

## REVIEW ESSAYS

### SOVIET MODERNISATION, ATHEISM AND INSULAR LITHUANIAN SOCIETY

This review article discusses reflections of the person, the Soviet regime and the spread of nationalism in the latest Lithuanian historiography examining the Soviet period. Under analysis are the recently released books by V. Davoliūtė<sup>1</sup> and N. Putinaitė.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, these books were chosen from the already rather full shelf of Lithuanian Sovietological research for their broad thematic and chronological scope, the conceptual coherency of their ideas, and for the recent rise in discussions in Lithuanian society about the significance of the cultural figure in the Sovietisation of Lithuania.

These discussions have become all the more acute for their personalisation: an argument arose back in the summer of 2015 about Justinas Marcinkevičius, the most famous Lithuanian poet from the second half of the 20th century, also known as the bard of the Lithuanian national revival. The hot point of this discussion became the refusal by the defence minister J. Olekas to award the Patriots' Prize to Putinaitė for her book, which was backed by an expert commission, explaining his decision, albeit very indirectly, on the author's attitude towards the poet J. Marcinkevičius. Amid the war of words, Rita Miliūtė, the host of the television programme 'Teisė žinoti' (The Right to Know), invited the 'culprits' involved in the scandal to her show, and rhetorically asked Putinaitė, the author of *Nugenėta pušis*, and the defence minister Olekas: 'If [Soviet dissident] Antanas Terleckas<sup>3</sup>, during those same Soviet years, when Justinas Marcinkevičius was writing his poetry ... had wanted to meet with Jean Paul Sartre<sup>4</sup> and speak with him ... what chance would he have had then, in the 1960s?'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania. Memory and Modernity in the wake of war* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> N. Putinaitė, *Nugenėta pušis. Ateizmas kaip asmeninis apsisprendimas tarybų Lietuvoje* [The trimmed pine. Atheism as a personal choice in Soviet Lithuania] (Vilnius, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Antanas Terleckas (b. 1928) was one of the most active Lithuanian anti-Soviet dissidents, imprisoned on numerous occasions by the regime.

<sup>4</sup> The French existentialist philosopher J.P. Sartre visited Soviet Lithuania in 1965. Only several selected cultural figures, including the poet J. Marcinkevičius, were allowed to meet him.

<sup>5</sup> A weekly programme hosted by Rita Miliūtė *Teisė žinoti*, 22 February 2016 <[http://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/95167/teise\\_zinoti](http://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/95167/teise_zinoti)>.

These words reflect perfectly the still-prevailing attitude in Lithuania towards the Soviet years, claiming that a dissident and opponent of the political system was naturally worthy of a meeting with representatives of the West's intellectual elite. Yet political persecution and discrimination steered him away from intellectual conversations. And conversely, as far as Soviet cultural figures were concerned, the most important condition for their chances of meeting with Western intellectuals was not their work or talent, but how 'Soviet' the creator actually was.

This quote defines precisely the field which, luckily, Lithuanian authors are now leaving. Putinaitė refrained from answering the question and expanding on the theme on the television programme, a theme which, aside from the dissident Terleckas, has been given wide coverage in Davoliūtė's book. Putinaitė does not in any way diminish dissidents, especially those from the Catholic anti-Soviet underground. Quite the opposite, in her book she highlights the damage caused by Soviet atheist policy. She correctly estimates the regime's struggle against the Church and faith as one of the most important bolsters of Soviet indoctrination. However, Putinaitė does not demean intellectuals who worked and created in the Soviet period and cooperated with the government. Their value to the system and the regime is no reason to dismiss their talent. This book gives her another chance, as in her earlier offering *Nenutrūkusi styga*,<sup>6</sup> to analyse the role of the intellectual during the process of the Sovietisation of Lithuanian society. In her new work, though, Putinaitė goes into greater depth, not choosing writers for her analysis, but atheists, and bases her findings on her own careful examination of archival material, something that was lacking in her *Nenutrūkusi styga*. Perhaps, in terms of the sources she used, one comment can be made that the author did not visit the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL) section at the Lithuanian Special Archives. It would be most correct to begin research of Soviet atheist policy from CPL Central Committee (CC) documents, whose resolutions were published in a very abbreviated form in the Soviet ideology collection,<sup>7</sup> which is what Putinaitė based her study on. For example, her research does not include the resolution of the CPL CC and Council of Ministries of Soviet Lithuania of 4 May 1963, which oversaw many atheisation measures. This resolution reflects the Soviet government's programme of atheisation, and its implementation in the very sense that Putinaitė discovered, although independently through her research, instead of just referring to it.<sup>8</sup> So, accurate work with archival material could have saved the author time and effort. Secondly, it is worth mentioning that the poet Justinas Marcinkevičius probably only

<sup>6</sup> N. Putinaitė, *Nenutrūkusi styga: prisitaikymas ir pasipriešinimas sovietinėje Lietuvoje* (Vilnius, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> *Ideologinio darbo klausimai: Dokumentų rinkinys*, ed. A. Viršulis (Vilnius, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> LCSA, f. R-754, ap. 1, b. 691, pp. 99–104.

spoke once at a CPL CC plenum, in 1963 during the peak of the promotion of atheism, where he said: ‘Our writers have in their works carried out a significant task in demasking bourgeois nationalism, religious superstitions and private ownership inclinations.’<sup>9</sup>

It is not only the thematic similarity between Putinaitė’s and Davoliūtė’s research that prompted me to choose their books for this discussion. The very release of their works signals that a certain level of Lithuanian historiography has been reached, and points to the variety of interpretations of Lithuanian nationalism in the Soviet years.<sup>10</sup> We have gone a long way from N. Gaškaitė’s ‘struggling Lithuania’ approach of the late 20th century, where the Soviet period was depicted as a change in the form of the struggle of the Lithuanian nation against the Soviet occupation: the armed partisan resistance was replaced by the anti-Soviet underground, which was replaced with the anti-Soviet dissident movement of the 1970s, then the baton was taken up by Sąjūdis, which fought hard and finally won independence for Lithuania. Indeed, we have not gone too far from the original gradation of Lithuanian society suggested by the political scientist Kęstutis Girnius in 1996, ranging from collaboration and accommodation, to resistance.<sup>11</sup> We have, however, moved away from the anti-Soviet partisan and deportation themes, which were understandably very popular among researchers in the 1990s and some years later. Echoes of those partisan struggles do remain, but they are made part of broader studies focusing not just on the postwar years. I could boldly say that Lithuanian Soviet-era research is entering the synthesis stage, where separate themes are combined, and conceptually coherent works spanning a wide chronological time-frame are being prepared.

