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LATVIJAS VĒSTURES INSTITŪTA ŽURNĀLS

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RESEARCHING THE BALTIC QUEER HISTORY

There are many reasons why research on the queer subcultures of Soviet Latvia is a challenge to a historian. As several authors of the articles in this issue argue, queer memory still has not become a part of the shared collective memory in Latvia. Queerness is something that people would love to forget in their memories or, if ever remembered, it is perceived as a strange phenomenon that needs to be discussed in private, among close friends, rather than made available for public discussions and representations. Surprisingly, even though more than thirty years have passed since the fall of the Soviet Union and following decriminalisation of male homosexuality, the presence of queer memory in the public discourse and public space is still low. It seems that a worldview informed by discourses of pathologisation and criminalisation of homosexuality is still shared among the older generations.

Contemporary European understanding of statehood and its values is connected to non-marginalisation of previously discriminated groups on a political level, as well as identification and inclusion of the narratives of these groups in the state history narrative. The need to research the past of queer people is determined by social and historiographic reasons. Firstly, marginalisation of queer people in contemporary Latvia possibly can be minimised, by showcasing same-sex loving people as powerful agents in their subcultures and their interactions with Soviet state authorities. It would allow the group to recognise its place in history, and to strengthen its social identity in the narrative of Latvia's statehood and history. It would furthermore allow the society to recognise the group's complex existence in the Soviet past. Secondly, in Latvia's historiography, no research has been done on the problematics of interaction

between queer people and the Soviet state, however, identification of this interaction is a prerequisite for democratisation of Latvia's historic metanarrative. What is important, the socio-political context and conceptual frames for such studies in Latvia can be provided by studies already published on Soviet Russia.

Research on the history of homosexuality in the Soviet Union has begun and continues examining its socio-political contexts and different discourses of Soviet Russia.[1] In recent years, the historiography on homosexuality in Soviet Russia has been significantly broadened through research on homosexual subjectivity. The early Soviet and early post-Stalinist homosexuals have been analysed through their correspondence and a diary written for 18 months in 1955–1956.[2] The late Soviet homosexual subjectivities have been researched through in-depth interviews suggesting that they were characterised by shared laughter, language, solidarity, and internalisation of self-censorship in Russia and Georgia.[3] Soviet Russian history of gay lives and "aversion therapy" has been studied thanks to new historical sources – the autobiographies and diaries of Soviet Russian sexologist Jan Goland's patients analysed by Rustam Alexander.[4] The existent historiography has even laid the ground for a narrative about the hidden history of gay oppression in the Soviet Russia, however, generalising it to the entire Soviet Union.[5]

1 For thorough analysis of the historiography see: Healey, Dan; Stella, Franceska (2021). Sexual and Gender Dissent in the USSR and Post-Soviet Space. *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 62 (2–3), pp. 225–250.

2 Healey, Dan (2018). *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*. London: Bloomsbury, 73–89; Roldugina, Irina (2019). "Why Are We the People We Are?" Early Soviet Homosexuals from the First-Person Perspective: New Sources on the History of Homosexual Identities in Russia. *Soviet and Post-Soviet Sexualities*. Ed. by Richard Mole. London: Routledge, pp. 2–22.

3 Clech, Arthur (2019). Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic: Tema or the Shared Forms of Late Soviet Homosexual Subjectivities. *Soviet and Post-Soviet Sexualities*. Ed. by Richard Mole. London: Routledge, pp. 32–55; Clech, Arthur (2021). An inconspicuous sexual dissident in the Georgian Soviet republic: Subjectification, social classes and the culture of suspicion in the late Soviet period. *Cahiers du monde russe*, 62 (2–3), pp. 367–390.

4 Alexander, Rustam (2023). *Gay Lives and 'Aversion therapy' in Brezhnev's Russia, 1964–1982*. Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan.

5 Alexander, Rustam (2023). *Red Closet: The Hidden History of Gay Oppression in the USSR*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

To avoid such a generalisation of the past of one (out of fifteen) republics to the alleged experience of the entire Soviet Union, the academics should provide the studies of the queer Soviet past in the states that once were occupied by or incorporated into the Soviet Union. However, it is hindered by the political regimes and everyday homophobia in the countries that regained their independence or established it after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, only since the beginning of the 2020s, the field of history of queer sexualities has begun to emerge gradually.[6] The research work was facilited by the international scholarly seminary "Researching, reworking and representing Soviet LGBT histories – Queer Between Surveillance and Non-Interference of State Authorities under Soviet System: The Practices and the Discourses", organised by the Institute of Latvian History of the University of Latvia on 2 June 2023. The event was sponsored by the research grant of the Latvian Council of Science, "Between Surveillance and Non-Interference of State Authorities: The Practices of Same-Sex Sexual Subcultures in Soviet Latvia, 1954–1991" (lzp-2021/1-0167). Sixteen scholars took part in the seminary delivering papers on different issues of the queer history of the period of late socialism in the occupied Baltic states and the USSR.[7]

The research published in the current issue which is mostly based on hitherto unused historical sources include a diary by the Latvian film director Gunārs Piesis (by Jānis Ozoliņš[8]), as well as the advanced research of an already

6 Lipša, Ineta (2021). Documenting the Queer Self: Kaspars Aleksandrs Irbe (1906–1996) inbetween Unofficial Sexual Knowledge and Medical-Legal Regulation in Soviet Latvia. *Cahiers du monde russe,* 62 (2–3), pp. 415–442; Lipša, Ineta (2022). Observing and Performing Male Same-sex Desire: Appropriation of Public Space in Latvia during the Second World War and Late Stalinism (1940–1953). *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* 1 (115), 86.–118. lpp.; Põldsam, Rebeka; Arumetsa, Sara (2023). Emergence of LGBT Movements in Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Estonia. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2023.2195207; Põldsam, Rebeka (2023). *"Why are we still abnormal?!" History of discourses on non-normative sex-gender subjects in Estonia*. Dissertationes Ethnologiae Universitatis Tartuensis, 15. Tartu: Department of Ethnology, Institute of Cultural Research, University of Tartu; Navickaite, Rasa (2023). In the Name of Love? Sexuality, Gender, and Communist Morality in the Late Soviet Baltic Republics. *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*. Accessible at: www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-116915 (viewed 28.02.2024).

7 Accessible at: https://www.lvi.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/lvi.lu.lv/Zinu_atteli/2023/Riga_Seminar_Program.pdf (viewed 28.02.2024).

8 Ozoliņš, Jānis (2024). Accumulating Negative Affects: The Diary of the Soviet Latvian Film Director Gunārs Piesis. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 81–102.

known diary by an employee of the Soviet People's Court Kaspars Aleksandrs Irbe (1906–1996) (by Andrei Vazyanau[9]). The second group of sources are criminal files and judgements on sodomy charges by people's courts of Vilnius, as well as the criminal file by the Soviet Lithuanian KGB (by Tomas Vaiseta[10] and Rasa Navickaite[11]). These legal documents were created within a short distance from the events described by the accused insiders of male same-sex loving subculture, forcibly answering questions by Soviet lawyers. What they said was influenced by self-censorship to avoid criminal liability. The third group of sources are in-depth and semi-structured interviews with same-sex loving men, same-sex loving women, and non-homosexual individuals who were directly or indirectly informed about same-sex loving people's lives. The researchers created the oral history sources themselves (Kārlis Vērdiņš,[12] Brigitta Davidjants,[13] Kaspars Zellis[14] and Elizabete Vizgunova-Vikmane[15]) forty to sixty years after the reality under research took place. Interviews with people born from the 1930s to the early 1970s, the oldest generation who experienced the Soviet period, provided information on the experiences of same-sex subcultures from the perspective of both insiders and outsiders.

9 Vazyanau, Andrei (2024). Queer and Ethnicity in Minsk, 1952: Belarusian Reading of Kaspars Irbe's Diary. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 59–80.

10 Vaiseta, Tomas (2024). Investigating the History of Homosexuality in Soviet Lithuania: Deconstructing Court Verdicts. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 10–31.

11 Navickaite, Rasa (2024). Political Homophobia in Soviet Lithuania Revisited: The Case of the Dissident Viktoras Petkus. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 32–58.

12 Vērdiņš, Kārlis (2024). Two Peters: Queer Domestic Space and Artist's Sensibility in Soviet Latvia. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 103–121.

13 Davidjants, Brigitta (2024). Between Women: Narratives of Estonian Lesbians and Bisexual During the Transition from Soviet Times. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 143–164.

14 Zellis, Kaspars (2024). Presence of Queer Sexuality in Memories of Latvian Non-Homosexuals of the Soviet Era. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 165–186.

15 Vizgunova-Vikmane, Elizabete (2024). Lesbian Lives in Soviet Latvia: The Narratives. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls,* Speciālizlaidums (120), pp. 122–142.

This issue is a significant contribution to the queer history of the Soviet period. Several authors deal with subjects that have been underresearched or totally neglected before. The geografic span of the research includes mostly Latvia and its neighbouring countries. However, we believe that the conclusions our contributors make will expand the understanding of the 20th century queer history for everybody interested in the field.

Guest editors
Dr. hist. *Ineta Lipša*
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LATVIJAS VĒSTURES INSTITŪTA ŽURNĀLS

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INVESTIGATING THE HISTORY OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN SOVIET LITHUANIA: DECONSTRUCTING COURT VERDICTS

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This article examines the Soviet court verdicts under Article 122 of the Criminal Code of the Soviet Lithuania, which tried men for homosexual relations, as historical sources. The author argues that the documents stored in the contemporary archives remain programmed according to Soviet logic. The 20 verdicts examined reveal that in practice, men in Vilnius Lenin District were mainly tried for having relations with minors or for sexual coercion rather than consensual sexual relations. The testimonies in which the convicted men's traces of subjectivity can be detected are proposed to be defined as 'post-voice'. In some cases, these 'post-voices' reveal how the 'weak' resorted to their own tactics when they found themselves in the judicial and political power field.

Keywords: homosexuality, Soviet Lithuania, court verdicts, post-voices, archival research

Introduction

The rapid growth of research on the history of sexuality in the 1980s and 1990s has turned the archives of the institutions responsible for controlling and disciplining "deviant" sexual behaviour into valuable research sources. Estelle

B. Freedman and John D'Emilio, discussing the research on the history of sexuality in the United States, wrote that "so many sources of sexual 'deviance' have survived", resulting in increased attention from historians. Those scholars researching the history of sexuality "must be careful not to write a history of the unusual".[1] Homosexuality has been one of those phenomena historically rendered "unusual", and the criminalisation of male homosexual relations has not only made it the subject of strict scrutiny but has consequently documented it as a subject of legal proceedings.

Scholars in the history of homosexuality have repeatedly noted the paradox of how the past legal persecution of homosexuals has become an opportunity for historians to gain insights into their lives.[2] What should have repressed and silenced the men now allows them to be heard and seen. Criminal investigations, interrogation and trial records, testimonies of defendants and witnesses, court verdicts and other legal documents offer a wealth of material, albeit no less problematic. In Soviet-occupied Lithuania, Article 122 of the Criminal Code, as relevant articles in the codes of other Soviet republics, meant the prosecution for homosexual intercourse. So, in theory, there should be similar materials for historical research accessible. Unfortunately, in reality, they are almost non-existent. Men were prosecuted for homosexuality in Soviet Lithuania, but only 2–5% of all criminal cases were kept in archives by law, meaning that almost all records had been destroyed. Only court decisions or verdicts remained archived and accessible.

In this article, I examine the Soviet court decisions as historical sources, asking what kind of source it is, whether we can learn anything from it, and if so, what can we learn. The aim here is not to analyse and interpret the content of these documents but to reflect on and evaluate the sources themselves – their nature, their purpose, the images, and the assumptions they suggest. Similar questions and issues raised by legal (and specifically court) documents have long been discussed by historians of queer history. They are seen as a potential "vantage point"[3] for a study of the history of sexuality, especially in everyday life and its practices. However, serious questions about using these sources in historical research are raised, especially for a study of "authentic experiences".

In the context of the queer history in the Soviet period, such discussions and reflections are still rare and sporadic. Dan Healey, Rustam Alexander, and Laurie Essig analysed and wrote about the Soviet history of surveillance and persecution

1 Freedman, D'Emilio 1990, 482–483.

2 For example, Cook 2006, 64–86; Brickell 2008, 25; Houlbrook 2005, 218.

3 Erber, Robb 1999, 5.

of homosexuality in general.[4] Healey, in his book, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi,* discussed, among other things, the difficulties for historians to access archival documents in Russia.[5] However, he prioritised finding out where and what could be uncovered about the persecution of homosexuals over how these documents and archives shape the understanding of queer history. Moreover, his research mainly focuses on the Soviet Russia. In addition, Healey acknowledged that to study the persecution of homosexual men, "a comparative approach, exploiting the differentiated archival regimes of peripheral post-Soviet states, would seem the most promising way to address this problem".[6] In the Baltic states and other post-Soviet republics, a broader analysis of Soviet queer history is slowly gaining momentum,[7] but only in recent years criminal cases have captured closer attention.[8] Meanwhile, in Lithuania, the queer history of the Soviet era was started to be explored at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century.[9] Thus far, Lithuanian historians have not analysed either the criminal cases or their verdicts. This might be due to a lack of understanding on how such sources should be analysed and their significance in the writing of Soviet queer history.

I have searched for verdicts in one court of the first instance, known as the People's Court, during the Soviet era. This court was located in Vilnius, the capital of Soviet Lithuania, and was responsible for the central district named after Lenin. I have reviewed all the verdicts of this People's Court from 1970 to 1986[10]. The end date of the verdicts is set to the *perestroika* period, which marked the change in the prosecution policy, even if not always publicly declared. I found convictions of 20 cases during this period. A few more convictions were listed, but they were either not transferred to the archive or removed from it.

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4 Essig 1999; Healey 2001; Alexander 2019; Alexander 2021.

5 Healey 2018, 151–175.

6 Ibid., 175.

7 For example, Čičelis 2011; Lipša 2017; Lipša 2021; Lipša 2022; Valodzin 2016; Clech 2018; Clech 2021; Põldsam, Arumetsa 2023.

8 For example, Aripova 2020. It is also worth mentioning Kamil Karczewski's article about a homosexual relationship between two men and a trial in the 1920s in the Suwałki Region, near the Polish border with Lithuania (Karczewski, 2022).

9 Rasa Navickaitė is working on a postdoctoral project entitled *Modernization of Sexuality and the Construction of Deviance in Soviet Lithuania* (University of Vienna). See also: Klumbys, Vaiseta 2022, 202–219.

10 The archive did not have lists of verdicts before 1970.

Methodological note: a two-way road

When research on social history, including non-heterosexual history, gained momentum in the second half of the 20th century, many scholars, not only historians, went into the archives. Archives became so popular that French philosopher Jacques Derrida ironically called this phenomenon "an archive fever".[11] He reflected the growing critical attitude among historians, especially homosexuality researchers, in the 1990s towards archives and the documents they contain. Many researchers, then and now, are enthusiastic to find in the archives a variety of historical sources that can supposedly reveal the "experience" of non-heterosexual people. Discovering a story and telling it to others seems like a significant event in itself. But such attitude is increasingly being questioned. For example, Anjali Arondekar, who later wrote the book *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*,[12] had criticised historians that although they "foregrounded the analytical limits of the archive, they continue to privilege the reading practices of recovery over all others".[13] She argued that this approach to archival materials means that "writing the history of colonial homosexuality is ruled by the paradoxical proposition that the homosexual is most himself when he is most secret, most absent from writing – with the equally paradoxical consequence that such self-fashioning is most successful when it has been recovered for history".[14] Arondekar furthermore suggested "to shift archival attention from the ultimate discovery of this report to understanding the compacted role its evocation plays".[15]

In other words, Anjali Arondekar puts forward what anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, in more general sense, calls a move "from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject".[16] The need to see the subjectivity of archives and to see them as "active sites of agency and power"[17] has been expressed repeatedly. However, this call to move "from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject" is often perceived and used methodologically as a one-way action. It critically reflects on archives, the political and ideological notions shaped by them as centres of power, and the context in which they are organised. But it underestimates the historical sources as a legacy from the past, which still have something to tell us about that

11 Derrida 1996.
12 Arondekar 2009.
13 Arondekar 2005, 12.
14 Ibid., 16.
15 Ibid., 26.
16 Stoler 2002, 87–109.
17 Cook 2011, 600–632.

past. This article aims to show that legal and other archival documents can be read based on a two-way approach rather than the one-way approach. It encourages us to look at archival documents as if there was a field of tension between two poles – considering both what is discovered, shown, and made visible, as well as the way archives influence our thinking. In this way, I will discuss the decisions the People's Court of Lenin District handed down, which referred to Article 122 prosecuting male sexual intercourse.

Historicising "the sexual zoo"

Article 122 of the Soviet Lithuanian Criminal Code, like similar articles in the codes of other Soviet republics, had two parts. The first part provided punishment for male sexual intercourse, while the second part did so for the same act if it involved threats, physical assault, taking advantage of a minor or exploiting the victim's helplessness. Thus, male consensual sexual intercourse was clearly linked to abuse and sexual abuse of minors. It was implied that the acts were of the same nature, though not entirely identical.

When men are convicted based on this implication, and afterwards, almost immediately by default, their criminal files end up in archives, years later becoming historical sources, they pose at least a twofold problem for historians. Firstly, the notion is formed that male consensual sexual intercourse is a social and moral deviation, and not a "normal behaviour". Furthermore, even when historians analyse such cases using the so-called "reading against the grain" method, they still essentially maintain that they are studying people who "are atypical in their behaviour or at least in being caught committing such acts".[18] Secondly, male consensual sexual intercourse is linked to what is still considered a criminal act today, such as assault or abuse of minors. This, according to Graham Robb, places homosexuals in the "same sexual zoo as exhibitionists, paedophiles, and sex-murderers".[19]

These critical remarks imply that historians confine homosexual men within a "sexual zoo", which is an "unfair" treatment of homosexuals. The historians who conduct the research are responsible for this, too. Thus a "fair" historical study should focus on examining the history of homosexuals separately, without the context of the "sexual zoo" and without any assumptions imposed by the culture of a particular era. But an urge to oppose the association of homosexual men with criminals, which seems logical and understandable from today's political

18 Robertson 2005, 163.

19 Robb 2003, 17.

viewpoint, may hinder learning the politics, ideology, law, and culture of the past for what it was. Understandably, historians who study the history of homosexual men during the Soviet period draw a clear distinction between them and the men who were punished for violating Article 122 (2) of the Criminal Code. However, these male same-sex acts should not be excluded from the context in which they were perceived at the time. In other words, it is wrong to place homosexuals in the same "sexual zoo" as paedophiles, rapists, and sexual abusers, but the Soviet legal and political system of that time[20] did just that. This must be considered when studying the history of homosexuals during the Soviet era. Because by making the distinction, we lose the opportunity to learn about the concepts of the Soviet time and the logic of the Soviet system.

So, even now, when we search for cases and convictions of homosexual men, we indeed find the archives programmed by the logic of the Soviet system. However, this does not mean we should reject the archive, but rather recognise and deconstruct its logic. The aim of historical research when reading the archives should not define the context of the "sexual zoo" as incorrect, but to historicise it, for instance, to analyse the normative power of these links between homosexuality and paedophilia or sexual abuse at a specific time and in a specific society.

Practice beyond statistics

Upon examining specific verdicts of the Soviet court, we find that the same logic prevailed linking homosexual relationships to other criminal acts. It is important to note that despite the internal debate within the Soviet Union on whether to decriminalise male consensual sexual intercourse,[21] the first and second paragraphs of Article 122 remained unchanged, and the link between homosexuality and criminality remained. However, it is possible that this link was rather a formality. Analysing the specific sentences handed down by a particular court can reveal what charges the men were actually convicted of.

Between 1961 and 1989, a total of 232 men were convicted in Soviet Lithuania, both for the first and second paragraphs of Article 122.[22] If we take into account that two, three, or even more men could be tried in a single case, we could probably, in a speculative way, divide the number by, say, two, and estimate that there might have been around 110–120 court cases. As I mentioned earlier, I discovered

20 At least at the legal and ideological level, if not at the level of legal practice.

21 Valodzin 2016, 13–18; Alexander 2018, 30–52.

22 Lipša 2017, 61.

20 criminal cases and their verdicts in one district of Vilnius over 16 years. Although this number is not representative, it could represent about a sixth of the total cases if we follow these speculative calculations. I do not intend to draw generalised conclusions from such a small sample size. However, the information I found in these cases raises questions about whether they might reflect more general trends.

Only two men were prosecuted under the first paragraph of Article 122 out of 20 cases. The rest of the cases include paedophilia or sexual intercourse without consent, using force or exploiting the victim's helplessness. Some of these cases in an interpretative and speculative manner could be classified as 'grey area' cases and may blur the line between consensual sex and violence. It is not uncommon for one of the parties to deny that the intercourse was consensual and to present himself as the victim as soon as the case becomes public.[23] This can happen when alcohol is involved. On such occasions, becoming a victim could result in avoiding imprisonment and a criminal record. I found at least two cases where the intercourse took place under the strong influence of alcohol. In one of those cases, in July 1970, two men were drinking in a courtyard of a dormitory in Vilnius. After getting very drunk, one of the men topped the other man and put his penis in the guy's mouth. The latter was allegedly already helpless because of his inebriation, even though he insisted on refusing the sexual act.[24] The accused and the victim differed in their statements. The former was found guilty based on the testimony of other witnesses.

In another case, on the night of 1 June 1986, two men drove to a remote location in the city and drank a bottle of alcohol. According to the court verdict, the driver of the car tried forcing his penis into the passenger's anus. The latter resisted, so the driver resorted to more violence and finally forced the victim to satisfy him twice by masturbating his penis.[25] The defendant did not admit the charges and denied that he had any kind of sexual intercourse with the victim. He also claimed that he did not use violence. According to him, the two men got into an argument, and the victim got out of the car, kicked the door, then started to run and fell, which caused his injuries. He said they slept in the car overnight, and in the morning he drove his passenger to the dormitory. The victim admitted in his testimony that the man he met around midnight invited him to go for a ride in the car and he accepted. They decided to have a drink

23 Brickell 2008, 37–41.

24 Verdict, 13.10.1970. *Vilnius Regional State Archive* (Vilniaus regioninis valstybės archyvas, hereinafter: VRVA), 1097–5–7, pp. 48–53.

25 Verdict, 25.09.1986. VRVA, 1097–5–210, p. 65–65. v.

while they were driving around the city, and in the morning, he was dropped off at the dormitory.[26] However, the victim also claimed that he was assaulted and forced to sexually satisfy the defendant, and that he had been unable to return earlier because of an injury to his leg. The victim did not immediately disclose everything that he had gone through. The court's verdict summarised his testimony stating that he was unable to "give a full and honest account of the circumstances of the crime committed against him" due to his poor health and the threats he received from both the defendant and the staff of the High School of Militia, where the defendant was studying.[27] The court found that the defendant was guilty based on the testimonies of the victim and witnesses, and other materials in the criminal case.[28]

In both cases, some circumstances or details could cast doubt on what really happened between the two men. However, a retrospective revision would be speculative and would risk undervaluing the victim's experience. Moreover, it is common for the perpetrators in cases of sexual assault, to deny their guilt. This was observed in some of the examined verdicts. Additionally, victims of sexual abuse often conceal their experiences in fear of intimidation or threats, particularly in a legal system where justice is very selective, as it was the Soviet legal system.

In two cases where men were convicted under the first paragraph of Article 122, they were prosecuted for having sex in prison. This means that in 16 years, there were only a couple of cases in Lenin District of Vilnius, and both involved men having consensual intercourse while imprisoned. As mentioned earlier, to conclude, it is necessary to examine other districts in Vilnius and other cities. However, it seems that in Lenin District, during the late Soviet period, mainly men were tried for non-consensual intercourse or exploitation of minors under Article 122. If this is indeed the case, it raises a question of whether in Lithuania, during the late Soviet era, the prosecution of consensual male sexual intercourse may have existed only formally, and if, in reality, it was more of an ever-present threat that was rarely, but not never, acted upon. In the Criminal Code, linking consensual male sexual intercourse with other sexual offences committed by men might have been politically, ideologically, and culturally significant, as it reflected a certain logic of the Soviet system. However, in practice, law enforcement tended to differentiate between the actions rather than treating them similarly.

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26 Verdict, 25.09.1986. VRVA, 1097–5–210, p. 66.

27 Ibid., p. 66. v.

28 Ibid., p. 66.

It may seem that men were rarely punished in the People's Court of Lenin District of Vilnius under the first paragraph of Article 122. This finding might lead to drawing a similar conclusion to the one Graham Robb made about the situation of homosexual men a century ago. He doubted the court documents' portrayal of a constant fear of legal persecution among homosexuals. He discussed that in their daily lives this might not have played a significant role.[29] However, we should rather agree with Matt Cook's observation that "[t]he law can have a significant impact without ever being directly applied".[30] The threat of criminal prosecution made it possible to maintain public silence on homosexuality during the Soviet period. Clearly, the aim was not necessarily to convict as many men as possible for same-sex relations, but rather to make them hide their relationships. This was to prevent individuals from disclosing their identities and avoid setting a precedent for questioning the existing norms of sexual and gender relations.

Meanwhile, it is possible that some forms of persecution did not end up in court but were carried out in other, more common or useful ways for the system or its agents. Court verdicts alone are not enough to explain why there are so few men convicted under the first paragraph in the People's Court of Lenin District. It is possible that known homosexual relations were not reported to the militia by others. Or, perhaps there were other ways of sanctioning the men that were preferable to authoritarian society, such as dismissal from a job, social exclusion and ostracisation, blackmailing, threats, or humiliation. Or perhaps reports of such relationships did not pass through some law enforcement filter and were rejected by the militia, the prosecutor's office, or the courts. Maybe the militia or KGB was inclined to deal with such men without trial?[31] Perhaps the societal belief that homosexuality was a disease had replaced the legal notion that it was a crime. Theoretically, it is possible that, in some cases, men, despite the consent, were intentionally charged under the second paragraph of Article 122 regardless. This was likely done because the charge under this paragraph was considered to be more serious. Such manipulations of accusations are well known in the Soviet

29 Robb 2003, 17–18.

30 Cook 2006, 74.

31 For example, the Latvian poet Knuts Skujenieks has said that the KGB officers used their knowledge about the sexual orientation of the men to coerce them into collaboration (Lipša 2017, 63). In Lithuania, some stories suggest that militias used to create lists of homosexual men (V. Simonko: Pirmieji LGBT aktyvistai Lietuvoje už atvirumą sumokėjo skaudžią kainą. *www.15*min.lt, 29.08.2019. Accessible at: https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/v-simonko-pirmieji-lgbt-aktyvistai-lietuvoje-uz-atviruma-sumokejo-skaudzia-kaina-56-1194854 (viewed 10.07.2023)).

legal system. However, it is difficult to confirm this or any other hypothesis based solely on court decisions.

Over-pollution with authority

In legal systems, documents are drafted based on their internal, self-referential logic and traditions. These traditions can vary significantly across different countries. Nevertheless, often these documents leave little or no room for the spontaneity of the subject matter, personal expression, and authentic experiences. Legal documents describe these aspects by translating them into a vocabulary, categories, and structure that are subjugated to their own rules. This applies even to eyewitness testimonies, which are captured using a certain procedure without necessarily recording everything said or in the same way as it was expressed. This is even more true for testimonies in court and, in particular, verdicts. The latter are always just a brief summary of what was said during the process and written down on hundreds of pages.

A verdict does not usually summarise different interpretative accounts of, say, one event. Instead, it synthesises those interpretations and transforms them into a new interpretation, the sole purpose of which is to justify the verdict's correctness. In other words, it affirms the righteousness of those who wield the legal power. This logic is reflected in the standard structure of the Soviet People's Court verdict. It included the following sections: personal information of the defendant, identification of criminal activities, a summary of the defendant's testimony, and summary of the testimony from victims and witnesses that usually refutes the defendant's testimony (if he denies his guilt in part or in full), supplementing it and proving the criminal acts committed by the defendant; a summary of the court's findings of evidence confirming the defendant's guilt, and the final sentence of punishment. In the verdict, the different versions of the defendant, the victims, and the witnesses are presented. However, they are clearly categorised into "subjective" accounts and "objective" facts, with the latter being seen as more credible. This means that the version expressed by the defendant, which may contradict the verdict, is framed by the court's interpretation as unreliable and not to be considered credible. Moreover, historians who have studied court records have noted that the narratives recorded in the court documents, the evidence presented, are inevitably "polluted with authority". Meaning that all the participants in the trial, especially witnesses, defendants, and victims, are confronted with an authority in court that determines their fate. This creates a justification

for all those who speak to tell a lie or to give an interpretation that serves their own interests.[32]

In authoritarian systems, the courts tend to favour the state, specifically the prosecutors. Soviet courts were notorious for their reluctance to acquit the innocent.[33] Judges would typically send a case back for additional pre-trial investigation rather than acquitting the accused because an acquittal was seen as a failure of the investigators and prosecutors,[34] which would then appear as a failure of the system and a sign of its weakness. From a historical perspective, this should also be considered in cases where a person is convicted despite denying his guilt, as in the cases described earlier in this article. While it may not be possible to revisit court judgments many years later without all the pre-trial material, it is important to take into account similar features of logic used by Soviet courts when making new historical interpretations.

Regarding all these concerns outlined above, Soviet courts were over-polluted with excessive authority. Even though after the Second World War, attempts were made to professionalise and bureaucratise the justice system,[35] it was fundamentally unfair due to its unlimited power. Judges were not independent, and courts often did not seek justice. At the start of *perestroika,* even the Central Committee of the Communist Party warned party agencies against interfering with the judges' decisions,[36] highlighting the widespread nature of such interference at the time. The courts were often corrupted to serve the interests of the Soviet government or influential state and party agents. If the cases were not relevant to the government and party, interference, pressure, so called "blat"[37] or bribery from other influential or well-connected people often corrupted the courts. Interference was not limited to the courts, but also extended to investigations. Thus, even the material submitted to the court could be influenced by interested parties. In such cases, the decision and the final narrative supporting it, i.e., the verdict, was predetermined, especially in politically sensitive cases. Consequently, the interpretation itself and the action that the interpretation

32 Robertson 2005, 162.
33 Quigley 1988, 465.
34 Ibid.
35 Cadiot, Penter 2013, 167.
36 Quigley 1988, 467.
37 The term defines an act of exchanging a favour for another favour in the Soviet system.

explains were presented in a purely politicised, ideologised or intentionally one-sided way[38].

Although the verdicts of the Soviet People's Court may not be entirely reliable, they still contain some valuable information. In addition to learning the logic of Soviet disciplining, the homosexual culture in correctional institutions and their role in the lives of homosexual people, the most valuable findings in the 20 cases reveal "everyday practices" that were treated as a criminal offence. These practices include information about the type of sexual acts that were performed, the location of the acts, such as in prison, venereal dispensary, building site, car, flat, basement, staircase of an apartment block, etc., and the circumstances under which they occurred. It also sheds light on whether or not the practices were continuous.

For example, a man was convicted under Article 121[39] and the second paragraph of Article 122 for sexually assaulting five underage boys. The verdict shows that the boys met with the man on more than one occasion between 1970 and 1973, and at least one met with him regularly. During these meetings, the man would massage the boys' genitals, and sometimes they would give the man genital "massages". The offender had intercourse with one of the boys. Initially, he wanted to insert his penis into the boy's anus, but the boy refused and instead inserted his penis into the man's anus.[40] However, all these details are selected and presented to fulfil the final interpretation of the court.

It is important to note that the verdicts of the People's Court follow both structural and semantic order. In the 20 examined cases, all homosexual interactions are treated as the fulfilment of a "perverted desire". In this sense, the court would not distinguish whether the sexual acts were consensual or non-consensual, and between the means of satisfaction, such as oral sex, anal penetration, or masturbation. The difference in the treatment of the various sexual acts we may not find due to the fact that a vast majority of the cases dealt with the exploitation of minors or violence, while in the two cases where men were tried for consensual intercourse, anal penetration was involved. However, to a certain degree, this could have been in line with the general legal and cultural notion at the time that any sexual satisfaction not achieved by vaginal penetration is "abnormal". In some legal textbooks in the 1970s, any sexual acts without vaginal intercourse, such

38 This is not to say that these were the unique features of the Soviet judicial system. Similar problems, from corruption to politicised decisions, albeit to varying degrees, have affected the judicial systems of other authoritarian and democratic countries, too – for example, Ginzburg 1999; Greer 1994; Gong 2004.

39 Acts of sexual abuse against a person under the age of 16.

40 Verdict, 17.04.1974. VRVA, 1097–5–34, pp. 118–122.

as oral sex, were treated as "abnormal", not only for same-sex relations, but also for heterosexual relations.[41] Article 122 of the Soviet Lithuanian Criminal Code punished a broadly defined act of "sexual intercourse between a man and a man" without specifying it. This definition of the Soviet Lithuanian Criminal Code was unusual. One report comparing the law in different post-Soviet countries found that Soviet Russia and other Soviet republics used the term *muzhelozhstvo*, which was defined as "satisfaction of sexual desire contrary to nature between two men in the form of anal contact". Whereas in Soviet Lithuania and Belarus such prohibited same-sex relations included both anal sex and oral sex.[42] Regardless, the definition of 'sexual intercourse' is broad and leaves room for interpretation in a courtroom. But the 20 cases that were examined, which mostly involved violence or sexual acts against minors, do not provide enough information to summarise the practices of the courts. For example, in the case of consensual intercourse, was it only anal sex that was prosecuted, or was it also oral sex and mutual masturbation?

The act itself, which is treated as a crime, and its circumstances are described in the verdicts only to the extent necessary to justify its criminal nature. For example, in the case in which two men were convicted of having intercourse in a prison cell, the act is described in considerable detail. There were three men in the cell. One inmate initiated sex with the other while the third stood at the cell door to cover the peephole. The verdict describes how one of the inmates took off his pants, bent down and propped himself on the bed. Next, the other man walked up and penetrated him from behind.[43] However, this description is given only to prove they indeed had performed an "illegal act". Such descriptions purposely reduce the true circumstances of the events, so we do not learn the actual context of the interaction.

When voices become post-voices

In the second half of the 20th century, social and cultural history scholars started to focus on groups of people that were previously overlooked or ignored in historiography, or had their stories told from someone else's perspective. In such a context, the term 'giving voice' became critical to the representatives of these groups. It meant that representatives of the marginalised and silenced groups

41 Buslius, Cėpla 1977.

42 Greif, Coman 2001, 24, 44.

43 Verdict, 24.04.1970. VRVA, 1097–5–3, pp. 167–171. v.

were given the opportunity to speak for themselves. The process of seeking, quoting, publishing and analysing sources allows people from such groups to express themselves in their own voice. This is believed to be a more 'authentic experience' than if their experiences were to be retold by people in positions of political, social, or cultural power. In the context of the official system and the dominant public discourses it produces, the concept of 'voice' challenges the idea of 'authentic experience.' Although some historians argue that legal records can give us "unique access to voices",[44] this is hardly applicable in the case of the verdicts handed down by the Soviet People's Court, as we have tried to show in this article. And yet, is there anything else in these documents beyond the legally bureaucratic, anonymous, and impersonal language?

To answer this question, one can look for cracks in the "scriptural empire",[45] to paraphrase Michel de Certeau, as seen in the verdicts of the Soviet People's Court. While some of these cracks could be taken literally, many others may be interpreted figuratively. Nonetheless, they can at least partly confirm Chris Brickell's assertion that despite official interpretations dominating legal documents, relationships between dominant and marginal groups are often more complex. Therefore, in the court files, "we can recognize the interplay of numerous, interwoven voices".[46]

Many of the verdicts issued by the People's Court of Lenin District were handwritten, and some of them were written in a hasty or negligent manner, leading to errors or surprises that can now offer us new insights into these documents. Out of the 20 cases examined, the most striking example of such a crack is a verdict that involved a group of prisoners charged with cruelty and sexual assault against another inmate. The victim was brutally beaten overnight because his attackers accused him of being homosexual. As he lay half-dead on the cell floor, the three aggressors continued jumping on him, and then each continuously raped him.[47] In the verdict, written in the same legal language, as other verdicts, we suddenly hear the victim's voice. His testimony, as usual, was provided in the third person. However, two sentences accidentally written in the first person intervene in the text, e. g., "Ž(...) instigated all the inmates in the cell to

44 Cook 2006, 64. Nancy Erber and George Robb also wrote: "Since all too frequently court and police archives remain one of the few arenas in which the voices and experiences of working-class men and women are consistently present" (Erber, Robb 1999, 5).

45 de Certeau 1984, 154.

46 Brickell 2008, 25.

47 Verdict, 28.09.1977. VRVA, 1097–5–64, pp. 127–135. v.

beat me."[48] This word 'me' suddenly sounds very strong and vividly stands out in an otherwise indifferent and bureaucratically written verdict. This error confirms that verdicts were recorded on demand by rewriting the participants' testimonies in the trial.

As mentioned earlier, it is essential to treat these testimonies with caution because of pollution with authority. Even if written down word for word, they become a part of the official interpretation of the verdict when rewritten in the third person singular or plural. However, it cannot be completely disregarded that the victim's, defendant's, or the witness's testimonies in such verdicts are derived from the original affidavit and still retain the trace of the authentic 'voice'. Even though such a statement can no longer be called a 'voice' since it is altered into legal jargon for the interpretation of the verdict, neither can it be dismissed entirely as unrelated to the person's genuine testimony. It is impossible to determine if some testimonies were obtained through coercion or falsification, as we do not know who influenced them or how. However, in some instances, subjectivity may still play a role in the remaining testimonies.

