher Resilience"; Lazdiņa and Marten, "Why Do Russian-Speaking Families?"

77 For example, Latvia's 2022 decision to adopt language requirements for the renewal of long-term residency permits for Russian Federation citizens.

78 Petersoo and Tamm, *Monumentaalne konflikt*; Cheskin, "History, Conflicting Collective Memories."

tension exists between the West and Russia.⁷⁹ Scholars will have to navigate a careful path in gauging these trends. In many respects, a number of very consequential changes are taking place (education reform, media reform, regional security shifts). For all intents and purposes, Estonia and Latvia are headed toward a more robust incorporation of Russian speakers into their national-language societies. Whether we are on the cusp of large-scale acculturation and assimilation of Russian speakers as a new model of ethnic relations remains to be investigated.

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79 Kuczyńska-Zonik, "The Securitization of National Minorities."

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