### **The identity of a Soviet Lithuanian: between trauma and Sovietisation strategies**

The cultural studies scholar Violeta Davoliūtė has probably gone the furthest in Soviet Lithuanian identity studies, harnessing the concepts of trauma and displacement in her book *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*, drawing a coherent picture of Lithuanian nationalism in the

<sup>9</sup> From a speech given by Marcinkevičius to the CPL CC on 9–10 July 1963, LYA, f. 177, ap. 228, b. 296, p. 186.

<sup>10</sup> There are other books by Lithuanian authors on the Soviet theme that were released in 2015 which stand out for the originality and depth in approach in analysis. Noteworthy are *Nematoma visuomenė* by A. Ramonaitė and a collective of authors, and *Įrėmintą tapatybę. Lietuvių rašytojai tautų draugystės imperijoje* by V. Ivanauskas. As I am one of the co-authors of the first book, and a reviewer of the second, I have declined to discuss them in this article.

<sup>11</sup> K. Girnius, ‘Pasiapriešinimas, prisitaikymas, kolaboravimas’, *Naujasis Židinys-Aidai*, no. 5 (1996).

Soviet period and its change. The anti-Soviet gun rebellion, its impact and influence is intertwined into a broad narrative, connections are made with the social context, revealing the effect of the armed anti-Soviet resistance on Lithuanian migration (retreat) from rural areas to the cities, and also displacement and all the associated experiences of social trauma. Using emotional history in narratives about the Soviet years is currently becoming more popular in historiography.<sup>12</sup>

As an attempt at an integrated narrative, Davoliūtė's book is commended. Relating into one story the partisan struggles, deportations, Soviet modernisation with its policy of industrial development, and the spread of culture and creativity, as well as the internal experiences of people from different social groups, is not an easy task. Until now, there has been one group of authors who have tried to produce a historical synthesis of Soviet Lithuania,<sup>13</sup> while the preparation of a new one does not feature in the immediate future. Let us not forget that the image Davoliūtė presents is not static, or a cross-section of just a certain stage: the author seeks to show the dynamism that existed across the whole Soviet period, and its outcomes today. Such intellectual experiments are indeed inspirational, and prompt admiration for tackling such a feat, revealing the interrelation between seemingly different phenomena. At the same time, readers can check whether something has not been missed, to voice their doubts over the basis or the feasibility of one or another interpretation. In this sense, the inaccuracies noticed lead to a deeper discussion of issues on Soviet-era Lithuania.

One such doubt is Davoliūtė's attempt to relate the dynamics of the anti-Soviet armed rebellion with the migration process of Lithuanians from rural areas to the cities. She states that at the end of the 1940s, when partisan fighting was declining, they resorted to repressions: acts of revenge and even terror on people accused of cooperating with the Soviet regime.<sup>14</sup> That is why, allegedly, the solidarity that had been a long-standing characteristic of life in villages, diminished, and young people were left with no other choice but to move to the cities, especially to Vilnius, which the Soviets had 'returned' to Lithuania.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See, for e.g.: *Georgia after Stalin: Nationalism and Soviet Power*, T. Blauvelt, J. Smith (eds.), (Tbilisi, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> *Lietuva 1940–1990 m.: okupuotos Lietuvos istorija*, ed. A. Anušauskas (Vilnius, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> The author incorrectly bases her arguments on and misinterprets the statements by the historian M. Pocius. Conversely, in his book, Pocius reveals that as partisan battles subsided, the punishments exacted by the partisans also diminished. See: M. Pocius, *Kita mėnulio pusė. Lietuvos partizanų kova su kolaboravimu 1944–1953 metais* (Vilnius, 2009), pp. 195, 346, 347.

<sup>15</sup> V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of*, p. 50.

This is a very serious accusation thrown at Lithuanian partisans over the wrecking of Lithuania's rural communities. It would suggest that not only Soviet terror and collectivisation destroyed Lithuanian villages, but also the actions of the partisans themselves. Such topics should be discussed more accurately, particularly since the claim about partisan terror is incorrect. Conversely, partisan punitive attacks on the country population accused of collaboration did not intensify in the late 1940s, but subsided.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it is unlikely that at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, a fear of partisan retribution could have prompted young people's escapist behaviour, as Davoliūtė alleges. This is quite evident from examples of separate individuals and regions. Take the 16-year-old future president of Lithuania Algirdas Brazauskas, who already in March 1949 became a member of the Communist Youth in the town of Kaišiadorys. He did not sense any threat for having made such a move in his hometown, nor on his grandfather's farmstead in Pašiliai in the Kėdainiai district where he spent his summers. The activities of the famous partisan leader Jonas Misiūnas-Žaliasis Velnias (Green Devil) in this district were but a legend by the late 1940s, and could not have driven youth to the cities. Young people left for other reasons, primarily education, and better job and career opportunities. Joining the Communist Youth whilst keeping in mind the better chances of pursuing higher education in one of Lithuania's cities, and not fear of the partisans, was a factor in Davoliūtė's overly dramatic portrayal of displacement. Her desire to link the postwar situation in the countryside with the city-bound youth's memory of his birthplace and feelings of guilt is an ambitious, but not quite successful, attempt.