Such testimonies that survive in the verdicts could be called 'post-voices'. These 'post-voices' in legal documents are formed by an unequal dialectic between the weak original 'voice' and the strong legal institution, its agents, its rules and traditions, in which the stronger transforms the original testimony for its own purposes. However, as the sources examined show, the authentic 'voice' cannot be permanently destroyed. When we encounter the word 'me', we might detect a transformation of 'voices' into 'post-voices', which was left accidentally. In most other cases, however, we do not find such accidental residues. When we read the versions given by the defendant, the victim, or the witness, we are confronted only with the 'post-voices' that have been formed in the synthesis of the verdict.

'Post-voices' can also be useful for historical research because behind them are real people who, if possible, tried to defend their interests in a court. 'Post-voices' could, therefore, be described as an indicator of the limited opportunities that the actors have in the trial. Even if their testimonies are polluted with authority, i.e. they adapt to power for their self-interests, saying what they feel is needed to say, we witness not only the field of action of that power but also, to quote Michel de Certeau, the tactics of the weak that they adopt.[49] The 'weak' in this context is defined relative to the institution and circumstances in which they find themselves, which can include victims testifying in court, as well as those on trial for coercion and abuse.

48 Verdict, 28.09.1977. VRVA, 1097–5–64, p. 129.

49 de Certeau 1984, 35–37.

For instance, one could assume that 'homosexual' might have functioned as a label, which, upon assigning to a person *a priori*, the court's decision is made. However, in one case of the People's Court of Lenin District, during the late Soviet period, allegations of same-sex relations did not automatically lead to a guilty verdict. In this case, a group of youth and an older man were tried for theft. The older man was not tried for stealing but for buying some of the stolen items, such as spoons or a velvet jacket. In addition to this main charge, he was also suspected of having sexual relations with an underage youth involved in stealing. The minor's testimony raised suspicions. The youth was identified as a "passive participant in sexual intercourse".[50] However, during the pre-trial investigation, he changed his testimony, at one point confirming and at another denying having had a sexual relationship with the older man, and finally rejected it at the trial. Meanwhile, the older man consistently denied the accusation and did not admit to sexual relations with the youth. The court eventually had to conclude that there was no evidence of their sexual intercourse. As a result, the older man was not convicted under Article 122.[51] This verdict exemplifies weak tactics used to avoid punishment, even in a Soviet court that was not inclined to acquit.

Conclusion

Historians studying the history of homosexuality in Soviet Lithuania are confronted with a scarcity of sources. The available primary sources are often fragmentary, sporadic, and accidental. Despite this, any source, even if it is unreliable, dubious, or complicated, is considered valuable or at least deserves to be assessed for its potential historical value. Soviet court verdicts prosecuting men for homosexual relations are among such sources. Although it is a complicated and questionable primary source due to what I define as "over-pollution with authority", it can still provide valuable insight into the lives of homosexual men[52] in Soviet Lithuania.

The documents stored in the contemporary archives of independent Lithuania are still programmed according to Soviet logic. Therefore, to analyse, understand, and interpret the verdicts, first and foremost, this Soviet logic must be deconstructed. For example, male same-sex relations were treated as a punishable

50 Verdict, 11.04.1980. VRVA, 1097–5–96, p. 147.

51 Ibid., pp. 141–149.

52 The scope of this research excluded homosexual women.

deviance. Furthermore, consensual sexual relations on the legal ideological level were equated with sexual exploitation of minors and other sexual assaults. This association of homosexuality with paedophilia raises the fundamental question of how to interpret the history of homosexuality in Soviet Lithuania, as well as other Soviet republics. Or how to view the history of homosexuality during the time when it was equalled with paedophilia. The answer to these difficult questions must start with a clear distinction: paedophilia is not a part of the history of homosexuality, but the association of paedophilia with homosexuality is part of that history.

The analysis of 20 verdicts has revealed a pattern in the legal system of Soviet Lithuania. Homosexual men living in Vilnius Lenin District were often prosecuted for having sexual relations with minors or for using sexual coercion rather than consensual sexual activity. The sample size of the verdicts is too small to generalise about the court practice in Soviet Lithuania. Still, the findings indicate a passive approach in implementing the first paragraph of Article 122 of the Soviet Lithuanian Criminal Code. Further research will reveal reasons for this seemingly reluctant attitude of the legal system, and to what extent this was due to implementing the second paragraph charging for paedophilia and coercion. Moreover, to what extent could Article 122 have influenced the lives of homosexual men indirectly, and to what extent did other forms of persecution replace its implementation? And furthermore, to what extent did this trend indicate the ability of homosexual men to escape from the system's observation?

The verdicts' texts can tell us little about the men's behaviour or thinking. However, they do contain summaries of the defendants', victims' and witnesses' testimonies, modified to suit the interpretation required for the verdict. These versions of the testimonies in which remnants of subjectivity can be detected are defined as 'post-voice'. To this day, these 'post-voices' have either not been preserved or have preserved very little of the authentic narrative of experience. But in some cases, they tell us directly, and more often indirectly, how the 'weak' resorted to their own tactics when dealing with judicial and political power.

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PĒTOT HOMOSEKSUALITĀTES VĒSTURI PADOMJU LIETUVĀ: TIESU SPRIEDUMU ATŠIFRĒŠANA

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Zinātniskās intereses: padomju perioda sociālā un kultūras vēsture, psihiatrijas vēsture, seksualitātes vēsture

Rakstā kā vēstures avoti aplūkoti padomju tiesu spriedumi, kuri pieņemti, pamatojoties uz Lietuvas PSR Kriminālkodeksa 122. pantu, tiesājot vīriešus par homoseksuālām attiecībām. Autors uzskata, ka šie mūsdienu arhīvos glabātie dokumenti joprojām ir sistematizēti atbilstoši padomju loģikai. Tādējādi tiesu spriedumu analīze un interpretācija nedrīkst tikt šķirta no šīs loģikas atšifrēšanas. Viens no šīs loģikas pamatiem ir homoseksualitātes saistīšana ar pedofiliju un piespiedu seksuālajām darbībām. Šī asociācija raisa fundamentālu jautājumu par to, kā interpretēt homoseksualitātes vēsturi padomju Lietuvā un citās padomju republikās. Autors ierosina sākt ar skaidru nodalījumu: pedofilija nav homoseksualitātes vēstures daļa, turpretī pedofilijas saistīšana ar homoseksualitāti gan pieder pie šīs vēstures. No otras puses, 20 aplūkotie tiesu spriedumi atklāj izteiktu tendenci: praksē Viļņas Ļeņina rajona tautas tiesā vīrieši galvenokārt tika tiesāti par mazgadīgo seksuālu izmantošanu vai par seksuālo darbību uzspiešanu pilngadīgajiem, savukārt pilngadīgo vīriešu abpusēji labprātīgu seksuālo attiecību tiesāšana veidoja mazākumu pētīto gadījumu vidū. Spriedumu teksti nesniedz daudz informācijas par notiesāto motīviem, uzvedību vai domām. Tomēr tajos fiksētajās liecībās var saskatīt notiesāto vīriešu subjektivitātes pēdas, kuras šajā rakstā tiek dēvētas par "balsi no pagātnes" (*post-voice*). Dažos gadījumos šīs "balsis no pagātnes" atklāj, kā "vājie" saskarsmē ar tiesu un politiskās varas sfēru lika lietā savu individuālo taktiku.

Atslēgas vārdi: homoseksualitāte, padomju Lietuva, tiesu spriedumi, balsis no pagātnes (*post-voices*), arhīva materiālu pētījumi

Kopsavilkums

Vēsturnieki, kuri pēta homoseksualitātes vēsturi padomju Lietuvā, saskaras ar avotu nepietiekamību. Pieejamie avoti bieži vien ir fragmentāri, sporādiski un nejauša rakstura. Tomēr jebkurš avots, pat ja tas ir neuzticams, aizdomīgs vai sarežģīts, tiek uzskatīts par noderīgu vai vismaz pelna tikt izvērtēts savas potenciālās vēsturiskās vērtības kontekstā. Padomju tiesu spriedumi prāvās pret homoseksuālās attiecībās apsūdzētiem vīriešiem pieder pie šādas avotu kategorijas. Lai gan šie avoti, būdami – kā definē raksta autors – "pārlieku piesārņoti ar varu" (*over-polluted with authority*), ir sarežģīti

un apšaubāmi, tie tomēr var sniegt vērtīgu ieskatu homoseksuālu vīriešu dzīvē padomju Lietuvā (homoseksuālas sievietes palika ārpus šī pētījuma loka).

Mūsdienu neatkarīgās Lietuvas arhīvos glabātie dokumenti joprojām ir sistematizēti atbilstoši padomju loģikai. Tādējādi, lai tiesu spriedumus varētu analizēt, saprast un interpretēt, pirmām kārtām tajos ir jāatšifrē šī padomju loģika. Piemēram, viendzimuma seksuālās attiecības starp vīriešiem tika uzlūkotas kā sodāma novirze no normas. Turklāt tiesiskajā ideoloģiskajā līmenī abpusēji labprātīgas viendzimuma attiecības tika pielīdzinātas mazgadīgo seksuālajai izmantošanai un cita veida seksuālajai vardarbībai. Šāda homoseksualitātes saistīšana ar pedofiliju raisa fundamentālu jautājumu par to, kā interpretēt homoseksualitātes vēsturi padomju Lietuvā un citās padomju republikās. Vai arī, kā aplūkot homoseksualitātes vēsturi laikā, kad tā tika pielīdzināta pedofilijai. Atbildes meklēšana uz šiem sarežģītajiem jautājumiem jāsāk ar skaidru nodalījumu – pedofilija nav homoseksualitātes vēstures daļa, turpretī pedofilijas saistīšana ar homoseksualitāti gan pieder pie šīs vēstures.

20 aplūkotie tiesu spriedumi atklāj padomju Lietuvas tiesu sistēmas tendenci. Viļņas Ļeņina rajonā dzīvojošie homoseksuālie vīrieši bieži tika tiesāti par seksuālajām attiecībām ar mazgadīgajiem vai seksuālo darbību uzspiešanu, ne tik daudz par abpusēji labprātīgām seksuālām darbībām. Spriedumi veido pārāk nelielu paraugu grupu, lai uz to pamata varētu izdarīt vispārinājumus par tiesu praksi padomju Lietuvā. Tomēr pētījums norāda uz pasīvu pieeju Lietuvas PSR Kriminālkodeksa 122. panta pirmās daļas piemērošanā. Turpmākajā pētījuma gaitā tiks meklēti iemesli šādai šķietami negribīgai attieksmei no tiesu sistēmas puses un analizēts, cik lielā mērā tas skaidrojams ar šī panta otrās daļas piemērošanu, izvirzot apsūdzības pedofilijā un seksuālu darbību uzspiešanā. Tiks skatīts arī, cik lielā mērā 122. pants varēja ietekmēt homoseksuālu vīriešu dzīvi netiešā veidā un cik lielā mērā tā piemērošana tika aizstāta ar citiem kriminālvajāšanas veidiem. Un – attīstot šo jautājumu tālāk – cik lielā mērā šī tendence norāda uz homoseksuālu vīriešu iespējām izvairīties no sistēmas veiktas novērošanas?

Spriedumu teksts nevar mums daudz pastāstīt par notiesāto vīriešu uzvedību vai domu gaitu. Tomēr tajos ir iekļauti apsūdzēto, upuru un liecinieku sniegto liecību kopsavilkumi, kas ir pārveidoti, pielāgojot tos sprieduma loģikai nepieciešamajai interpretācijai. Šīs liecību versijas, kurās var saskatīt subjektivitātes paliekas, tiek definētas kā "balss no pagātnes" (*post-voice*). Šīs "balsis no pagātnes" autentisko pieredzētā stāstījumu līdz mūsdienām nav saglabājušas vai saglabājušas to ļoti nelielā apjomā. Taču dažos gadījumos tās mums pastāsta tiešā vai visbiežāk netiešā veidā, kā "vājie" saskarsmē ar tiesu un politiskās varas sfēru lika lietā savu individuālo taktiku.

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POLITICAL HOMOPHOBIA IN SOVIET LITHUANIA REVISITED: THE CASE OF THE DISSIDENT VIKTORAS PETKUS

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This article explores the uses of homophobia as a part of the Soviet repressive apparatus. It examines the case of the Lithuanian dissident, political prisoner, and human rights activist Viktoras Petkus (1928–2012), in particular, the accusation of sodomy he faced in 1978, as a part of the highly political case related to Petkus' involvement with the Lithuanian Helsinki Group. I employ the concept of political homophobia to analyse the ways that the KGB tried to destroy Petkus' reputation and defame the Lithuanian dissident movement for human rights, which the Soviet authorities perceived as particularly threatening.

Keywords: homophobia, Soviet Union, dissidents, LGBTQ people, Lithuania, Baltic states, Helsinki groups

From the history of LGBTQ people in the Soviet Union we know of certain famous victims of political homophobia, such as the Russian singer Vadim Kozin, the Armenian film director Sergei Parajanov, and the Russian poet Gennady Trifonov.[1] All of them were more or less open about their homosexuality, were arrested for their lack of collaboration with the state or "anti-Soviet" views, and convicted under sodomy article or in combination with other accusations. As the historian Dan Healey writes, "the Soviet authorities used the sodomy law to harass these figures and destroy their reputations".[2] Unlike these people,

1 Healey 2018, 172–173; de Jong 1982, 341–157.
2 Healey 2018, 172.

the Lithuanian dissident and human rights activist Viktoras Petkus was not openly homosexual and has not left any personal archival materials (that we know of) that would show his attraction to men or would advocate tolerance of homosexuality. In his case, the aggravated sodomy charge and other criminal charges were added to a clearly political case, in which Petkus was initially arrested for his involvement in dissident activities and, specifically, in the formation of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group (LHG). The accusation of "pederasty"[3] under Article 122 of the Lithuanian SSR Criminal Code served a certain clearly defined function for the Soviet authorities. By employing homophobia, they wished to damage his reputation, and obfuscate the fact that his persecution was political and illegal, even by the Soviet legal standards. As I argue in this article, Petkus' case is an important example of the use of political homophobia as a tool of repression against dissent in the Soviet Union.

Since the Soviet authorities had so many tools for repression through intimidation, blackmailing, *kompromat*, abusive psychiatric practices, coercion etc. at their disposal, one wonders why political homophobia (which was used only in exceptional cases) should deserve any special attention.[4] The main reason to consider it separately is the persistence of homophobia in Lithuania after the fall of the Soviet Union, which makes this tool of public humiliation a particularly lasting legacy. While many of the denigrating labels systematically used by the KGB, such as "banditism",[5] "hooliganism"[6] and the psychiatric diagnosis of "sluggish schizophrenia",[7] have been reconsidered in historical studies on the Soviet period in Lithuania, the term 'pederasty' has never attracted such a critical attention.[8] Probably due to the lack of such historical reflection, the term 'pederast' at times re-appears in contemporary political discourse as a tool of humiliation and mockery, used, in particular, against those who advocate for various human

3 In this article I use the words 'sodomy' and 'pederasty' interchangeably. The word 'sodomy' is used by Healey in discussing Soviet law, and it helps to show the historical parallels with similar laws in other countries and periods. The Lithuanian law referred to "sexual intercourse between men", but the word "pederasty" (Lit. *pederastija*) was used in the case files and in forensic literature. The term 'pederasty' also implicitly suggests connection or equivalence between male homosexuality and paedophilia, hence I use it in quotation marks.

4 de Jong 1982.

5 Jurkutė 2015, 4–16.

6 Swain 2015, 162–182.

7 Kuklytė 2007; van Voren 2010.

8 The attempt at attributing the label of 'homosexuality' to Romas Kalanta is mentioned in passing by Burinskaitė 2006, 63–82.

rights issues.[9] Revisiting the case of Petkus can help us reevaluate political homophobia as a part of the arsenal of the repressive tools of the Soviet state, and reflect on the harm it has caused to people who have expressed dissent against the state, irrespective of their sexual orientation.

In this article I first of all explain the concept of political homophobia and show how it can be understood, from a historical perspective, as a part of the repressive apparatus of the Soviet state. Then I introduce Petkus and his involvement with human rights activism in the Soviet Union, explaining why it was perceived as threatening by the authorities. I then describe how the pederasty charge was introduced into Petkus' case. I show that the chronology, the circumstances in which the evidence was collected, the parallels with similar cases in other Soviet republics, and the ways the charge of "pederasty" was discussed in the Soviet press afterwards show intent at defamation. I discuss how the dissident circles reacted to the charge initially, wishing to vindicate Petkus from criminal charges and also to prove that he was not homosexual, and how eventually the charge was erased from the memory of Petkus and the LHG, and "forgotten" in post-Soviet Lithuania. Nevertheless, Petkus was never exonerated from these charges. Finally, I argue that there has never been an attempt to rethink and reevaluate the sodomy article and the very notion of "pederasty" (either in the case of Petkus or in general) as a repressive tool used by the Soviet authorities in Lithuania.

Political homophobia as a KGB tool

Homophobia is often considered to be a "natural" response to homosexual, bisexual, trans or queer identities and sexualities, founded upon deeply ingrained feelings or certain moral or religious values.[10] Nowadays, in Lithuania and elsewhere, homophobia is also often seen as a reaction to the demands of the LGBTQ peoples' movement for equal rights and increased visibility. However, as Michael J. Bosia and Meredith L. Weiss argue, when various state actors invoke homophobia, it is normally a "conscious political strategy", and is independent of sexual rights movements or privately held views regarding sexual minorities.[11] In such cases it should be understood as political homophobia (or state homophobia) which takes the form of a coordinated attack against an individual or a group

9 Platukytė 2022; Sinica 2022.

10 Bosia, Weiss 2013, 11.

11 Ibid., 2.

of people, on the basis of allegations regarding their "immoral" and "abnormal" sexual behavior, with a clear political goal in mind. As Bosia shows, a charge of sodomy brought up against a political enemy "provides a public forum to define a surrogate foreign menace embodied by the accused, and behind whom lurk the international pressures on state sovereignty".[12] In other words, accusing someone of homosexuality ("sodomy", "pederasty", etc.) is a strategy of political retaliation or a preemptive strike, employed by the authorities against political opponents, whom they want to portray as destructive to the society, the state, and, eventually, the moral order. Political homophobia therefore often manifests itself in public arrests, prosecutions, and show trials, and is supported by the media, compliant to the state.[13]

In the Soviet Union, including the Lithuanian SSR, as in many other modern contexts worldwide, the use of political homophobia preceded the formation of collective identity of LGBTQ people or their demands for rights. Homosexual acts between men (Rus. *muzhelozhstvo*) were re-criminalised by Stalin already in 1933–1934, because homosexual men were considered to form a counter-revolutionary threat and have a demoralising effect on Soviet youths.[14] Homosexuals, or "pederasts", as they were called by the authorities, were regarded by the communist ideologues to be "a declassed rabble, or the scum of society, or remnants of the exploiting classes", who may corrupt healthy youths.[15] The criminalisation of homosexuality fell neatly into the overall context of the time, in which Stalin became increasingly anxious with preventing various "conspiracies", which led to the Great Terror.[16] Since the death of Stalin in 1953, the character of political repression in the Soviet Union changed considerably, moving from direct mass repressions to more sophisticated means of control of the population, such as through imposing "Communist morality" and policing the private sphere.[17] While Khrushchev's reformers relaxed many of the Stalin's laws, this did not apply to the sodomy article, which remained in force until the collapse of the Soviet Union and beyond.[18] Furthermore, as Healey has shown, in 1958, a special directive was issued by the Russian SFSR (RSFSR) Ministry of Internal Affairs which demanded the strengthening of the crackdown on sodomy and

12 Bosia 2013, 41.
13 Ibid., 41–42.
14 Healey 2018, 158–159.
15 Healey 2018, 165–166; de Jong 1982, 342; see also Healey 2002, 349–378.
16 Snyder 2010, 71.
17 Field 2007, 11.
18 Healey 2018, 170–71; Alexander 2012, 138.

apparently resulted in the increased amount of convictions under the sodomy article.[19] While the exact rationale for increasing the persecution of homosexual men is still unknown, Healey attributes it to the "anxieties" that followed the massive release of GULAG prisoners back into the Soviet Union and fears over their negative impact on the public morals.[20] Following Healey, the historian Rustam Alexander also sees the increasing policing of homosexuality as characteristic of Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation period, where it was fuelled by the "anxieties" regarding the declining institution of family.[21] However, in understanding the ongoing criminalisation and persecution of homosexuality one cannot ignore another, arguably even more significant "anxiety" permeating the Soviet authorities, namely, the fear of the national independence movements in the territories occupied by the Soviet Union and political resistance in general. I believe that the continuous stigmatisation of homosexual men, framed as "pederasts", who allegedly posed a demoralising threat to Soviet youths, provided the authorities with yet another tool (among many) of humiliation, intimidation and repression of men, perceived as threatening to the regime.

The Soviet Union invaded the three independent Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia first in 1940 and then again in 1944, upon which it annexed the countries. The occupation sparked armed resistance movements. In Lithuania alone, between 1944 and 1953, around 20,000 people were killed by the authorities in relation to the partisan movement.[22] By 1953, the armed resistance was curbed by the authorities; and the anti-Soviet underground, mostly centred around the Lithuanian Catholic Church, adopted peaceful means of disobedience – forming clandestine organisations, distributing samizdat, organising symbolic gestures, such as the raising of the national Lithuanian flag or celebrating traditional Catholic holidays. On the official level, since Khrushchev's rise to power, the ideological narrative promoted by the state was that socialism has been achieved, and therefore, no political or ideological resistance was possible anymore in the Soviet Union.[23] This, in turn, meant that anti-Soviet dissidence was interpreted as either a diversion instigated by the so-called bourgeois West, or an act of individual madness, perpetrated by "dangerous and anti-social elements" and individuals with "psychiatric disorders".[24] While there was less of

19 Healey 2018, 42–43.

20 Healey 2001, 241; Healey 2018, 41.

21 Alexander 2021, 39.

22 Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija, 2024.

23 Burinskaitė 2015, 39.

24 Ibid., 39–46.

an outright violent suppression of anti-Soviet dissidence, the KGB employed more subtle means of repression: by trying to damage the image of dissidents in the eyes of the broader public, by presenting them as eccentric and having no support in the broader society, by depoliticising their activities.[25] Oftentimes the dissent was suppressed preemptively – preventing any unwanted social or political actions through "prophylactic" intimidation and blackmailing.[26] Criminalisation and stigmatisation of homosexuality allowed to keep a large group of people in fear of repressions simply because of their sexual preferences – this was also useful for the regime.

The Soviet legal framework was introduced in the Baltic states upon their occupation, including the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, which punished sodomy with imprisonment from three to five years, and, in aggravated circumstances, up to eight years.[27] In 1961, all three countries adopted renewed Soviet Criminal Code with removed minimum sentences and with some variations regarding maximum imprisonment sentences for sodomy (Latvia – 5 years, Estonia – 2 years, Lithuania – 3 years). According to the historian Ineta Lipša, the adoption of the new Criminal Code was carefully monitored by the central leadership of the Communist Party and the KGB.[28] Article 122 of the new Criminal Code of the Lithuanian SSR criminalised "man's sexual intercourse with another man" and deemed it punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, and in aggravated cases ("performed with the use of force or by taking advantage of the dependent or powerless situation of the victim, or if a victim is a minor"), with imprisonment from three to eight years.[29] In addition to criminalisation, throughout the Soviet period, the understanding of homosexuality as a deviance and moral degeneration was popularised by medical, psychiatric, criminological, forensic, and pedagogical texts.[30] The simultaneous criminalisation and pathologising of homosexuality meant that people with same-sex attraction had little or no perception of themselves as a distinct group with social and political rights, and society as a whole saw homosexuality as a taboo topic.[31] This underlaying context created perfect conditions for the use of homophobia as a tool of political repression.

25 Burinskaitė 2006.
26 Cohn 2018, 769–792.
27 Healey 2001, 330.
28 See Lipša, in Healey 2018, 171.
29 Lietuvos Respublikos Aukščiausioji Taryba, 1961.
30 Healey 2001, 229–50; Healey 2018; Alexander 2021, 170–206.
31 Skirmantė 2013; Čičelis 2011.

How was political homophobia used in the Soviet Union, including the Lithuanian SSR? According to researchers, a popular way of "neutralising" dissident groups and resistance in general was through the use of *kompromat*, namely, by casting a bad light on the character of anti-Soviet activists in the press or their activist circles.[32] As the KGB textbook for Lithuanian officers indicated, when it was "difficult to prove their guilt with evidence", the right approach in the fight against dissidents was "to discredit them publicly", namely "by publicising the information on the immoral behaviour of nationalists, as well as charging them with criminal offenses".[33] This was supposed to remove the heroic aura from the dissidents and, through defamation campaigns, portray them as simple criminals. In order for slander to be more convincing in the eyes of the public, as the historian Kristina Burinskaitė argues, the KGB normally would do preparatory work to figure out the person's weaknesses, hobbies, health problems, details of their private lives, their social networks, etc. Once the *kompromat* was collected and a need for it arose, it would be publicly released, most often by the state newspapers, "with as much detail as possible".[34] Homosexuality, which was both seen as immoral, pathological, and punished as criminal, was in many ways an ideal piece of *kompromat*. The KGB and the *milicija* (police) kept record of gay meeting places and harassed homosexual men, with a goal to extract bribes and, most importantly, to collect useful information for the purposes of blackmail or public humiliation.[35] The accusation of "pederasty", which carried a huge social stigma, was very rarely publicly applied in political cases, probably only when the blackmail and prophylactic intimidation was not successful, and radical measures where needed. The case of Petkus is therefore valuable in helping to understand the details of how the KGB employed homophobia as one of its many tools of political repression.

Petkus and the Lithuanian Helsinki Group

The Lithuanian dissident and writer Tomas Venclova described Viktoras Petkus as a very well-read man, especially knowledgeable about Lithuanian history and literature, very courageous, but also as a very private and even

32 Falkov 2023, 1–28.

33 Aukštoji TSRS KGB mokykla, 1993, 85.

34 Burinskaitė 2015, 96.

35 Navickaitė 2022.

"mysterious" person.[36] The Russian dissident and historian Lyudmila Alexeyeva, who met Petkus in 1976, described him as a "tactful, insightful, charming" man.[37] Petkus was born in a small town of Raseiniai, in central Lithuania, in 1928[38] and was first arrested during Stalinist repressions in 1947, while still a minor, for participating in the Catholic youth organisation *Ateitininkai*. In 1948, he was sent to hard labour for five years in a "corrective labour colony" in Inta, Komi Republic of the RSFSR. After his attempted escape, the sentence was increased by ten years. With the amnesty after Stalin's death, in 1953, he was released and returned to Lithuania, where he finished high school and moved to Vilnius. Petkus was a devout Catholic and in the 1950s considered joining the Kaunas Priest Seminary, but was prevented from it by the state. Petkus was soon arrested again for keeping and distributing "anti-Soviet" literature, and served another sentence, between 1958 and 1965, in the labour camps of Irkutsk and Mordovia.[39] After his second return to Lithuania, Petkus continued speaking out against the Soviet occupation of Lithuania and participating in dissident activities. Petkus was therefore closely followed by the KGB, who prevented him from obtaining higher education and forced him to change jobs often. They also tried to undermine his reputation through "satirical" articles in press, where he was accused of stealing money from his employer and leading a lascivious lifestyle.[40]

Even though under constant surveillance, in the 1960s, Petkus's apartment in Vilnius became a meeting point for anti-Soviet Lithuanian intelligentsia and youth.[41] Due to his long imprisonment as a political prisoner, Petkus had contacts with dissidents across the Soviet Union: Russians (Yuri Orlov, Alexander Ginzburg, Sergei Kovalev), Latvians (Ints Cālītis, Viktors Kalniņš), and Estonians (Mart Niklus, Erik Udam, Enn Tarto). Among his comrades was also the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov, who was the initiator of the first Helsinki Group, formed in Moscow in 1976. Petkus was among the closest contacts of Sakharov in Lithuania, when the latter came to the trial of Kovalev in Vilnius in 1975.[42] Given his network, it is not surprising that Petkus was one of the initiators

36 Venclova 1978.

37 Alexeyeva 1999, 500–511.

38 For an unknown reason, the archival KGB documents date his birth to 1930.

39 "Viktoras Petkus," in *Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija*, n.d., https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/viktoras-petkus/.

40 Jūsų Kritikauskas, 1972.

41 Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania, "In Memoriam. Viktoras Petkus," genocid.lt, accessible at: http://genocid.lt/centras/lt/1620/a/ (viewed 27.12.2023).

42 Venclova 1978.

and, later, the unofficial leader of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group (LHG). His personal convictions and character also made him suitable for such a role. A Catholic and ethnic Lithuanian himself, Petkus was concerned with the rights of all ethnic minorities and religious denominations in the Soviet Union and with the universal implementation of democratic principles and human rights[43]. This was also the vision of the LHG.

The idea of forming such Helsinki groups across the Soviet Union was prompted by Helsinki Accords – an international document, signed by the Soviet Union and the Western countries at the Helsinki summit in 1975, as the final agreement of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Signing the Accords was an important part of the process of *détente*, the relaxation of political relations between the West, including the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Initially, the Helsinki summit raised some worries in the Baltic diaspora and dissident circles, who feared that the desire to normalise the relationship with the Soviet Union might lead Western countries to abandon the question of the illegal annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.[44] In the long run, however, Helsinki Accords played a positive role in the demise of the Soviet Union and the democratisation of Eastern Europe, by promoting human rights protection on an international level and in this way strengthening the position of dissidents.[45] Given the context of *détente,* the Soviet Union could not completely ignore the Western opinion about its internal affairs.[46] Knowing this, Soviet dissidents used the Helsinki Agreement to "illustrate the discrepancy between international commitment by their governments and the everyday reality in the socialist countries" and make human rights part of the agenda of the East–West diplomatic relations in order to push for democratisation.[47]

Helsinki groups were intended as monitoring bodies of the implementation of Helsinki Accords, and tasked themselves with recording and reporting human rights abuses. They in particular based their activities on Principle VII of the Accords': "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief"; and on Principle VIII: "equal rights and self-determination of peoples".[48] The first Helsinki group in

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43 Venclova 1999, 489.

44 Bergmane 2023, 30.

45 Thomas 1999, 205.

46 Morgan 2018.

47 Bergmane 2023, 30.

48 Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe Final Act (Helsinki, 1975), https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/c/39501.pdf.

the Soviet Union was founded in Moscow in May 1976. The same year such groups were formed by dissidents in Lithuania and Ukraine, the following year – in Armenia and Georgia. Importantly, the groups were formed as official and not underground organisations, acting within the framework of Soviet legality.[49] The official Lithuanian name of the group was *Helsinkio susitarimų vykdymui remti Lietuvos visuomeninė grupė* (Lithuanian Public Group in Support of the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreement).[50] The founding members of the LHG were the Jesuit priest Karolis Garuckas, the physicist and Jewish rights activist Eitanas Finkelšteinas, the poet and former political prisoner Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė, the aforementioned Venclova, and Petkus. The manifesto of the LHG and the first documentations of human rights abuses were publicly presented for the first time at the press conference in Moscow on 25 November 1976. The manifesto also included the statement about the illegal occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Army in 1940, meant to defend the right to self-determination of the Lithuanian nation. This statement was particularly daring, as it could have been interpreted by the government as an "attack on the territorial sovereignty of the Soviet Union", punishable by death sentence.[51] By 1981, despite repressions, the group had produced 30 documents, documenting human rights abuses in the Lithuanian SSR and across the Soviet Union.[52] The LHG was quite unique in the Lithuanian landscape, as it was the first attempt at broadening the goals of political dissidence "beyond the confines of a narrow ethnic base".[53]

While the LHG and other Helsinki groups operated within the official restraints of Soviet legality and based their activities on Helsinki Accords signed by the Soviet Union, the formation of such groups was well understood to be a highly risky affair. While the Soviet Constitution and official rhetoric allowed freedom of speech, the self-determination of peoples, etc., in reality, the political system was based on censorship and the suppression of any dissent. Essentially, the task of Helsinki groups was to demonstrate to the Western world the blatant disregard for international agreements, legal norms and human rights as the everyday reality in the Soviet Union, even if they had to show it through

49 Račkauskaitė 1999, 6.

50 Juozavičiūtė 2024.

51 Venclova 1999, 493.

52 The topics covered by the LHG were the constraints on the freedom of conscience, rights of religious communities, freedom of movement, emigration and family reunification, ethnic minority rights, freedom of information, also the abuse of psychiatry against political prisoners and repressions against dissidents. See Petkus, Račkauskaitė, Uoka 1999.

53 Bilinsky, Panning 1981, 7.

their own personal example – by being punished for exercising their constitutional rights.[54] The Soviet authorities feared Helsinki groups not only because they publicised human rights abuses for Western publics to see. They also particularly disliked the unprecedented collaboration among dissident organisations across different Soviet republics, which challenged the centralised power of Moscow.[55] Unsurprisingly, in 1977, the leaders of all the five Helsinki Groups across the Soviet Union were arrested and jailed. The goal was not only to stop the activities of these groups, but to crush them completely, delegitimise them in the eyes of the Soviet public and internationally. For that reason, the members of Helsinki groups were charged not only for "anti-Soviet agitation", which would have left them "at least the dignity of being officially recognized as prisoners of conscience", but also for various criminal offences.[56] Members of the Ukrainian Helsinki group, for example, were charged with "resisting militia" and "attempted rape".[57] As I describe next, Petkus became a victim of a similar strategy of defamation, except that he was charged with sodomy.

The Petkus' case and the sodomy charge

On 23 August 1977, Petkus was arrested by the KGB at the Vilnius Bus station. The KGB confiscated the documents that he carried, which were prepared by the LHG for the Belgrade conference.[58] Initially, on 1 September 1977, Petkus was charged only for his alleged offences under articles 68 and 70 of the Criminal Code, respectively "anti-Soviet activism and propaganda" and "organizing with the goal to commit particularly dangerous anti-state crimes, including the participation in an anti-Soviet organisation".[59] The KGB interpreted Petkus' participation in the creation and activities of the Helsinki group as falling under the category of such crimes. A separate concern for the KGB was

54 Venclova 1978.

55 Bilinsky, Panning 1981, 14.

56 Ibid., 16.

57 Ibid., 25.

58 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Apklausos Protokolas [Interrogation Record], 27.10.1977. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, p. 26. Helsinki groups across the Soviet Union hoped to present their findings on human rights abuses at this international conference, a follow up meeting to the Helsinki Accords. See Liskofsky 1979, 152–159.

59 Vytautas Kažys. Nutarimas Patraukti Kaltinamuoju Viktorą Petkų [Decision to Indict Viktoras Petkus], 01.09.1977. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, pp. 9–10.

Petkus' initiative to create a joint organisation of dissidents of all three Baltic Republics: *the Supreme Committee of the National Movements of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania* (the Supreme Committee).[60] While Latvia and Estonia, where the dissident movement was smaller than in Lithuania, did not manage to form their own Helsinki groups, they were hoping to co-operate with Lithuanians in publicising their concerns about human rights abuses and the issue of national self-determination.[61] Petkus was placed under arrest and interrogated about his political activities numerous times throughout the months preceding his trial. His arrest lasted more than ten months.

Holding his arrest to be incompatible with the Soviet law and the international agreements, Petkus protested against what he saw as a sham process. He did not answer his interrogators' questions, except when making statements about the legal basis for the establishment of the LHG, reminding of the Soviet commitment to international law, requesting the Helsinki Accords to be listed among evidence, etc. The transcript of his interrogation shows Petkus's statements (of which there were very few) as contained and purposeful:

> The Lithuanian public group in support of Helsinki agreements had no anti-Soviet aspect and its actions were never underground, but public, and therefore the charges that were raised against me (…) are not only untrue and have no basis, but are also absurd. I see the charges raised against me, as a member of this group, as a conscious effort to harm me and my reputation and in this way to slander the whole Lithuanian civil society group in support of Helsinki agreements and its activities.[62]

In this typical example of his interaction with the interrogator, Petkus made it clear that he saw his arrest as purely political and a part of the larger slander campaign against the LHG. Already before forming the Helsinki group, all of its members were aware of the likely persecution ahead.[63] Petkus, a former political prisoner and already a victim of KGB persecution and defamation campaigns, was the most likely target of a show trial and imprisonment.[64]

Throughout the months following his arrest, Petkus refused to cooperate with the interrogator, who kept inquiring him about his involvement in the activities of

60 Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Criminal Case. 1978–1988. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9560, p. 10. Also see Bungs 1988, 268–269.

61 Bilinsky, Panning, 1981, 8.

62 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Interrogation Record, 02.09.1977. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, p. 23.

63 Venclova 1999, 490.

64 Tomas Venclova, interview by Rasa Navickaitė, 16.02.2024.

the LHG and the Supreme Committee. The persecution collected a mass of "evidence" of Petkus' involvement in the formation of these two dissident initiatives, even though Petkus never denied any of these accusations and stated his actions to be completely public and legal. He repeated this a few times in his very measured statements to the interrogator.[65] Almost eight months after his arrest, on 14 April 1978, Petkus was interrogated again and this was the first and the only time recorded in the KGB archive that Petkus was questioned about his allegedly indecent involvement with young men and minors in the period between 1972 and 1974. The interrogator T. Lazarevičius was rather brief and the questions addressed to Petkus were less detailed in comparison to earlier interrogations. The questions revolved around Petkus' alleged sexual advances on two young men, called Jonas Šliauteris and Mindaugas Gabrys, which supposedly took place while Petkus was visiting the priest Česlovas Kavaliauskas in Dubingiai in 1974. The interrogator claimed that Petkus bribed young men with expensive gifts and would get them drunk with cognac, before trying to take advantage of them during the trip. The interrogator also claimed that Petkus groomed a certain Rimantas Čivilis with money and drinks and eventually sexually assaulted him in his apartment in 1973, a day before Čivilis' seventeenth birthday. This event allegedly took place five years prior to the interrogation. As the interrogator put it, Petkus also took Čivilis with him "on trips to see friends in Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu, where he would then seek to satisfy his sexual urge while sleeping in one bed".[66] The interrogation report says that Lazarevičius read to Petkus the witness statement of Čivilis, which ended with words "…I then understood that V. Petkus is a pederast".[67] In line with Petkus' general behaviour during the interrogation, he did not react to these allegations.