Davoliūtė portrays postwar Lithuania and the country in the second half of the 20th century as a stage for several traumatic processes. Indeed, there were many transitions, injustices, cruelties and repressions in this land, so it seems surprising that they do not have some points of connection. Her narrative combines the Lithuanian nationalist discourse, and the tragic elimination of the Jews, and the significance of their former life in Lithuania, along with sentiments for Polish Wilno. All that is missing are the Russian speakers who arrived from other republics, who are mentioned only episodically. We can read into the author's desire to place those scattered pages from history neatly into one book. This is a moral stance, inviting readers not to forget all that was lost: not just their personal losses that affect them even today, but also those from that period. However, the author's attempt at combining all these separate narratives is not always successful, because it is difficult to claim there was trauma where there was oblivion and euphoria. It is sad, but the reality was that the lost Lithuanian Jewish world had no influence whatsoever on the creation of the Soviet Lithuanian identity. That is why Davoliūtė's talk

<sup>16</sup> M. Pocius, *Kita mėnulio pusė*, pp. 346, 347.

about the Vilnius synagogue that was not rebuilt in the Soviet period, and similar episodes, are only side-narratives that barely, or do not at all, contribute to threshing out the main theme in the book, the construction of a Soviet Lithuanian identity and its fate. Incidentally, the mentioned (non) reconstruction of the synagogue is also not quite accurate. According to Davoliūtė, at the time when Lithuanians were making the most of Vilnius' destruction, and building and restoring structures of importance to them in Vilnius, the main house of prayer of the Jews was overlooked and ultimately destroyed, though it could have been rebuilt. Interestingly enough, on the same page, Davoliūtė discusses and agrees with the opinion of the historian A. Streikus that Catholic churches were not restored because of their religious nature, which was proper atheist policy. However, when she touches on the synagogue issue, the author does not present it as the destruction of a religious object, but the destruction of a Jewish cultural object.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the opinion prevails that the Soviet government did not rebuild or construct new cult objects, whatever confession they might have represented, Orthodox, Catholic or Jewish.

The theme of the Jews' destiny in Lithuania in Davoliūtė's book runs parallel to the Soviet Lithuanian identity. The author is perceptive and sophisticated enough not to talk about the absurd 'double genocide' theory, yet even without it we can search for the impact of Jewish culture and the Jews' departure from Lithuania during the *detente* period on the situation in Soviet Lithuania. A rather large number of Lithuanian Jews, taking the opportunity to emigrate, willingly left for the West and Israel from the 1970s. This left a significant impression on Lithuanians who were forced to remain behind the Iron Curtain. The social consequences of Jewish migration have been researched in historiography.<sup>18</sup> The author could also have discussed works or literature by Lithuania's Jews, as the historian Vilius Ivanauskas has done in his book.<sup>19</sup>

Yet for some reason, Davoliūtė does not delve deeper into the situation of the Jews in Soviet Lithuania. Without this kind of analysis, mention of just the Holocaust and the destruction of the Jewish heritage paints a rather grim picture of the trauma simulated by Lithuanian writers and cultural figures, which are like crocodile tears compared to the tragedy of the Holocaust. When such scales of tragedy and trauma are introduced, the reader finds it hard to understand and compare at which points Soviet Lithuania's cultural figures truly experienced trauma, whether they comprehended it as such, or quite conversely, whether they played into the game because it was simply more convenient and beneficial. Thus, one

<sup>17</sup> V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking*, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> See: S. Grybkauskas, *Sovietinė nomenklatūra ir pramonė Lietuvoje* (Vilnius, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> V. Ivanauskas, *Jrėmintą tapatybę: Lietuvos rašytojai tautų draugystės imperijoje* (Vilnius, 2015), pp. 332–355.

question remains unclear, which trauma is a strategy, and which traumas are a genuine, authentic sensation felt by an entire generation of people. Even though it appears that Davoliūtė herself maintains the authentic trauma position, the completely unmotivated introduction of the side-topic of the Jews in Lithuania into her narrative sows seeds of doubt over the authenticity of the trauma experienced by Lithuanians, especially cultural figures. The matter of genuine grievances experienced during the Soviet period is not as straightforward as it might appear at first glance. Some Lithuanian Soviet-era specialists blame the poet Marcinkevičius for his Soviet nationalism strategy, which extracted Catholicism and presented Lithuanian history as the life of a tragic, weak, oppressed nation forced to obey its stronger neighbours. According to these authors, this narrative strategy only deepened Lithuanians' adaptation to and collaboration with the regime.<sup>20</sup>

Putinaitė would agree that the Lithuanian patriotism of our cultural figures was simulated, surrogate and superficial, but not natural. In her book, she highlights the alternative traditions that were introduced, such as wedding customs and civil rituals that, according to the author, were false, and devised only so as to distract the people from believing in the Catholic faith.

The construction of a Soviet Lithuanian thematically links Davoliūtė and Putinaitė. Both authors have assumed a radical nationalism studies constructivist position, attributing to cultural figures almost magical powers as agents of the Soviet regime. Davoliūtė asserts: 'In Soviet society, where the freedom of speech was restricted and real politics were conducted behind closed doors, the cultural intelligentsia came to play an exceptionally important role. Especially in the non-Russian republics, where they took advantage of the relatively broad cultural autonomy ...'<sup>21</sup> Putinaitė is of a similar view, saying that the more adept creators laid bridges between the regime and society,<sup>22</sup> and uses the 'co-workers of the regime' concept when referring to this group.<sup>23</sup>

It has become common practice among Lithuanian authors to talk about writers, poets and other artists as 'engineers of the soul'.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, when we read the books being discussed here, we might doubt whether the emergence of a Soviet Lithuanian identity can be attributed to one quite small albeit influential group of the intelligentsia. Left on the sidelines are entire generations of Lithuanian engineers, who can be called the real agents

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g.: R. Kmita, 'Justino Marcinkevičiaus herojus', *Colloquia*, no. 28 (2012), pp. 95, 96.

<sup>21</sup> V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> N. Putinaitė, *Nugenėta pušis*, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g.: V. Ivanauskas, *Įrėmintą tapatybę*.

of modernisation. Perhaps, having taken a closer look in their direction, we might notice much more enthusiasm, belief in the future, and opportunity for social mobility in the Soviet Lithuanian identity, or the anger of a rational engineer over economic planning errors, or the population's dissatisfaction with low consumption levels, and not just the introverted writers' traumas and nostalgia for rural life that Davoliūtė describes.

Nonetheless, Davoliūtė's and Putinaitė's accounts of the evolution of Lithuanian nationalism in the Soviet period are similar only at first glance. Even though both authors stick by radical constructivism, saying that national identity was constructed by cultural figures, their assessments differ. For Putinaitė, the Soviet period was like an empty hole in time, where alternative Soviet traditions were falsely created that had nothing to do with Lithuanians' real identity, erasing the natural, 'innate' Lithuanian Catholicism inherited from the interwar period. Therefore, her book offers an invitation to cleanse ourselves of the outcomes and legacy of Soviet modernisation, and to return to that interwar 'normal' state.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most important and interesting discoveries Putinaitė has made is that the Soviet was not so concerned with the pure atheisation of society, and in that regard, the situation here was different to atheist policy throughout the rest of the USSR. The author alleges that already in the late 1950s, the Lithuanian *nomenklatura* started to construct a unique, pioneering atheist approach unlike any other in the whole USSR, allowing a flexible approach and the utilisation of folk traditions. In analysing Soviet anti-religious policy, Putinaitė enriches and contributes corrections to the earlier studies of Soviet anti-Church policy by the historian A. Streikus, where in his monograph he called the period from 1957 'bulldozer atheism in Lithuania'.<sup>26</sup> Putinaitė, on the contrary, shows that from the end of the 1950s, Soviet Lithuania's anti-Church policy was flexible and adapted to the population's expectations, searching for ways they could be influenced without resorting to direct violence. The Lithuanian *nomenklatura* 'allowed itself' to be restricted to the very pragmatic task of simply maintaining society's loyalty through atheism, rejecting the utopian aim of transforming society into an atheist one. This is truly an important claim, which, it appears, would allow the author to make use of the existing material in Lithuanian historiography,<sup>27</sup> and to present a broader discussion about the Soviet ethno-federal structure, the limits of the local *nomenklatura*'s powers in implementing in their own republics unique initiatives, not

<sup>25</sup> For more about the return to a normal state, see: A. Švedas, 'Lietuvos idėjos paieškos: elito projekcijos', *Epochas jungiantis nacionalizmas: tautos (de)konstravimas tarpukario, sovietmečio ir posovietmečio Lietuvoje*, ed. Č. Laurinavičius (Vilnius, 2013), pp. 317–370.

<sup>26</sup> A. Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios antibažnytinė politika Lietuvoje (1944–1990)* (Vilnius, 2002), p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> See: V. Ivanauskas, *Irėminta tapatybė*.

always approved by Moscow: discoveries of the republic's 'uniqueness' were useful for the local *nomenklatura*, not just for the Sovietisation of the republic's society, to maintain the latter's loyalty to the regime, but also to maintain their own kind of autonomy from Moscow's institutions. Yet here Putinaitė limits herself to an inaccurate reference to the researcher of Soviet elite networks J.P. Willerton, saying that 'autonomy from Moscow, that is, the guarantee of a position's consolidation, depended on the local nomenclature's consolidation.'<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, this particular researcher is not speaking about the local *nomenklatura's* autonomy from the centre at all, but rather, in his work he reveals the importance of local *nomenklatura* networks in realising the political programmes of Moscow's protectors. It was precisely Lithuanian authors who revealed the importance of the local *nomenklatura's* consolidation on the republic's political autonomy.<sup>29</sup>

Putinaitė stops at just an analysis of the situation in the republic, thus narrowing her potential field of argumentation. She depicts the Soviet regime in a paradoxical way, as static though adaptable, yet unchanging. Why adaptable? Because the author attributes to the Lithuanian *nomenklatura* a large degree of autonomy to operate in making society atheist, describing the *nomenklatura's* activities as flexible, and featuring atheist policy that was orientated towards the Lithuanian person: 'Once [the Lithuanian *nomenklatura*] started to pay attention to the person, his complexity countered the ideological simplifications.'<sup>30</sup> The author places a great degree of importance on this 'simplification'; based on Peter Sloterdijk, she calls it a violent totalitarian tool for political action.<sup>31</sup> However, could we not interpret this rejection of simplification actually as the Lithuanian *nomenklatura's* relationship with the republic's person, making an impact on regime change which would lead the Soviet system in Lithuania from its totalitarian state? Unfortunately, Putinaitė stops short of this, not 'reshuffling' the previous claims in literature about national communism, the development of relations with the centre, or introducing her own statements or corrections. As such, the inspiration of the book's narrative wanes. The author makes use of the already traditional standard periodisation of events of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist period, based on which stages in history are signified by external circumstances (usually policy from Moscow, in this case, Stalin's death). Having clarified the local *nomenklatura* component and its significance, the author should not retract her investigation: the actual political context was not filled and realised only by the Kremlin's

<sup>28</sup> N. Putinaitė, *Nugenėta pušis*, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> See: S. Grybkauskas, 'Petro Griškevičiaus personalinis tinklas: tarp klano ir konsoliduotos nomenklatūros?', *Politologija*, no. 3 (2015), p. 120; S. Grybkauskas, 'Lietuviškosios nomenklatūros tinklai ir partikuliarizmas', *Nematoma sovietmečio visuomenė*, ed A. Ramonaitė (Vilnius, 2015), p. 297.