Four days after this interrogation, on 18 April, the KGB investigator Vytautas Kažys sent a letter to the Bureau of Forensic Medicine, attempting to have Petkus physically examined in order to "determine pederasty, namely, the insertion of penis into the rectum". The reply explained that the act of "pederasty" can only be confirmed by a physical examination in "fresh" or "chronic" cases and not when it supposedly happened five years ago.[68] The case was therefore constructed on the basis of victims' testimonies collected by the KGB. The testimonies of several men described in minute detail the behaviour of Petkus, allegedly taking place

65 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Interrogation Record, 11.04.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, pp. 63–64.

66 Ibid., p. 68.

67 Ibid., p. 69.

68 Vytautas Kažys. To the Head of the Forensic Medical Expertise, Frnd. A. J. Laužikas, request and reply, 18.04.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, A-31, 47725, pp. 385–386.

at night during various trips and under the influence of alcohol, and involving touching, pranking, or kissing young men. The testimonies also described how Petkus allegedly took minors to restaurants and to his flat and gave them money, sweets, and alcohol.[69] Archival documents show that the collection of "evidence" of Petkus' indecent behaviour with young men had started already in January 1977, before any charges against Petkus were brought and soon after the public launching of the LHG in November 1976. One of the first written testimonies collected by the KGB was that of Kazimieras Paulionis. On 4 January 1977, he testified to militia that Petkus allegedly wanted to "use him for sexual relations", while sleeping in the same bed during a trip to Estonia.[70] Only about a month after giving this testimony, on 8 February 1977, Paulionis "killed himself by negligence with a shooting gun in the cellar at home".[71] At the time various conspiracy theories surrounded his premature death, from a suicide to a murder,[72] and it is hard to interpret this event as a simple coincidence, but rather as somehow connected to the interrogation methods of the KGB.

Only on 11 May 1978, more than nine months after his arrest and two months before the trial, Petkus was officially charged (in addition to articles 68 and 70) under Article 122, part two (man's sexual intercourse with a man, aggravated due to the use of force and the victim being underage and powerless), and Article 241, part three (the involvement of a minor into illegal activity or prostitution, although in Petkus' case this probably related to "drunkenness").[73] In a hand-written statement to the Highest Court of the Lithuanian SSR, written two months later, Petkus complained about the illegal methods used during the KGB interrogation.[74] As Petkus wrote, immediately upon his arrest and before any charges were brought up against him, the KGB investigator Kažys tried persuading him to sign a pledge that he would stop his anti-Soviet and political activities. The KGB officer threatened Petkus that if he did not sign such a pledge, "there would be not only a political, but also a criminal case started against me [Petkus],

69 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm. Witness interrogation report of Dainius Šeputis, Adolfo, 25.04.1978. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 47725/3, p. 344.

70 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Witness interrogation report of Kazimieras Paulionis, 25.04.1978. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, pp. 282–283.

71 Ibid., pp. 349–353.

72 Personal communication with Julius Sasnauskas by Rasa Navickaitė, 27.02.2024.

73 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Decision to Indict, 11.05.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, pp. 11–16.

74 Viktoras Petkus. Statement Addressed to the Highest Court of the LSSR, 05.07.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9558, p. 72.

which would harm me seriously".[75] Petkus refused to sign such a pledge. In his letter, written just before his trial, he complained of "lies, threats and blackmailing", which, he assumed, must have been used not only against him but also to other people in the process of "fabricating this case", as he put it.[76] This was the only instance that Petkus tried in any way to refute the criminal charges brought against him – otherwise he simply boycotted the whole investigation and trial.

The trial started on 11 July 1978. The trial attracted a lot of public attention and dissidents gathered to support Petkus, some bringing him flowers and publicly reciting prayers.[77] However, since "the accused had perpetrated a sexual crime", the judge decided that no observers would be allowed into the courtroom.[78] From the very start, Petkus expressed his refusal to participate in the trial and asked the judge's permission to lie down on the floor. After doing so, he demonstratively pretended to sleep. It is unclear if Petkus continued to do so in the next days, but this form of protest was noted in the transcript of the first day of the trial.[79] It is interesting to note that while the case against Petkus was initially built on his involvement in the LHG and the Supreme Committee, the trial mostly centred on Petkus' alleged criminal activities under articles 122 and 241, which were added to the prosecution case much later. The first person called to witness was Čivilis, recalled from military service specially for the trial, who repeated his statement regarding Petkus' sexual assault on him in 1973. The following statements also revolved around Petkus' involvement with minors and his alleged sexual advances, with some witnesses confirming and some denying the allegations. Only a few witnesses were called to give statements regarding Petkus' involvement in his "anti-Soviet" activities. The dissident Romualdas Ragaišis, the LHG member Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė and some other dissidents publicly refused to give witness statements during the trial.[80] The Estonian dissidents Enn Tarto and Mart Niklus not only refused to give incriminating statements but also

75 Viktoras Petkus. Statement Addressed to the Highest Court of the LSSR, 05.07.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9558, pp. 69–72.

76 Ibid.

77 Anonymous witness, 1978.

78 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Trial proceedings transcript. 10.–13.07.1978. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, p. 8.

79 Ibid., p. 52.

80 Ragaišis later incurred a punishment of six months imprisonment at a corrective labour facility.

refused to speak Russian and demanded an Estonian–Lithuanian interpreter.[81] On 13 July, after a semi-closed trial, the court found Petkus guilty on all counts and imposed a sentence of ten years of imprisonment and five years in exile.[82]

It is notable how the "evidence" collected by the KGB made Petkus' alleged sexual perversions and crimes look interconnected with his dissident activities. His visits to his dissident friends in Latvia and Estonia, as well as Lithuanian provinces were allegedly opportunities for Petkus to seek sexual gratification with men. His apartment in J. Garelio (now Dominikonų) Street, which served as a meeting spot for dissidents, was alleged to be the place where the rape of Čivilis had taken place. His engagement with dissident-leaning youths was portrayed as an act of grooming and molesting. This narrative was further enhanced and amplified in a slanderous article, published by the state magazine *Tiesa* after the trial, on 16 July, depicting Petkus as an abhorrent character. His anti-Soviet views and ideas of national independence, as well as his religiosity were depicted as a convenient "curtain" which hid his criminal intents and perverse desires. The article quoted statements from the trial (despite it being closed to public), in which Petkus was accused of corrupting and molesting minors. *Tiesa* also explicitly mentioned that Petkus was accused of "debauchery in perverse ways – homosexualism".[83] In the article all of this was intertwined with Petkus' participation in the LHG, which was presented as "a group of people, who had lost a sense of reality" and tried to defame the Soviet Union internationally. The article stated that Petkus' "anti-Soviet activities and his moral degeneration complement each other" and that movements like the LHG only pretend to fight for human rights, while in fact they serve as a cover for "perverts, bandits, and terrorists".[84] The appearance of such an article was a characteristic part of the KBG defamation strategy.[85] At the core of the slander campaign against Petkus was his supposed homosexuality, which was also depicted as inseparable from molesting young boys. This logically followed from the Stalinist understanding of "pederasty" as

81 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Trial proceedings transcript, 10.–13.07.1997. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, pp. 77–78. The Latvian dissident Ints Cālītis also refused to give incriminating statements. Another Latvian, Viktors Kalniņš, however, gave an incriminating statement against Petkus in exchange for the permission to go to the West. The statement was read out loud in court. See Anonymous witness, 1978.

82 Nuosprendis. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Court Verdict, 13.07.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9560, pp. 51–62.

83 Baltrūnas 1978.

84 Ibid.

85 Burinskaitė 2006, 70.

an anti-Soviet vice, a sign of the debauchery of the bourgeoisie, which could corrupt youths and pose counterrevolutionary danger.

Denying and forgetting the sodomy accusation

A year before Petkus' arrest, in October 1976, the aforementioned Alexeyeva, one of the founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG), was sent as the representative of MHG to the Lithuanian SSR, in order to investigate the recent expulsion of seven boys from a public high-school in Vilnius at the start of their final year at school.[86] The stated reason for the expulsion was that the boys acted in ways "irreconcilable with the behaviour required from Soviet pupils".[87] After conducting a short research in Vilnius together with Venclova, Alexeyeva concluded that the expulsion had been initiated by the KGB and violated legal norms and human rights.[88] One thing in common for the expelled boys was that they all stayed in close touch with Petkus, who was privately tutoring them on Lithuanian history and culture in the informal setting of his apartment on J. Garelio street. During her visit, Alexeyeva attended a dinner at Petkus' place and had a conversation with the youngsters, during which they told her about their encounters with the KGB. All of them had received threats from the government agents and all had been interrogated about their relationship with Petkus. The youngsters had been verbally, and some even physically, abused by the KGB, who took them for interrogation straight from school.[89] According to the subsequent MHG's report, the KGB had told the boys that Petkus was homosexual and pressured them to defame Petkus' character, to accuse him of giving them alcohol, cigarettes, money, and underground publications. The youngsters refused to give false witness statements. Therefore, according to Alexeyava, the authorities later "extorted a "confession" from another poor one".[90] Indeed, the boys who formed the close circle of Petkus' informal students were not the same youngsters, whose

86 The following account of Alexeyeva was taken from the essay she wrote for the Lithuanian diaspora newsletter *Pasaulio lietuvis* on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the LHG. See Alexeyeva 1999.

87 Alexeyeva 1999, 506.

88 Moscow Helsinki Group. Moscow Helsinki Group Documents (1976–1982). Document No. 15. On the Exclusion of Seven Students from the Vienuolis Middle School (Vilnius), 08.12.1976. National Security Archive, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/23766-moscow-helsinki-monitoring-group-exclusion-seven-students-vienuolis-middle-school.

89 Interview with Julius Sasnauskas by Rasa Navickaitė, 20.02.2024.

90 Alexeyeva 1999, 504.

witness testimonies were used by the KGB to frame Petkus as a "pederast", even though most of them attended the same school.

Having the benefit of hindsight, Alexeyeva used her memoirs of her trip to Lithuania in 1976 to deny the later allegations against Petkus. She described Petkus' informal students as "delightful"[91] and stressed that the relationship between the youngsters and Petkus was nothing but respectful and teacher–student like. Alexeyeva interpreted the whole situation as the KGB's attempt at smearing Petkus' reputation through the accusation of the "crime" of homosexuality, which she ironically put in quotation marks.[92] Similarly, in his article in 1978, Venclova described the accusations of homosexuality and sexual abuse of minors against Petkus as "absolutely unsubstantiated" and "silly".[93] The Lithuanian Catholic underground also denied any allegations regarding Petkus' homosexuality or his involvement with minors. The article, published in the dissident samizdat *Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Kronika* (The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, LKBK), claimed that after giving his incriminating statement in court, Čivilis confessed to his friends that "he was drunk when the KGB first interrogated him, did not understand anything and agreed with everything that he was told, which he later could not retract".[94] The samizdat and diaspora articles portrayed Petkus' trial as a political spectacle, and the allegations of sodomy against Petkus as pure slander.

Did the criminal charges against Petkus have any truth to them? Were they completely fabricated? And was Petkus in fact homosexual? As Burinskaitė notes, "the information spread by the Soviet propaganda was not mere invention, it also had a big part of truth in it."[95] The priest Julius Sasnauskas, one of the youngsters from the informal group of Petkus' students, recalled in an interview that since Petkus was unmarried and lived alone, there were some rumors regarding his sexual orientation. His tendency to have groups of male teenagers gathering at his apartment might have also raised suspicions. On the other hand, as Sasnauskas noted, Petkus did not belong to any informal network of gay men, which he only

91 Alexeyeva 1999, 503.

92 Alexeyeva 1999. In more recent times Alexeyeva also protested the Russian government's suppresion of LGBTQ people's human rights. See Gabriela Baczynska and Alissa De Carbonnel, "Russian Parliament Backs Ban on 'Gay Propaganda,'" *Reuters*, accessible at 27.02.2024. https://jp.reuters.com/article/us-russia-gay/russian-parliament-backs-ban-on-gay-propaganda-idUSBRE90O0QT20130125/ (viewed 27.02.2024).

93 Venclova 1978.

94 Anonymous witness, 1978.

95 Burinskaitė 2006, 69.

later became aware of as having existed during the Soviet period.[96] However, a homosexual man Saulius (b. 1945), also from the dissident circles, interviewed by me for a LGBTQ history project, mentioned the case of Petkus as the most notable example of persecution on the basis of Article 122 in Soviet Lithuania. He believed that the KGB had to have had information about Petkus' sexual orientation in order to start fabricating a case of this sort.[97]

It is important to note, however, that during the time of Petkus' trial the Soviet Lithuanian society saw homosexuality almost exclusively in a negative light, which was also a product of its consistent criminalisation and pathologising by the state.[98] Therefore, those defending Petkus did not only aim to defend him against the charge of rape and abuse of minors, but also to prove that he could not have possibly been homosexual. In general, homosexuality and paedophilia were seen as almost inseparable in the Soviet expert medical and criminological discourses – this view remained prevalent in Lithuania until the end of the Soviet period and beyond.[99] As Venclova recalled, the term 'pederasty' was used synonymously with paedophilia in Soviet Lithuania and there was no awareness of homosexuality as a variation in sexual orientation.[100] While a few individuals might have viewed homosexuality neutrally, or even positively, the overall stigmatisation of same-sex attraction meant that, for the dissident community, defending Petkus from the charges of rape also included denying that he could possibly have been homosexual.

The interconnection between the notions of homosexuality and paedophilia persisted into the post-Soviet period and probably created obstacles for a formal reconsideration of Petkus' case. In 1990, after the declaration of Lithuanian independence, Petkus' case from 1978 was revisited by a prosecutor, who called Čivilis in for "a conversation". According to the short statement included in Petkus' file, neither Čivilis nor his mother wanted to change their testimony regarding the alleged events of 1973. Čivilis declared that "in general, Petkus had performed the actions recorded in the case".[101] The prosecutor decided therefore

96 Sasnauskas 2024.

97 Interview with Saulius (b. 1945) by Rasa Navickaitė, 11.06.2022.

98 Healey 2018.

99 Mentions of homosexuality in popular press were extremely rare, but one of the first "expert" articles on homosexuality written already during the *perestroika*, in 1989, claimed that paedophilia is characteristic to 30–40% of homosexual men. See Lelis 1989.

100 Venclova 2024.

101 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Certificate by B. Žeberskis, 04.04.1990. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, p. 191.

not to reopen the case. At that point homosexuality was still criminalised under the same Soviet sodomy article and would continue to be criminalised until 1993. The second part of Article 122, on aggravated sodomy, including sexual intercourse with a male person younger than 18 years, punishable with imprisonment up to eight years, was abolished only in 2003.[102] Even if Petkus might have been homosexual or bisexual, or "in general" had had sexual relations with young men, his sexual orientation does not in itself constitute a crime, at least not after decriminalisation. However, in the public eyes the connection between homosexuality and criminality remained strong long after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This probably prevented Petkus or anyone else from seeking a formal revision of the case from 1978, and Petkus was never exonerated for his alleged crimes under articles 122 and 241. Later this part of the KGB's persecution of Petkus even stopped being mentioned in the historical accounts of the LHG.[103] Seemingly "forgotten" on the official level, the earlier allegations fortunately did not prevent Petkus from living an intellectually and politically active life in post-Soviet Lithuania, after he was freed in 1988. A formal revision of the case, however, might have caused him a greater reputational damage, once again linking his name with the stigmatised label of "pederasty".

Conclusion

The main intention of charging Petkus under Article 122 of the Lithuanian SSR Criminal Code was not only to attribute to him a certain criminal act (rape of a minor), which was a technique often employed by the KGB in dealing with dissidents. The main goal of this accusation was to attach to Petkus, who seemed to be immune to the threat of imprisonment and regular KGB intimidation, the label of "pederasty". Not unlike labels such as "banditism", "hooliganism", "sluggish schizophrenia", and others, the label of "pederasty" served the purpose of depicting the person as an outsider to Soviet society, as a dangerous and "anti-social" element. Even more so than other labels, "pederasty" was the charge of sexual deviance and moral transgression, making it detestable both for those aligned with the Soviet state and those resisting it, especially the Catholic Church. The role of the detailed descriptions of the alleged sexual advances and obscene behaviour by Petkus (likely fabricated by the KGB at least to some extent) aimed at portraying him as a molester and a pervert, and in this way damaging his

102 Jackevičius 2013.

103 See, for example, Račkauskaitė 1999.

reputation and defaming the LHG. The dissident circles and the Catholic underground, which knew the techniques of the KGB very well, were not affected by the accusations and defended Petkus fiercely, which included also denying that he could have possibly been homosexual.

In Western Europe, as Healey correctly notes, the commemoration of the Nazi crimes against homosexual and trans people, alongside other social groups, such as the Jews, the Roma and people with disabilities, has served an important part in the reconsideration of LGBTQ issues as essentially a part of the human rights agenda. In the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, formerly occupied by the Soviet Union, as well as in the rest of the former Soviet Union, the KGB's employment of homophobia as a tool or repression has never been fully examined, understood, and commemorated.[104] While the accusation of "pederasty" was not often publicly employed in the persecution of dissidents, it probably also served the purpose of prophylactic intimidation and blackmail, and thus remained largely invisible to the broader society. The lack of reflection on Soviet political homophobia results in the persistence of a stigma and taboo associated with homosexuality, which likely also prevented the authorities of independent Lithuania to properly revise Petkus' case and exonerate him of the charges under articles 122 and 241. This is in contrast, for example, to the case of Parajanov, who, during the writing of this article, was officially exonerated by the Ukraine's National Commission for Rehabilitation from the charges of "Ukrainian nationalism and homosexuality", for which he was sentenced in 1973.[105] Revisiting such prominent cases of political homophobia as the case of Petkus might shed light on the ways the Soviet authorities invoked prejudice against homosexuality to persecute, intimidate and defame anyone who resisted the regime.

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104 Healey 2018, 154.

105 Panorama, 2024.

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POLITISKĀ HOMOFOBIJA PADOMJU LIETUVĀ: PĀRVĒRTĒJOT DISIDENTA VIKTORA PETKUS GADĪJUMU

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Rakstā aplūkota homofobija kā padomju represīvā aparāta instruments. Tajā analizēta lietuviešu disidenta, politieslodzītā un cilvēktiesību aktīvista Viktora Petkus lieta, īpašu uzmanību pievēršot apsūdzībai sodomijā, kas viņam tika izvirzīta 1978. gadā. Šī apsūdzība bija daļa no ļoti politizētas prāvas, kas bija saistīta ar Petkus aktivitātēm Lietuvas Helsinku grupā. Rakstā tiek izmantots "politiskās homofobijas" jēdziens, analizējot paņēmienus, ar kādiem Lietuvas PSR Valsts drošības komiteja (VDK) centās iznīcināt Petkus reputāciju un celt neslavu lietuviešu disidentu cilvēktiesību kustībai, kurā padomju varas iestādes saskatīja īpaši bīstamu apdraudējumu.

Atslēgas vārdi: homofobija, Padomju Savienība, disidenti, Lietuva, Baltijas valstis, Helsinku grupas

Kopsavilkums

1976.–1977. gadā lietuviešu disidents Viktors Petkus (*Viktoras Petkus*, 1928–2012) ierosināja veidot divas organizācijas – Lietuvas Helsinku grupu (LHG) un "Igaunijas, Latvijas un Lietuvas Nacionālās kustības galveno komiteju" (Galvenā komiteja). Abas organizācijas balstījās uz Helsinku Nobeiguma aktu – starptautisko cilvēktiesību deklarāciju, ko bija parakstījusi arī Padomju Savienība. Padomju Lietuvā tās pārstāvēja jaunu atklātas pretošanās formu, kas izgāja ārpus nacionālo un Katoļu baznīcas interešu aizstāvības robežām un tiecās veicināt vispārējās cilvēktiesības un demokratizāciju. VDK sagrāva Helsinku grupas visās padomju republikās, kur tās bija izveidotas. LHG neoficiālais vadītājs Petkus kļuva par mērķi Lietuvas PSR rīkotā paraugprāvā, kuras gaitā tika aptraipīta viņa reputācija, izvirzot viņam apsūdzības saskaņā ar Lietuvas PSR Kriminālkodeksa 122. panta otro daļu (sodomija vainu pastiprinošos apstākļos) un 241. panta trešo daļu (mazgadīgo iesaistīšana nelikumīgās darbībās). Petkus tika atzīts par vainīgu visos apsūdzības punktos un notiesāts uz 10 gadiem ieslodzījumā un pieciem gadiem izsūtījumā; viņš tika apžēlots tikai 1988. gadā. Petkus sodīšana par viņa politiskajām aktivitātēm, piespriežot viņam ilgu ieslodzījumu, kā arī izvērstās publiskās apmelošanas apmērs plašākā sabiedrībā noteikti raisīja bailes un palīdzēja novērst sociālās vai politiskās neapmierinātības izpausmes.

Rakstā vispirms tiek izskaidrots politiskās homofobijas jēdziens un parādīts, ka to var uztvert kā vienu no represīvajiem instrumentiem, kas Padomju Savienībā tika izmantots iebiedēšanai, šantāžai un apmelošanai. Tālāk tiek sniegta informācija par Petku un viņa iesaisti cilvēktiesību aktīvismā Padomju Savienībā, izskaidrojot, kāpēc varas iestādes uzlūkoja LHG un Galveno komiteju kā īpaši bīstamu apdraudējumu. Turpinājumā aprakstīts, kā Petkus lietā tika iepītas apsūdzības sodomijā. Autore atklāj, ka laika izvēle, apstākļi un paralēles ar līdzīgām krimināllietām citās padomju republikās, kā arī apsūdzību iztirzāšanas veids tiesas procesa ietvaros un vēlāk valsts kontrolētajā presē atsedz uzskatāmu nolūku apmelot Petku. Raksta noslēgumā izklāstīts, ka disidentu aprindas, kurām VDK paņēmieni bija ļoti labi pazīstami, bija imūnas pret šīm apsūdzībām un dedzīgi aizstāvēja Petku. Galu galā, kā rakstā atklāts, apsūdzība sodomijā tika izdzēsta no Petkus piemiņas neatkarīgajā Lietuvā, tomēr viņš tā arī nav ticis attaisnots šajā apsūdzībā. Rakstā autore aicina no jauna izskatīt un izvērtēt sodomijas panta un paša "pederastijas" jēdziena kā padomju varas iestāžu represīvā instrumenta pielietojumu Lietuvā.

Rietumeiropā piemiņas kopšana par nacistu veiktajiem noziegumiem pret homoseksuāļiem un transpersonām līdzās noziegumiem pret citām sabiedrības grupām, kā, piemēram, ebrejiem, romiem un cilvēkiem ar īpašām vajadzībām, ir bijusi būtisks elements LGBT+ jautājumu kā neatņemama cilvēktiesību aspekta pārskatīšanā. Padomju Savienības okupētajās Baltijas valstīs – Igaunijā, Latvijā un Lietuvā, kā arī citviet bijušās Padomju Savienības teritorijā VDK veiktais politiskās homofobijas pielietojums kā ierocis cīņā ar disidentiem tā arī nav ticis pilnībā izpētīts, izprasts un ierakstīts piemiņā (sk. Healey 2018, 154). Tā rezultātā turpinās ar homoseksualitāti saistītā stigmatizācija, kas arī, visticamāk, ir kavējusi neatkarīgās Lietuvas institūcijas pienācīgi pārskatīt Petkus lietu un reabilitēt viņu saskaņā ar 122. un 241. pantu izvirzītajās apsūdzībās.* Tādu skaļu politiskās homofobijas gadījumu kā Petkus lieta pārskatīšana varētu izgaismot veidu, kā padomju institūcijas raisīja sabiedrībā bailes un aizspriedumus pret homoseksualitāti, lai ar šī instrumenta (līdzās daudziem citiem to rīcībā esošiem līdzekļiem) palīdzību vajātu, iebiedētu un apmelotu ikvienu, kurš pretojās režīmam.

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* Šī raksta tapšanas laikā Ukrainas Nacionālā reabilitācijas komisija oficiāli reabilitēja pazīstamo armēņu kinorežisoru Sergeju Paradžanovu, kurš 1973. gadā tika apsūdzēts "ukraiņu nacionālismā un homoseksualitātē". Sk.: Panorama, "Ukraine Exonerates Sergei Parajanov 50 Years after Soviet Trial," Panorama.Am, January 10, 2024. Pieejams: https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2024/01/10/Sergei-Parajanov/2949728 (skatīts 12.02.2024.).

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LATVIJAS VĒSTURES INSTITŪTA ŽURNĀLS

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QUEER AND ETHNICITY IN MINSK, 1952: BELARUSIAN READING OF KASPARS IRBE'S DIARY

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This article proposes an intersectional approach to studying non-Russian queer experiences in the Soviet empire. While earlier applications of intersectionality focused on race, gender, and class, other regional perspectives may highlight ethnicity, citizenship, and language. The text approaches non-Russian queer subjects in the USSR as a heterogeneous multiplicity via a contextualised reading of a diary fragment written by the Latvian Kaspars Irbe in Minsk in 1952. It highlights the prominence of communication between queers and people from the "centre" but also notes the hindrance of immediate contact between ethnicised subalterns due to Soviet social engineering. Tracing contingencies of Belarusian history, the article reveals how national identity and queer emancipation projects can evolve together.

Keywords: queer subaltern, decolonisation, Belarus, Latvia, nationalism

Introduction

The text is an intersectional analysis of a diary fragment of Kaspars Irbe, a Latvian gay man, during his stay in Minsk in 1952, in the context of his travels around the Soviet Union. Irbe's diary has become iconic among researchers studying the Soviet occupation of Latvia and the USSR. Since its discovery in 2016, it has been repeatedly examined due to the impressive volume of written material left behind.[1] Following others but taking a different perspective, I will

1 There are a few works that either focus on the diary or use it among other data. See, for example, Lipša 2021; Gricmanis 2019; Gerhardt 2023.

analyse intersections of ethnicity and queerness in Irbe's social navigation, focusing on his relations with Russians and non-Russians in Minsk. The intersectional approach reveals how ethnicity and queerness contribute jointly to the construction of subaltern subjectivities outside the empire's[2] centre.

In 1952, Irbe visited Minsk for almost three months, from October to December, apparently to attend extension courses in law. He describes his weeks of living in the city in eleven pages of the diary. The source provides insights into his daily social and cultural experiences while staying in the dormitory, visiting public venues, and walking on the streets. Along with ethnographically precise descriptions, it features Irbe's self-reflection on his stay in Minsk. In this way, Irbe's diary is a valuable resource for researchers in many aspects. It offers a novel account of post-war Minsk, insight into the geographies of homosexuals' life in the city, and provides an account of the educational infrastructure and Soviet legal culture in the USSR, among other topics. For a scholar interested in Belarus, this document's fragment provides unique evidence of queer life in the Belarusian capital city from the perspective of a Latvian, offering a distinctive glimpse into one national Soviet republic from another. In this article, I focus on the intersections of ethnicity, subalternity, and sexuality in Irbe's travels. Particularly, I take into account the presence of people from Moscow and Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) in Irbe's entries, as well as his intercultural contacts. As I will show, contacts with individuals from the imperial centre held greater prominence than immediate contacts between Belarusians and Latvians.

At the beginning of the text, I discuss the regional specifics of the intersectional approach in studying LGBT lives. Then, I provide a brief summary of the scarce Belarusian queer history. Finally, I analyse Irbe's diary entries from his trips to Minsk, Kyiv, Leningrad, Tallinn, and Vilnius. Such reading will provide valuable insights for understanding some contingencies and recurrent phenomena of Belarusian queer persons' lives.

As noted by Feruza Aripova[3], Western queer and LGBT scholars have paid the most attention to Russia compared to other post-Soviet countries. The representatives and scholars of other countries had the prerogative to write their own history, as Aripova mentions in her literature review.[4] Such asymmetry is an echo of colonial subalternity, a geopolitically conditioned exclusion of populations

2 For a view of the USSR as an empire on a multiethnic basis, see Hirsch 2018.

3 Aripova 2023, 20.

4 Ibid., 28.

from power hierarchies,[5] contributing to political oppression and silencing.[6] After analysing subalternity in a South Asian setting, it was also identified in post-Soviet Central Asia[7] and in Ukraine.[8] Importantly for this text, subalternity exists beyond the public domain in intimate sexual interactions.[9] An example of a decolonial approach to queer critique is the collective monograph *Decolonizing Queer Experience* focusing on LGBT people from Caucasus, Central Asia, and Baltic countries.[10] This article, too, aims to construct and promote subaltern queer narratives as valuable entities. This is particularly relevant during the war in Ukraine and the state-sponsored Kremlin-backed mass repressions in Belarus, both fueled by the notion that Ukrainian and Belarusian cultures, languages, and states should not exist.

Although Irbe's diary gained attention due to the author's non-normative sexuality, this paper uses an intersectional approach to explore the effects of his multiple identities rather than one particular. Irbe's various identities as a lawyer, an urbanite, and a Latvian all intersected with his sexuality and affected his socialisation during the trip. In this reading, I am particularly interested in the meaning of Irbe's ethnicised background, which, along with ethnic identity, includes his ideas of others, as well as linguistic practice and practices of self-representation and networking.

Intersectionality and ethnicity

Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term 'intersectionality' to underscore the "multidimensionality" of marginalised subjects' lived experiences.[11] The intersection of multiple social positions shapes their experiences. In early applications of the term, the intersections of gender with race and class were one of the most important,[12] reflecting the history of segregation and income-based stratification in North America. Different intersections may come to the fore in other contexts, such as ethnicity, citizenship, and language. The reasons for this are historical in Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe, as well as the Baltic states. Ethnocentric

5 Mignolo 2005.
6 Spivak 1988, 79.
7 Tloustanova 2015.
8 Törnquist-Plewa, Yurchuk 2019.
9 Khanna 2018.
10 Aripova et al. 2020.
11 Crenshaw 1989, 139.
12 Ferguson 2004.

national state here developed as a dominant model of statehood. Many countries situated between Russia and Western Europe experienced occupation more than once. Although the Soviet Union declared the equality of nations, Stalinism tended to promote Soviet and Russian ethnocentrism.[13] Despite the fact that the Soviet Constitution declared the equality of all nations (ethnicities, *narody*), ethnicity was often accounted for in social mobility, education, career, and other spheres of social life. During the Soviet period, different ethnic populations had varying degrees of self-determination. Some succeeded in establishing sovereign nation states before the Soviet period and were recognised as socialist republics during it. Other groups had the status of "autonomous republics", while some did not have any of these options. During the 1930s–1950s, forced deportations were more prevalent among non-Russian populations, indicating a higher degree of vulnerability for these groups. Additionally, the use of language played a significant role in creating hierarchies of scale, where individuals who spoke a particular language, such as Latvian, were marked as "others", whereas Russian was considered a "universal" and international language.[14]

Ethnicity is important in the analysis of Soviet queer lives for several reasons. In the USA, in the late 1970s, the homosexual part of the population was much more institutionally developed than the vast majority of ethnic groups.[15] In the USSR, LGBTQ individuals lacked institutional representation or establishment, unlike ethnic groups.[16] Thus, ethnicity more commonly served as an identity resource. Particular ethnicities made homosexuality especially shamed. Armenian and Azeri gays would be condemned as "men from the Caucasus", and an ethnic Georgian in Moscow would use the same idea to choose an active role in sexual encounters.[17]

When studying non-Russian Soviet queers, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of their positions, as well as the "history of multiple 'colonisations' of different parts of Eastern Europe".[18] During the Soviet period, a gender hierarchy was imposed on ethnic populations, in which the roles of men and women were determined according to the perceived needs of the communist state.[19] Ideas of LGBTQ rights were present in the Soviet republics' movements

13 Martin 1998.

14 Karklins 1994, 17.

15 Schluter 2002, 31–32, cited in Valodzin 2016.

16 On the diversity of ways in which ethnicity was promoted and institutionalised in the USSR, see Slezkine 1994.

17 Clech 2017.

18 Ousmanova 2020, 142.

19 Mole 2011, 550.

for regaining independence.[20] Later, it became possible to observe antagonism between conservative nationalist groups, denying the rights and even belonging of queer people to the nation[21] and those moving towards gender equality, women's rights and LGBT rights as a way to ”become like the West” or ”become real Europe”.[22] Struggles for independence in countries with a background of imperial oppression often reinforced gendered social roles, presenting heroism as exclusively masculine.[23] This implies that queer desire can be both anticolonial and anti-imperialist yet still condemned by conservative others who also claim their credit for decolonisation.

How can we differentiate between non-Russian Soviet queers, who are a heterogeneous group? Should they be classified as colonial subjects? Are they queer subalterns in a similar manner to Phillipino queers as described by Duque – surviving periods of forced assimilation by Spain and the USA, having to mimic their colonial "fathers" to prove themselves capable of autonomy, feminised by the empire's familial rhetoric, and still often feeling ashamed of their ethnicity,[24] considering how "Philipines are structurally queer to the United States"[25]? Speaking of the multinational gay environment of the USSR, Arthur Clech proposes a notion of supranational identity to show how the experiences of homosexuals could be affected by their experiences of being Caucasian, Central Asian, or Soviet.[26] Clech notes that LGBT individuals from the Baltic states, who had gained independence before being occupied by the Soviet Union, felt a particular sense of otherness.[27]

Almira Ousmanova has noticed that in the Baltic states the notion of occupation is used as preferable to the one of colonisation.[28] In the Latvian context, the colonisation of the Soviet years was discussed rather as a cultural development rather than a political realm.[29] At the same time, the latter is classified via the above-mentioned category of *occupation*. When executing colonisation,

20 Põldsama, Arumetsa 2023; Vērdiņš, Ozoliņš 2020. See also Davidjants and Zellis in this issue.

21 For the Armenian perspective, see Sargsyan 2021. On ethnonationalism and gender identity in Kyrgyzstan, see Buelow 2017. In the Latvian case, see also Mole 2011.

22 Serdyukova et al. 2022.

23 Wingfield, Bucur 2006.

24 Duque 2014.

25 Ponce 2012, 26.

26 Clech 2017.

27 Ibid.

28 Ousmanova 2020.

29 Riekstiņš 2015; Ozols 2023.

empires aspire not only to control colonised subjects but also to *remake* their identity.[30] For instance, the myth of the triunity of Eastern Slavic nations is repeatedly used by the Kremlin to justify the violent Russification of Belarusians and Ukrainians, including the LGBTQ+ people. The decolonial approach has been present in Belarusian scholarship since the early 2000s. For instance, Andrei Gornykh translated Spivak's text "Can the Subaltern Speak",[31] Ousmanova used Spivak's approach to analyse gendered stereotypes in post-Soviet cultures.[32] At the same time, Ihar Babkoŭ explored Russification as a form and manifestation of colonisation.[33] Recently, the decolonial approach regained the attention of Belarusian intellectuals, becoming a subject of conferences, interviews, and writing contests.

Given this complex nature of the subaltern experiences in the Soviet Union, it is important to note the discrepancies between the positions of a queer person from the centre of the empire and those from the peripheries, keeping in mind that the latter group is a heterogeneous multiplicity in itself.

Queer scholars use the intersectional approach to highlight the additional positionalities and vulnerabilities of the groups they study. For example, Clech discovered that the invisibility of homosexual relations made them less affected by interethnic stereotypes and taboos on mixed alliances.[34] For those concerned with national history, the intersectional approach is a way to recognise the often invisible subjects in the narratives of anti-imperial resistance and national liberation.

Ethnicity and homosexuality are not the only formative categories in Irbe's experience on trips. For instance, his occupation as a bailiff in people's courts and education might also be important, as well as the fact that he was raised in an urban environment instead of a rural one. Still, regarding Irbe's mobility, Latvianness might be essential to understanding how he experienced other Soviet republics. The fact that Irbe identified his sexual contacts mainly according to outward appearances and most often according to their ethnic origins[35] can be a starting point for this reading.

30 Platt 2013, 133.
31 Spivak 2001 was translated by Andrei Gornykh.
32 Ousmanova 2001.
33 Babkou 2005.
34 Clech 2017.
35 Lipša 2021, 423.

Irbe and materiality of Minsk

This passage draws from research conducted by Uladzimir Valodzin for our joint presentation at the seminar on Soviet queer history in Riga in June 2023. Valodzin reconstructed the geography of Irbe's movements in and around Minsk. Our thematic coding of the text focused on two layers: Irbe's social encounters and the socio-demographic markers he used, as well as the urban topography of his daily life. Also, Uladzimir reconstructed the topography of Irbe's movements in the city. I am summarising the main conclusions from his analysis to provide a context for Irbe's social life during his stay in Belorussian SSR. During Stalin's era, there was a general retreat in the direction of social conservatism and traditional values, while the immediate postwar years also meant the suppression of nationalism.[36] In these conditions, some of Irbe's records serve as hints more than documental evidence to be taken at face value. Therefore, this should be considered in the interpretation of the diary entries.