<sup>30</sup> N. Putinaitė, *Nugenėta pušis*, p. 341

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

resolutions, which is what we read in several places in Putinaitė's book. It appears as if the author herself does not fully appreciate the importance of the idea that she broached while analysing Soviet atheist policy, which she discovered; perhaps, not wanting to develop the somewhat heretical idea about the Lithuanian *nomenklatura*'s positive contribution to the Soviet system's change, she hides in the safe, yet today quite banal, opposition-conformation-collaboration triangle. Though it appears that spurred on by her publisher's catch-cry 'a fresh look at the Soviet years', and having raised so much discussion in society with her bold exclamations, the book's author should not be searching for calm waters.

The impression of an inert regime is also created by the author through images of atheists, and the motivation for their activities. In her account about Jonas Ragauskas, one of the main characters in the book, she claims: 'Due to his popularity, he [the atheist Ragauskas] was allowed to do more than any other ordinary agitator. Ragauskas' case reveals that neither dogmatic nor ideological requirements applied strictly to society's "stars", if they collaborated with the regime. Such freedoms made them even more appealing to the public.'<sup>32</sup> Yet only a few pages earlier, Putinaitė portrayed a somewhat different situation: 'The propaganda system drew Ragauskas into a battle he did not want to fight, yet could no longer avoid, as he had become dependent on the government. Having turned into a popular propagandist, only very limited opportunities were left open to him as to what activities he could engage in.'<sup>33</sup>

Thus, as we see, it was Ragauskas' own choice which ultimately bound his hands: his atheist propaganda was inversely proportional to his opportunity to choose and improvise; that is, these chances were diminished. Thus, there remains the question, how could he step beyond the boundaries of the day's ideology? In that sense, ideological dogmas were not so strict: they were created, re-created, interpreted and adapted, and the cleverer cultural figures and atheists who enjoyed society's backing found it easier to act. So Ragauskas' atheist resolve carried greater value than Putinaitė would like to admit. He not only won status and symbols of power, and perhaps greater opportunities for consumption, but also the chance to step beyond the boundaries of ideological dogma.

This case may be transferred to other situations: the symbiosis between writers, engineers and other figures, and the regime and the system. It is not difficult to apply the standard Putinaitė has devised specifically to Justinas Marcinkevičius: the skilled poet had the chance for greater freedom of expression, and his talent was used for the deeper Sovietisation of the Lithuanians. Yet, however strange it may seem, this was not at the expense of any power to the regime, nor did it have to make any concessions.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

Why is that so? If a cultural figure is allowed to go beyond the strict ideological boundaries, and that is harnessed in the Sovietisation of society to create the regime's bond with social groups, do the system and ideological dogma not then undergo a change? Putinaitė does not seem to notice the regime's change, and puts responsibility on the cultural figures and atheists who sold themselves to the regime. She writes that Ragauskas 'could not have been so naïve to consider the conditions created by the regime as "normal"'.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the 'abnormal' Soviet regime took on a 'normal' and deceiving nature in Lithuanian society, thanks to the actions of talented, albeit 'sold-out' creators such as Ragauskas and Marcinkevičius, who could nevertheless allow themselves to say more than the regime wanted.

This argumentation that Putinaitė presents, and the static image of the regime, is not convincing. The Soviet system or regime she depicts is like a kind of eternal, all-powerful universe, an absolute evil that never changes, only the regime's 'black angels' (its cleverer co-workers) change their faces, yet the regime itself does not feel any inflation of ideology or power, nor debasement or loss. The question here is about the change in Soviet ideology, the ability to adapt, and the necessity of acknowledging or even legitimising phenomena the earlier Soviet indoctrinators could not even have imagined. Even in 1963, a functionary who had arrived in Lithuania from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) CC expressed criticism that the approach towards religion here was too flexible, and that the appreciation of the threat posed by the Catholic Church was insufficient.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps if Putinaitė had indeed undertaken a study of everyday subjectivity or topics relevant in academic Soviet-era research, she could have presented a more coherent image of the Soviet actor, expanding the motivation of his behaviour. Now, at the beginning of her book, she simply declares that her study is more like a history of the everyday, as she was researching ordinary members of society, not the elite. It is not clear what she had in mind: surely Ragauskas and other famous Soviet Lithuanian atheists can be considered part of the elite. In addition, Putinaitė conducted a close analysis of atheists' writings and documents, but she did not examine their immediate everyday life realia. The people she researched lived as if driven by a strategy of rationalism alone. We would think that a revelation of subjectivity and everyday life would allow the presentation of an image of a more flexible and motivated actor. Now her actors appear to be more rational, wooden almost, whose behaviour is far from natural. Thus, if Davoliūtė sometimes looks at the person's behaviour in the Soviet years through the structural prism of emotions uniting generations, then Putinaitė in her book tends to rationalise actors' behaviour.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>35</sup> A. Streikus, *Sovietų valdžios antibažnytinė*, p. 213.

Maybe, after a more detailed discussion of the everyday life of atheists, we would come to a clearer understanding of the variables in Putinaitė's narrative: the regime (defining the subject), the cultural figure (Davoliūtė's 'mediator' or Putinaitė's 'bridge'), and society. Then her narrative might express less of a neutral mood, like: 'The idea emerged that non-religious rituals had to be created.' But how and who specifically created those ideas? Were they initiated by the CPL CC, or another institution, or did they develop from among the people? If they originated from the people, then why do we say: 'it is considered a Lithuanian tradition,' and not just 'it is a tradition.'<sup>36</sup> From this, it becomes obvious that the Soviet years for Putinaitė are like a time of non-existence, when people did not live 'for real', thus traditions could not form naturally. Then the question arises about society itself, which, according to Putinaitė, was Sovietised, harnessing those 'sell-out' cultural figures: is society just a silent mass lacking any hopes, quietly accepting the ideologems and indoctrinated stories and customs thrust upon them by the talent that agreed to cooperate with the regime? Did the regime actually form and re-form the concept of nationalism and patriotism, while society's participation in this process was merely passive? After all, the ideological strategies created by the regime had to suit society, meaning not just that society had to accommodate the regime, but vice versa as well. The latter's power and influence had its limits too: ideology implemented only through force and accostation, if it did not comply with society's value system or world-view, experienced silent, or sometimes amid mass protests (as in 1956 and 1972), outright rejection. Putinaitė knows this, and says that Lithuanians' Soviet character and cooperation with the regime was much broader and deeper than earlier believed. However, a different approach here is possible, to explain why things unfolded as they did: did it depend only on the regime and its underhand Sovietisation, or did society harbour certain expectations that the Soviet system could at least partially satisfy? If so, then perhaps that Soviet system was not so 'abnormal', as Putinaitė claims? Perhaps it had the chance and potential to change, or in other words, to 'normalise', to become 'more human', and transform into socialism with a face, as the demonstrators in the Prague Spring, and later Gorbachev, believed. Even if the Soviet government had no chance of survival, the system's mutual relations with society can explain more convincingly that Soviet folk phenomenon, the intertwining of a belief in communism and survival practices, which produced the Soviet Lithuanian. Perhaps this two-sided growth can explain the Soviet-era vitality that can be noticed even today.