In 1952, Belarus looked unattractive from the window of the train: Irbe saw "ugly stations, unsightly landscapes, poor huts, wretched herds of breedless cattle".[37] The territory of present-day Belarus has suffered greatly in terms of population loss and the destruction of industrial and agrarian complexes.[38] Poverty and ugliness of the Belarusian countryside are also mentioned in Irbe's entries from 1964 – when he took part in a bus excursion to Kyiv in the Ukrainian SSR. Cities had deteriorated as well. Around 80% of buildings were destroyed in Minsk during the Second World War. Later, many buildings from previous historical epochs were demolished according to Soviet architectural plans. Only a very few survived, but these were scattered around and not presenting a contiguous part of the city.

Minsk was not Irbe's love at first sight. He frequently expresses his feelings of disgust related to the details of his everyday life, especially the condition of toilets. He also looks forward to leaving Minsk during most of his stay. So, the temporality of his stay is framed by his longing to "go back to the environment of a better culture and living life in accordance with own views".[39]

Irbe mentions extensively unpleasant living conditions of his dwelling – including hygienic conditions, the temperature on premises, and noise, as well

36 Mitsuyoshi 2004, 29. For the studies on gender and nationality, see Massel 1974; Northrop 2001; Michaels, 2001.

37 "[n]eglītās piestātnes, neglītos dabasskatus, nabadzīgās būdas, slikto bezšķirnes lopu pūlīšus". Irbe 01.11.1952.

38 Snyder 2023.

39 Irbe 01.11.1952.

as bad-tasting food. His accounts expose stark discrepancies between the "exemplary" public image and the poorly maintained semi-private space. The facades of Minsk streets presented a mix of temporary housing for workers, called *baraki,* and newly built Stalinist architecture. Although Belarusian SSR was intended to be one of the showcases of socialism, both the city and the country were still recovering from the aftermath of the Second World War. Minsk, being a model Stalinist city, illustrated this profound contradiction particularly well. The poor living conditions were visible to residents rather than tourists, and Irbe was not a tourist.

Irbe's diary entries mention Moscow's symbolic and cultural presence in Minsk. For example, a concert from Moscow was broadcast on the radio. Similarly, there is a monument to Belarusian poet Janka Kupala with his verses glorifying Moscow. However, there is no indication in the diary whether Irbe knew the context. In the 1920s, having created *Tutejšyja*, an anti-colonial play with a critique of both Polish and Russian dominance over Belarusians, Kupala maintained relations with Belarusian nationalists in emigration. The Soviets later forced him to write a letter of repentance, presumably from dictation.[40] The invisibility of Belarusian history and the prominence of Russian/Moscowite signs for Irbe in Minsk is meaningful in itself – as it displays the Soviet centre spreading its influence and culture across formerly heterogeneous space.

Irbe navigating Minsker public

Irbe led an active social life in Minsk, but his social curiosity was by no means limited to homosexuals. Irbe does not describe relations other than sexual intercourse with those whom he met on *pleshki* (places in the cities used for cruising by homosexuals). He socialised in multiple social circles, such as peers at university (the study process appears several times on the pages), Latvians at the dormitory, theatre visitors, and men from *pleshki.* Some of these circles did not overlap. Irbe's contacts with Latvians in Minsk, who are also studying there and waiting to return to Riga, are quite autonomous. Right after arrival, he meets "sisters in the misfortune having arrived from Latvia [to Minsk]" [*no Latvijas atbraukušās bēdu māsas*][41] and shares with them his longing to go home.

Speaking of other men, Irbe utilised a complex system of coordinates that, if not explicated, was likely intuitive. In the diary, he described the appearance, manners, age, and clothing of the people he met, which is expected for a queer

40 Hnilamiodau 1995, 161.

41 Irbe 01.11.1952.

account of sexual and romantic encounters. However, he also mentions the statuses, languages, and ethnicities of those around him. To us, readers, this provides insight into Minsk as a socially diverse, layered, and stratified social space.

During the post-war decades, there was a rapid change in the population structure of Minsk. The Jewish population, which had previously made up half of Minsk's inhabitants, decreased while ethnic Belarusians resettled here in large numbers from rural areas. The population of Minsk grew enormously in the 1950s, going from 273,6 k to 403 k between 1950 and 1955.[42] However, Minsk did not seem to display a distinct Belarusianness for Irbe. Instead, it functioned as a melting pot where the Russian language was commonly used as lingua franca with larger Russification processes in the background. The Belarusian language was only mentioned once in the text as the language of a newspaper Irbe's roommate read. Often, it is difficult to determine the ethnicity of a particular Irbe's partner because many non-Russians in the USSR spoke Russian. The Soviet census, similar to the post-Soviet ones in Belarus, relied on self-identification criteria to identify ethnicity. While ethnic Russians comprised only 20% of the city of Minsk in 1959, the rate of Russian-speaking people was much higher as Russian, unlike Belarusian and Latvian, was used for interethnic communication.

Irbe's neighbourship in the dormitory is not the most pleasant one for him: he is surrounded by "people who are not bad but of low culture ([characterised] by indecent behaviour, dirtiness, laziness)."[43] In this regard, Minsk turns out to be a rather proletarian place of noisy conversations and cramped living space. Irbe does not seem to make friends among this social layer of the city; instead, choosing to go to venues of leisure with higher social status, like the theatre.

Opera and ballet served as places of aesthetic impressions not only from music and dances but also from the scenery and a place to observe other members of the subculture. Some may be in the audience, others on the scene or in the orchestra pit, and sometimes, it would be possible to enter a conversation with them and even schedule a date. There, he also observes an ethnic difference in the biographical strategies of Soviet queers, as "almost all Russians get married and continue their other [homosexual] life".[44]

In the sphere of high culture in Minsk, typically Russian surnames such as Mironov, Maslennikova, and Nikolayeva dominate, at least on the pages of Irbe's account. In many cases, they are evidently invited from Moscow or Leningrad. During one of Irbe's last days in Minsk, he meets a person from Leningrad with

42 Govorushko 2021, 22.

43 Irbe 01.12.1952.

44 Irbe 21.12.1952.

whom they share a mutual liking. Leningrader can even recite a verse by Latvian poet Jānis Rainis. Both dislike Minsk, expressing this attitude in Russian, as they find it to be an ahistorical space devoid of comparable potential for both of them. At the end of his stay, Irbe mentions "a few others"[45] (*dažus citus)* whom he regrets not being able to meet again after leaving Minsk, but the only one particular person from the theatre is mentioned, whose surname is Glinskih and he is Russian.[46]

During his time in Minsk, another social milieu Irbe contacts is the military. At least one of Irbe's lovers was an officer. Importantly, the military and their families were not only economically privileged and mobile (even though their occupation conditioned the latter). Additionally, their children who attended schools in different Soviet republics were exempt from learning the local language – a free pass that many used after coming to Minsk.[47]

It was, thus, education, language, and milieu that separated Irbe from many ethnic Belarusians. During the 1950s, the use of the Belarusian language was firmly associated with the absence of urban identity; the city, the high culture, and the education required to master Russian, even though ethnic Russians constituted only 8% of the population of the Belorussian SSR in 1959.[48]

It seems that Irbe, based on his diary, did not make meaningful connections with people of the Minsker or Belarusian identities in Minsk. This fact indicates the social fabric in the empire wherein contacts between peripheries are to be maintained via the centre. Wherever they are, the people from the centre prioritise having proper positions and resources, such as the Russian language to facilitate making contacts and expressing their opinions. Irbe does not consciously seek a Russian as a partner instead, he is attracted to people's traits such as cultural knowledge, art expertise, and travel experiences that in Soviet conditions come with elements of Russianness, such as education or work in Moscow, or fluency in the imperial language, pre-conditioned by Russian ethnicity and name.

Architectural heritage, distributed unevenly between the territories of the USSR, adds to the social attractiveness of some places and turns other places

45 Irbe 11.01.1953.

46 Surnames ending with -ih are considered particularly foreign to Belarus. An example of discussion is available in *Nasha Niva* newspaper https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=221921.

47 The exemption from studying the local language for children of the Russian military is a recurrent motive in Belarusian media and in oral conversations with people born in the 1970s or earlier. Here is a forum page where users mention the corresponding waiver both in Byelorussian and Ukrainian SSR. https://www.tanzpol.org/2015/02/t90949--ukrainskij-yazyk-v-sssr.html.

48 Uroven' 1959, 14.

into less "interesting". Both Riga and Minsk suffered demographic losses during the war. However, Minsk was a very provincial town that gained the status of the capital of the Belorussian SSR. On the one hand, there were lower buildings that were not fully reconstructed by 1952 and only 400,000 inhabitants, with a large part of rural newcomers.[49] Riga was a bustling, culturally rich, post-imperial harbour town with six-storey buildings, beautiful parks, and boulevards. During late Stalinism, it served as a regional capital whose territory of attraction extended beyond the borders of Latvia. Being a queer person, Irbe is also affected by that matrix. He practices his identity as a homosexual by meeting other gay people in Minsk. However, Irbe, as a Rigan or Latvian, relates more to Russian and Latvian persons who happened to be there.

It is unclear from the fragment to what extent Irbe was aware and critical of the nature of social engineering of the Soviets, particularly their ethnic policy. Stalinist atrocities emerge on the margins of Irbe's writing, to the extent he believed it was safe to mention them. Once, the 1933 famine in Belarus[50] emerged as a topic of students' conversations. On another occasion, Irbe noted that the examiner had been an "old colonel, the head of the military tribunal".[51] The general lack of references to repressions and programmed cultural inequalities in the diary may have been due to the risks of such writing in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the language of anti-colonial critique was hardly available to the author at that time. However, with its uneven, ethnicised and spatial distribution of social capital, the city was not an easy place to criticise. Along with hardships, it offered pleasures, and its injustices were less explicit when compared to many other adversities in the Soviet Union, such as deportations, imprisonments, and forced slave work. Irbe admits some sympathy to the city in the last days before departure – or at least a pity that he was not going to come back.

Living a non-normative sexual life, Irbe was one of those actors who explored urban space beyond the usual conventions. His diary shows that his peers in Minsk were quite successful in creating this "lived space" in the categories of Henri Lefebvre.[52] However, Irbe, as a Latvian urbanite, was a stranger in Minsk in multiple senses, which opens up the possibility for a decolonial reading of his text. The context in which Irbe, with his multiple identities, navigated was characterised not only by institutionalised homophobia but also by the imperial relationship between the Russo-centric metropole and ethnicised peripheries.

49 Bohn 2008.

50 Ramanava 2003.

51 Irbe 16.12.1952.

52 Lefebvre 2014.

Irbe as a queer Latvian traveller across the USSR

Irbe's diary contains entries of his travels to different parts of the USSR. Apart from Belorussian SSR, he travelled to RSFSR, as well as to Ukrainian, Estonian, and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics. In the 1960s, Irbe visited Leningrad, which impressed him with its Westernness, architecture playing a vital role in that. In a way, Leningrad is antithetical to Minsk: a city with preserved architectural heritage and a pronounced Western vibe contrasts with the Belarusian capital, which was destroyed almost entirely and reconstructed according to the dominating ideology of the time. Irbe mentions historical buildings in the city centre and sightseeing opportunities in the suburban area of Peterhof, which contrast with ordinary residential areas. In the city centre, he can "feel the culture" (*[J]ūtama kultūra*)[53], enjoys an interesting excursion led by a Jewish guide, and repeatedly mentions encountering many tourists from different countries. Residents of Lenigrad, for Irbe, are different "from ordinary Russians"[54] (*no parastajiem krieviem*). It is also Leningrad, a monument on Marsovo field, that evokes negative emotions towards Nazi Germans in Irbe. Despite all reservations, this indicates his affinity to Soviet culture. At the same time, Irbe was pleased to hear the Latvian language spoken by strangers on Nevsky Avenue. Irbe also mentions that many people in Leningrad perceived him as a foreigner, which he probably experienced himself.

Speaking of Irbe's national consciousness, examining his trips to Lithuania and Estonia is particularly interesting. In 1952, while on his way to Riga, Irbe passed by Vilnius and described it as "less beautiful but more interesting than Minsk".[55] However, in 1965, when Irbe revisited Vilnius, his impression was very different. This time, he noticed the Lithuanian language's remarkable presence in signage and street conversations.[56] Moreover, Irbe writes that he could comprehend most of the written and spoken Lithuanian, and was understood when speaking Latvian. He also reflected on the sisterhood between the Latvian and Lithuanian nations, mentioning Prussians as the third sister in the triad of Baltic nations.[57]

Although his notes from Tallinn in 1970 were short, they, too, mention the dominance of the Estonian language in the streets and on street signs.[58]

53 Irbe 12.08.1960.
54 Ibid.
55 Irbe 11.01.1953.
56 Irbe 13.10.1965.
57 Ibid.
58 Irbe 17.09.1970.

In both Tallinn and Vilnius, Irbe opposed what he saw in Riga, where he felt a prevalent presence of Russians or Russian speakers. During these trips, Irbe identified himself not only as gay but also as a "foreigner", a compatriot, and a person from a brotherly nation without reducing himself to Sovietness or sexuality. However, despite the variety of places, topics, and situations that Irbe encountered, the importance of the Latvian language for his construction of self remained inviolable.

Value of Irbe's diary for Belarusian queer history

Irbe's diary entries from the 1950s about Belarus are of great significance, for they provide a rare insight into the scarce body of Belarusian queer and LGBT history. There is no academic research in Belarusian history on non-normative sexualities similar to the work by Lipša[59] on the interwar period, which was a time of independence for Latvia.[60] The 1950s was a period of intensive Russification in Belarus, which happened between the resurgence and "peaks" of the Belarusian national revival movements.[61]

Analysing parallels between now and the early 1950s can hardly be relevant for Latvian scholarship. However, it is pertinent from the Belarusian perspective, currently the country undergoing the most massive government repression in Europe since the break-up of the USSR. Many aspects present in Minsk during Irbe's 1952 visit are returning to Minsk in the 2020s. Homophobic rhetoric on the political level is returning in the context where the Russian language dominates every sphere of social life. Belarusian territory is used according to the needs of stakeholders from Moscow, and Russian ethnic identity can be expressed freely in a Belarusian city, contrary to both queer and Belarusian ones. This oppression is happening, again, despite only 8% of the Belarusian population declaring themselves Russians during the Belarusian population census 2019 (the same percentage as in 1959). There are also differences: the Belarusian language is avoided not because of its association with non-prestigious provincialism but because it is a sign of dissent and using it may lead to repression.[62] Here, we can

59 Lipša 2014, Chapter 4.

60 Search in Polish and English also did not bring up texts that would shed light on LGBT and queer in Western Belarus, which was part of Poland in 1921–1939.

61 Zaprudnik 1993.

62 For example, Alina Nahornaja, in her book *Mova 404,* collected more than a hundred persons' stories of being bullied, insulted, fired, or imprisoned for the use of Belarusian in Belarus.

only speculate on how different the degree of change is in comparison to 1952 when it comes to ethnicity and sexual orientation.

Valodzin undertook the first attempt to write Belarusian queer history;[63] most available accounts of Belarusian queer lives date back to the post-Soviet period. Belarusian queer subjectivity was perhaps inhabited relatively late; moreover, it was probably emerging in parallel with the national subjectivity of Belarusians, similarly characterised by lateness. In the early 1980s, Dančyk (full name – Bahdan Andrusišyn), an openly gay singer from American emigration, was used as a cultural symbol in important accounts of Belarusian national revival (*Adradžennie*),[64] but with no mention of his sexuality. Interestingly, the book also features a story of a Belarusian-speaking student minority speaking publicly to defend a female student assaulted by a male peer – thus attracting new allies to their community.

Belarusian national project is often described as having failed due to the establishment of a dictatorship, the reinstatement of Russian as a state language in 1995 (along with Belarusian, but dominating), and continued maintenance and strengthening of ties with Russia. Belarusian LGBT also found themselves among the readership of the Russian gay journal *Tema*, published since 1990.[65] *A* reader of Belarusian newspaper *Perspektiva* "expressed the hope that "someone brave enough will create a society of sexual minorities, similar to those in Moscow, Riga and St. Petersburg, here, in Hrodna".[66] This perspective is seen as a sign of double backwardness, as it is a backlash from both the West (Riga) and the centre (Moscow, Leningrad). Later, LGBT-themed magazines emerged featuring materials in Belarusian,[67] which is significant to note because Belarusophone content is consensually considered part of Belarusian culture. At the same time, the status of Belarusians' Russophone texts is repeatedly debated. Belarusophone gay prose[68] and queer poetry[69] followed. In 2015, the Makeout initiative organised a discussion on "Gender and Nation" during the Meta Festival that featured three days of screening of LGBT-themed cinema with subtitles in Belarusian.

Belarusian national project is often considered the least successful compared to others, which, virtually is true compared to the Latvian project. Still, Irbe's Latvian perspective on supposedly more "national" capital cities of Estonia

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63 Valodzin 2016.

64 Dubavets 2012.

65 Valodzin 2016, 45.

66 Ibid.

67 E.g., Lambda started by Eduard Tarletski, with the associated website *Apagay* (apparently, a word play between *apahej* (Belarusian word for apogee) and "gay")

68 Consider Piesni traleibusnych rahuliou by Uladzislau Harbacki (Harbacki 2016).

69 E.g., by Artur Kamarouski (Kamarouski 2020).

and Lithuania has parallels with how Belarusians view Ukraine throughout the post-Soviet decades, especially regarding linguistic situations.

As compared to 1952, the asymmetry between Latvian and Belarusian homosexuals has increased in terms of the rights and travel opportunities secured in their respective home countries. A queer traveller from Belarus cannot enter Latvia unless for business or humanitarian reasons due to a visa ban on Belarusian citizens since 2022 Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, a queer traveller from Latvia can, as of early 2024, travel to Belarus visa free, but probably they may opt for other destinations.

However, a transformation is evident in the way Belarusianness is present in Belarusian queer activities, both in emigration and inside the country, especially after the events of 2020, such as rigged elections, mass protests, and mass repressions. It is not possible to reveal all the LGBT initiatives and grassroots activists in Belarus due to security reasons. However, the Belarusian LGBT community actively uses the Belarusian language on social media and their literature. In addition, the decolonial debate is a topic of discussion in queer-writing workshops, and the rainbow flag was present during the 2020 protests, while the white-red-white flag was present at Vilnius Pride. Vika Biran and Toni Lashden, in their 2023 books published abroad, presented accounts of mass repressions and forced exodus that LGBT Belarusians have been facing since 2020.[70] Also, in the same year, an anthology of Belarusian gay writing was published in Great Britain.[71] As of 2023, it is virtually impossible to imagine that such publications will exist in Belarus due to both state homophobia and discrimination against the Belarusian language and culture. This discrimination has intensified since 2020 and is accompanied by the expansion of Russian ideology.[72] This body of works and activities centred around the use of the Belarusian language allows us to speak about the ethnonational consciousness among Belarusian LGBT individuals, even if they face persecution from the state for both national and sexual identities. Given the absence of support from the state, it is noteworthy that in Belarus, the only political force consistently supporting LGBT is the anarchist movement.[73]

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70 Biran 2023; Lashden 2023.

71 Harbacki, Ivanou 2023.

72 Notably, the only piece of the anthology (Ivanou, Harbacky 2023) in the Russian language is Zmicier Aliaksandrovich's fiction piece in the form of a letter to the newspaper *Sovietskaya Byelorussia* (Soviet Belarus) from a reader of Russian descent who exhibits both Belarusophobic and homophobic views. The text is available online https://queerion.com/4580-pismo-v-sovetskuju-belorussiju.html.

73 Valodzin 2016, 49.

In November 2023, the Russian government announced a new law recognising "the LGBT movement" as extremist. In response, the editorial board of *Nasha Niva*, the first Belarusian newspaper, which is a widely read Belarusophone media, published a comment stating: "This [homophobic legislation] only reinforces our moral imperative to treat LGBT people as equals. They are part of our society, part of the Belarusian nation, one of us."[74] The publication gathered significantly more likes than dislikes – given the nationalist and conservative image of the media and its audience during previous decades. This is happening almost simultaneously with the legalisation of same-sex partnerships in Latvia in November 2023, which could be more evidence that relations between queerness and Belarusian national project are also changing.

Conclusion

Irbe's diary allows multiple readings depending on the reader's interest and positionality. However, there are limitations given the context of writing, such as the repressive Soviet occupation and the context of reading conducted and interpreted by a non-Latvian and non-historian scholar during the period of aggressive Russian expansion in the region. In the diary, non-heterosexual inhabitants actively explored and used Minsk's urban space during the 1950s. It implies that the almost unresearched "black box" of queer life in Soviet Belarus might contain more discoveries than previously thought. Also, diversity – and unequal status – of sexual habits were intertwined with other heterogeneities, constituted by class, education, cultural consumption, and ethnicity, among other factors. In one of the possible readings, this paper proposes that, to some extent, the social capital for interethnic romantic encounters in post Second World War Soviet Minsk was formed by assets primarily available to individuals of Russian origin and socialisation. The avenues for further research, however, are not limited and related to the historical past alone but also to its echoes in the contemporary world. One area important to explore is whether subaltern queer subjects will succeed in building channels of communication and a sense of solidarity that circumvent imperially constructed images and views of each other.

74 "Гэта толькі ўзмацняе нашу маральную патрэбу ставіцца да ЛГБТ як да роўных. Яны частка нашага грамадства, частка беларускай нацыі, адны з нас" https://nashaniva.com/331291.

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KVĪRS UN ETNISKĀ PIEDERĪBA MINSKĀ 1952. GADĀ: KASPARA ALEKSANDRA IRBES DIENASGRĀMATAS BALTKRIEVU LASĪJUMS

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Zinātniskās intereses: masu represijas Baltkrievijā 21. gadsimta 20. gados, mīlestības kritiskās studijas

Raksts piedāvā intersekcionālo pieeju padomju impērijā dzīvojošo nekrievu homoseksuāļu pieredzes izpētei. Agrāko intersekcionālo pētījumu uzmanības centrā bija rase, dzimums un sociālais slānis, savukārt citu reģionu kontekstā priekšplānā var izvirzīties etniskā piederība, pilsonība un valoda. Izmantojot kontekstualizēta lasījuma pieeju, latvieša Kaspara Irbes 1952. gadā Minskā veikto dienasgrāmatas ierakstu izpētē, raksts aplūko nekrievu homoseksuālos subjektus Padomju Savienībā kā neviendabīgu un daudzveidīgu grupu. Pētījumā arī parādīts, kā notika homoseksuāļu komunikācija ar cilvēkiem no "centra", padomju sociālajai sistēmai kavējot tiešos kontaktus starp konkrētām etniskām grupām piederošiem pakļauto nāciju pārstāvjiem. Pētot attiecīgās situācijas Baltkrievijas vēsturē, autors arī atklāj, kā savstarpējo kontaktu ceļā var attīstīties nacionālās identitātes un homoseksuāļu emancipācijas projekti.

Atslēgas vārdi: pakļautie kvīri, dekolonizācija, Baltkrievija, Latvija, nacionālisms

Kopsavilkums

Raksts piedāvā intersekcionālo pieeju padomju impērijā dzīvojošo nekrievu homoseksuāļu pieredzes izpētei. Agrāko intersekcionālo pētījumu uzmanības centrā bija rase, dzimums un sociālais slānis, bet citu reģionu kontekstā priekšplānā var izvirzīties etniskā piederība, pilsonība un valoda. Kontekstualizēti pētot latvieša Kaspara Irbes 1952. gadā Minskā veiktos dienasgrāmatas ierakstus, raksts aplūko nekrievu homoseksuālos PSRS pavalstniekus kā neviendabīgu un daudzveidīgu grupu. Pētījumā arī parādīts, kā priekšplānā izvirzījās kvīru komunikācija ar cilvēkiem no "centra", padomju sociālajai sistēmai kavējot tiešos kontaktus starp konkrētām etniskām grupām piederošiem pakļauto nāciju pārstāvjiem. Pētot attiecīgās situācijas Baltkrievijas vēsturē, autors arī atklāj, kā savstarpējo kontaktu ceļā var attīstīties nacionālās identitātes un kvīru emancipācijas projekti.

Raksta pirmajā daļā tiek aplūkota intersekcionālās pieejas LGBT+ dzīves izpētei reģionālā specifika. Tiek pamatota etniskās piederības nozīme, analizējot kvīru dzīvi padomju un pēcpadomju periodā. Tālāk sniegts baltkrievu kvīru maz pētītās vēstures pārskats. Pārējā teksta daļa ir veltīta Irbes dienasgrāmatas ierakstiem, kas veikti, viņam

viesojoties Minskā, Kijevā, Ļeņingradā, Tallinā un Viļņā. Noslēgumā ir dažas piezīmes par Irbes dienasgrāmatas lasījuma nozīmi no 21. gadsimta 20. gadu baltkrievu skatījuma.

Irbe Minskā viesojās gandrīz trīs mēnešus – no 1952. gada oktobra līdz decembrim, lai apmeklētu kvalifikācijas celšanas kursus tieslietās. Šajā pilsētā pavadītajām nedēļām viņa dienasgrāmatā ir atvēlētas 11 lappuses. Avotā sniegts ieskats ikdienas dzīves sociālajās un kultūras pieredzēs, ko Irbe piedzīvoja kopmītnē, publiskajās vietās un ielās. Līdzās aprakstiem, kas reizēm izceļas ar etnogrāfisku precizitāti, dienasgrāmatā pierakstīta arī ar uzturēšanos Minskā saistītā pašrefleksija. Tādējādi Irbes dienasgrāmata ir vērtīga pētniekiem daudzos aspektos – kā unikāls pēckara Minskas apskats, kā ieskats homoseksuāļu dzīves ģeogrāfijā šajā pilsētā, kā stāstījums par PSRS izglītības infrastruktūru, padomju tieslietu kultūru utt. Pētniekam, kas interesējas par Baltkrieviju, šī dokumenta fragments ir unikāla liecība par kvīru dzīvi Baltkrievijas galvaspilsētā latvieša skatījumā; citiem vārdiem sakot, tas sniedz īpašu viena nacionālās padomju republikas pārstāvja redzējumu par citu republiku. Raksta uzmanības centrā ir Irbes ceļojumu etniskās piederības, pakļautības un seksualitātes aspektu krustpunkti. Īpaša uzmanība pievērsta Maskavas un Ļeņingradas iedzīvotāju klātbūtnes minējumiem Irbes ierakstos, kā arī viņa kontaktiem ar citu kultūru pārstāvjiem. Attiecības ar cilvēkiem no impērijas centra bija redzamākas nekā tiešie kontakti starp baltkrieviem un latviešiem.

Irbes dienasgrāmatai ir iespējami daudzi lasījumi, atkarībā no lasītāja intereses un pozīcijas. Vienlaikus interpretācijas process uzliek arī ierobežojumus, ko diktē rakstīšanas konteksts – represīvā padomju okupācija, kā arī lasījuma konteksts – avotu analizē nelatvietis un nevēsturnieks un pētījums tiek veikts laikā, kad notiek agresīva Krievijas ekspansija reģionā. Minskas 20. gadsimta 50. gadu pilsētvide dienasgrāmatā atklājas kā tās neheteroseksuālo iedzīvotāju aktīvi izzināta un lietota. Tas vedina domāt, ka vismazāk pētītajā padomju Baltkrievijas homoseksuāļu dzīves "melnajā kastē" varētu slēpties vairāk atklājumu, nekā tika iepriekš domāts. Turklāt seksuālo paradumu dažādība – un nevienlīdzīgais statuss – savijās ar citiem daudzveidības veidiem, ko cita starpā nosaka sociālais slānis, izglītība, kultūras patēriņš un etniskā piederība. Saskaņā ar vienu no daudzajiem iespējamajiem lasījumiem sociālo kapitālu romantiskiem kontaktiem dažādu etnisko pārstāvju vidū pēckara padomju Minskā vismaz kaut kādā mērā radīja priekšrocības, kādas bija galvenokārt pieejamas krievu izcelsmes un krievu aprindās socializējušamies cilvēkiem.

Tālākās izpētes virzieni tomēr ir saistīti ne tikai ar vēsturisko pagātni kā tādu, bet ar tās atbalsīm mūsdienu pasaulē – cik sekmīgi homoseksuāļiem kā bijušajiem pakļautajiem izdosies veidot tādu komunikāciju un solidaritāti, kas apietu impēriju radītos priekšstatus citam par citu?

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LATVIJAS VĒSTURES
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ACCUMULATING NEGATIVE AFFECTS: THE DIARY OF THE SOVIET LATVIAN FILM DIRECTOR GUNĀRS PIESIS

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Research interests: queer representation and masculinities in contemporary art and Soviet cinema, the historical development of narrative theories, and the archives of writer Andra Neiburga and film director Gunārs Piesis

This article comprehensively analyses Gunārs Piesis's diary, providing a complete reconstruction of its content. Historical and literary discursive practices have been employed to examine the material. The central point of the argument is that the diary illuminates Piesis's personality, his queer feelings, and mental health struggles, particularly his battle with depression, which had been previously dismissed as mere moodiness rather than a genuine disability. Furthermore, the diary confirms rumours surrounding Piesis's homosexuality, an important part of his identity, which he tried to suppress and emancipate. The diary offers valuable insights into his personal history. It serves as a testament to the controlling and repressive mechanisms employed by the Soviet authorities during that time. These mechanisms significantly impacted Piesis's sexual life and artistic freedom, and this article is the first to discover and analyse their effects.

Keywords: Gunārs Piesis, diary, queer feeling, homosexuality, Latvian film history

Introduction

In 2012, Riga Film Museum of the Latvian Academy of Culture acquired the archive of a Latvian film director, Gunārs Piesis (1931–1996). The archive was discovered by the new owner of Piesis's summer cottage in Bigauņciems,

Evija Morse-Buch's family, in its attic.[1] The museum has obtained the collection of materials that were not available in Riga Film Studio's archive. The collection includes diaries, notes, letters, scripts, photographs, film editing sheets, and other valuable materials. Despite the inadequate storage conditions and previous demolition cases in the summer house,[2] these materials provide an opportunity to learn about Piesis's private life and the legacy of his creative work. Previously, only Dzidra Sondore (1932–2016) had edited and published collected memories of Piesis's colleagues about him in the book titled *Talented. Interesting. Testy* (*Talantīgs. Interesants. Kašķīgs*, 2003), which was released seven years after his death.[3] Piesis's colleagues' memories repeatedly emphasise his talent, untapped potential, and explosive character, which led to loneliness in his final days. However, Piesis's voice was missing, which is usually revealed in well-known creatives' diaries, letters, and memoirs. Before this accidental find, it was impossible to fully comprehend his voice and personality. Aside from the newly discovered excerpts of the diaries from 1981 to 1984 that were commented on and published in the Latvian film magazine *Kino Raksti*[4] by Kristīne Matīsa[5], these materials gained little resonance.[6] The published excerpts reveal Piesis's struggle with depression, which made it possible to speculate that his grumpiness and lousy temper are a hasty and superficial judgment. There were also rumours about his

1 Līva Pētersone (2012). Zudušo laiku meklējot. Atradums! *Diena*. Accessible at: https://www.diena.lv/raksts/sodien-laikraksta/zuduso-laiku-meklejot.-atradums-13957899 (viewed 09.05.2023).

2 In the book about Piesis compiled by Dzidra Sondore, dance historian and writer Igors Freimanis describes the damage done to the archive: "After a while, Gunārs Piesis's cousin Valdis Piesis inherited the property in Bigauņciems. A couple of years ago, the neighbour's sons, unable to control their mischief, ransacked the house. From the attic, where a large collection of valuables was stored, books were tossed out of the window and burned in a bonfire. Was there an offence? Probably not. There was no crime and no punishment." (Sondore 2003, 152). I can only speculate whether the diaries, which are currently considered lost, were also burned. It is important to note that the neighbours mistreated Piesis's property during his lifetime, which he writes about in the third volume of his diary, covering the period from 1981 to 1984.

3 Ibid.

4 Piesis 2016.

5 The editor-in-chief of the film magazine *Kino Raksti*.

6 Dzidra Sondore had the last volume of Piesis's diary covering the period from 1989 to 1995. In 2001, she handed it over to Riga Film Museum. Agris Redovičs, the head of the museum and the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Kino Raksti*, during that time, published it with accompanying comments, thus making it the first publication of Piesis's diary (Piesis 2001, 104–109).

sexuality,[7] which have not yet been contextualised concerning the films he made. Piesis has constructed the narrative of his diary exclusively about himself, writing down his thoughts and experiences, which most often reveal a gloomy picture of his life. However, the boxes of unsystematised archival materials provide unexpected discoveries, as the earliest entries from the diary date back to 1959 when Piesis studied film direction at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow.

This article presents the analysis and a complete reconstruction of Piesis's diary corpus for the first time. Historical and literary discursive practices are combined to analyse the material.[8] The findings in the diary provide new knowledge about Piesis's mental health. They prove that his struggle with depression and bipolar affective disorder was often misunderstood as a bad temper instead of a mental disability.[9] The diary also confirms rumours about his homosexuality that he tried to suppress and emancipate. It is important to note that his diary is not just a source of personal history but also a testimony of the Soviet authorities' controlling and repressive mechanisms. These mechanisms limited both Piesis's sexual life and artistic freedom.

Periodisation and aspects of materiality

The diary genre allows its author to decide which life events to describe in more detail. Hence, subjectivity and temporality are essential in analysing such a deeply personal "ego document".[10] Piesis was most active in writing his diary when he was forbidden to work on feature films. During this time, he expressed doubts about the creative process and his thirst for recognition and intimacy

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7 The former head of Riga Film Studio, Heinrihs Lepeško (1931–2014), brings these rumours up to date in the documentary dedicated to Piesis's feature film "Blow the Wind!" Agita Cāne-Ķīle (Dir.) (2013). *Pūt, vējiņi! Filmas arheoloģija*. [Documentary, 68 min.] Latvia: Latvian Television. Accessible at: https://replay.lsm.lv/lv/ieraksts/ltv/89002/dokumentala-filma-put-vejini-filmas-arheologija (viewed 09.05.2023).

8 Ozoliņš 2020, 6–19.

9 Although I am not a qualified psychiatrist and cannot make a medical evaluation, I hesitate to dismiss this hypothesis as it is essential when analysing Piesis's diaries. Writing allowed Piesis to explore his emotions without reiterating existing notions of his bad temper. This is important because it sheds light on his artistic endeavours and can be viewed through the lens of affect theory, a concept that will be further explored in upcoming articles.

10 Hellbeck 2004, 621–629; Schulz 1996.

from friends and sexual partners. He mainly used the diary for self-motivation,[11] therapy, or recording new artistic ideas rather than for direct documentation of the era. However, he was aware of its potential as a testimony of personal history for future researchers.

In some cases, Piesis drafted notes that were initially intended for carefully planned entries but did not make it into the diary itself. Sometimes it is difficult to date them, making it challenging to distinguish whether it is a continuation of the same day or a new entry.[12] Piesis's diary is no exception in that it simultaneously serves as a documentary testimony and an artistic expression.[13] It questions critics' influence on the Soviet audience's opinions[14] and challenges encountered during the stages of film development and production.[15] It looks at the interpersonal relations within the Soviet film industry, influenced by the political conditions of the time, and the intrigues within Riga Film Studio.[16] Piesis would allude to all this indirectly, letting the reader of the diary interpret the content. Among other things, the diary reveals the diversity of lived experiences of the Soviet subject, which cannot be reduced to a simplistic dichotomy of loyalty and dissidence.[17]

The volumes of the diary and dated notes cover the period from Piesis's studies in Moscow to the last year of his life. The diary of 1959 is available in a separate notebook,[18] while the period from 1963 to 1981 is preserved as individual blocks of pages torn out of notebooks.[19] Piesis wrote a diary from 1981 to

11 "The skill to discipline myself for work, for life. Trying to have a grip on myself and continue work, work. Because in work, there is both – material and moral well-being. Prolonged inactivity degenerates. I am using the allocated lifetime extremely irrationally. The best part of my life is behind me. More foresight with the rest." Piesis, Gunārs. Dienasgrāmata, 1981–1984. Rīgas Kino muzejs (Rīga, hereinafter: RKM), RKM 19015, 09.08.1983.

12 A similar example, which has been a challenge for its researchers due to erratic date-keeping, is the diary of the Russian Soviet writer Yuri Olesha (1899–1960). It was not easy for Olesha to fit into the new Soviet society and literary circles, so he used his diary as a platform to start a new novel to overcome the white page syndrome (Wolfson 2004, 609–620).

13 Paperno 2004, 564.

14 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 20256, 07.10.1974.

15 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 19015, 03.03.1981.

16 Most clearly evidenced by the script and film preparation period of the children's fairy tale film "Tom Thumb" from 1982 to 1984.

17 Healey 2020, 196.

18 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 20255.

19 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 20256.

1984[20] and 1989 to 1995 in notebooks made for technical notes with plastic or leather covers.[21]

Except for the Moscow period, the diary of the 1960s and 1970s has survived only as a compilation of separate blocks of pages. Piesis tore these blocks from his notebooks and left them for future generations to reconstruct his thoughts and experiences. While it is possible that Piesis destroyed a series of records related to his relationships and feelings, the remaining individual logs allow us to speculate about his intimate life.

The first volume of the diary was initially written with a pencil. In the second volume, entries were made with a fountain pen. However, starting from then on, Piesis used blue or black ballpoint pens for writing. He also used green and red colours to write individual segments. The third volume of the diary, with an inscription in Russian "Notebook for technical notes", is voluminous and covers a period of four years. The most widely documented year is 1984, when Piesis worked on the fairy tale feature "Tom Thumb" (*Sprīdītis*, 1985). It is worth noting that the diary provides more details about the film's pre-production period rather than the actual filming.[22] Likewise, no entries have been found in the diaries about his most successful feature films – "In the Shadow of Death" (*Nāves ēnā*, 1971) and "Blow the Wind" (*Pūt, vējiņi!* 1973), which suggests that he did not write a diary during the production phase.

Apart from the pre-production of "Tom Thumb" and separate entries about the documentaries produced during the 1960s, Piesis did not maintain a diary while on the film set. He resorted to writing in his diary during the so-called idle work periods to record his inner turmoils and motivate himself to work. Riga Film Museum preserves Piesis's employee record cards that often indicate "Idle 60%". Although such periods were not entirely idle, the creative work on film development was inconsistent when he was not working on the set. So the diary entries reveal episodes of self-loathing in which he admonished himself for not working enough, not scheduling his time more carefully, and not fighting for his ideas to be turned into films.[23] However, the above mentioned excerpts reveal something else – the idle periods are quite extended, not only due to Piesis's

20 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 19015.

21 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 10442. See also published version of this diary: Piesis 2001, 104–109.

22 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015.

23 Here and after, I give the abbreviated record with the most relevant data: Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 29.11.1982.

struggle with depression,[24] which affects his ability to work, but also he assumes that he is intentionally being kept away from film work. In the diary, he laments being disregarded as a director because work on a film can be suspended for several years. Despite working on multiple potential projects simultaneously, Piesis struggles to finish them and lacks confidence in their eventual realisation.

Piesis was an ardent advocate of national cultural values. Most of his feature films are based on Latvian literary classics and folklore materials. However, in the early 1960s, he often expressed in his diaries that he ceased speaking and writing in Latvian and switched to Russian as a radical protest against criticism of his creative work and the low rating of his films.[25] Regarding his fluency in Russian, it is worth noting that he spent his early school years in the settlement of Kstinina, Kirov region. Later, while studying in Moscow, all his notes were written in Russian, including the diary notebook of 1959.

The diary is a testimony to intense emotional turmoils that became stronger over the years, documenting a personality that accumulates negative affects[26] and emotional outbursts. These are exacerbated by the suppression of his artistic freedom and the fear created by the political system. They contribute to conflicts with colleagues, isolation, passivity and inability to work, persecutory delusion, and depression. As the diary entries show, these emotions become more intense towards the end of his life. Contemporaries described him as intolerant, hysterical, and despotic. Piesis most likely suffered from bipolar affective disorder, evident in the larger volume of the diary from 1981 to 1984.[27] During the time period in which he lived, he did not have access to the advantages that are available today, such as therapy, appropriate medication, and the understanding that

24 In the diary, Piesis records his struggle with depression in 1984, which might have been the most challenging year for him emotionally.

25 Such reflections occurred to Piesis after his first failures in feature films, after 1963, when he turned to the documentary genre.

26 In this article, negative affects are discussed which include various adverse emotional experiences, such as anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness (Koch, Forgas, Matovic 2013, 326–334). A recent scholarly examination of negative affects in the work of Latvian filmmakers has been authored by a prominent film scholar and professor Inga Pērkone, with whom I have studied film history. In the second chapter of her book *Affects and Memories: On Feelings and Latvian Cinema* (*Afekti un atmiņas: Par sajūtām un Latvijas kino*, 2023), she focuses on the analysis of negative affects and draws upon the categorisation put forth by the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1911–1991) (Pērkone 2023, 38).

27 "I constantly dwell on the theme of my insignificance and helplessness. Hard-heartedness in this regard has already become traditional. I am inexorably sliding down, losing more and more importance and authority in those around me." Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 19015, 30.10.1983.

mental health can be very fragile. Therefore, within these limitations, Piesis used the diary to study his personality and monitor himself, particularly focusing on self-discipline and self-motivation. There is also no doubt that Piesis wrote the diary assuming that others would read it in the future, so he cyclically reevaluates his films in each decade of his life. Piesis, like many artists, has always been egocentric, which has manifested in his relations with colleagues and film reviewers. In his opinion, critics are too harsh and ruthless towards the films produced by Riga Film Studio compared to criticism of other forms of Latvian art. He is particularly bitter about how critics and the public reacted to his films "Your Son" (*Tavs dēls*, 1978) and "Twists of Eras" (*Laikmetu griežos*, 1981), which, in retrospect, can be considered creative failures in his filmography.[28]

Piesis ended his creative endeavours with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the closure of Riga Film Studio, unable to enroll in the new film project system. The collapse of the film industry also meant that many veteran filmmakers failed to adapt, while some established industry professionals continued their work. Due to Piesis's mental health issues and damaged relationships with his contemporaries, he could not build new work relationships within artistic circles. Instead, he sold antiques, and vegetables and flowers from his greenhouse to earn some income in addition to his small pension. His last fairy tale film for children was made in 1990. The last diary entry in the shortest volume is dated 20 August 1995. On 9 February 1996, Piesis died of lung cancer.

Notably, the diary does not contain any reflections on the political changes and historical events of the Third Awakening,[29] except for the observations of social reality connected to his poverty and efforts to survive by buying and selling antiques. The fourth volume of the diary is the shortest one. It starts with a synopsis from the creative plenum but then continues as a diary with separate entries about the reality of the early 1990s. During this period, Piesis earned money by buying antiques and selling them not only in Riga but also in Moscow and Leningrad, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union.[30]

Apart from the filming process and inner mental turmoils, Piesis mentions the deaths and funerals of known cultural personalities that were close to him, such as actress Anta Klints (1893–1970) and poet Ojārs Vācietis (1933–1983).[31] Some of his diary entries reveal Piesis's suspicion that they were read by

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28 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 20256, 22.11.1978 and Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 19015, 10.–11.03.1981.

29 The movement led to the restoration of Latvia's independence, sometimes called the "Singing Revolution", from 1987 to 1991.

30 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 10442, 23.12.1990 and 01.05.1991.

31 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 19015, 29.11.1983 and 02.01.1983.

"supervisors", and thus, he did not record topics related to ideology and politics. He writes: "Even diaries are subject to secret scrutiny. The mood is probed, subject matter checked (doesn't matter – guilty or innocent, preventive control, so to speak)."[32] Piesis's diary serves as a portrait of his inner world, with little focus on the external world unless it impacts criticism, colleagues related to the creative process, and in some cases – intimate partners, about whom the reader is informed fragmentarily and elliptically. Between 1981 and 1984, Piesis censored his diary entries by tearing out individual pages about his private life. Several records reveal that he was paranoid about certain men he met, thinking that they were reporting on him to the Committee for State Security (KGB).[33]

Relations with colleagues and reaction to criticism

Throughout his career as a director, Piesis faced criticism for his creative work on films, which occasionally had certain consequences. He wrote: "It remains only to apologize that I have worked so poorly. Finally, under the blessed influence of criticism, I have understood the gravity of the irresponsibility with which I create all my projects. It is so good that now there are these diligent debunkers. Criticism is aiming to antagonize us with the audience." [Underlined by Piesis.][34] Piesis was offended by accusations that Latvian film professionals, having been trained in Moscow, did not live up to the expectations placed on them. It was difficult for him to accept that state theatre actors and directors were also employed in film production at the Studio. When working on documentaries, Piesis realised the advantages of television. The programmes on TV are an hour or an hour and a half long, which provides more opportunities for narrative development: "The form of the film chronicle is outdated and useless as a source of information."[35]

In his diary, beginning from the 1960s, Piesis frequently expressed his feelings on the situation at Riga Film Studio. He complained about the poor quality of criticism and took personally the harsh tone with which the films were evaluated. He states: "I do not believe that the press has any influence on our work and actions. That is why I remained silent for years; my very subjective, emotional expressions

32 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 1982, entry without date, also 21.11.1983.

33 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 29.11.1982 and 19.07.1983. (It is possible that the entry in green ink was made impulsively, undated, between 19 July and 4 August 1983.)

34 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 10.–11.03.1981.

35 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 18.12.1962.

at various meetings or congresses have never left the slightest impression. (...) I think the press is guilty of intentionally antagonising the Studio employees. Whatever microclimate we create, it makes us feel ourselves accordingly. A lot of different assessments [are expressed]. A good hardworking employee uses to get a more cruel beating."[36] Piesis experienced the mechanisms of oppression and retribution of the political system, leaving an indelible trauma that escalated in his behaviour and communication with colleagues and closest friends. It was difficult for him to find protection because Piesis was not a member of the Communist Party, unlike the majority of his fellow film directors. Living in a constant state of melancholia, he came across as grumpy, hysterical, and lacking self-control. Still, the real cause for his behaviour lay in his depression, which was triggered by the Soviet system's restrictions and his repressed sexuality, which Piesis tried to bring to life in artistic images in a unique way. They are boys and young men who, through their idealism try to find their place in the world (Kārlēns, Gatiņš, Kurt fon Brimmer, Sprīdītis), they are emotional, which makes them appear feminine in the eyes of others. There are also young girls whose desires go unfulfilled (Zane, Amālija, Paija). Likewise, among his characters, an important place is assigned to pure-hearted young maidens (Baiba, Lienīte, Maija), whose fate is resolved both positively and negatively, depending on the setting of the literary source, and authoritative stern stepmothers (in the movies "Blow, the Wind", "Tom Thumb", and "Maija and Paija"). The maidens are usually offered lessons from dramatic life events or through the intervention of mythological deities. However, Piesis mostly worked with adapting literary classics, including the fairy tale genre. The cinematographic images he created have significance in Latvian folklore. It is worth noting that even before they gained popularity in the 1980s, ethnographic ensembles and dance groups were already featured in his films. One of the first examples is the movie "Blow the Wind".

The ratings of Piesis's film adaptations of literary classics, except for "Twists of Eras", were higher than those of his films depicting the present day. This trend began with his debut film "Gray Willows in Bloom" (*Kārkli pelēkie zied*, 1961), followed by the short film "No Need to Go Anywhere Else" (*Nekur vairs nav jāiet*, 1963), and the drama "Your Son" made in 1978.[37] Regarding the classics, Piesis emphasises that he is interested in the author's temperament and the way their

36 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 07.10.1974.

37 Observing the work of his colleagues and the critics' harsh reviews of "Twists of Eras", Piesis considered turning to the problems of his time, abandoning his favourite approach of adapting the works of Latvian literary classics. Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 29.11.1982.

emotionality manifests itself in the age-old opposition of love and hate.[38] When defending his artistic vision, Piesis always refers to the stylistics of the screened work and its author, including "Twists of Eras".[39] It should be noted that among the Soviet critics, when evaluating adaptations of literary works for the screen, one of the criteria was the movie's accuracy to the source material and its previous interpretations. It is not surprising in the context of the Soviet period, but it seems absurd now because such an approach hinders the creation of any new interpretations. Piesis's writing about the influence of critics on the audience comes across as point on and bitter: "And so we have to start again with [self-]justification because by using the right to be the first to view [the movie], [the critics] impose an early judgement on those who have not seen [the movie] yet, fostering a negative, critical attitude in advance."[40] A year later, Piesis is looking for a contemporary literary source to avoid interpreting the works of the classics. One of the solutions he mentions is getting to know the writer Ēriks Hānbergs (1933), who, in his opinion, deeply understands rural people.[41] Another option he considers is using observations gained in the courtrooms as a source material.[42]

Piesis holds idealistic and romantic views and seeks similar qualities in his preferred audience. His reaction to the critics is connected to his personal traumas and his discontent with their voicing publicly their opinion before the audience has had the chance to view the film. According to Piesis, the critics thus maliciously exercise their right to see the movie first and deny the audience the joy of discovering it for themselves.

Social conditions

In his diary, Piesis frequently writes about poverty that arises from the imposed idleness. Even if he receives a higher fee, he struggles to manage his money and often spends it on gifts for "small gestures of attention". Sometimes,

38 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 14.03.1981.

39 In February and March 1981, Piesis recorded in his diary about the critics' reaction to the film "Twists of Eras". Some of the entries express resentment and contain anti-Semitic accusations. For example, he describes the opinion of the critics from *Kino* magazine as "pro-Semitic". Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*, RKM 19015, the introductory text of 1981 without date, as well as 02.03.1981 and 03.03.1981.

40 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 14.03.1981.

41 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 29.11.1982.

42 Ibid.

he lends it out with the understanding that he may never get it back.[43] But Piesis needs money not only to maintain his appearance, which he feels has deteriorated over the years, but also for taking care of his mother[44] and renovating his summer cottage in Bigauņciems, which he bought after shooting "In the Shadow of Death".[45] Unfortunately, the upkeep of the house is not going well. The neighbours steal flowers grown in the greenhouse, firewood, and planks. They also break window panes of the house and possibly set up a dump on the side of the road leading to the cottage.[46] The conflict with the neighbours escalates to the point of systematic theft from their part. Piesis believes that the root cause of this is his lost authority, which has led to a rude attitude from those around him. The diary presents the reader with the author's subjective viewpoint of the events, which may not always indicate the true extent of the conflict. However, he cares a lot about the property's condition, even though he may sometimes find it difficult to manage.[47]

Piesis lived in a communal apartment in Riga for a long time. In his diary, he blames himself for lacking the same entrepreneurial spirit as other film directors, such as Jānis Streičs (1936), Olģerts Dunkers (1932–1997), and Gunārs Cilinskis (1931–1992), possessed to get his own living space and improve his living conditions.[48] Towards the end of his life, when he got a more spacious apartment, Piesis did not hide his struggles with keeping it clean. In his final years, he wrote very few entries and instead focused on tracking his expenditures and trades related to collecting and reselling antiques.[49]

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43 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 09.08.1983.

44 See entry without date (from the context, it can be concluded that it is probably 1982): "To organise the apartment to have the necessary workplace. Take care of my mother who can't handle her affairs." Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015.

45 "I am the only one who is burdened with a lot in this battle, at least for external appearance and modest decency in the garden in Bigauņciems, the condition of the houses, the cleanliness of the Rīga apartment, etc. It is difficult to deal with all this without direct assistants, without relatives and even just sympathizers." Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 10.08.1983.

46 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, entries of 29.11.1982, 24.08.1983, 30.10.1983, 09.11.1983, 30.11.1983, RKM 19015.

47 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 09.08.1983.

48 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 10.05.1983.

49 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 10442.

The subjectivity of the Soviet homosexual

Piesis's homosexuality is probably one of the reasons why film historians in Latvia were uncomfortable with him. This is because his films do not fit into traditional interpretations unless viewed from the perspective of queer theory, which would bring him closer to other queer film directors behind the Iron Curtain.[50] While Armenian-born director Sergei Parajanov (*Sarkis Hovsepi Parajaniants*, 1924–1990) was openly caught in a same-sex relationship, Piesis avoided sexual contacts in public space. However, his homosexuality was rumoured. In the documentary "Blow the Wind! The Archeology of the Film" (*Pūt, vējiņi! Filmas arheoloģija*, 2014), it was also confirmed by the former director of Riga Film Studio, Heinrihs Lepeško (1931–2014). He mentions that The Corner House (i.e., the KGB headquarters[51]) was also informed about it.[52]

Evidence of Piesis's intimate life is revealed through the narration of his inner experiences. The diary provides scant and limited information, which is sometimes censored by tearing out individual pages or even blocks. It does, however, reveal details about his relationships with partners to whom he was attached, those with whom he had casual encounters, and also those who most likely reported on him. Piesis was aware of the latter, experiencing fear, anxiety, and self-reproach, which often bordered on persecution mania.

When Piesis, on occasion, opened up about his sexuality, he did not deny it, but he did not openly express it either. Being in the "closet" depressed him, but in his diary entries, he never condemned or denied his sexuality. Piesis knew that his writings were being secretly read to uncover his political views and thoughts. Therefore, in some places, he openly employs irony and indirectly addresses the secret reader when more sensitive posts are published. Unlike Kaspars Aleksandrs Irbe (1906–1996), Piesis does not advocate for decriminalisation or

50 I have planned several publications on this, focusing on camp aesthetics and the resulting adaptations of literary works.

51 From 1940 to 1941 and from 1946 to 1991, the building located on the corner of Lenin (now Brīvības) and Friedrich Engels (now Stabu) Streets (the address now is 61 Brīvības Street) served as the headquarters of the USSR State Security Committee. Because of its location, people named it The Corner House. Today, the building serves as a part of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, where the exhibition "KGB in Latvia" takes place.

52 Cāne-Ķīle 2013.

normalisation of homosexuality in his diary.[53] Information about the discussions on the decriminalisation of homosexuality between 1965 and 1975 was not publicly available, therefore, neither Irbe nor Piesis were aware of this debate.[54] Piesis worries about his loneliness, not having a stable relationship, and about wasting his time and resources. Piesis was never caught in sexual activities and punished for them, which suggests, among other things, that his intimate life was very private. He is also not mentioned in Irbe's diary, which often records cultural figures. Since he lived with his mother in a communal apartment until her death, he likely hosted his partners in the summer cottage in Bigauņciems. We learn from Piesis's diary entry on 31 December 1968 that he celebrated the New Year's Eve alone at the summer cottage, expressing sadness that his partner did not visit.[55] He would socialise with other homosexuals from the art world in cafes and bars that were popular among intellectuals.[56] Only one recorded instance describes a date; it was with a 23-year-old man in the hotel "Rīdzene" in 1991 when Piesis was 60.[57]

Self-censorship in the diaries is manifested by his tearing out individual pages, using initials when writing about his partners, or not naming them. In two cases, the partners' names are known. They are Jānis from Strenči, also called Jancis or Janka,[58] and Aigars or A., which most likely was Liepāja Theatre actor Aigars Birznieks (Krupins).[59] The latter played the leading roles in Piesis's two films – "Your Son" (1978) and "Twists of Eras" (1981). Based on the diary entries, Piesis's partners have always been younger men. At the age of 38, he fell in love with Jānis, who was about 20 years his junior. The record mentions that the young man was drafted for compulsory military service.[60] Piesis, who was 47 years old at

53 Piesis's diary is not the only such source in which the discourse of homosexuality has been brought up. The discovery of the diary of Kaspars Aleksandar Irbe by the historian Ineta Lipša is an important turning point in researching the history of sexuality in the Soviet period. The diary covers the period from 1927 to 1996. Of course, this is only a factual coincidence, but Irbe and Piesis lived near each other – in Jūrmala and Bigauņciems. Both men passed away in 1996. Commenting and publishing Irbe's diary is an ongoing process, and of the planned four volumes, the first volume covering the period from 1927 to 1949 is currently available. See Irbe 2021; Lipša 2021, 415–442; Vērdiņš 2022, 315–317.

54 Alexander 2018, 30–52.

55 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 31.12.1968.

56 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 21.12.1983.

57 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 10442, 06.08.1991. In printed version: Piesis 2001, 108.

58 The person cannot be identified, but the diary entries, in which Piesis wrote about this partner are quoted in the article.

59 Aigars Birznieks, previously with the surname Krupins, later worked in Liepāja Theatre.

60 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 01.09.1964.

the time, cast Aigars in his movies when the latter was still a high school student. The relationship continued for at least three more years, during which Piesis lent Aigars a large sum of money for that time – 960 rubles.[61]

However, in his diary, Piesis did not pay much attention to short-lived casual connections unless they involved people he suspected of being informants for the KGB. Piesis often regrets his wasted time and blames himself for not being careful in detecting traitors earlier.[62] The incident at "Rīdzene" hotel reveals Piesis's attentiveness and paranoia. If his partner opens up too fast or starts prying, Piesis becomes anxious.[63]

When describing closeness and intimate relationships, Piesis used euphemisms, putting them in quotation marks, such as "fun". The terms "homosexuality" and "homosexual" are not used in his diary.

Still, little is known about Piesis's study years in Moscow from 1956 to 1961. The only document that has survived is his diary from 1959, which mainly contains reflections on the assignments that he had to complete for his studies. There might be some evidence of his friendships in the letters written to him in Russian, which still need to be studied.[64] Due to the lack of information about this period, it is unclear whether Piesis was aware of the Moscow cruising grounds and whether he visited them and met other men there.[65] It is worth noting that Piesis attempted to build a relationship with the above mentioned Jānis from Strenči upon his return to Riga in the early 1960s. He also reflected on his sexuality in his diary and with his girlfriend, Zinta. This suggests that he had gained some experience during his time away from Latvia.

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61 Birznieks's request for a loan for the first time was recorded on 04.08.1983. In the entry, Piesis lends the mentioned amount five days later. Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*, RKM 19015, 09.08.1983.

62 A striking example is the conversation with the two dancers of the national dance ensemble "Daile". Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 19015, 21.12.1983.

63 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 10442, 06.08.1991. In printed version Piesis 2001, 108.

64 I have separated the letters into a set of archival materials worthy of a separate publication to provide more information about Piesis's studies in Moscow.

65 Healey 2017, 99–100; Healey 2014, 90–108; Healey 1999, 38–60; Essig 1999, 87–89; Clech 2017, 91–110; Clech 2018, 6–29; Roldugina 2019, 16–31; Aripova 2020, 95–114; Schluter 2002, 89–94; Fiks 2013.

In the 1960s, Piesis was supposed to participate in the first Komsomol wedding[66] at Riga Film Studio. The bride was also from the Studio.[67] In any case, Piesis desires to establish a relationship with a woman, as throughout the diary he frequently worries about loneliness in old age. The diary entries of 1964 mention Zinta. It can be understood from the context that Piesis was open to her about his private life, including his relationship with Jānis from Strenči:

> With Zinta, we have known each other for a long time; [it] could be said that we are good friends. I am open with her; I do not bicker with her as I do with others. We have never quarrelled. I am more and more convinced that cohabitation [with her] is possible. She is a person who can understand everything and not blame one for his past, not even to mention other important and outstanding qualities in her – she is easygoing, sociable, and prudent! Only after everything that has happened and still is happening, will she agree [to marry me]? This time, only someone like her, who knows everything about me, can help me. Loneliness is unbearable even for Mum. She has longed for a close person for ages. The curse will be at least partially lifted. This is no longer bearable. Should I talk about everything today with the doctor? The important thing is that if I am healthy, everything will be fine. There are different ways that people can meet. This will be a rather dreadful way of dating, yet it is the only way we can get out of all this terrible endless monotony and loneliness. Taking care of [my] peace of mind and old age will begin. Public opinion? After all, think what you want, say what you want. And I think there may even be a child. (…) If you don't turn your lifestyle around by 180 [degrees], all of this can drag on, spiral down, and eventually lead to a miserable, terrible, slow death of a useless person.[68]

Piesis views this relationship as an opportunity to organise his life and have someone close to him who supports him in his profession. However, it is apparent

66 Komsomol wedding was an attempt made in the 1950s–1960s to introduce a Soviet tradition: wedding without the presence of an authorised minister of the Church and religious ceremony. It was a wedding ceremony organised by institutions, enterprises, factories, collective farms as well as trade union, Communist Party or Komsomol organisations for their most exemplary Komsomol members and workers. The celebration was sometimes attended by as many as two hundred guests. The respective institution or organisation covered all the costs and the newly-weds received a multitude of gifts that helped them to set up a new household.

67 Cāne-Ķīle 2013.

68 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 15.04.1964.

that he has internalised the medical discourse, and he perceives his sexuality as a curse that is difficult to bear and is affecting his health. Therefore, he thinks he should seek medical consultation with a doctor. He desires to change his life, but the exact opposite becomes a reality in his future. This destructive scenario intensifies his inner experiences and leads to even greater isolation from those around him. However, although the intended marriage does not occur, he continues maintaining good relations with Zinta, as evidenced by further diary entries.[69] Two years later, in July 1966, Piesis writes in his diary: "Janka dropped by. We have become very close without realising it. Without this friendship, everything would be unfathomably difficult."[70] In an entry dated 1 September, we learn, among other things, that "Janka is in 'exile' – [he has] a good internship, an adequate, furnished room. He can be drafted at any time."[71] Despite the distance and separation, their friendship lasted at least two more years since Piesis dedicated a long and open entry in his diary on New Year's Eve to their relationship.:

> The boy has exhausted [all opportunities] he could and is now moving to the next stage. Frustrating, yes, but in the end – it's consequentiality. To see a grumpy, unkept, overly concerned, considerably older person and having to deal with him, if, instead, you can have "fun" and everything else "frisky", as [actress] Ferda would say in Daile Theatre dance class. The boy is clever, rational, and knows how to become attached, but he also deftly shakes himself free. Everything else is left at the disposal of the "ridiculed". But the lad should have sensed that the defeaters and passers-by "swallow" it quickly, however, there was something genuine [between us]. It will remain a memory. Feelings are short lived, then indifference [sets in]. (…) Jancis also left in one of the most excruciating moments [of my life]. (The film has not been wrapped, and it will be difficult to finish [it] for various reasons; my head is splitting.) And to convince the boy that in life, just like in the army, you sometimes should visit [the other person] during difficult moments [in their lives]. Exactly at that very moment, the trip from Skrīveri to Riga appeared to be longer than the many previous roads. But that's just acknowledging facts. It would be ridiculous and unnecessary to blame the youth. Now for myself. Zinta laughs at [my] pessimism. But what exactly is that for a 38-year-old man?[72]

69 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, entries 25.07.1964 and 08.11.1968.

70 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 27.07.1964.

71 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 01.09.1964.

72 Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata.* RKM 20256, 31.12.1968.

Piesis admits that he is too proud to show his affection, but he does not hide that he had made preparations for celebration and welcome of a much-awaited guest, who never arrives. On New Year's Eve, his loneliness manifests more acutely as he reflects upon it in his diary from that moment on.[73] Significantly, Piesis describes his longing for intimacy in his diary just before he was given the opportunity to direct his second feature film, "In the Shadow of Death". This film became the highest achievement of his creative career, following his successful work in documentary filmmaking during the 1960s. In the film, homoerotic motives are also evident in the portrayal of the relationship between Karlēns – a sixteen-year-old boy, and Birkenbaums – a middle-aged married man.[74]

Conclusion

Gunārs Piesis's diary is a unique "ego document" that sheds light on his personality, revealing aspects that were unknown even to his closest colleagues. He wrote in notebooks and on separate pages, creating drafts for planned entries, often leaving out important details that were not included in his chronologically organised "intimate archive". Although this habit made it difficult for us to reconstruct the diary, it allowed the author to conceal certain events in his life. As seen from the torn-out pages in the diary volumes, Piesis reread and censored his writing, destroying several essential pieces of his private life. His intention was to meticulously document, review, and evaluate his personality, creating an image of himself as a sensitive, talented, and misunderstood person for the future reader. However, the diary reveals a far more complex picture than the author intended.

The diary confirms his colleagues' rumours about his homosexuality but lacks any reliable evidence since he was never caught in public places. Still, Piesis mentions some partners in the diary, naming those with whom he formed an emotional connection. The diary was where Piesis revealed his awareness of his homosexuality, although in a censored way. He wanted to leave a testimony about himself and, on the pages of the diary, did not hide his sexuality. The desire to be open coexists with wanting to remain silent, but his loneliness pushes him towards sharing more about himself. The terms "homosexual" and

73 "For a long time, but not until the end, one can endure a friendship while hiding." Piesis. *Dienasgrāmata*. RKM 20256, 01.01.1969.

74 It is worthwhile to quote a recollection from the painter Boris Bērziņš's memoirs that Piesis liked the actor Gunārs Cilinskis, who plays Birkenbaums in the film, during auditioning because of his dry, chapped lips (Sondore 2003, 16). I plan to analyse the film in a separate article.

"homosexuality" do not appear in his writings. Instead, Piesis used the euphemisms "friendship" and "fun" to describe his relations with men, leaving out further descriptions of contact.

An important discovery, evidenced throughout the diary, is Piesis's struggle with depression and, very likely, bipolar affective disorder, which even his closest friends and colleagues did not know about. These potential disorders could explain his mood swings and verbal attacks on his colleagues, who interpreted his behaviour as an expression of Piesis's explosive character rather than a mental disability. The symptoms of it were exacerbated by loneliness, repressed sexuality, and the oppressive political regime. Manic episodes reinforced his feelings of being controlled, restricted, and monitored, which resulted in isolation from the environment. This was particularly evident as of the early 1980s when Piesis experienced two creative failures. Along with the internalisation of medical discourse, certain character traits like ego-centeredness, self-love, pride, and ambition cannot be dismissed, as Piesis himself admitted in his diary. This affective background forms a complex and multidimensional portrait of the artist who lived and worked under communist ideology and repression.

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AKUMULĒJOT NEGATĪVOS AFEKTUS: PADOMJU LATVIJAS KINOREŽISORA GUNĀRA PIEŠA DIENASGRĀMATA

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Zinātniskās intereses: kvīru reprezentācija un maskulinitātes mūsdienu mākslā un padomju kino, stāstījuma teoriju vēsturiskā attīstība, rakstnieces Andras Neiburgas un režisora Gunāra Pieša arhīvu izpēte

Rakstā pirmoreiz analizēts Gunāra Pieša dienasgrāmatas korpuss pilnā apjomā, veicot pilnu dienasgrāmatas rekonstrukciju. Materiāls raksturots, apvienojot vēsturiskās un literatūrzinātniskās diskursīvās prakses. Rakstā apgalvots, ka dienasgrāmata sniedz jaunas zināšanas par Pieša garīgo veselību: cīņu ar depresiju un, iespējams, bipolāri afektīviem traucējumiem, kas līdz šim skaidrots kā neciešams raksturs, nevis invaliditāte (*disability*). Tāpat dienasgrāmata apstiprina baumas par Pieša homoseksualitāti, kuru viņš centies gan apspiest, gan emancipēt savā dzīvē. Raugoties plašāk, šī dienasgrāmata ir ne vien personīgās vēstures izziņas avots, bet arī laikmeta liecība, kurā nolasāmi padomju varas orgānu lietotie kontrolējošie un represīvie mehānismi, kas Pieša gadījumā ierobežoja gan viņa seksuālo dzīvi, gan māksliniecisko brīvību.

Atslēgas vārdi: Gunārs Piesis, dienasgrāmata, kvīru jūtīgums, homoseksualitāte, Latvijas kino vēsture

Kopsavilkums

Gunārs Piesis (1931–1996) visaktīvāk rakstījis laikā, kad viņam tika liegts strādāt pie spēlfilmām, atklājot gan šaubas par savu radošo darbību, gan alkas pēc atzinības un tuvības ar draugiem un intīmajiem partneriem. Dienasgrāmatu viņš galvenokārt izmanto sevis motivēšanai un terapijai vai jaunu mākslinieciskо ieceru fiksēšanai, mazāk – nepastarpinātai laikmeta dokumentēšanai. Pieša dienasgrāmata ir ne vien dokumentāla liecība, bet arī mākslinieciskās prakses izpausme, uzdodot jautājumus par kritikas ietekmi uz padomju skatītāja viedokli, grūtībām filmas izstrādes un ražošanas posmos, cilvēku savstarpējām attiecībām padomju kino industrijā, ko ietekmējuši ne vien politiskie apstākļi (par tiem Piesis ļauj dienasgrāmatas lasītājam noprast vien netiešā veidā), bet arī intrigas Rīgas kinostudijas iekšienē. Cita starpā tā parāda padomju subjekta pieredzes dažādību, kas nav skatāma vienkāršotā lojalitātes un disidentisma pretstatījumā.

Dienasgrāmata ir liecība pārdzīvojumiem, kas gadu gaitā pieņemas spēkā, dokumentējot Pieša personību, kas akumulē negatīvus afektus un emocionālos izvirdumus, kurus saasinājusi mākslinieciskās brīvības apspiešana un politiskās iekārtas radītās bailes. Tas veicina konfliktus ar kolēģiem, norobežošanos, pasivitāti un nespēju strādāt,

vajāšanas māniju un depresiju, kas piemeklē mūža nogalē, kā apliecina dienasgrāmatas ieraksti. Piesis, kuru laikabiedri raksturojuši kā neiecietīgu, histērisku un despotisku, visticamāk, sadzīvoja ar bipolāri afektīviem traucējumiem, īpaši tas manāms apjomīgākajā dienasgrāmatas sējumā, kas aptver laiku no 1981. līdz 1984. gadam.

Zīmīgi, ka līdz šim atrastajās Pieša dienasgrāmatās nav pārdomu par politiskajām pārmaiņām un vēsturiskajiem notikumiem Atmodas periodā, izņemot ikdienas dzīves realitāti, kas saistīta ar nabadzību un centieniem izdzīvot, pērkot un pārdodot antikvārus priekšmetus. Dažos ierakstos atklājas Pieša nojauta, ka viņa dienasgrāmatas lasa arī "uzraugi", varbūt tāpēc viņš nav rakstījis par jautājumiem, kas skar ideoloģiju un politiku.

Pieša homoseksualitāte, iespējams, ir viens no iemesliem, kāpēc kino vēsturniekiem Latvijā viņš ir bijis neērts. Viņa filmas nepadodas tradicionālām interpretācijām, ja tās neaplūko no kvīru teorijas pozīcijām, meklējot atslēgu estētikai, kas viņu tuvina citiem režisoriem – kvīriem Padomju Savienības telpā. Lai gan sniegtā informācija ir skopa un vietumis arī cenzēta, tā dod ieskatu attiecībās gan ar partneriem, kuriem viņš bija pieķēries, gan tiem, ar kuriem viņam bija gadījuma attiecības un kuri, visticamāk, par viņu ziņoja. Brīžos, kad Piesis atļāvās būt atklāts par savu seksualitāti, viņš to nenoliedza, taču neizvirzīja arī priekšplānā. Būšana "skapī" viņu nomāca un pastiprināja depresijas izpausmes, taču nevienā no dienasgrāmatas ierakstiem viņš savu seksualitāti nav nedz nosodījis, nedz noliedzis. Fakts, ka Piesis nekad nav pieķerts seksuāla rakstura darbībās un par tām sodīts, cita starpā liecina, ka viņa intīmā dzīve pamatā norisinājās privātā telpā. Publiskās vietas, kur viņš satika citus mākslas vides homoseksuāļus, bija intelektuāļu iecienītās kafejnīcas un bāri. Vienīgā epizode, kurā aprakstīts gadījuma rakstura sakars ārpus privātās telpas ar 23 gadus jaunu vīrieti viesnīcā "Rīdzene", ir fiksēta 1991. gadā, kad Piesim ir 60 gadi.

Gunāra Pieša dienasgrāmatas ir unikāls "ego dokuments", kurā atklājas viņa personība, kas nebija zināma viņa tuvākajiem kolēģiem. Savu dienasgrāmatu viņš rakstījis gan burtnīcā un kladēs, gan uz atsevišķām lapām, veidojot uzmetumus plānotiem ierakstiem, kas nereti nav iekļauti hronoloģiski organizētajā "intīmajā arhīvā". Šāds ieradums apgrūtināja dienasgrāmatas rekonstrukciju. Kā redzams no vietumis izplēstajām lapām dienasgrāmatas sējumos, Piesis to pārlasīja un cenzēja, iznīcinot vairākas būtiskas liecības par savu privāto dzīvi. Tas saistāms ar viņa ieceri iespējami rūpīgi dokumentēt, pārskatīt un izvērtēt savu personību, lai nākotnes lasītājam radītu priekšstatu par sevi kā jūtīgu, talantīgu un nesaprastu personību. Taču dienasgrāmata atklāj daudz sarežģītāku ainu par paša autora ieceri.

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LATVIJAS VĒSTURES
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TWO PETERS: QUEER DOMESTIC SPACE AND ARTIST’S SENSIBILITY IN SOVIET LATVIA

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The article focuses on the phenomenon of queer domesticity in Latvia in the 20th century, analysing evidence of a homosexual couple living together in a house they built in Rīga. Adapting to different political regimes, two men who met while working in the theatre could maintain their lives together for about twenty years. To do this, they had to use various adaptation tactics and subterfuge and create their own concept of family in their daily lives. Their subterfuge tactics have been so successful that their queerness and cohabitation are forgotten today. This case study adds to the knowledge of queerness during the Soviet era by highlighting the complex relationship between personal freedom and conformism concerning state power in the artistic environment.

Keywords: domesticity, theatre, LGBTQ+ history, Latvian history, housing

Introduction

In 1951, on a warm summer day, the prominent Latvian opera singer Milda Brehmane-Štengele (1893–1981) visited theatre director Pēteris Lūcis (1907–1991) and his life partner Pēteris Kaktiņš (1901–1958) in their house in Pārdaugava, the outskirts of the left bank of the Daugava river in Riga, for the first time. She later recalled this visit in her memoirs, including a detailed description of the party:

> I was taken to the house of Lūcis in 4 Slampes Street by our mutual acquaintance – dentist Marta Komisāre. Surprise after surprise awaited us there. Entering the garden gate, two men in white shirts suddenly

> came out on the path. Kneeling before us, they bowed like Orientals, touching the ground with their hands. I met two Peters there: Kaktiņš, the Tall one, and his neighbour Lūcis, the Little one. The welcoming ceremony was not over yet. We were served a beautiful plate with fruit decorated with roses. There was no shortage of fruits and flowers (grown by both Peters themselves) on the table, which was laid out in the garden under a large parasol. There was even electric lighting installed above the table. After some time, we were invited to the house in Lūcis's apartment, where the new bookshelf stood on the wall, covered with a white cloth. At its festive opening, we said words of appreciation and "washed down" our joy with wine and coffee.[1]

The description of such a party seems unusually idyllic for its time. Six years have passed since the end of the Second World War, two years since the large-scale deportation of Latvian farmers to Siberia in 1949.[2] The last years of the Stalin era were passing when the communist occupation government aggressively controlled the cultural sphere. According to Moscow's mandates, it regularly organised campaigns where scapegoats were sought out and condemned for deviating from the Communist Party's ideology. And perhaps most unusual is that Brehmane-Štengele visits a house built by two men to live there together.