Davoliūtė has a different take on the Soviet years. For her, the period was a time of intense development of Lithuanian nationalism, no less important than the interwar years. Having read Davoliūtė's study, we might

<sup>36</sup> N. Putinaitė, *Nugenėta pušis*.

come to this kind of image of a Soviet Lithuanian: the trauma experienced by youth who arrived in the cities from their rural surroundings, the feeling of guilt for having abandoned the countryside where an armed anti-Soviet resistance was taking place, the retreat from this struggle instead of joining in the struggle with their elder brothers who simply died in the unequal battle against the Soviet NKVD and the *stribai* (violent civilian NKVD collaborators). This was a glorification of Soviet progress and achievement, at least not until faced with the wider world: not the Soviet internationalism or the colonialism of other nations that Davoliūtė barely mentions as a problem. Here the Soviet regime has little impact or significance. It is only a stage, given over to Lithuanian nationalists. The global world reached Lithuanians via French intellectuals. On meeting the abovementioned J.P. Sartre, the Lithuanian nationalist, burdened with feelings of guilt and provincialism, failed to advance any further towards modernism. His entire faith in progress is diminished, and the creator turns to his nation's history, to the name of Lithuania, seeped in honey and blood. From occupation and Soviet industrialisation, it was other nationalities who suffered, Jews, Poles, and they suffered because the Lithuanian cultural establishment exploited the Soviet platform in order to continue with their nationalist project.

The Soviet Lithuanian project does not end here, though. Another important turning point was when Marcinkevičius, one of the dominant leaders of the cultural establishment, supported the release of a book of memoirs by the exile Dalia Grinkevičiūtė right at the end of the Soviet years. This symbolic and also very practical act points to a connection between two different experiences: the convergence of the once-acknowledged figure that did experience the sensation of Soviet internal exodus and maintained the nationalist line, with the non-systemic experience of people who survived deportation to Siberia. We can guess that this step became important in legitimising the Soviet Lithuanian's re-orientation towards the national revival movement, and the moral approbation of its transformation. Davoliūtė's account of the path taken by Lithuanian nationalism from the Stalinist years to the national revival is logically consummated with the mention of this act.

We shall not discuss further the trend of fleeing rural areas: I have already mentioned that the partisan war reason for escaping to the cities was not very convincing. I shall discuss in more detail Davoliūtė's concept of Lithuanian nationalism. Unlike Putinaitė, she claims that the nation-building process did not just continue during the Soviet years, but intensified. If we can describe Putinaitė's narrative as the use of nationalism (or at least some of its elements) towards a deeper Sovietisation of Lithuanians, then the opposite applies to Davoliūtė, as the use of Sovietisation by Lithuanians creating the Lithuanian identity in order to implement their own nationalist agenda. The two are similar, but not identical. We can agree with

Davoliūtė's statements that some elements of interwar nationalism were transferred into the Soviet period. According to her, even then power was concentrated in the hands of Soviet Lithuania's intellectuals, who formed Lithuanians' identity.<sup>37</sup> Though Davoliūtė does not restrict herself to this kind of claim, going further, she adds: 'The key formula of Soviet nationalities policy – national in form and socialist in content – created an opening to pursue the same nationalizing project of the interwar regime with similar, though better resourced and more elaborately articulated, techniques of mass politics.'<sup>38</sup>

Was the same nationalist project really being continued during the Soviet period? Saying this is not the same as saying that even under such radical Soviet transitions, the interwar heritage and mentality remained. She goes further: the Soviet system, via Lithuanian cultural figures, continued to carry out a Lithuanian nationalist agenda.

What should we make of this? It can be viewed as an understanding reached between the regime and cultural figures, and reading Davoliūtė's narrative we would be led to believe so, had nothing been skipped in the book, of course. And the elements she has missed are significant. I would say that the *zhdanovshchina* experience and impact on Lithuanian writers were under-estimated. Even though Davoliūtė mentions that in her times E. Mieželaitis had been criticised, she immediately notes that during the 'thaw' he was highly valued. And indeed, the *zhdanovshchina* phenomenon in Soviet Lithuania in 1946 was like a cold shower, even for many leftist intellectuals.<sup>39</sup> The young poet E. Mieželaitis, attacked by CPL CC secretary K. Preikšas over his ideological persuasions, later received the Lenin Prize in 1962; however, neither he nor other Lithuanian cultural figures could imagine then, in 1946, that the leftist idyll had come to an end, and that it was mandatory to obey the Kremlin's requirements that had little in common with Lithuanians' requests and visions. The recent publication of documents of the Central Committee All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (VKP(b)) by the historian M. Pocius clearly testify that before the Second World War was even over, Moscow embarked on a categorical policy of Sovietisation in re-occupied Lithuania, not tolerating how during the first occupation (1940–1941), local communists had 'played along with' the leftist interwar intelligentsia.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking*, p. 155, 'In reality, power never left the stage, but was concentrated into the hands of the masters of discourse, the establishment intelligentsia who had been shaping Lithuanian memory throughout the Soviet period.'

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> V. Ivanauskas, *Jrėmintą tapatybę*, pp. 47, 48.

<sup>40</sup> *Lietuvos sovietizavimas 1944–1947 m.: VKP(b) CK dokumentai*, ed. M. Pocius (Vilnius, 2015).

Davoliūtė also overlooks Justas Paleckis and the issue of the old interwar leftist intelligentsia from the early 1950s. Whilst great attention is given to Paleckis in the postwar period, and his enthusiasm over the return of Vilnius, there is no analysis of how he and writers from his milieu were shunted from actual power in the late 1940s–early 1950s. In the footnotes the author only briefly mentions that Paleckis had weak, symbolic power.<sup>41</sup> He lost this political influence for trying to highlight the importance of the 19th-century national revival and the importance of the interwar Lithuanian heritage. In the early 1950s, Paleckis used words similar to Davoliūtė's when describing Soviet national policy. He stressed its 'national form and socialist content'. At the plenum of the CPL CC of June 1953, Paleckis discussed the passing of the VKP(b) CC resolution 'On the Lithuanian SSR' initiated by Beria: 'We cannot forget that Lithuania did not simply change over to a Soviet order from the period of tsarism, but experienced 20 years as a bourgeois state, thus it had its statehood and state offices. Yes, it was a bourgeois state, its cultural content was mostly bourgeois, but its form was national. And form has great significance, as the broader masses of the people more commonly draw conclusions from form, whilst not always gaining a deeper understanding of content.'<sup>42</sup> Let us agree: it is simply unbelievable that Paleckis dared to legalise the statehood of the Republic of Lithuania. According to the canon of that time, one could only mention the exploitative bourgeoisie dependent on the imperialism of the West. This is without even mentioning the entrenched statements that came from 'A. Smetona's fascist regime'. That is why both Paleckis and the chairman of the Writers' Union A. Venclova were sternly criticised at the same plenum, where there was talk of the promotion of Lithuanian cadres to leading positions and the necessity of spreading Lithuanian culture. Paleckis attracted even stricter condemnation at other 'ordinary' plenums. This situation that cultural figures found themselves in, amid the republic's establishment, is of critical importance: if Paleckis, Venclova and the group of leftist cultural figures from the times of the interwar republic had not been pushed to the political fringes, then we could talk about some kind of agreement between the interwar intelligentsia, their nationalism and the Soviet system, and the silent adoption of a national programme. Yet this was not the case. Yes, in 1957 there was a contract between A. Sniečkus with his *nomenklatura* and Lithuania's writers, where their positions were brought closer to one another, the privileges of cultural figures were widened, and limits were defined as to the amount and the kind of nationalism that would be allowed in their work.<sup>43</sup> But at the same time, any attempts

<sup>41</sup> V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> From a speech given by J. Paleckis on 12 June 1953 at the plenum of the CPL CC, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 131, b. 182, pp. 85, 86.

<sup>43</sup> A. Streikus, 'Ideologinė cenzūra Lietuvoje 1956–1989 m.', *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 1(15) (2004), p. 45.

at a cultural 'united stream' were halted, distancing themselves from the legacy of the 'Third Front' movement.<sup>44</sup>

That is why saying that during the Soviet years the Lithuanian elite continued the nationalist project under even better conditions than during the interwar years is rather too bold, and not quite accurate. Nor is it correct to say, as Davoliūtė does, that Lithuanian cultural figures were the authors of the ideological discourse: they had to adapt to the conditions and manoeuvre in the political context, and obey Moscow and the republic's *nomenklatura*. We can agree that some elements from the interwar period were utilised, but we cannot go as far as to place an equal-sign between the interwar and Soviet periods. There is no doubt that cultural figures, especially writers, were important people in the Soviet system, with great authority; however, they operated within the borders defined by the system. Perhaps they even widened those limits, going beyond them, which Putinaitė mentions and yet does not even consider giving them credit for. Nonetheless, there are no grounds for claiming that an independent agenda, identical to the interwar nationalist version, existed.

#### **Soviet modernisation: displacement of Lithuanians or localisation?**

If we believe in Davoliūtė's scenario for the spread of nationalism in Soviet Lithuania, it would mean that the only 'inconvenience' brought in by the Soviets that created some discomfort, perhaps even sadness, was the somewhat too rapid industrialisation of the republic, which offended the Lithuanian character, while displacement raised feelings of nostalgia and left a deep trauma. However, Davoliūtė is not talking about Kazakhstan, or the Soviet Virgin Lands Campaign implemented there in the 1950s that determined grandiose demographic changes in that republic. Nor does she have in mind neighbouring Latvia, where urbanisation and migration were much more intense, and the less populous republic's capital Riga surpassing Vilnius by a long way. Davoliūtė talks about Soviet Lithuania, and tries to prove that there was large-scale internal migration of Lithuanians from the countryside to the cities, the meaning and social impact of which cannot be compared either to the deportation of Lithuanians or immigration from other republics. According to her, from 1951 to 1976, more than 700,000 Lithuanians left their place of birth and moved to the cities.<sup>45</sup> However, this number only appears large at first glance. Yes, 700,000 is a large figure

<sup>44</sup> The 'Third Front' (*Trečias frontas*) was cultural movement in Lithuania established in the end of 20's. Despite being sympathetic to some of the communist ideas, the movement was not part of the Lithuanian communist underground during the interwar period.