The household of two gay men that lasted for almost twenty years is quite exceptional, given the sexual politics implemented by three authoritarian and totalitarian regimes that replaced one another in Latvia during that period. At the same time, it proves that such a lifestyle was available to a tiny minority of people and was possible only on specific terms. I argue that the queer household of the two Peters could only exist in Soviet Latvia if it were surrounded by silence and discretion about the true nature of their relationship. This discretion was achieved by specific ways of deception, namely making other people part of their household, both practically and symbolically, and disguising the relationship in the fundament of their cohabitation. As many pieces of evidence show, their secret was kept so well that it has disappeared from public memory and can be reestablished only through a knowing queer eye.

Silence, evasive hints, and frankness are the three modes of testimonies about the life of the two Peters. The key evidence is the biography of Pēteris Lūcis, written by the actress and theatre historian Austra Skudra (1926–2020), published in 1983. It contained a rather frank depiction of the love story of the gay couple,

1 Brehmane-Štengele 1986, 136–137.

2 *The deportations of 1941 and 1949*. (n.d.). Accessible at: https://militaryheritagetourism.info/en/military/topics/view/59 (viewed 18.10.2023).

of course, disguised under poetic sentences about their friendship and shared obsession with theatre. However, it is pretty straightforward when speaking about the emotional attachment between the two Peters and the great sense of loss Lūcis felt after the sudden and premature death of Kaktiņš. My interviews with Austra Skudra, theatre director Māra Ķimele, and Anita (to protect her privacy, I do not mention her surname), the current owner of the house, supplement the "official" biography of Lūcis, as well as published and unpublished memoirs by Milda Brehmane-Štengele, fan letters, and other writings. A new surge of interest in Lūcis's personal life emerged with the Valmiera theatre production "Lūcis" in 2017, staged by director Elīna Cērpa.[3] It made some more evasive hints about the relationship between the two Peters that the show reviewers discussed as a daring gesture or, on the contrary, as a weak attempt to talk about Lūcis's queerness.[4]

This article illuminates the concept of queer domesticity, as it has been developed by scholars of queer history over the last decade. Matt Cook, in his *Queer Domesticity*, defined home as "a place infused with desires – for love, sex, intimacy, relationships, for pleasure, for security and comfort". However, he pointed out that men in his case studies "often acted in private with the public in mind – even if what they had and did there was never observed by anyone else".[5] Antu Sorainen states, "The term queer domesticity refers to intimate LGBTQI+ arrangements of the activities, space, style, and finances of the home, as distinguished from kinship or family. The concept strictly concerns the setting up and administration of a household as opposed to the family structure."[6] Stephen Vider understands domesticity "as a flexible and ongoing act of social performance" when "through the everyday acts of creating, maintaining, and being at home, individuals make continuous claims to the control of space over time. They designate a space as their own, separate from the wider world, while defining simultaneously that space's insiders and outsiders".[7] In the centre of such definitions, we witness the complicated relationship between privacy and agency, on the one hand, and different inner and outer pressures, on the other.

The relationship between the two Peters began in the early 1930s, survived the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, the first year of Soviet occupation, Nazi Germany's occupation, the Stalin era, as well as the first years of Khrushchev's "thaw". All this time, male homosexuality was criminalised in the territory of

3 Adamaite 2017.
4 Radzobe 2017; Vējš 2018.
5 Cook 2014, 9–10.
6 Sorainen 2019, 1312.
7 Vider 2021, 7.

Latvia. Therefore, the longevity and relative openness of these relationships raise the question of how they were possible under such conditions. As the analysis of archival evidence shows, they faced similar challenges that queer couples on the other side of the Iron Curtain; however, in their own specific context.

Queer domesticity has become a subject of interest for several scholars. In contrast to the popular belief of gay life as a series of cruising, hook-ups, and casual sex, it is home life and a long-term relationship, as well as different partnership models, that is the focus of recent scholarship.[8] Steven Vider, writing about American queer domesticity in the decades after the Second World War, sums it up: "Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people did not simply reproduce or reject [heterosexual] ideals but rather elaborated new domestic styles and intimacies as a primary means of negotiating their relationship to postwar sexual and gender norms and the nation."[9] A prominent case study of queer domesticity in America is the love story of wealthy Robert Allerton and his younger lover John Gregg whom he adopted as his son after decades spent together. The couple held conservative views and never publicly acknowledged their queerness.[10] The case study of the two Peters shows how these models of intimacies were invented in various countries, including Latvia, under different regimes and periods of occupation.[11]

Chronicle of the mansion on Slampe Street

The relationship between the two Peters lasted from the beginning of the 1930s when they were young actors who had graduated from Latvian Drama Classes and met at the Farmers Drama Theatre to "become inseparable".[12] Both Peters

8 On casual gay sex in Soviet Latvia, see: Lipša 2021; Lipša 2022; Aripova 2020; Vērdiņš 2022.

9 Vider 2021, 3. Matt Cook has summarised several points about queer domesticity: (1) heterosexual normality as the ideal of all kinds of relationships (queer men's relationship has often been judged against that ideal, sometimes forgetting that heterosexuality can be very variable, too); (2) masculinity as a privilege that allows for greater independence and earning potential means that queer men were often more able to make their own way domestically; (3) eccentricity, Bohemianism, and exoticism associated with queer life; (4) woman's presence at queer men's home as helper and caretaker when it is necessary; (5) acting in private with the public in mind even when not observed by anybody else; (6) there is no queer monopoly on familial and domestic difference; no straight monopoly on conformity. Cook 2014, 6–18.

10 Syrett 2021.

11 On Soviet occupation and colonisation of the Baltic states, see: Annus 2018.

12 Skudra 1983, 77.

had common backgrounds and interests: they came from farmhand families and pursued their dream to be on the theatre stage.[13] However, their professional life took different paths. Kaktiņš, the older of the two Peters, received an actor's education but maintained a semi-professional status in the theatre. In the 1930s, he played in the Farmers Drama Theatre and other troupes, also serving as a manager. In the 1940s, during the Nazi occupation, he was involved in the travelling Stage Art Ensemble. However, he maintained his primary profession as a printer all this time. After the Second World War, he was the head of the zincography workshop of the Rīga Model Printing House until his retirement. It was different with Lūcis, who already started directing during his years at the Farmers Drama Theatre. After the Second World War, he first became a director at the Jelgava Drama Theatre, which was located in Rīga during the post-war period. After liquidation of this theatre, he became the director of Valmiera Drama Theatre in northern Latvia. Shortly before Kaktiņš's death, Lūcis was appointed the chief director of this theatre and kept the position throughout his long life until his death at the age of eighty-four, one month before the August Putsch in Moscow, which was followed by the restoration of Latvia's independence. Nowadays, Lūcis's fame is still lasting while Kaktiņš has wholly sunk into oblivion.[14]

The role which contributed to Lūcis's fame the most and made him a national star was his leading role in the movie "The Fisherman's Son" (*Zvejnieka dēls*) which was shot in 1939 and screened in overcrowded movie theatres in early 1940. Lūcis played the young fisherman Oskars, who rebels against the old order in his father's home, thinks about technological innovations in fishing, and eventually finds a wife, the beautiful Anita. Lūcis became a sex symbol of the generation that received much attention from women.[15] As Austra Skudra writes,

> Along Mārupe river, the ladies of Rīga paraded in droves. They came with small boats and boats under their arms, made of amber, carved from wood, and bent from the bark. The souvenir collection

13 On Lūcis's family in Jaunsvirlauka, see: Freimanis et al. 2003.

14 For short biographies of Kaktiņš and Lūcis see: Niedra 2002, 25, 313–315.

15 Part of the letters written by women admirers to Lūcis is collected at the Museum of Literature and Music. For example, young Rita and Ilona in Liepāja wrote to Lūcis on 8 May 1940, after his guest performance at Liepāja Theatre: "Your handsomeness has bewitched very many girls in Liepāja who already plan to chase you. We also start to be interested in you because we have not seen a more handsome man in Liepāja who could bewitch us with his handsomeness like you. (...) Actually, we ought to be watching the whole show, but all we saw was you. Every lover suffers from jealousy, and we are not an exception. Just one night at the theatre has made us martyrs. Because all you cared about was [actress] Marianna Zīle, and we envy her since." Rita and Ilona 1940.

> of the house stored a whole history of shipping. Under the windows of Slampe Street, serenades were sung even by famous voices.[16]

This attention did not seem to change the relationship between the two Peters. Unlike the homosexual Hollywood movie star Rock Hudson, Lūcis did not marry any woman to hide his queerness. The character of Oscar accompanied Lūcis for many years: he has played it in several theatre productions, as well as staged a dramatisation of this novel by Vilis Lācis in the theatre several times. Ironically, the generous fee he received for this movie role, the representation of the heterosexual fisherman's son, soon became the financial fundament of the home of the two Peters.

Around 1939, both Peters decided to exchange their furnished room for a house. They put Lūcis's fee to good use and took a loan from the bank, which they later paid back over a long time. The house was built quickly, and both moved in with Lūcis's elderly father, who spent there his old age. The house on 4 Slampes Street was situated on the southern border of Riga City by the little Mārupe river. Kaktiņš was the practical side of the couple and had some knowledge of architecture, house building, and law. Legally, he was the one registered as responsible for the construction work: as the municipality magazine *Pašvaldību Darbinieks* (Municipalities' Employee) informed in July 1939, he was building "a two-story house, a one-story outbuilding, and a fence".[17] The completed two-story house consisted of two apartments connected by the staircase inside the house. Such an arrangement allowed for free moving between the two flats that neighbours and passers-by could not observe. Two Peters started to share one building that officially counted as a two-apartment house with two independent owners and simultaneously served as their private mansion. Such a cohabitation model proved successful and lasted for almost twenty years.

The closest friends of the two Peters obviously treated them as a couple. When Milda Brehmane-Štengele first visited the house in 1951 to celebrate the arrival of the new bookshelf, she was invited to the upper-floor apartment owned by Lūcis. In her published memoirs, the two Peters are called "neighbours", while in a takeout passage stored by the Literature and Music Museum, she offers a more detailed characterisation of their relationship:

> Everything in life is balanced: day and night, good and evil, black and white, light and dark, etc. That's why two Peters have met: the tall

16 Skudra 1983, 80.

17 Būvju valde 1939, 666.

> one and the small one. I got to know both of them simultaneously, but the tall one died soon. He was the main gardener, the grower of vegetables and flowers. Lūcis is more of a consumer and a good cook. So, little by little, we started visiting, making friends, and attending the Valmiera Theatre's opening performances.[18]

Interpreting the two Peters as each other's *yin* and *yang*, the singer gives their relationship an almost mystical tone, which indicates the solid and long-lasting affection, clearly the love of their lives. She also touches on their shared domestic life, including gardening, cooking, and throwing parties for friends. In 1952, Lūcis started his collaboration with Valmiera Theatre and had to divide his time between Riga and Valmiera, where he eventually was given a small apartment and where Kaktiņš, Brehmane-Štengele, and other friends visited him for premieres. Kaktiņš continued his work at the Model Printing House of Riga as the head of the zincography workshop and, in 1947, was awarded an honorary letter from the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Soviet Latvia (LPSR AP 1947). Unfortunately, this work contributed to his untimely death in 1958 when he was already retired: zinc dust gradually ate away at his lungs.[19] In Lūcis's biography, love between the two Peters manifests most profoundly in the pages dedicated to Kaktiņš's death and its consequences on Lūcis's personality.

Austra Skudra, Lūcis's biographer, was a beginning actress at Valmiera Theatre who often visited 4 Slampes Street in the 1950s. She worked on her roles with Lūcis and treated the couple's dog, Hertans, with some sausage. The dog had joined their household as a premiere present from the actors of Valmiera Theatre in 1952. Skudra witnessed the affection between the two Peters, who, as she remembered in 2015, were "always walking hand in hand" and who treated her as their "stepdaughter". Another person, important to their chosen family, was Marija Trautiņa, a widowed woman who lived nearby and who became Lūcis's close friend. She helped him out with "women's chores" around the house. As Skudra points out, Lūcis's obsession with theatre and faith in himself as an actor and director was what differed him from Kaktiņš, who believed in himself much less and, over the years, gradually estranged himself from active participation in the theatre. However, Kaktiņš served as an advisor and critical voice when Lūcis worked on his productions.[20] When Pēteris Kaktiņš suddenly died on 2 April 1958, Lūcis was devastated and sunk into depression for a long

18 Brehmane-Štengele 1980, 1.
19 Skudra 1983, 114.
20 Ibid.

time. As Skudra remembered in 2015, "It was extremely tragic for Lūcis when Kaktiņš died. After Kaktiņš's death, I looked at him and thought: he was going to commit suicide. But he buried himself into his work." As she recalled, Lūcis brought to his partner's grave all the flowers he got after the opening performances of his productions. Lūcis remained single for the rest of his life, and the house on Slampes Street gradually turned into a museum full of memorabilia from the happy days together and presents from his many admirers. He spent more and more time in his small apartment in Valmiera, visiting Rīga about once a month and staying longer at 4 Slampes Street during the guest performances of Valmiera Theatre. After he died in 1991, Lūcis was buried in Meža Cemetery in Rīga next to Kaktiņš, enjoying the privilege of having a grave beside his partner, an opportunity that not all homosexual couples had. In the summer, when thick myrtles grow on both graves, their shoots connect, so it seems that both Peters are buried in a common grave.

In 1964, the ground floor apartment that had belonged to Kaktiņš was sold by his heirs to a Latvian family who moved in with their four-year-old daughter Anita. She shared her name with the beloved girl of Oskars, Lūcis's famous movie hero, like many girls of her generation. The family invested in the building's amenities, enlarged the ground-floor apartment, and covered the outer walls with plaster.[21] In the interview in 2023, Anita recalled the particular design and furniture of Lūcis's apartment, including his memorable writing desk and portrait on the wall where Lūcis looked much more severe than in real life. When Lūcis died, his apartment on the second floor was inherited by Irēna Trautiņa, the daughter of Lūcis's friend Marija, who had passed away some years before the director. Irēna kept Lūcis's memorabilia in the apartment untouched till her death in 2018. After her death, her heirs cleared the apartment of Lūcis's things, took his collection of poetry books to second-hand bookshops, and moved in. Now both flats are owned by Anita's family: she lives on the ground floor while her son Kristaps renovates the upper-floor apartment. Lūcis's piano, the last piece of memorabilia, was given as a present to Valmiera Theatre in 2023. The house of

21 A private house on Slampes Street offered higher living standards than the big complexes of apartment houses built in several neighbourhoods of Rīga City during the period. As Jānis Matvejs points out, "Most large-scale panel housing microrayons in Rīga were built from the end of the 1950s to the late 1980s and were located in the suburbs. Nearly 485,000 people were settled in the housing estates of Rīga created during the Soviet era. In 35 years, 13 residential areas were built. Most importantly, it was a utilitarian living space that provided people with flats but offered minimal comfort and did not take architectural aesthetics much into account." Matvejs 2022, 85.

the two Peters has changed over time; the premises have been enlarged and made more comfortable, and its current inhabitants keep in their memory the idealised the image of Lūcis and, to a lesser extent, also Kaktiņš whom Anita classified as Lūcis's cousin.

The only visible testimony of the era of two Peters is a painting on the staircase wall, a landscape in brown and green colours with a huge oak tree, a birch grove, and a river beyond them. Two small figures are seen in Latvian national costumes at the oak tree: a man and a woman. The painting seems to be a work by a stage painter because it reminds of the painted set decorations that dominated stage design before more contemporary aesthetics took over. Many other gay male couples in history decorated their homes with homoerotic pictures.[22] The two Peters, on the contrary, decided to have on their staircase wall a painting that fully conforms to the Latvian nationalist dream of a heterosexual couple that lives close to nature and, as the painting implies, follows the paganic world order with rituals in the sacred groves and honouring the giant oak trees. Whenever the two Peters visited each other's apartment, they had to go past the painting that seems to have served as a disguise for the true passions and desires of the house's builders. Now it serves as the last evidence of the aesthetic sensibility that dwelled in the house in its most happy years and could exist only as an open secret.

The two-apartment house of the two Peters embodies queer domesticity, analysed by Matt Cook, especially of the British artist couple Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts, whose homes were "not oriented towards the procreative family but rather to a cultural legacy and the nurturing of collectors and artists who were usually male and often queer".[23] Preserving of that legacy was taking place in Latvia, where socialist rules were established after the Second World War. While queer couples in capitalist countries of Western Europe could keep servants, secretaries, and other paid workers under their roof, this was not an option for households in Soviet Latvia. The people living under the same roof were conceptualised as one family, and kinship ties were invented to justify the existence of such a household. The two Peters became two "cousins" or at least "neighbours" while Austra was proclaimed their "stepdaughter". The function of the apartment as an artistic place for accumulating material evidence of one's career became even more prominent in Lūcis's life after Kaktiņš's death.

22 See, for example: Vider 2021, 19.

23 Cook 2014, 51.

Queer sensibility vs. nationalism of the colonised western borderstate

The second section of the article is dedicated to the afterlife of the love story of the two Peters, or Lūcis's life as a single man after Kaktiņš's death. This period lasted from 1958 to 1991, when Lūcis was the chief director of Valmiera Theatre and mainly lived in his small apartment in Valmiera, surrounded by his actors, colleagues, and audience. There is no evidence of another Lūcis's love relationship or affair in that period. When Kaktiņš died, Lūcis was a man in his fifties who buried himself in his work and purposely affiliated himself with morality and dedication to the ideals of art. His portrayal of 1972 said: "Pēteris Lūcis works with every smallest part of his being: everything in him is work, and he himself is a full dedication work personified. There is nothing private or personal that could distract him from work and that he would prioritise above work."[24] Lūcis created his public image as the kind and emotional artist who was always among people; he could joke and recite poetry and never actually talk about his feelings.

The main and the most visible element of Lūcis's public persona was himself as the symbol of the past – the good old days of the Republic of Latvia. It was expressed by the ethnographic tie he always wore, the choice of plays he enjoyed to stage (besides the mandatory plays of the Soviet playwrights he had to produce as the chief director of the theatre), his "archaic" directing style, based on actors and their pedantic delivery of text, and his fame as Oskars from "Fisherman's Son". Being such a symbol was obviously a political statement that implied silent resistance to the aesthetics of socialist realism and the robust style of the politically oriented mainstream of Soviet theatre.[25]

Another feature of Lūcis's personality was his performative behaviour, characteristic of both his professional life and leisure time. Some people who professionally collaborated with Lūcis remember his public persona as artificial. For example, theatre critic Silvija Radzobe remembered: "When meeting with the director on several occasions, one could not help but notice that his jokes and sayings (such as "Nothing is so good that it cannot be made even better" or "My dear, my golden one, my only one") repeat often and, most likely, we see not the true face of this person, but a carefully elaborated mask."[26] We can easily speculate that Lūcis needed to create this masked persona as a defence mechanism

24 Skudra, Ferbers 1972, 140.

25 On resistance to the official culture of Soviet Latvia, see Svede, Vērdiņš 2023.

26 Radzobe 2017. A similar opinion on Lūcis's personality was held by Latvian movie director Oļģerts Dunkers, who, in the process of making a documentary about Lūcis in 1981, had to provoke him to throw off his "mask" and open to sincere conversation. As he revealed in his memoirs, they gradually became closer, and

to protect himself from the scrutiny of his personality, sexuality, loyalty, or artistic practices.

However, the memoirs of Milda Brehmane-Štengele interpret Lūcis as somebody who could act continuously and had made acting his usual way of communication in his private life as well.[27] She shared her impressions of what Lūcis's regular private conversations would look like:

> When Pēteris Lūcis arrives in my apartment, it is always an original theatre production. (...) He stops when he enters and asks loudly: "Don't you see who has come?" (It's a line from a play.) Serious conversations don't start right away. First, he utters various interesting and amusing lines; sometimes, he sits down at the piano and plays and sings Schubert's melodies from *Die schöne Müllerin*. (...) He is surprised when I object to him. After a moment of silence, he puts his hands together and calmly says: "I don't understand why you hate me." (Again, a line from a play.) Smirking slyly to himself, he finishes: "I can't say a single bad word about myself." (Also from a play.) (...) When I enthusiastically praised him, he became shy and let loose his devil of humour: "You see! You're out of words!" (Again, a line from a play.)[28]

Judging by the singer's memoirs, Lūcis could communicate using only quotes from the plays he had worked with as an actor or director. In 1964, Susan Sontag conceptualised such behaviour as "camp" in her famous essay. As she put it, "Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman". To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. In sensibility, it is the farthest extension of the metaphor of life as theatre."[29] As I suggest, camp can serve as a tool to gain insight into Lūcis's public and private persona as well as his apartments in Rīga and Valmiera. In photographs and memoirs, his flats are remembered as stuffed with poetry collections, artworks, knitted mittens in different colours and other memorabilia. Over time, they gradually turned into his memorial museums while

Lūcis talked about his love life. However, Dunkers kept this sensitive information to himself after Lūcis's death. See: Dunkers 1997.

27 In another passage, omitted from her memoirs that were published after her death, Brehmane-Štengele emphasises Lūcis's practical side: "What else can I say about little Peter? He knows how to manage: to bake, cook, brew juices, make cakes, and how to hoe the land. He has a big garden, lots of apple trees and apples. He will never get lost – he is warmly welcomed everywhere." Brehmane-Štengele 1980, 2.

28 Brehmane-Štengele 1986, 137.

29 Sontag 1966, 280.

he was still alive. The specific situation he lived in – as a chief theatre director of a provincial theatre in occupied Latvia – created his style that combined representations of camp similar to what Sontag associated with Western culture with Latvian ethnographic imagery and multilayered references to the past. This sincerely curated environment served as a dream space for reminiscing about the golden age of the pre-Soviet period.

The contemporary debates about queer temporality are usually based on Western case studies and life in capitalism under conditions of democracy that can be understood as a slow progress towards tolerance, visibility, recognition and respect. As José Esteban Muñoz argued in Cruising Utopia, "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."[30] Under the Soviet occupation, queer individuals nurtured utopian hopes for a better future, which included the decriminalisation of male homosexuality and recognition of queer sexuality. These hopes overlapped with nostalgia for the interwar period of the Republic of Latvia, also felt by the majority of the population, and the potential of the future restoration of state independence. Thus, nationalism with its expressions, allowed by the Soviet authorities (such as glorifying the artefacts of the past, including handicrafts, ethnographic objects, literary works, and artworks etc.) became the language for queer persons to talk about their private melancholic feelings. Lūcis effectively used this language while exploiting his status as an artist and celebrity who had built his career on sentiments felt by a large part of his audiences.

Artistic circles in urban metropolises were considered to be relatively accepting spaces for queers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In New York City, Broadway theatres, Carnegie Hall, and Metropolitan Opera were among the few places where gay people could pursue their artistic careers.[31] In the capital of the USSR, according to Dan Healey,

> The important locus of Moscow's male homosexual subculture was the art world. Homosexuals believed with some justification that they were tolerated there, and they gravitated toward music, drama, dance, the visual arts, and allied professions. (...) Mosfilm Studios, the Moscow Conservatory of Music, and Moscow State University were scenes of at least one sodomy scandal each in the 1950s through 1970s. Such scandals were normally hushed up, and archival access to criminal records on them remains blocked.[32]

30 Muñoz 2009, 1.

31 Albrecht, Vider 2016, 108.

32 Healey 1999, 55–56.

To a certain degree, the same could be said about Riga and its art scene, as well as the theatre world of Soviet Latvia in general, where public outings of queers rarely occurred. The Soviet authorities were interested in submissive and supportive artists who did not get involved in conflicts with the Communist Party's vision of the development of the Soviet republics. Therefore, in the eyes of the authorities, Lūcis, who had become a member of the Communist Party in 1958,[33] fulfilled the task of preserving the ideological and artistic status quo in his theatre, while in the eyes of a large part of the public, his national stance and sentimental understanding of art reminded of the "good old" days.

Both kinds of expectations could be fulfilled only by an artist with impeccable behaviour. Lūcis conformed to such a type of artist, carefully controlling his behaviour even among his colleagues. As Skudra remembered in 2015, Lūcis in Valmiera Theatre enjoyed respect and authority as well as kept open his small apartment to sporadic bohemian gatherings that sometimes could last all night. His physical endurance allowed him to party till early morning and never miss a rehearsal the next day. However, there is no evidence (or even rumour) of his love life or affairs after Kaktiņš's death.

What was the relationship between Lūcis's queer sensibility and his work in theatre? Unlike the canon of camp aesthetics described by Sontag, which often included undisguised sensuality and balanced on the border of bad taste, Lūcis's aesthetic principles, formed by the traditions of Latvian theatre, were characterised by sentimentality and a certain puritanism. Soviet officials did not tolerate exposures of eroticism and sexuality in art, and Lūcis's taste conformed to them. In 2015, Skudra recalled how she had to play a Hella Wuolijoki's heroine who was having a love affair and had just spent a night with her lover. According to Lūcis's demands, they both were fully dressed in their next morning scene and showed no signs of physical desire sitting on a neatly made bed. When Lūcis staged "Fisherman's Son" in Valmiera Theatre in 1963, a critic pointed out that the interpretation of Anita's character was unusual because she was more of a friend and companion to Oskars than a lover. Such a treatment of the relationship between a man and a woman was seen as characteristic of Lūcis's productions.[34] In his obituary, the critic Gunārs Treimanis interpreted this style as Lūcis's desire "to protect art from dirt, mud, and perversion".[35] There could be several reasons why

33 LPE 1985, 258.

34 Skudra, Ferbers 1972, 143.

35 Treimanis 1991, 2. Homosexuality became an object of public discourse in Soviet Latvia around 1987 when articles on gays and lesbians appeared in periodicals. In the early 1990s, queer characters started to appear in Latvian fiction. See: Vērdiņš, Ozoliņš 2019; Vērdiņš, Ozoliņš 2020.

Lūcis imposed such limitations on the characters of his productions, including his shyness, dated ideals of morals and good taste, and unwillingness to associate his name with anything that Soviet critics and officials might label as sexual promiscuity.

As director Māra Ķimele acknowledged in 2022, Lūcis was more easily controllable than his younger and more rebellious colleagues in Valmiera Theatre, Oļģerts Kroders and herself, because he, like other homosexuals in the USSR, had to live in constant fear because of his sexuality. His fear could have been influenced by the fact that in Soviet Latvia, homosexual relations between men were punished according to Article 124 of the Criminal Code, which provided for a prison sentence of up to five years both for consensual sex and for sexual assault. Between 1961 and 1991, 272 men were convicted of homosexual relations in Soviet Latvia.[36] In such conditions, self-censorship and a certain conformism with the Soviet authorities created the possibility of survival, avoiding public scandals, disgrace or imprisonment.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the history of the relationship between the two Peters, it was influenced by the opportunities that opened up for them while living in Latvia under different political regimes unfavourable to same-sex relationships. Closely involved with family, friends, and professional contacts, they shaped their relationships to create a network that supported and helped them or did not hinder them. As Matt Cook wrote,

> (…) the way these various men made home was as much about the street or area where they lived, about their proximity to or distance from friends and family, about the money they had and the jobs they did, about their understandings of identity, about their relationship status, health, age and much more besides. It was about their queerness in as much as it affected (and was affected by) each of these things, but that queerness in itself was not necessarily the decisive factor in the way they organized and made their homes and felt themselves to be 'at home'.[37]

In the case of the two Peters, they hid their domestic life and relationship very well beneath the labels of "friends", "neighbours", "cousins", or "soulmates".

36 Aripova 2020, 111.

37 Cook 2014, 5–6.

The only way their relationship could last was to make it as obscure as possible. However, Lūcis's biography, other publications and archival materials encourage one to read between the lines and feel the emotional power of their relationship and the depth of Lūcis's pain and despair after his partner's death.

As it seems, the surviving strategies of the two Peters with their blending-in policy have been successful. The true nature of their relationship has sunk into oblivion even among the people who call themselves their neighbours and can claim the authentic experience of knowing Pēteris Lūcis.[38] Paradoxically, it has to be some outsider, a queer historian, who should disrupt this comfortable but distorted understanding of who Lūcis was and alter his image as the symbol of the past and the symbolic "father of the nation" to make it more friendly to queerness. The relationship between the two Peters in the conditions of various political systems unfavourable to sexual diversity serves as an unusual example in Latvian queer history, where there is very little detailed evidence of long-term domestic life.

Until recently, Lūcis's homosexuality and relationship with Kaktiņš were an "open secret", which was well known to Latvian theatre people, but it was not acceptable to talk about it openly. Such a policy of silence was characteristic of Latvian society and largely determines the attitude towards the LGBT+ community even today. The silence surrounding Latvia's queer history cannot be explained solely by homophobia or ignorance. This silence is maintained both by the members of the LGBT+ community themselves and by their families, friends, and colleagues. This double-walled silence should protect vulnerable community members in a context where much of society is perceived as homophobic. Generations have lived under the conditions of criminalisation of homosexuality and are used to perceiving such identity as something to hide. They continue this policy even today and teach it to younger generations. At the same time, this silence distorts the perception of Latvia's history, allowing it to be portrayed as exclusively heterosexual.

38 As Eviatar Zerubavel has argued, "the proverbial closet often surrounding homosexuality is remarkably similar both structurally and functionally. Fundamentally double-walled, it is essentially "a collaborative construction of gay and straight" built by both of them together. After all, contrary to common belief, it is "not just a shield (...) that prevents those outside it from hearing", as it also "prevents those [inside] it from speaking". Zerubavel 2006, 50–51.

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DIVI PĒTERI: KVĪRU MĀJAS DZĪVES TELPA UN MĀKSLINIEKA SENSIBILITĀTE PADOMJU LATVIJĀ

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Zinātniskās intereses: Baltijas literatūra, kultūras studijas, kvīru studijas, modernisms

Raksts fokusējas uz kvīru mājas dzīves fenomena izpēti Latvijā 20. gadsimta vidū, tajā analizētas liecības par homoseksuāla pāra kopdzīvi mājā, kuru abi partneri uzcēla Rīgā. Šī kopdzīve pastāvēja autoritārisma, totalitārisma un kara apstākļos, kad homoseksuāli sakari vīriešu starpā bija krimināli sodāmi. Adaptējot savas radošās un ikdienas prakses dažādos politiskajos režīmos, divi teātra darbinieki bija spējīgi saglabāt savas attiecības gadu desmitiem, izveidojot savu mājas dzīves modeli, kurā bez viņiem bija iesaistītas arī citas personas, kas veidoja simboliskas ģimenes attiecības. Kad viens no partneriem pāragri nomirst, otra dzīve vienatnē turpinās vēl vairāk nekā trīs gadu desmitus, un viņa mājas arvien vairāk kļūst par muzeju, kurā saglabāti priekšmeti, kas liecina par iepriekšējā periodā piedzīvoto.

Atslēgas vārdi: mājas dzīve, teātris, LGBT+ vēsture, Latvijas vēsture, mājoklis

Kopsavilkums

Kvīru mājas dzīve (*queer domesticity*) ir koncepts, kas attiecas uz kvīru dzīves organizēšanu mājsaimniecībās un kuru savā monogrāfijā *“Queer Domesticities”* (2014) attīstījis britu profesors Mets Kuks (*Matt Cook*). Rakstā analizētas liecības par latviešu aktiera un režisora Pētera Lūča (1907–1991) un viņa dzīvesbiedra – aktiera un tipogrāfijas darbinieka Pētera Kaktiņa (1901–1958) attiecībām. Tās ilga no 20. gadsimta 30. gadu sākuma līdz Kaktiņa pāragrajai nāvei. Šajā periodā abi Pēteri uzcēla māju Rīgā, Slampes ielā, kuras plānojums kalpoja viņu kvīrajai mājas dzīvei, taču formāli tika iegrāmatots kā divi atsevišķi dzīvokļi, kas piederēja to saimniekiem, neprecētiem vīriešiem. Abu Pēteru mājsaimniecībā bija klātesoši arī citi cilvēki, kas palīdzēja to uzturēt, kā arī noklusēt viņu attiecību patieso raksturu, dēvējot Pēterus par kaimiņiem, brālēniem vai arī ar teātra mākslu apsēstiem draugiem un domubiedriem. Lai ilgstoši varētu uzturēt savas attiecības laikā, kad politiskie režīmi īstenoja homofobisku politiku, abiem Pēteriem nācās izmantot pielāgošanās taktiku. Viņi izvairījās no publiskiem skandāliem, nebija iesaistīti Rīgas homoseksuāļu subkultūras piekoptajās krūzinga praksēs, nerunāja par savu seksualitāti savās darba vietās, kā arī profesionālajā darbībā nenonāca pretrunā ar attiecīgā laikmeta izvirzītajām prasībām. Lūcis savos iestudējumos tiecās izvairīties no lugu varoņu seksualizācijas, ievēroja pieticību un mērenību mīlas pāru attēlojumā uz

skatuves, neļaudams varoņiem pārāk kaislīgus tuvības skatus. Viņa galvenā režisora amats Valmieras Drāmas teātrī pieprasīja arī regulāras nodevas padomju varas prasībām, piemēram, mazvērtīgu padomju autoru lugu iestudējumus. Tajā pašā laikā Lūcis ar savu nacionālo stāju un filmā "Zvejnieka dēls" (1940) iegūto slavu padomju laika skatītājiem kalpoja par vienu no neatkarīgās Latvijas simboliem, kura mājās Rīgā un Valmierā krājās daudzie apsveikumi un dāvanas no viņa talanta cienītājiem. Viņa dzīvokļi pamazām pārvērtās par piemiņas lietu kolekciju glabātavu, kurā katrs priekšmets saistījās ar atmiņām par pagātni un tajā sastaptajiem cilvēkiem. Šī gadījuma izpēte papildina zināšanas par kvīru seksualitāti padomju laikā, izceļot teātra mākslas vides sarežģītās attiecības starp personas brīvību un konformismu attiecībās ar valsts varu, kā arī atklāj netipisku gadījumu, kad politisko varu maiņas laikā un staļinisma periodā Latvijā bija iespējama kvīru mājsaimniecības pastāvēšana.

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LATVIJAS VĒSTURES
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LESBIAN LIVES IN SOVIET LATVIA: THE NARRATIVES

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This article employs narrative analysis to examine three testimonies provided by individuals who were contemporaries of lesbians in Soviet Latvia. The author's research is based on two oral history interviews and the diary entries of a homosexual man, dating between the 1950s and 1980s. The research was carried out in four stages: (1) story analysis; (2) identification of main topics and characters; (3) identification of main terms and tone; and (4) extraction of three key narratives. The findings demonstrate, firstly, the lack of terminology to describe homosexual/non-heterosexual relationships between women when referencing the Soviet time. This indicates that contemporary terms used by the LGBTQI+ community may not be valid for analysing the experiences of non-heterosexual people in Soviet Latvia. Secondly, the testimonies described in this article view same-sex women's relationships through heteronormative lens as deviating from the norm. Thirdly, the article highlights how rigid expectations of "manly" and "womanly" behaviour and traits are used to judge compliance with or deviation from societal norms. The understanding of non-heterosexual relationships between women, as evidenced by the sources, cannot be standardised. While the testimonies reference non-heterosexual relationships between women, they also mention same-sex relationships, which may have formed due to socioeconomic conditions and different intimate bonds.

Keywords: oral history, narratives, lesbians, Soviet Latvia, same-sex sexuality

Introduction

In the Baltic states, lesbians' lives were deeply influenced by what sociologist Franceska Stella referred to as "the Soviet gender order". Women's lives were

shaped by the standard of "working mother contract" and "monogamous heterosexuality harnessed to the reproductive needs of the socialist state".[1] This article aims to explore the lives of lesbians in Soviet Latvia. It will do so by analysing the narratives about homosexual women through the eyes of their contemporaries. Prior to this article, only one source had been published, which was journalist Rita Ruduša's project. Between 2010 and 2012, Ruduša interviewed homosexuals who had experienced Soviet times in Latvia. The life stories based on interviews include the testimony of one lesbian, Signe, on her experiences from the 1990s. Another self-identified lesbian, Līga, declined the publication of her life story due to fears of being recognised, and therefore, only a few paragraphs containing Ruduša's impression are available.[2] Whereas Ruduša's book provides no knowledge of the lives of lesbians' lives in Soviet-day Latvia.

By relying on two interviews and diary entries of a homosexual man, dated between the 1950 and 1980s, as well as an extensive historiography analysis, the article presents three narratives on women's homosexuality in Soviet Latvia. All three sources used in the article were contemporaries of homosexual women. Only the author of the diary, Kaspars Aleksandrs Irbe (1906–1996), was practicing queer sexuality. This fact also highlights a shortcoming of the article and leaves room for future research. At the same time, the recent publication of a scholar of gender studies Rebeka Põldsam's doctoral dissertation on the history of discourses on non-normative sex-gender subjects in Estonia explains that she "managed to talk to women who had same-sex relationships only in the 1990s", however, her interlocutors "did not know any living women who had had homosexual relationships earlier and who would agree to speak to me".[3]

The article does not intend to reconstruct things "such as they happened", and due to the limited sources used for this research, it would not be possible. However, it does observe specific traces of information[4] to form a subjective understanding of same-sex relationships and desires between women, as well as the identity markers and character traits attributed to homosexual women. It also examines the appearance and visibility of such women in public spaces in Soviet Latvia. By critically examining the sources, the article only begins to explore narrative possibilities on lesbian lives in Soviet Latvia, leaving ample room for further inquiry.

1 Stella 2015, 19.
2 Ruduša 2014, 97.
3 Põldsam 2023, 46.
4 Ricoeur 1965, 23.

State-of-art research on lesbians who experienced socialism

Historiography was the catalyst that propelled me to inquire how same-sex relationships were perceived in Soviet Latvia. Stella's academic work, which I read first, inspired this article. Her work on lesbian lives in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia shows how two simultaneous forces discriminated against homosexuality. The first one is what she calls "the Soviet gender order".[5] State control over economic resources emphasised the inherent connection between sexuality, reproduction, and the traditional nuclear family. This allowed the government to exert control over the intimate lives of its citizens.[6] The second, equally important force was the families themselves reinforcing women's gender roles to fulfil the "natural calling", which was considered the most important contribution of any woman to society.[7] The consequence of such an order is summarised by the scholar of gender studies Tuula Juvonen, who writes about Finnish homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s in Tampere. She writes that men could separate between the spheres of life and move between them freely, creating space for alternative sexual encounters. However, "women, for whom home, work, and leisure often fell together, were most of the time much more intensely socially monitored".[8] It is evident that women in such circumstances may have concealed their true desires and lived outwardly heterosexual lives, only hinting at their same-sex desires through the traces of information they have left for future generations.[9] As shown by Põldsam and Arumetsa in the case of Estonia, the emancipation of LGBTQ+ people became possible gradually after the regaining of independence – even if the national political elites dismissed the minorities as they were not falling comfortably with the nation building project.[10] Ruduša made similar observations in the case of post-Soviet Latvia, saying that the Latvian society reacted to the first Pride in Latvia in March 2005 "in the classic spirit of the old Criminal Code[11] and Dr. Zālītis".[12]

At the same time, I have come across more accounts highlighting the impact of state socialism on the lives of lesbians. For instance, historian Věra Sokolová

5 Stella 2015, 19.

6 Ibid., 33.

7 Ibid., 31–32.

8 Juvonen 2006, 64.

9 Taavetti 2019, 205.

10 Põldsam, Arumetsa 2023.

11 The 1961 Criminal Code of the Latvian SSR imposed on a man guilty of male same-sex intercourse imprisonment for up to five years. See: Lipša 2021, 429.

12 Ruduša 2014, 11.

emphasised that during the socialist era in the satellite state of Czechoslovakia, discussions about gender and sexuality were inadequate in addressing and moving beyond the established norms that concealed non-heterosexual experiences.[13] This also meant that the "lesbian", "gay", "transgender", and "homosexual" people did not use the terms to talk about themselves before 1989. Coming from this perspective, Sokolová collects accounts of the discovery of an individual's non-heterosexuality, their same-sex experiences and how the regime has shaped their identities.[14] Sokolová's insights clarified for me why I encountered avoidant behaviour when asking my interviewees about contemporary sexual identity labels. Some even appeared disgusted as I raised this question, perhaps seeing it as perverse. Realising my initial approach was ill-fitted, I inquired more about "same-sex relationships" in a broader sense in my interviews. This proved to be more productive. It seems that the context for relationships in Soviet Latvia may have created many forms of caring and loving links, not all of which were forged by intercourse and sexual desire.

Aspects of historiography are important in examining the narratives as it allows us to explain why women's same-sex attraction was considered not only immoral but also unnatural and, therefore, had to be concealed. Homophobia historically has been rooted in the Latvian society by criminalising male anal sex. It was first put in place in the Russian Empire in 1832.[15] Homophobia was amplified by the perception that same-sex desire among men and women was directly associated with prison camps, where it could be expressed and tolerated as a substitute for heterosexual relationships.[16] Besides the prejudice, the Soviet Latvian society had little to go by when it came to sex education. In 1981, the first sexual education book by Jānis Zālītis entitled *In the Name of Love* (in Latvian – *Mīlestības vārdā*) was published in the Latvian SSR.[17] In his book, Zālītis describes male and female homosexuality as criminal and deviant, which leads Lipša to conclude that Zālītis "simply hated homosexuals".[18] In the case of socialist Czechoslovakia, historian Kateřina Lišková notes female sexual deviance was absent from the scholarship of sexology. It only came under scrutiny if the criminal activity was punishable by law and could imprison the person.[19]

13 Sokolová 2014, 243–284; Sokolová 2021, 40–49, 149–173.
14 Ibid., 7.
15 Lipša 2017, 5.
16 Stella 2015, 34.
17 Lipša 2022, 99; Navickaite 2023.
18 Ibid., 113.
19 Lišková 2018, 234.

Stella explains that for older homosexual women, it is often difficult to define themselves in contemporary LGBTQ+ terms used by the community. Their experiences were often complicated, including heterosexual elements such as marriage to a man.[20] Therefore, recounts or observations of "lesbian" experiences are difficult to gather and systematise. As women's sexuality was also considered outside the realm of "normal", albeit to a much lesser extent than the lives of homosexual men who faced pathologising and criminalisation for practicing their sexuality, many women are not ready to testify about their experiences today. Historian Galina Zelenina has carried out a survey of Russian lesbians and concludes that "the lesbian self-identification in approximately one third of cases remains on private life level; it is an individual and private identification, not social or civil or cultural". She summarises the prevailing position: "My orientation is my private business, for myself and my other half."[21] I claim that such internalised homophobia also prevails in Latvia and, therefore, prevents historical inquiry into lesbian lives.

Finally, I also questioned if lesbians "really had it that bad", considering that only male homosexual activity was criminalised. Historian Dan Healey shows that the Soviet police did not view lesbians as a security threat to the same degree as male homosexuals did. Nevertheless, he also states that "they were prosecuted under various laws if political or behavioural non-conformity drew attention to their sexuality".[22] Furthermore, historian Rustam Alexander even shows that during the drafting of the Criminal Code of the Latvian SSR in 1960, the Latvian SSR considered criminalising female same-sex relations. However, he puts forth that it "seems probable that the proposals to criminalise lesbianism were rejected, perhaps by the authorities in Moscow".[23] The existence of a criminal clause allows for the precise documentation of men being persecuted for homosexual activity in the USSR. However, we know nearly nothing about women who may have suffered various forms of punishment from society.

Sources: oral history and written testimonies of contemporaries

For this article, I collected narratives by analysing the findings of two interviews conducted between May 2022 and May 2023. The respondents were women

20 Ibid., 33.

21 Zelenina 2007.

22 Healey 2018, 76.

23 Alexander 2018, 35.

born in 1934 and 1949 who identified as heterosexual. They shared their stories and opinions on same-sex relationships they witnessed between women. A second source used for this article was the diary entries of a homosexual man.

The first respondent – a contemporary of a same-sex loving couple – was identified by accidentally coming across a recount of such a relationship in the book *Cilvēkglābējs Žanis Lipke* [Saviour – Žanis Lipke], published in 2018.[24] In a 2016 interview, Žanis Lipke's lifelong neighbour Silvija Zenta Kraukle and his daughter-in-law Ārija Lipke tell the story of their experience in the Ķīpsala district of Rīga.[25] Telling about life in Ķīpsala, they start the interview by mentioning that Lipke's family lived next to a lesbian couple.[26] I interviewed Ārija Lipke in 2022, in a follow-up meeting, to learn more about her perception and experience with the said couple.[27] Thus, the 2016 interview was the third oral history source which I analysed to compare the knowledge on the female same-sex relations obtained in 2016 and in 2022. The second respondent is Zane, a long-standing Latvian Academy of Arts employee.[28]

I relied on previous knowledge about the individuals and common acquaintances to enlist the participants for the interviews. I reached out to Lipke through a common acquaintance – the editor of the book that her interview was published in, Lolita Tomsone. Zane and her family were known for their inclusive attitudes towards contemporary gender politics in Latvia. This might be the reason why she eagerly responded to my text message. She was also known for having many acquaintances in Rīga's "creative circles", where both homosexual men and women found solace during the Soviet era.

I also used a particular primary source, the personal diary of Kaspars Aleksandrs Irbe (1906–1996) who practiced queer sexuality. Historian Ineta Lipša, who wrote scientific commentaries for the first volume (1927–1949) of the diary published in 2021, points out at the beginning of the diary that it is a unique source for understanding the past of homosexuals in Latvia, and also on the broader geopolitical areal – the Soviet Union after the Second World War.[29]

24 Tomsone 2018. For this article, I use the English translation of the book. See Tomsone 2020.

25 The book focuses on the life story of Lipke, who saved 55 Jews from the Nazis during the occupation of Latvia between 1941–1944.

26 Zandere, Tomsone 2020, 211. If neighbours knew something, they kept their mouths shut. Inese Zandere and Lolita Tomsone interview Silvia Zenta Kraukle with the participation of Ārija Lipke.

27 SBK008.

28 SBK009.

29 Lipša 2021, 11.

In this article, I have critically examined the sources that were used. Despite the potential for narrativity and partiality to be recognised as flaws of oral history sources, I claim that they can be interpreted as strengths.[30] Firstly, the two interviews used in the analysis of this article present two different perspectives on homosexuality. Lipke's formative years were the 1940s and 1950s, which saw Soviet policy solidify the perception that homosexuality was dangerous and detrimental and, therefore, criminalised under the Latvian SSR Criminal Code. Although Zane has spent most of her life in Soviet Latvia, she is an art historian who is well-versed in both past and present academic and political discussions about homosexuality. Her views cannot be considered "standard" for her generation, as she has been exposed to progressive ideas during her long-standing career at the Academy of Art. For instance, she emphasises that the transgression of sexual norms and homoeroticism is a normal part of an artist's creative process. However, it is precisely this perspective on inspiration and creation, as merged with the artists' sexuality, which leads Zane to negate homosexuality or lesbianism as a separate form of relationship. She sees them as part of the wider societal processes in Soviet Latvia that facilitated an increase in same-sex relationships.

Second, Irbe's diary entries are reflective, uncovering his knowledge, spontaneous thoughts, and profound feelings. However, they are short and contain a maximum of two paragraphs in every instance – often mentioning the sighting of lesbians only in one sentence. The diary in question, therefore, only partially reveals the life perspective of the writer on same sex loving women;[31] however, it still allows us to trace certain narratives that reflect Irbe's observations and perceptions.

The method

In my research, I use narrative inquiry and view the narrative as a method and a phenomenon. According to historian Kevin P. Murphy et al., the practice of oral history holds inherent queer potential through a focus on non-hegemonic storytelling and its emphasis on the ongoing and incomplete nature of narrativity.[32] For individuals, narratives serve as instruments for making sense of and understanding their lived experiences and help them explain how they fit into

30 Murphy, Pierce, Ruiz 2016, 2.

31 Summerfield 2018, 50.

32 Murphy, Pierce, Ruiz 2016, 2.

their current worldview.[33] Narrative analysis is the most appropriate method for examining my sources as it allows for exploring different forms of the stories – as in my case, personal experiences and observation narratives on lesbians, which I derived from the interviews with two heterosexual women and the diary of Irbe. Borrowing from sociologist Ken Plummer, I am not looking at the structure of the narratives reviewed in this article but rather their meaning.[34] Specifically, I am examining the understanding of same-sex relationships, identity markers and character traits that are perceived as "lesbian", as well as the visibility of lesbians in public spaces as perceived by their contemporaries. This approach contextualises knowledge traces within the larger sociopolitical environment that described sexual subcultures in Soviet Latvia.

Considering that I could use only three sources for this paper – which characterises the overall silence surrounding homosexuality in the Soviet era – I relied on a four-step approach to analysis, which is loosely based on Crossley's narrative analysis model.[35] The four steps are as follows: (1) *Story analysis*. By employing a critical perspective, I first read the transcripts and extracted the core story of the testimony. (2) *Identification of main characters and topics*. In this stage, I identified the key figures spoken about in the interviews and any critical themes that emerged. (3) *Identification of main terms and tone*. While writing the article, I paid attention to the demeanour of the respondents' stories and any specific terms used to carry over the narrative. The terms identified were mostly linked to their perception of lesbian sexuality, identity, and self-expression. (4) *Extraction of three key narratives*. After analysing the story, I identified each testimony's main topics, characters, and specific terms and tone. I then described key narratives in each testimony and systematically analysed them in the following sections of this paper.

Zane's story. Same-sex intimacy not bound by sex

Zane's story focuses on her observations within the "creative circles" of Latvia. She clearly states that the environment at the Academy of Art was entirely different from what I understood as Soviet normativity. She believes that "it's not the duty of an artist to comply with totalitarianism…".[36] Located in central Riga,

33 Clandinin, Rosiek 2007.

34 Plummer 2002, 19.

35 Corssley 2000, 35.

36 SBK009.

the Academy is known for its annual Carnivals[37] with themes that mock social normativity and stage provocations.

However, she notes that even in the artist circles, homosexuality was an open secret and was only "discussed in the Carnivals. As some provocations."[38] During the interview, Zane avoided mentioning any individuals by name, abiding by a self-enforced code of confidentiality to protect her acquaintances and friends' secrets. She hinted about some public personalities in her social circle, hoping that I could guess who they were and thus bear the responsibility of "outing" these people. Her hour-long story consisted of observations and reflections on how the Soviet system affected the sexuality of people, particularly women. However, she remained sceptical of defining "same-sex loving women" or "same-sex subcultures", especially when I mentioned contemporary terminology, such as "gay" or "lesbian", as used in this paper. For her, intimacy cannot be reduced to mere genital sexual activity, as this might undermine other essential aspects of same-sex relationships – and she emphasised that such efforts are pointless. She considers progressive academics' fixation on the topics of identity as banal and lacking depth. She quotes examples from antique cultures and art, where homosexuality was a common practice, but not a central subject of study, to support her argument.

Zane knows sodomy was punishable by law during the Soviet times. She does not deny that same-sex relationships existed and emphasises that the topic of homosexuality was completely taboo. She, however, sees sexuality as a part of artistic curiosity, as "the need to touch, therefore [it is a feeling of] sensuality on the border of erotic", potentially enticing sexual desire.[39] Zane considers artists aesthetically and sensually superior in their ability to appreciate beauty "as a phenomenon itself". Their artistic vision requires them to touch and feel the subject of study. This leads her to believe that "same-sex relationships" may be "artificially constructed" and misunderstood.

She also separates sexual activity involving genitalia from intimate relationships. Where same-sex intimacy exists, Zane argues it may be a by-product of the systematic circumstances, especially in the 1940s and 1950s. She explains that "right after the war, there was a pronounced lack of men, if you did not want to go to bed with anyone who approached you. This created a problem. There were a lot of smart women, having studied during "Latvia's time"[40], they were eman-

37 The Academy of Art of Latvia has a decades-long tradition of an Annual Carnival.

38 SBK009.

39 SBK009.

40 During the independent Latvia (1918–1940) before the Soviet occupation in 1940.

cipated women with a different way of thinking".[41] Zane's view reminded me of Herzog's conclusion, saying that lesbianism remained less visible as, according to her, "when remarked upon at all, it was more seen as a 'second best' arrangement arising due to the death of men; very rarely was it imagined as titillating".[42] Furthermore, according to Zane: " (…) there was the absolute, total lack of apartments. Yes, people lived in some kind of common hostels and communal flats. Some parents of a classmate may have taken someone in. The conditions, therefore, promoted these relationships. Maybe intimacy was created both from spiritual fusion and because of the need for it."[43] Thus, Zane's perception of deep and meaningful female relationships is devoid of physical sex. Zane's perspective on female cohabitation is similar to that of Yaseneva and Davydova in their elaboration of Boston Marriages. They argue that women's cohabitation often takes place, mediated, but not exclusively linked to economic factors. They also note that "emotional intensity and commitment in such relationships were unprecedented".[44] However, there is controversy around whether such romantic friendships can be interpreted as lesbian relationships "in disguise" or as another form of intimacy between women. Despite the controversy, this concept can be a useful tool for analysing and explaining some of the same-sex loving (but not necessarily sexual) relationships encountered by Zane. Intimacy is therefore understood as a form of "being close", and it may be distinguished from other forms of intimacy, such as love, care, and physical intimacy.[45]

Zane adds another factor which connects female sexuality with the "natural" link to reproduction popularised by the Soviet state. She notes that "every normal woman has a mother instinct inside" and, therefore, needs to care for someone. For her, it explains why women may have chosen to live with other women without a suitable male partner. Zane, like Stella, notes that intimacy was intricately linked to the socialist state during the Soviet period, as it aimed to control the private lives of citizens through the economy and politics. Zane does not provide specific details about the later Soviet period characterised by the proliferation of mass housing projects in Latvia. However, Stella claims that the "private lives of citizens were re-privatised in the late Soviet period" due to the onset of large-scale housing construction. The private domain and personal relationships within families were considered a place for genuine expression and

41 SBK009.

42 Herzog 2011, 117.

43 SBK009.

44 Yaseneva, Davydova 2020, 320–322.

45 Jamieson 1998, 157.

a refuge away from the Soviet government.[46] Therefore, Zane's observations may only offer a partial explanation of this "early" Soviet period in Latvia.

The narratives in Zane's story show that women's non-heterosexual relationships were not perceived as homosexual by default. To her, the relationships were formed out of a need for connection and material hardship, as well as the expectations of the socialist state. In addition, Zane perceives human sexuality as a potent force for aesthetic creation instead of just procreation, which is vital for the artistic process. Transgressing the common norms of "decency" is, therefore, something that may lead to same-sex attraction. This observation creates her scepticism about contemporary terminology and conceptualisation of same-sex relationships. As this was one of my first interviews, I learned the importance of seeking alternative descriptors to explore the configurations of non-heterosexual relationships between women and men in Soviet Latvia.

Ārija Lipke. Clothing as an identity marker

In their book *Saviour – Žanis Lipke*, Kraukle and Lipke compare Ķīpsala to a "parish" or a reservoir, where "all neighbours had to be greeted" by Kraukle.[47] Lipke, born in 1934, moved to Ķīpsala in 1956 after marrying Žanis and Ārija Lipke's son Zigfrīds. In a 2016 interview, Kraukle mentioned three neighbours, the women Vera, Elvīra, and Zina, who lived on the other side of their fence. The topographical location of Lipke's dwelling plays a crucial role in the story. It allowed for observations of the women and their character assessment. To gain further insight, I requested a follow-up interview, which she agreed to in Ķīpsala in 2022. We met in Lipke's living room, which stands just a few meters away from where the house of the three women used to be.

Lipke based her assumption that Vera and Elvīra were in a romantic same-sex relationship on the information provided by her mother-in-law. "People knew they were huddling together (…) living like a husband and a wife," she says with some discomfort in her voice. The language she uses to describe the relationship is somewhat juvenile and sounds like she does not have the proper terms to explain what this "huddling together" entailed. Her tone is casual. She and Kraukle use the term "lesbian" in their interview. However, it seems that the term

46 Stella 2015, 31.

47 Zandere, Tomsone 2020, 213.

may have been applied retroactively to the case as Lipke explicitly states that the two women "were lesbians … or how are they called these days".[48]

An informal exchange with Lolita Tomsone, the book editor of the publication containing the 2016 interview, presents a different perspective on Lipke's testimony. Tomsone notes that Lipke may have changed her views over time, but in 2013, she did not like the couple, especially Vera, whom she perceived as different, not least because of the unusual and conspicuous clothing choices. Elvīra's image receives much less scrutiny as she dresses conventionally, appropriate for a woman at the time.

"Vera was a half-man," Lipke says in her 2016 interview. "In early April, she was walking around in sports shorts and a T-shirt and digging in the garden." Lipke provides additional insights to complement her observations in a follow-up interview conducted in 2022: "She did not have a soft, womanly voice. She was a *grubaya zenschina* [from Russian – a rough woman]. Not to say she was rude! But her voice was deep. She was a little different than the rest of us, women..."[49] She describes Vera as rather nosy, "one who knows everything about everyone", yet has never spoken about her knowledge of Lipke's family activities to the Gestapo. "She told me [after the Soviet reoccupation in 1944], "Young Ms. Lipke, I know everything, I know that your father-in-law was hiding the Jews! (…) In the German times, I saw a smallish man with a scarf on his head and the cattail of Johanna on his shoulders, weeding your garden!""[50]

Kraukle reiterates the observations on Vera's manly appearance: "Vera looked like a man, she had stringy legs, short hair, she was always wearing pants." However, in the next sentence, she describes her as educated and competent: "She was a learned woman, she was a governess, a smart woman, but not nice at all. She taught me everything – Latvian and Russian when Russians had already arrived." It is apparent that Kraukle sees Vera in a more favourable light than Lipke due to personal interactions with her. Unfortunately, she has since passed, and I could not further elaborate on their differing perspectives. Note that in the interview dating back to 2016, almost nothing is said about Elvīra. When asked about her in the follow-up interview in 2022, Lipke stated that she was "more like us, women".

Reading the interview of 2016, it appears that Lipke and Kraukle hold differing opinions regarding their trust in Vera. In the interview dating back to 2016, Kraukle notes: "If we would have been bad neighbours, I do not know,

48 SBK008.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.

what would be the outcome of this!" A little further in the interview, she notes that Vera, Elvīra, and Zina were the Lipke family's only direct neighbours. "Even if the neighbours knew something, they kept their mouths shut."[51] Yet, in our follow-up interview, Lipke contradicts Kraukle. She notes a perceived "womanly" characteristic of Vera and says she thought that if they had known, they would have reported the family to the Gestapo. She explains: "After all, women are such blabbermouths…".[52]

When asked if Lipke had ever visited the women, she replied that she had not. Lipke remembers at least two rooms in the wooden house, which were typical of the architecture of Ķīpsala. Vera and Elvīra were the lesbian couple and the main protagonists in her story. They lived in one room, while Zina, Elvīra's sister, lived separately. Lipke explains that she sometimes bought flower bulbs from the couple, as it was how they were making money, and exchanged occasional polite phrases over the fence, such as asking about each other's health.

Overall, Lipke's observations show that there were no profound interactions with Vera and Elvīra beyond the mannerisms. Therefore, Vera's mannish traits are primarily assessed based on her appearance. A contradiction exists in Lipke's description of Vera's physical appearance, often compared to a man's, whereas, her negative character traits associated with women. Lipke's narrative reinforces traditional gender stereotypes of women and how they should – or should not – behave. Lipke describes Vera's behaviour as "mannish" due to her gender performance. At the same time, both Kraukle and Lipke refer to Vera as a woman because of her profession, intellect, and talkative and nosy nature. Perhaps if Kraukle were interviewed again, a different image of Vera would emerge, as a difference in opinion between Lipke and Kraukle was already evident in the previous interview from 2016.

An astonishing conclusion from the testimony is the deviance from heterosexual norms, which were woven into Ķīpsala's social life. People have known about the women's relationship to be the same as "between a husband and a wife". However, Vera's seemingly masculine gender performance caused the locals to raise eyebrows and perceive her as unlikable. At the same time, there is little mention of Elvīra, whose appearance did not differ much from what was expected of women back in the day.

51 Zandere, Tomsone 2020, 213.

52 SBK008.

Kaspars Aleksandrs Irbe. Lesbian appearances in Soviet Latvia

Non-normative performance of gender and non-standard fashion choices as an attribute of lesbians is also noted in Irbe's diary. This section uses ten entries from Irbe's diary, dating from the 1950s and 1980s, documenting his observations and perceptions, including references to lesbian affection and even sex in public spaces. During the Soviet era, Irbe lived in Dubulti district of the city of Jūrmala. The diary entries include Irbe's observations, thoughts, and feelings about his surroundings. Being a well-read man, he also references foreign literature and scholarly research. Irbe is constantly doubting and justifying the normality of male homosexuality in his diary and continue to convince himself of its normalcy.[53] Considering this, when reading the entries, I do not mine for specific facts. Instead, I critically assess the narrative Irbe constructs about Soviet lesbians. In this way, I also engage in what Healey calls a critical reading of a "self-fashioning exercise".[54]

Irbe uses the term "tribāde" [in Eng. – tribade] to refer to lesbians and when describing women in manly outfits and displaying "boyish looks". He perceives such appearance as identity markers of lesbians and observes them in several instances. Irbe believes that he has exclusive knowledge and recognition of same-sex loving women, noting in 1980: "They thought that nobody understands – does not know their relationship."[55] However, Irbe did notice, and believes that he is also recognised as homosexual by onlooking lesbians. In 1956, while shopping for strawberries at Bulduri, district of Jūrmala city market, he notes: "Another very manly, youngish woman was buying [strawberries]. She was looking at me understandingly. Without a doubt, she is a tribade [lesbian] – that is why she understood me just by looking at me…".[56]

In July of the same year, he visits a friend – Š.– whose son's daughter is visiting. He records his assumption: "There was Š.'s son's daughter – pretty, of a boyish look. She does gymnastics. Perhaps she is a tribade?"[57] In 1963, Irbe notes his experience in Riga: "I was at the L. family, who were renting the little house during the German and the first Russian times[58]. Then, there was a young boy and a girl. Now the eldest daughter already has a child. The youngest girl resembles

53 SBK008, 415-442.

54 Healey 2020, 201.

55 Irbe, 01.09.1980.

56 Irbe, 10.07.1956.

57 Irbe, 23.07.1956.

58 During the Nazi occupation (1941–1944/1945) and the first Soviet occupation (1940–1941) in the Second World War.

a boy. She also dresses in a masculine pantsuit. Obviously – a tribade."[59] Irbe's entries suggest that if the person's appearance and behaviour, such as manner of walking, were not, according to him "gender appropriate", they communicated a different sexual desire.

Stella recounts lesbian spaces in Moscow and provincial Ul'ianovsk, as well as women's wit to carve out "lesbian" spaces in semi-public settings.[60] Irbe's observations offer insight into the experiences of lesbians who lacked formal spaces for interaction in Soviet Latvia. In the 1980s, he spots two women openly engaging in same-sex lovemaking on the beach of Jūrmala. In this passage, he first justifies same-sex attraction. He mentions that even "foreign researchers in the sexual field also recognise that normal sexual satisfaction is what is desired, and that the basis of sexuality is not mere reproduction".[61] He speaks of two women, around 20 years of age, "kissing gently, rubbing noses".[62] He continues, elaborating on their appearance: "One of them was hard to distinguish from a slim boy – masculine clothes, hairstyle. The other was very feminine looking."[63]

There are three instances when he makes notes on blatant sexual acts in public he witnessed or overheard. In early 1964, he writes: "Rasma said that an acquaintance of that friend saw two girls indulging in lesbian love last summer on the riverbank – kissing, licking (genital organs – oral sex)."[64] In 1955, he describes another interaction: "I met the driver and the known soldier [in Mežparks, Riga]. I helped the driver pick pink mushrooms. Told his adventures. They saw a wom. with a wom. Then a man with a man who drank and indulged in the most disgusting debauchery (…)."[65] Whereas the limited evidence does not provide a holistic understanding of lesbian sexual practices in public spaces, it shows that some lesbians found ways around the lack of private space and the scrutiny of their private lives. In these instances, women could have used these ways to establish alternative lifestyles that differed from what was expected of them.[66]

Irbe's memories bring some insight into how homosexual women may have understood and expressed their identity. They would often openly display attributes that allowed other homosexual women to recognise them. Non-normative

59 Irbe, 22.09.1963.

60 Stella 2015, 15.

61 Irbe, 01.09.1980.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Irbe, 07.04.1964.

65 Irbe, 11.10.1955.

66 Takács 2015, 171.

clothing and gender performance seem to be essential aspects of lesbian perception, as also noted by Lipke and Kraukle. Furthermore, the public sighting Irbe describes shows that lesbians may have been seeking to live a fulfilling life by actively pursuing their desires in semi-public spaces. An important element, however, is that Irbe himself was practicing queer sexuality and had a much better comprehension of non-traditional sexuality. He was, therefore, not only more competent at naming and describing his observations but also admitting that sexual expression for non-reproductive purposes – regardless of one's gender – is normal.

Conclusion: the narratives

Based on the analysis presented in this paper, several general observations can be made. Firstly, there seems to be a lack of terminology to describe homosexual/non-heterosexual relationships between women. The more recent sexual identification categories that are used to refer to "lesbians" today are replaced by alternative descriptors, such as "intimacy", "living as husband and wife", and "friendship" in the interviews. The term "lesbian" is applied retroactively, and "homosexual women" was never used. In the first two testimonies, only Irbe was using the term "tribade" to refer to lesbians. Yet his ability to specifically define a certain sexual identity is linked to his own belonging to and practicing queer sexuality.

The testimonies described in this article contrasted same-sex women's relationships with heteronormative subjectivity. Whereas neither Zane's nor Lipkes testimonies explicitly reference heterosexual relations as the norm. Their understanding of same-sex relations between women is seen as outside the realm of "normal". However, Lipke is lacking words to describe the relationship between the protagonists, Zina and Elvīra. On the other hand, Zane confidently explains that loving, intimate relationships may emerge because of reasons other than what I understand as "homosexuality".

A substantial and apparent topic is the binary understanding of what it means to be a woman and a man. The two sexes receive descriptions by proxy attributing stereotypical "manly" and "womanly" traits to the characters in Lipke's and Irbe's stories. Even Zane believes that women have an inherent need to care for someone – which, to her, explains why, in the absence of men, a woman may start a caring relationship with another woman. On some occasions, the exterior appearance, not corresponding to heteronormative looks or behaviour, is the "proof" of a person's sexual desires, which is especially prominent in Irbe's diary entries.

Importantly, it is impossible to standardise the understanding of the non-heterosexual relationships between women based on the sources analysed for this paper. Only in Irbe's case could one draw similarities with the contemporary understanding of lesbian relationships. Zane's testimony also suggests that many female close companionships may or may not entail sexual relationships between same-sex couples.

Even though little evidence supports the idea that this was practiced beyond the identified cases, Kraukle, Lipke, and Irbe observe lesbian women who dress in masculine clothing or display manly behaviour. Furthermore, the accounts of Lipke and Zane show that the lives of non-heterosexual couples were an "open secret". It is unclear if the non-heterosexual relations between the women may have led to a judgemental attitude towards them. For example, Lipke's negative attitude towards Vera also indicates that the knowledge of their sexuality was stigmatised. It is likely that many non-heterosexual couples tried to conceal their relationship to avoid public judgement.

Irbe makes notes on overt sexual acts that he witnesses or overhears in public spaces. Although it is difficult to prove that lesbians carved out their own semi-public or public spaces in Riga, a knowing eye – like Irbe, who describes the identity markers of lesbians in detail – can recognise public displays of lesbian love and desire.

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LESBIEŠU DZĪVE PADOMJU LATVIJĀ: NARATĪVU ANALĪZE

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Pētījuma mērķis ir atklāt dažus lesbiešu dzīves aspektus padomju Latvijā, kā avotu izmantojot divu heteroseksuālu sieviešu mutvārdu vēstures intervijas, kā arī homoseksuāla vīrieša dienasgrāmatas ierakstus, kas tapuši no 20. gadsimta 50. līdz 80. gadiem. Pētījumā papildus salīdzinošo analīzi bija iespējams veikt, pateicoties vienas respondentes iepriekš publicētai intervijai. Ievadā raksturotas līdzšinējās zināšanas par viendzimuma seksualitātes vēsturi Padomju Savienībā un citās sociālistiskās nometnes valstīs, tās kontekstualizējot ar padomju Latvijas praksi. Izmantojot naratīvo analīzi, intervijās pētīti heteroseksuālo sieviešu novērojumi un pārdomas par sieviešu viendzimuma attiecībām padomju Latvijā. Analizējot interviju stāstus, identificētas galvenās stāstījumu tēmas un to personas, lietotā retorika un stāstījumu emocionālā izpausme. Galarezultātā tiek izdalīti trīs galvenie stāstījumu sižeti.

Atslēgas vārdi: mutvārdu vēsture, naratīvi, lesbietes, padomju Latvija, viendzimuma seksualitāte

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā izmantoto avotu izpēte liecina, ka cilvēkiem trūkst jēdzienu, lai aprakstītu padomju laikā notikušās homoseksuālās/neheteroseksuālās attiecības starp sievietēm. Seksualitātes kategorijas, kuras mūsdienās izmanto LGBT+ kopiena, lai apzīmētu "lesbietes", intervijās tika aizstātas ar alternatīviem raksturotājvārdiem, piemēram, "tuvība", "dzīvo kā vīrs un sieva" un "draudzība". Termins "lesbiete", šķiet, tiek lietots retrospektīvi, bet termins "homoseksuālas sievietes" šajā rakstā ievākto liecību ietvaros neparādās nevienu reizi. Tikai homoseksuāļa dienasgrāmatā fiksēts termins "tribāde", lai apzīmētu lesbietes. Tomēr viņa spēja atpazīt sieviešu viendzimuma seksuālo identitāti ir saistīta ar viņa paša homoseksualitāti un tās praktizēšanu. Intervētās pretstatīja viendzimuma sieviešu attiecības heteronormatīvajam analogam. Kaut gan intervijās heteroseksuālas attiecības nav skaidri raksturotas kā norma, respondentes uztvēra viendzimuma attiecības starp sievietēm kā kaut ko ārpus normas. Tas konstatējams gan no alternatīvu frāžu izmantojuma, lai raksturotu viendzimuma attiecības starp sievietēm, gan no skaidrojuma, ka mīlošas, intīmas attiecības padomju laikos varēja rasties citu iemeslu dēļ, nevis aiz viendzimuma seksa alkām jeb "homoseksualitātes". Izpēte liecina par pastāvošo bināro skatījumu uz to, ko nozīmē būt "sievietei" un "vīrietim". Dažkārt

stereotipiskajam heteronormatīvajam izskatam vai uzvedībai neatbilstoša āriene tika uztverta kā cilvēka netradicionālo dzimumtieksmju "pierādījums", kas īpaši uzsvērts homoseksuāļa dienasgrāmatā.

Kopumā nav iespējams standartizēt intervēto izpratni par neheteroseksuālām attiecībām starp sievietēm padomju laikos. Viena respondente uzsvēra, ka intīmas un mīlošas sieviešu viendzimuma attiecības var nebūt vienlīdzīgas ar romantiskām, seksuālām attiecībām starp viendzimuma pāriem. Savukārt homoseksuāļa Irbes dienasgrāmatas analīzē iespējams saskatīt līdzības ar mūsdienu izpratni par lesbiešu attiecībām. Irbe pierakstījis liecības par atklātām seksuālām darbībām starp sievietēm sabiedriskās vietās, kurām viņš kļuvis par aculiecinieku vai par kurām dzirdējis. Lai gan ir grūti pierādīt, ka lesbietes Rīgā padomju laikos ir izveidojušas "savas" daļēji publiskās vai publiskās telpas, Irbe, kurš savā dienasgrāmatā detalizēti apraksta lesbiešu identitātes marķierus, uzskata, ka spēj atpazīt publisku lesbiešu mīlestību un iekāres izpausmes. Intervētās sievietes norāda, ka neheteroseksuālu pāru attiecības bija "atklāts noslēpums". No viņu teiktā nav secināms, ka neheteroseksuālās attiecības starp sievietēm būtu izraisījušas nosodošu attieksmi sabiedrībā, tomēr vienlaikus zināšanas par lesbiešu seksualitāti bija stigmatizētas.

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BETWEEN WOMEN: NARRATIVES OF ESTONIAN LESBIANS AND A BISEXUAL DURING THE TRANSITION FROM SOVIET TIMES

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Research interests: the doubly marginalised identities within the subcultural organisation, the subcultural ideologisation among 21st-century Estonian youth

In this article, I analyse the life narratives of three Estonian women who identify as either lesbian or bisexual. Based on three semi-structured in-depth interviews, I focus on the period when the local LGBTQ+ movement became active, during the 1980s and 1990s, after half a century of Soviet dominance that had crumbled and Estonia regained independence. The process of growing older, combined with the individual's biography, along with added depths of memory and critical reflection, are key elements in interpreting the social significance of their personal experiences. By using thematic analysis, I reveal how these personal experiences can become a shared narrative while letting us focus on the uniqueness of each life history.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ identity, post-Soviet, oral histories, lesbian, bisexual

Introduction

Estonian history is characterised by the narratives of people who belong to groups with often hidden or marginalised identities that have yet to be fully recognised. In my article, I examine the narratives of three women who identify as lesbian or bisexual. The women also played an active role in the local lesbian community during the early days of the Estonian LGBTQ+ movement between the 1980s and 1990s. This was the time when the Soviet rule was collapsing, and Estonia was regaining its independence.

I chose oral histories as the basis for my analysis because growing older, along with biography, remembering, and critical reflection, are all key elements in interpreting the social significance of personal experience.[1] Personal stories also allow for a focus on the unique aspects of each experience while revealing how individual memories intertwine when people remember the experience they shared at a certain point in time. Altogether, such personal yet socially shared experiences offer an insight into the time and space that was a turning point for Estonians, which is rarely discussed.

When analysing the narratives, I used a microhistorical approach, which offers a return to the narrative without overlooking marginalised voices in society. This allows us to grasp large-scale global processes and events as well as look at the memories of everyday life[2] while underscoring the importance of the local perspective.[3] Additionally, this approach helps us focus on the narrative itself, as our lives are entangled in stories, and our identity and perception of reality are formed within a vast network of stories. At the same time, our deeds and words gain analytical meaning only when integrated into a larger narrative, while the latter's meaning depends upon the interpretation of individual events.[4]

Therefore, another central concept in my research is narrative, which I define as a complete unit that provides an overview of one's experience.[5] It includes the text and its transmission and representation, which is related to the context in which events occur over time in a chronological sequence.[6] To be a story, it must combine the elements of temporality, social context, events, and an opinionated conclusion, offering a certain coherency when combined.[7] The narrator is the main character and an active participant in the narrative, rather than a bystander, giving them agency in the story.[8]

When thinking only about stories, it is dangerous to fail to recognise that other people's narratives are not merely the literary expression of their lived experiences.[9] This brings into focus the concept of social history. The process of thinking with and about stories is intertwined. We all think with stories, engaging ourselves in a moral dialogue with them and noticing the historical and social details

1 Bennett 2010, 245.
2 Paul 2018, 64.
3 Walton et al. 2008, 4.
4 Väljataga 2011, 250–253.
5 McAlpin 2016, 3.
6 Väljataga 2011, 241–246.
7 McAlpin 2016, 7.
8 Elliott 2005.
9 Frank 2004, 209.

that demand recording. In my article, I aim to navigate between different registers, as a historian and as an empathetic friend,[10] finding support in social history, which offers tools to think *with* and about the stories. I position these narratives in social, cultural, and political contexts to document significant structural changes, reconstruct people's experiences during those changes, and connect those two.[11]

The research participants, methods, and limitations

In this chapter, I analyse the life stories of three Estonian women who identify as bisexual or lesbian. I found these women through personal contacts and gathered their narratives through semi-structured in-depth interviews. One of the interviewees, Sirts (1955–2022), was a well-known member of the LGBTQ+ community, and her interview has already been published.[12] Therefore, I use her real name and exact year of birth. I had known Sirts for many years, as she was a legendary barmaid at the oldest Estonian LGBTQ+ bar, *X-baar*. We met repeatedly during the interview process, which took place in several instalments, and she added retrospective moments, which she deemed essential. Sirts also brought me the photos and reviewed the transcript for accuracy. The interview, which lasted approximately two hours, was conducted by myself and my colleague, Silja Oja, in June 2021 and was later transcribed by me. Unfortunately, our last planned meeting was cancelled because Sirts passed away due to an illness.