<sup>45</sup> V. Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking*, p. 50.

for a republic that had a population of only a little over three million, but let us not forget that we are talking about a period of 25 years. During that period, a whole generation was born, completed its schooling in the towns of their birth, and left to pursue university studies in the cities. In Soviet Lithuania, the figure for the urban population equalled the rural population quite late, only in 1970. So the 'rustic turn' taken by cultural figures that is so widely described by Davoliūtė (she dedicates a whole chapter of her book to this) takes place precisely at the time when the republic's industrialisation is just gaining pace. Thus, we can say that the most important themes of her narrative pass each other by. The plot of Davoliūtė's narrative follows this sequence: Lithuanian partisan terror in the countryside, collectivisation and rapid industrialisation coupled with urbanisation provoke the migration of the rural population to the cities, resulting in their displacement, and this in turn leads to traumatic moods and the creative work of cultural figures, who echo the population's feelings. The fact that Davoliūtė sees the rural approach agenda as an outcome of Soviet industrialisation is obvious from the statistics she gives. The reader is generally not 'burdened' with statistics or empirical material in this book, where especially little statistical data is provided from the 1980s. We are led to believe that in the author's view, the main processes in the creation of the Soviet Lithuanian took place in an earlier period, starting in the postwar years, and ending in the 1960s–1970s.

However, industrialisation, despite not being so rapid and even delayed, only gained pace in Soviet Lithuania in the second half of the 1960s, at a time when the rural approach in the work of cultural figures had already taken place. Davoliūtė does not even attempt to explain this anachronism, because she fails to realise it. For her, the Lithuanian Soviet Republic's industrialisation is even more rapid and intense than in the neighbouring republics, and commences from the Stalinist period, immediately after the Soviet re-occupation; this timing does not correlate with the economic or social development situation that existed then.

Davoliūtė might avoid this anachronism if she were to change her argumentation for the social outcomes of industrialisation that led to displacement and the rural approach of cultural figures: first, the cultural turn to the countryside, and later, some of the outcomes of industrialisation. Here, the logical sequence of Davoliūtė's narrative could be saved by the poet Justinas Marcinkevičius, his heuristics, having experienced nostalgia for his abandoned birthplace early in life (he arrived in Vilnius to pursue his studies in 1949), was ahead of society in terms of time, and through his work he guessed how it might feel in the not-too-distant future. His poetic intuition chose the road back to the village, the history of his native land, something which is later acknowledged by Lithuanians as the trauma of displacement due to Soviet industrial policy. Davoliūtė dedicates most attention precisely to Marcinkevičius in her book: not just over his role in the Soviet years, but also during the Lithuanian national revival period.

It was not just Leninist national policy, but also the specific ethno-federal order of the Soviet empire, and the institutional interests of the Lithuanian *nomenklatura*, which determined the placement of labour across the republic, distributing it evenly among the regions. The resolution passed by the CPL CC on 30 March 1964 foresaw the development of regional cities such as Utena and Alytus. The Lithuanian *nomenklatura*'s tug-of-war with Moscow's all-Union ministries meant that not only migration from other republics but the movement of the population within the republic was viewed through the prism of rational planning. Seeking political survival and to strengthen its own positions, the republic's *nomenklatura* had no other way of explaining to the Kremlin why all-Union ministries in Moscow should not invest in the development of its production in the republic, if investment gave a better return here than in the other republics. For this reason, the criterion of the rational movement of labour was devised: calculations were made for the distance people had to travel from a district to a regional centre, and the ways the development of regional cities halted people's movement within the republic was investigated. When she talks about rapid urbanisation and the sudden growth in the urban population, Davoliūtė fails to consider that the majority of new city-dwellers were people who had come from villages to the district centre, whose birthplace and aging collective farmer parents could easily be reached, if not by private car, then by district public transport. The main agricultural work, as earlier in old villages, would be done by the whole family pitching in to help.

Thus, the Soviet republic's *nomenklatura* and economists strived to basically 'freeze' people's movement, and they more or less succeeded. The outcome of this policy was not a 'displaced' society, as Davoliūtė claims, but rather an insular society, hardly affected by migration, and thus distinctive in the context of modernisation, one that was united, shared common successes, concerns, fears, rumours and myths. KGB files also reveal just how rumours and fears affected such a close-knit community. On 25 October 1972, the Šiauliai city branch of the KGB informed its heads and the Party government: 'Rumour is rife among the people in the city that over the next few years Russian nationals will be brought to live in the Lithuanian SSR and to the city of Šiauliai, motivated by different factors: some say that it is in relation to the approaching famine in the Russian Federation, others that it is the result of the events in Kaunas in the summer of 1972, still others say that it will be done to russify Lithuanians.'<sup>46</sup> Let it be said that the Lithuanian 'tribe' remained the closest-knit group even during the Soviet period, thus it was quite sensitive to rumours, myths and information coming from its guides, the cultural figures. It was this localisation, or placement of society, that created the autochthonic feeling

<sup>46</sup> Notice from the LSSR KGB Šiauliai branch, dated 6 August 1973, LYA, K-1, b. 703, p. 167.

in the community which Davoliūtė discusses, mistakenly presenting it as the result of trauma caused by displacement, rather than actually being in one's place. It could be that this position and autochthonous feeling is a cause for concern among Lithuanians today, with the European Union's migration policy, amid complaints over the disappearing nation due to excessive migration to the West. In the Soviet years, there were similar fears over the colonisation of Lithuania by foreign arrivals.

### Final comments

Modernisation in Lithuania during the Soviet years unavoidably raised feelings of uncertainty and traumatic experiences, and was noted for the secularisation of society. However, modernisation, especially under the conditions of occupation, was a challenge not only to the Lithuanian *socium*, but to the Soviet regime as well, especially to its agents, the Lithuanian *nomenklatura*, the establishment's cultural figures, and to atheists. Both authors have tackled this regime-person-society-based tension that existed in the context of modernisation, discerning the contours of a local Lithuanian's identity. I doubt whether a Soviet Lithuanian could be placed in a fighter-conformist-collaborator scheme. We could say that Lithuanian historiography, helped along by Davoliūtė, and partly by Putnaitė as well, is going beyond that dimension. The trauma and emotional structure approach to interpreting Lithuania's past during the Soviet period is not without its faults, nor is the overly rationalised image of an atheist very convincing. Therefore, it is evident that research on the Soviet Lithuanian does not end with the books by these authors.

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