In two other cases, I use pseudonyms to protect the interviewees' privacy and will not reveal their exact birth year. Riina (1961) is a well-known figure in both her professional community, where I initially met her when I was thirteen years old, and within the LGBTQ+ community. I interviewed Riina in 2015 for approximately two hours. As for Kristi (1971), it was her partner, whom I have known for twenty years, who informed me via Facebook chat after the publication of the interview with Sirts, that Kristi also has memories of the period between the 1980s and 1990s. I contacted Kristi for an interview, which she agreed to. The three of us met at a restaurant, and I interviewed Kristi in 2022, which lasted approximately two hours.

To convey each individual's story in the most comprehensive way possible and to explore the microworld of a particular story,[13] I analysed each narrative in

10 Skultans 2012, 31.
11 Tilly 1985, 31; Väljataga 2011, 256.
12 Davidjants 2022.
13 McAlpin 2016, 18.

its entirety rather than focusing on common themes across all life stories. I then grouped the material according to themes that emerged across all the interviews. I also examined the structure and components of the narratives and how each story was told.[14] I acknowledge that the small number of interviewees makes it challenging to see diverse patterns of shared experiences. However, I hope that this sample will equally highlight each of the narratives involved.

Throughout my research, I was writing about people with whom I belong in the same community. For the most part, they knew me, and we had strong elements of dialogue and shared experience in our conversations. Therefore, my research also contained aspects of at-home ethnography or autoethnography. Such an approach had its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, I had a deep knowledge of the socio-cultural context in which my fieldwork was positioned, and the insider role helped me access the community members.[15] At the same time, knowing the interviewees involved a risk of interpretative bias. To mitigate this risk, I followed the feminist principle, which emphasises the connection between me as a researcher and the interviewee as a research participant, who discusses the general human experience that unites us.[16] I considered data collection a collaboration between the researcher and the research participant,[17] with both of us jointly creating the story.[18] Later, while analysing the interviews, I used a bottom-up approach to remain grounded in the interviewees' perspectives and focus on how they perceived their experiences as much as possible.

Socio-historical background

All of the narratives were highly individual and, at the same time, situated within a similar political and cultural framework of late socialism. The Soviet Union consistently violated human rights, even if the severity of the oppression varied over decades. For example, people who expressed themselves differently from the mainstream, such as those involved in subcultures, ethnic minority organisations, etc., were subjected to discrimination. In addition, male homosexuality was criminalised.[19] The interviews were conducted in the context of

14 Linno, Strömpl 2012, 56–57.
15 Hodkinson 2005, 146.
16 Oras 2008, 17.
17 Sfard, Prusak 2005.
18 McAlpin 2016, 15.
19 Talalaev 2010, 112.

the changes that occurred in the second half of the 1980s, which marked the end of deepening censorship and economic stagnation in the USSR. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed as the general secretary of the Soviet Union. In 1987, he announced *perestroika* as the country's new political direction. Gorbachev hoped to pull the country out of stagnation and economic crisis through this new direction, which included *glasnost*, the softening of censorship rules, the reduction of secrecy, and more freedom of expression in society.[20]

Due to those reforms, the opportunity to express minority or underrepresented identities emerged. For example, when the reform-based changes began in the 1980s, people across the Soviet Union, including Estonia, took advantage of the chance to start their own national movements. Additionally, local ethnic minorities started to organise themselves culturally.[21] Similarly, dispersing ideological restrictions sparked the local LGBTQ+ movement, and freely expressing an identity which was different than heterosexuality became possible. These conditions brought together my interviewees, who became socially active after Gorbachev's introduction of *perestroika*, and Estonia's subsequent return to independence in 1991.

Benedict Anderson has emphasised how the development of print media contributes to people's self-awareness[22] and helps large groups of anonymous individuals imagine themselves as one nation with a shared set of values. This highlights the impact of the written word in forming communities. Similar processes took place in Estonia, where many people used print media to find each other and organise into groups. For example, this includes Armenians in 1986 as an ethnic minority[23] or subcultures, such as the Depeche Mode Fan Club in 1992.[24] The emergence of an independent press has given voice to the LGBQT+ community, allowing them to connect with each other and express themselves. As a result of the first gay and lesbian personal ads being published, the foundation for future organisations was established. Since that time, the landscape of LGBTQ+ organisations has become highly diverse. One local peculiarity has been a lively lesbian movement. *Eesti Lesbiliit* (the Estonian Lesbian Union) became the first sexual minority organisation in Estonia established in 1990,[25] and my interviewees were actively involved in the organisation. Following Estonian

20 Made 2011, 152–153.
21 Davidjants 2016.
22 Anderson 2006.
23 Davidjants 2016.
24 Davidjants 2024.
25 Talalaev 2010, 112–113.

independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, society became even more open. The state censorship disappeared, and an almost unregulated free-market economy replaced the former totalitarian state. Public expressions of LGBTQ+ identity, including activism, became common, and subsequent decades witnessed the breakout of a good many LGBTQ+ organisations and movements.

Analysis of narratives of Sirts, Riina, and Kristi: love, activism

The article offers a qualitative thematic analysis of the life narratives during the late 1980s and early 1990s, of three Estonian women – Sirts, Riina, and Kristi – who identify as lesbian or bisexual. The preliminary interview's structure could determine the similarity in the progression. However, during the actual interviews, I allowed the interviewees to go beyond the questions and expand on topics that emerged organically from their dialogue. This led to a more unique difference in style and less in the exact content of the conversations, as the three participants proceeded somewhat similarly in their topics.

Fig. 1. Sirts around 1991.
Photo from a private collection

1. att. Sirtsa ap 1991. gadu.
Foto no privātkolekcijas

Fig. 2. Sirts at the *X-baar*, summer 2021.
Photo by Silja Oja

2. att. Sirtsa bārā *X-baar*, 2021. gada vasara.
Foto: Silja Oja

Sirts, Riina, and Kristi started their life stories from childhood and youth, acknowledging their non-normative identity rather early, despite the closed society of the Soviet Union era, and quickly mentioned their first relationship. They then delved into the social life and lesbian activism at the turn of the decade. They reflected upon current developments for LGBTQ+ people, including their private lives and concerns. During analysis, three main categories emerged that I discuss in detail in this article: participation in lesbian activism and social life during the transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period in Estonia, love relationships, and family and parenting.

Lesbian activism and social life

> "I guess the aim at the very beginning was to map how many of us there are. Rights and stuff came later." – Kristi

> "I think there are about eight hundred such women [in Estonia]. I also know those who are married – with husbands and children – everything very decent. But then they come [to X-baar] later, and there they are." – Sirts

All the interviewees were born during different decades, ranging from the 1950s to the 1970s. However, they all belonged to the same sociocultural context, as they were part of the early days of the lesbian movement in Estonia that began at the turn of the decade. As they all were active in the Estonian Lesbian Union, one of the first emerging themes during interviews was participation in the first wave of lesbian activism during the transition from the Soviet to post-Soviet times. This was intrinsically related to the creation of one's own social life. During that short period, which was marked by the destabilisation and subsequent collapse of (Soviet) socialism, people were driven by enthusiasm to undertake the creation of society as free and active individuals.[26] The stories focused heavily on this time, which was the densest part of the narrative.

The interviewees belonged to the pre-internet generation and relied mostly on writing letters or direct contacts to organise themselves into a community, whereas the following generation of activists focused mainly on internet interactions. The lesbian activist and historian Lilian Kotter initiated the activist movement by placing a newspaper ad in *Eesti Ekspress* on 2 March 1990, which stated: "Young woman wants to meet older lesbian women."[27] All three members

26 Aarelaid-Tart 2012, 2–11.

27 Kotter 2023.

remembered the ad – two of them responded to it, and one heard about it from her girlfriend at the time. Being active in the Lesbian Union also meant taking on duties. Riina recalls: "I remember meeting someone under that tree on Freedom Square. The goal was to get to know all of these people and to create a community circle. Everyone took someone under their wing." Kristi, too, occasionally recalls the tasks she undertook in the Estonian Lesbian Union: "For a while, I even dealt with letters which came to me via the *Eesti Ekspress* mailbox. I had a small child, so I invited everyone who wrote to my place."

The lives of the women intersected to some extent as well. They casually mentioned each other and referred to the same events, even though the period between the first and last interview was seven years. All three talked about the places in Tallinn that were the first to embrace the LGBTQ+ community. Some of the establishments were *Vase kelder*, *Enke kelder*, and *X-baar*, among others. The relationship with the Finnish lesbian community, who – according to all of them – brought the masculine style to the scene and with whom professional contacts have existed since 1990, was also discussed.[28] The DIY (do-it-yourself) aspect of events emphasised the community spirit of the era. For example, the bar counters were made from old doors, and the music came from cassettes, and people brought their own drinks and food. The theme days were organised, including BDSM Day (BDSM – sexual practices involving physical restraints: bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism) on Tuesday and Women's Day on Wednesday. At least in retrospect, the act of partying was never just partying in itself but was instead a form of activism. According to Sirts: "It wasn't just a party after the party. There was indoor hockey and basketball. We had halls booked on Ujula Street. We played sand football at Võsu, along with other games and a tug-of-war. It wasn't the case that we were all simply nice, drunk fools."

It is essential to note that before the internet era, it was crucial to actively participate in the union's activities because there was no other way of recognising LGBTQ+ people in the city and meeting other women. Also, according to the interviewees, the generally feminine style of those involved was not so different from that of straight women. Under those conditions, age and profession did not play a role in shaping the community's social life. There were people from various occupations, such as teachers, doctors, builders, historians, social workers, construction painters, and so on. Additionally, women of all ages were present, ranging from under 20 to those in their late 60s and born during the First Estonian Republic.

28 Taavetti 2018, 27–28.

In retrospect, when discussing activism, there was a subtle difference in emphasis – Sirts was building a professional life through activism and dug much deeper into the topic. On the other hand, Kristi and Riina emphasised building their personal lives through it. In all cases, social activism was intertwined with stories of relationships. The reason probably lies in that Riina defined herself through her professional identity, which lay outside of the LGBTQ+ movement. Meanwhile, Kristi's perception of narrative creation was mainly based on her private relationships. At the same time, Sirts remained professionally connected to the community until the very end, working at the *X-baar*.

Based on those three interviews conducted, it can be deduced that several beginnings coincided for this generation of LGBTQ+ activists in Estonia. Activism intertwined with love and relations, and the dawn of an independent Estonia together with its criminality. For instance, interviewees recalled shootings by local gangsters in the first lesbian bar. The borders, both actual and metaphoric and the atmosphere surrounding the LGBTQ+ community is aptly summed up through the carousel metaphor used by Sirts. The keywords were openness, curiosity, and a commitment to build up one's own community. At the same time, all the interviewees acknowledged how times have changed since then, including the way people meet and spend their time. Sirts commented on this from the perspective of working in a bar, saying, "Physically, people look the same, but the way they are and party is different. The feeling is gone." Meanwhile, Riina discussed the challenges from the point of view of finding a date in the new era.

> Maybe people are a bit more tolerant in society now, but for me, personally, nothing much has changed. It's not easy for me to find a partner now at this stage of my life. (…) I could start writing to someone, but writing for a long time is pretty pointless, and I don't need an imaginary pen pal. I want to meet a person and see if I like them and whether they are likeable. I've been to *X-baar* a few times in six months. But you have to go there after midnight, or there will be no one there. Personally, I'd rather be at home and asleep by then. And if I go there, at my age, what would I talk about? The girls are sitting there around their table. I can't swing in there and start talking... But at that time [at the crossover between the 1980s and 1990s], there was really nothing more than a single newspaper ad that Lillian [*Kotter*] had put up. And, indeed, people simply recognised each other somehow and fell in love. People like us.

Love relations

> “We had kittens in the attic at work, and then we climbed up there thinking we would feed them. Then we sat there in silence and darkness for half an hour, not saying a word. Well, I guess no one goes to sit in the attic with someone in silence.” – Riina

The second category was love relationships, which played the most prominent role in narratives. The main themes in this category were the acknowledgment of the lesbian or bisexual identity from an early age, the stories about feeling affectionate towards women, and the possibility of such relations in the Soviet times. For example, while dwelling on her childhood, Sirts recalls her first crushes and school-age platonic affections: “I personally started thinking in this way when I was around seven. I really liked my sister-in-law. She came here from somewhere in Russia, and when she left, I remember sniffing her pillow.” Riina also mentions how information about LGBTQ+ relationships was obtained in the mid-1970s, during the Soviet period, from a book entitled *Avameelselt abielust* (*Openly about marriage*), which provided an early recognition of her non-normative identity, albeit in the section of perversions. She recalls: “I read there that it’s called like this when you are of the same sex, and I thought, well, probably it is with me like this. (…) I was platonically in love with one of my relatives, someone who was eight years older than me. I was about twelve years old then.” Similarly, Kristi remembers an awareness at the age of 11 when she saw a film on Finnish television showing two women intimately close.

The biggest difference between the interviewees was that Sirts focused on one relationship, while Riina and Kristi discussed several. In the whirlwind of adventures in Sirts’ life, there was one constant topic: the love of her life and a friend called Taimi (who passed away a few months before the interview with Sirts took place). Sirts repeatedly returned to mentioning Taimi during the interview, whom she met in the erotic dance troupe *Essex* and with whom she later opened the *X-baar*. The prominence of that relationship in Sirts’ life is summed up metaphorically in the following commentary, showing how a relationship can continue for years, even if only in a latent form:

> Taimi and I were together for a very short time. We were not actually together. But I was with her all my life, just like an old married couple. We couldn’t be together, and we couldn’t be apart either. Thirty-two years until the end. Then, there were all kinds of quarrels. I realized that Taimi was looking for something else and I didn’t belong there. But at the same time, she was always there for me, and I was there for her.

> We were a couple at the very beginning. It was 1990 when we were in *Essex. We* were *podrugas* [‘girlfriends’ in Russian] of the war front, as they say. I was thirty-five at the time, and she was twenty. We had to go to Yugoslavia [with the dance troupe] a few days after my birthday, and Taimi dared to approach me and send me a letter on paper. She realised, somehow (…). Let’s be honest, I didn’t take her seriously because she had just married. She was such a man’s woman, beautiful and everything. But at some point, we were in some hotel, and then she had a fight with her guy who was there with her the whole time. And then she ran into my room. I was all alone, and she grabbed my neck, and I understood how bad she felt. And I realized, my God, how vile am I? She really had feelings for me, and I had been so superficial. That’s when I suddenly felt – I had never been in love with her as such – but I love her. We had already known each other for a few years by this point. Our relationship had been ticking over like this for a few years but at that moment, I realized it was the right thing, and that right thing continues to this day.

Much of Riina’s conversation was also about relationships, but she prioritised them in order of importance rather than their chronological order. Unlike Sirts, who focused on one love story, Riina recalled relationships from different decades, relating them wittily to the social situation during the turn of the 1970s that carried over to the 1980s. Like Sirts and Kristi, Riina did not acknowledge the issue of homophobia during both the Soviet and post-Soviet years. Instead, she considered her heterosexual friends to be tolerant. Riina painted a picture of reality in which loving same-sex relationships were accepted, even in a stagnant society, by the more bohemian part of the hetero(normative) society. While discussing what it meant to discover one’s LGBTQ+ identity during the Soviet period, she also reflected that lesbian relationships were perfectly possible and did not necessarily cause internal anguish to the women because “If you love someone, this love seems natural.” Riina’s relationships were longer than usual for someone her age, often lasting for several years, but sometimes ending sadly:

> Then she stopped loving me. She wanted a husband and children, I guess. I hitchhiked to see her [once]; she was sent to work in the countryside. This is when I found out that a man had been brought into the house, and I was told that I had to leave now. It was a terrible moment, and then I hitchhiked back.

In Kristi’s narrative, too, the most coherent part is her relationships and flings with other women. What makes her story unique is the way it reflects her personal development over the years through the evolution of different

relationships. It paints a picture of a young and somewhat naive girl who nevertheless roots her sexual identity in the LGBTQ+ field. In her narrative, the private and public spheres intersect – the scenes are parties, such as those of the lesbian union and the apartments. As a storyteller, Kristi recalls colourful details from her extensive dating history:

> We were young, and my girlfriend lived in Mustamäe [a suburb of Tallinn]. We hung out there all night and got into a fight. I left and slammed the door, of course. At six in the morning, I'm walking across the yard, the sun is rising in Mustamäe, and then I hear Tina Turner's "I don't wanna lose you." She quickly found the tape, and it was just so sweet.

During the interviews, I focused on understanding the interviewees' perspectives and also allowed them to bring up topics they felt were important. As a result, an unexpected theme emerged regarding relations with men. In addition to being involved romantically with women, the interviewees talked about romantic involvement with men. They all contested the common stereotype that a woman who defines herself as a lesbian can only have an authentic identity when she is in relationships exclusively with women. In both cases of lesbian identifying interviewees, relationships with men were clearly not seen as a threat to their lesbian identity. They also mentioned the invisibility of bisexual women. This reality, which was likely not unique among women who identified as lesbian or bisexual, was poetically expressed by Riina:

> I have actually loved my husband. Our child was born out of love. That time was dedicated to him, and I loved him. But something pricked at my soul. There was still a desire to meet someone. And I had some experience... I met someone on the street. I guess the need to find someone had become so deep. I was out with a gay friend, a young person, in front of the café, *Moskva*. I was talking to someone who looked interesting, who had short hair and a sailor's shirt, and I thought she was someone else until my friend exclaimed: 'Well, that's an old lesbian!'. I said: 'Really? Let's turn back!' Immediately I approached her... We went to visit her [at her place], and since the front doors were not locked then, I simply returned the next day. Then suddenly everything happened... Soon I had already broken my marriage. I came home in the morning to find my husband crying in our bed. That was terrifying, very sad... I asked him, what do we have to do now? Do we have to divorce now? He said yes, we have to divorce now.

Queer children and parenting as queer

> Once, when he was eight, I mumbled something, to which he shouted: 'Mum!' I didn't understand and even flinched, but now he calls me *emps* ['mum' in everyday Estonian], and I don't mind. Today he has become my son. He is a very good boy, even looks like me by now. – Sirts

Another unexpected theme occurring in the interviews was parenting. A large part of the discussion concerned the role of children in the LGBTQ+ community, both those born from previous relationships with men and those born to female couples with gay friends or anonymous donors around the turn of the century. Becoming a parent through IVF (*in vitro* fertilisation) or with the help of gay friends was organically linked to the growth and development of the community, as Kristi's reasoning suggests: "In the beginning, when I started going to the events, [having a baby] was rather exceptional. But at a certain point, there was a baby bom in our lesbian union because everybody started having babies. People got together at these events." Sirts confirms Kristi's opinion which shatters the stereotypical assumption that there were no children born among LGBTQ+ couples before the turn of the century: "There were indeed children already in the 1990s. Somehow they came, and we did not ask too much about it."

Concerning the parenthood of the interviewees, all the narratives revealed a non-normative approach to mothering, which is still relevant today during a very different style of governance. They all avoided the traditional approach to family, showing three very different paths and motivations for becoming a parent.[29] Sirts, for example, showed her path to motherhood and affection towards a child caringly by telling the story of raising a son. Her son had been abandoned by his biological parent and her partner:

> I don't have children myself. I've done all kinds of things, but I've never become pregnant. But if it had happened, there was no way I would have gotten rid of it. But I have raised a child. That child came to me at the age of three. At first, he was waiting with me for his mother. We watched a Canadian film in which the mother bear died, and the little bear wandered around. I lied to the child by saying that mummy would come back soon, mummy's at work, and so on. And then he sniffed and said: 'What are you telling me? My mummy won't come. My mummy left me, just like this little bear was left to walk around on his own in the film'. And then I realised, my God, what a stupid thing it is that I'm saying to this kid! Children don't need lies, so from that moment, I never lied to him again.

29 Fish et al. 2019.

A significant portion of the conversation, also concerned in Riina's case, was parenting and the position of bisexual women in male and female relationships. This probably was one of the reasons why Riina repeatedly mentioned marriage. Compared to Sirts, she showed a more traditional path of becoming a mother. Her reflection echoed heteronormative presumptions prevalent in Soviet Estonia around the 1970s to 1980s, which linked motherhood directly to heterosexual relationships. Thus, Riina talked about her early marriage and proposing to her husband, which she associated with her desire for children at the time. According to Riina, "We all have a woman programmed into us. As a part of nature, we all want children, or at least most of us."

Riina also felt the need to explicitly discuss the realms and problems involved in being a bisexual woman. Her queer approach to parenthood emerged as she considered what family life and parenting means for women in lesbian relationships, as well as for women who have had children from a previous relationship with a man. She discussed her son at length, growing up with a mother in a lesbian relationship, and the need for honesty with children. She reflected on how "he figured it out and asked me about it when he was of school age, five or six years old. I should have told him nicely, but I couldn't." Here lies the beauty and essence of Riina's narrative. Bisexual women often do not feel themselves to be at home in lesbian or LGBTQ+ communities, and also in a heteronormative society – a feeling which tends to reflect the marginalisation of a bi identity.[30] One of the reasons for this alienation is that self-identified heterosexual and homosexual people may have overlapping interests in terms of the erasure of bisexuality. These, perhaps not always conscious, interests led them into an epistemic contract regarding the stabilisation of exclusive sexual orientation categories.[31] Riina opposes such a binary by not only talking about her own experiences but also those of her friends, interweaving literary examples such as Virginia Woolf. Altogether, she articulates her experience as a bisexual woman. Riina's narrative offers bi-identified women the agency to be included in the lesbian community.

Unlike the other interviewees, Kristi mentions her child only occasionally: "My mother largely raised him. [There was] a new exciting world [around me]. It was necessary to fly." Perhaps having a child at the age of seventeen also plays a role here. Kristi intrinsically relates having a child to her heterosexual relationship and the beginning of her social and private lesbian life. While reminiscing, she merges all those different layers together:

30 Hayfield et al. 2014.

31 Yoshino 2000.

> I remember my thoughts so well about having a baby, either now or never. By then, I already had a clear picture of what or who [interested me, i.e. women]. It was a deliberate decision. I thought that if I didn't do it now, I never would. We had already been living together since I was fourteen. He went into the army when he was eighteen, and I was sixteen, and then I followed other paths. I don't remember where it came from. There was probably a moment of recognition. [When he returned] I already had a girlfriend.

As Kristi's words vividly illustrate, the pressures of late socialism and national awakening on the proper way of mothering were also crucial, forcing a woman into a domestic role after childbirth:

> At that time, apartments were still distributed by the state, so he [the boyfriend] got an apartment from the municipality [about 50 kilometres from the capital] and came to me saying: 'Of course, come here with the child – I even have a washing machine.' That washing machine was the word that made me want to vomit – that I would come for the washing machine? It somehow symbolised housewifery for me.

In Kristi's case, the parent–child relationship reveals itself from a slightly different angle, and the emphasis shifts from queer parenting to queer children. The significant topic is related to Kristi's relationship with her own parents. Her father brags to his girlfriends about his lesbian daughter. Whereas Kristi's mother – a product of a closed society – appears extremely intolerant of her daughter's identity. Kristi's closest relationship in the family is with her grandmother, about whom she talks very warmly. Such an experience resonates broadly with existing research about the role of grandparents in the lives of their LGBTQ+ grandchildren. According to studies, female grandparents who know about their LGBTQ+ grandchildren are likely to become important family members when young adults come out.[32] Also, findings indicate that grandparents who learn about their grandchildren's LGBTQ sexuality may have surprisingly supportive reactions, even in comparison to other family members.[33] Kristi takes it somewhat further:

> My dad's mum was the first to know. We were 'besties', always the closest to each other. I knew her and trusted her. Afterwards, she befriended the gay guys, being such a fan of them. All my gay friends

32 Scherrer 2016.

33 Scherrer 2011.

> went to her to discuss their relationship dramas and also to gossip about me. She was a real lady, always having red painted nails, smoking a fancy cigarette. She was the only person in my family whom I really loved. We were so alike. When she died, she was around sixty. There was a party in Enke's basement, and grandma said she wanted to come, too. I told everyone that my grandma would come with me, and then she died a week before the party took place.

Conclusion and discussion

> I have had an awesome life. Happy? I am not sure how big the happiness has been. All that has been done – I don't regret a single thing. I rather regret what I haven't done yet. I have had a very colourful and quite impulsive life. Awesome life. Every trick has been done. – Sirts

All three interviewees belonged to the same socio-cultural context and were part of the early days of the first wave of the late or post-Soviet lesbian movement in Estonia during the 1980s and 1990s. The movement organised itself into a community mainly through letter writing and later through meetings. The interviews revealed three main categories: participation in lesbian activism and social life, romantic relationships, and family relationships.

While the social context was evident in Sirts's story, it was less explicit in Riina's and Kristi's, with the social meanings being more implicit. All three talked very little about the totalitarian Soviet conditions, and their realisation of their non-normative identities in those circumstances did not seem to cause them any pain, at least not retrospectively. None of them recalled the homophobia prevalent in the society during that time. They profoundly remembered participating in the activities of the newly formed Estonian Lesbian Union in the context of the lawless 1990s. Although they did not say much about the remarkable social changes, the notion was implicitly present in the narrative, as all these changes made early lesbian activism possible. From a community-building perspective, an interesting aspect of the transition period emerged from all three interviews: social boundaries, whether of age, occupation or education, were much less strict in creating a community than today.

As the interviewer, I welcomed Sirts, Riina, and Kristi to deviate from the original structure of the interview. Nevertheless, they chose to focus mainly on the context of their sexual identity. Another aspect of the retrospective was that the stories shared were clearly from within the LGBTQ+ community, and

predominantly, the main characters were all members of the community, mainly women. Despite the similar context and process of storytelling, the three women had very different narrating styles. Sirts offered a precise sequence of events, and she was strongly present throughout her story. The narration style was emotionally charged and direct, focusing on the events rather than self-reflection. Her story formed a cohesive whole, providing a clear overview of the events that she considered essential. Riina's story was more fragmented, with the interviewee and interviewer as two members of the community, engaging in dialogue and exchanging experiences. During some parts of the interview with Riina, the storytelling became secondary. The descriptions of events alternated with philosophical and very personal discussions about sexual identity and its meaning, about the role of love and relationships over the lifespan, and about the challenges being posed by the new era for women loving women. Riina did not follow a clear progression from one point to another but repeatedly returned to specific moments that were important to her. Of all the three interviews, Kristi's story was the most fragmented but also contained many colourful, even anecdotic memory pictures and specific episodes. Kristi, a vivid and funny storyteller, was very present in her narrative. She talked expressively, sometimes imitating people and their voices, making them recognisable.

Love played a crucial role among all the motives and was more significant than activism or social life. While the story of activism was quite comparable to the different groups organising in Estonia at the time of the change of power,[34] the narratives about love between women were each beautiful and unique in terms of storytelling. A series of stories unfolded, describing the discovery and expression of feelings from a very young to an older age, from a closed society to a more open one. The theme of romantic involvement with women was not the only focus; two unexpected themes emerged: relationships with men and parenthood. Through these themes, the women challenged the common stereotype that lesbian identity is only authentic in relationships with women, while also touching upon the invisibility of bisexual women. The narratives also offered a queer approach to motherhood, which remains relevant today in a very different style of governance. Overall, they all avoided the traditional approach to family, showing three distinct paths to and motivations for parenthood.[35]

Finally, from the viewpoint of at-home ethnography, it was easy for me to relate to the narratives. Also, as a member of a post-Soviet generation that went through similar phases in the 21st century, my impression was that the focuses

34 Davidjants 2016; 2024.
35 Fish et al. 2019.

and emphases were not so different from those of the previous generations. Both generations would have encountered similar paths toward self-discovery, social life, and activism, as well as fatigue. The narratives illuminated all these very different paths into queer parenthood, which are visible many decades later.

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STARP MUMS, IGAUNIETĒM: LESBIEŠU UN BISEKSUĀLAS SIEVIETES NARATĪVI PAR PADOMJU UN PĒCPADOMJU PĀREJAS LAIKU

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Zinātniskās intereses: divkārt marginalizētās identitātes subkultūras organizācijā, subkultūras ideoloģizācija 21. gadsimta Igaunijas jauniešu vidū

Rakstā ir analizēti trīs igauņu sieviešu dzīvesstāsti, kuras identificējas kā lesbietes vai biseksuāles. Balstoties uz trim daļēji strukturētām padziļinātām intervijām, autore koncentrējas uz laiku, kad vietējā LGBT+ kustība aktivizējās 20. gadsimta 80. un 90. gados, pēc pusgadsimtu ilgušās padomju varas sabrukšanas un Igaunijas neatkarības atgūšanas. Gadu gājums apvienojumā ar indivīda biogrāfiju, atmiņu dzīles un vērtējošs atskats uz savu dzīvi ir izšķirošās sastāvdaļas, interpretējot personīgās pieredzes sociālo vērtību. Lietojot tematisko analīzi, autore atsedz, kā personīgās pieredzes var kļūt par kopīgu stāstījumu, vienlaikus atklājot katra dzīvesstāsta neatkārtojamību.

Atslēgas vārdi: LGBT+ identitāte, pēcpadomju, mutiskā vēsture, lesbiete, biseksuāle

Kopsavilkums

Igaunijas vēsturi raksturo apslēptu un marginalizētu identitāšu naratīvi, kuri gaida uzklausīšanu. Rakstā analizēti trīs sieviešu dzīvesstāsti, kuras identificējās kā lesbietes vai biseksuāles un kuras aktīvi piedalījās Igaunijas LGBT+ kustības pirmsākumos, aptuveni no 20. gadsimta 80. līdz 90. gadiem, kad padomju vara sabruka un Igaunija atguva neatkarību.

Stāstījumu analīzei autore lietoja mutvārdu vēsturi, jo gadu gājums, autobiogrāfija, atmiņas un vērtējošs atskats uz dzīvi ir svarīgas sastāvdaļas, interpretējot sociālo un kulturālo faktoru nozīmi personiskajā pieredzē. Dzīvesstāsti izceļ katras personīgās pieredzes unikalitāti, vienlaikus parādot, kā individuālās un kolektīvās atmiņas savijas, kad cilvēki atceras pieredzi, kas viņiem bija kopīga noteiktā laika posmā. Kopumā personīgā pieredze kļūst par sociālās grupas pieredzi, veidojot vēsturisku fenomenu, tādējādi piedāvājot ne tik bieži apspriestu skatpunktu uz laika periodu, kas igauņiem bija pavērsiena punkts. Analizējot naratīvus, mikrovēsturiska pieeja ļāva autorei atkārtoti atgriezties pie stāstījuma, vienmēr saredzot sabiedrības marginalizētās balsis.

Naratīvi tika veidoti no daļēji strukturētām padziļinātām intervijām. Tā kā viena no intervētajām, Sirtsa (1955–2022), bija labi zināma LGBT+ kopienā, tika lietots viņas īstais vārds un uzrādīti dzīves dati. Savukārt abām pārējām – Rīnai (1961) un Kristi (1971)

izmantoti pseidonīmi un netika norādīts precīzs vecums. Lai pētītu katra naratīva mikropasauli, katrs stāstījums analizēts atsevišķi, nevis pēc kopējām tēmām, kas sastopamas trijos dzīvesstāstos. Balstoties uz intervijās teikto, detalizēti aprakstīts stāstu saturs un sastādīts kopsavilkums. Aplūkota katra stāstījuma struktūra un sastāvdaļas, kā arī stāstīšanas veids. Analizējot intervijas, izmantota pieeja "no apakšas", lai būtu pēc iespējas tuvāk intervējamo perspektīvām un koncentrētos uz to, kā viņas izjuta savu pieredzi.

Visas respondentes piederēja vienam un tam pašam sociokulturālajam kontekstam, piedaloties lesbiešu kustības pirmsākumos Igaunijā, aptuveni 20. gadsimta 80. un 90. gados. Stāstu esence koncentrējās uz šo īso laika periodu, kuru raksturoja (padomju) sociālisma destabilizācija un tai sekojošais sabrukums. Šis laiks atspoguļoja entuziasmu, mudinot cilvēkus pārveidot sabiedrību kā brīvām un aktīvām personām. Šo sieviešu dzīves takas arī zināmā mērā krustojās, viņām gan vienai otru nejauši pieminot, gan atsaucoties uz vieniem un tiem pašiem notikumiem.

Interesantākais atklājums bija tas, ka šajos diezgan līdzīgos apstākļos parādījās trīs ļoti atšķirīgi stāstīšanas veidi, pat ja temats, par ko intervējamās runāja, kopumā bija līdzīgs. Sirtsas stāstījums piedāvāja ļoti skaidru lineāru notikumu secību. Rīnas stāsts bija fragmentārāks, mijoties dialogam un pieredzes atstāstījumam starp divām intervijā klātesošajām kopienas loceklēm – intervējamo un autori – un tādējādi dažviet stāstīšana kļuva sekundāra. Arī Kristi stāstījums bija fragmentārs, ietverot daudz krāsainu, pat anekdotisku atmiņu tēlojumu.

Respondentes sāka savus stāstus no bērnības un jaunības, diezgan agri apjaušot savu nenormatīvo identitāti, neskatoties uz Padomju Savienības laika slēgto sabiedrību. Viņas ātri vien pieminēja savas pirmās attiecības un pēc tam pārgāja uz lesbiešu aktīvisma un sabiedriskās dzīves sākumu. Lai gan visas trīs bija aktīvas LGBT+ kustībā, Sirtsa šajā tēmā iedziļinājās vairāk nekā Rīna vai Kristi. Iemesls tam, iespējams, slēpjas apstāklī, ka Rīna vairāk identificējās ar savu profesiju, kas nesaistījās LGBT+ kustību, savukārt Kristi stāstījums galvenokārt balstījās uz viņas privātajām attiecībām. Tajā pašā laikā Sirtsa, kura līdz mūža beigām strādāja X-bārā, vienmēr saglabāja profesionālo saikni ar kopienu.

Sirtsas stāstījumā sociālais konteksts bija ļoti klātesošs, savukārt Rīnas un Kristi stāstos tas nebija tik izteikts, jo viņu naratīvos plašākas sociālās nozīmes bija netiešas. Visas trīs ļoti maz runāja par totalitārajiem padomju apstākļiem, un savas nenormatīvās identitātes atjaušana tajos apstākļos viņas nesāpināja, vismaz ne retrospektīvi. Viņas atcerējās savu dalību Igaunijas Lesbiešu savienības veidošanā un darbībā, kas kļuva iespējama režīma maiņas dēļ.

Starp stāstu virzošajām tēmām būtiska loma bija mīlestībai. Mīlestība iekļāva ne tikai romantiskas attiecības ar sievietēm. Viens no autores mērķiem bija atstāt vietu tēmām, ko intervējamās pašas varētu izvirzīt. Rezultātā atklājās divas neparedzētas tēmas – viena par attiecībām ar vīriešiem un otra par bērnu audzināšanu. Intervējamās noliedza to, ka biseksuālas sievietes neeksistē. Sakarā ar sieviešu neheteroseksuālām identitātēm stāstījumi attēloja kvīru pieeju bērnu audzināšanā, kas joprojām ir aktuāli

mūsdienās pat ļoti atšķirīgas valsts pārvaldes laikā. Viņas izvairījās no tradicionālā ģimenes modeļa, rādot trīs dažādas pieejas un motivācijas, lai kļūtu par māti.

Kopumā intervijas parādīja, ka, neskatoties uz padomju laika autoritārismu, lesbiešu attiecības ir pastāvējušas vienmēr. Raugoties caur vietējās etnogrāfijas skatpunktu, autorei bija viegli uztvert šos naratīvus, un, pārstāvot pēcpadomju paaudzi, kura jaunajā gadsimtā piedzīvojusi līdzīgus posmus, viņa pieļauj, ka šīs paaudzes uzmanības fokuss un uzsvari daudz neatšķīrās no iepriekšējās paaudzes. Abas paaudzes varētu būt gājušas līdzīgus ceļus gan sevis izzināšanā, gan sociālās dzīves veidošanā un aktīvismā (un ar to saistītajā nogurumā). Visbeidzot, šie dažādie veidi, kā kvīri kļūst par vecākiem un veido ģimeni, ir redzami arī daudzus gadu desmitus vēlāk.

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PRESENCE OF QUEER SEXUALITY IN MEMORIES OF LATVIAN NON-HOMOSEXUALS OF THE SOVIET ERA

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The research aims to analyse oral history interviews of heterosexual people about their experience with homosexuals during the Soviet times. Eight interviews were selected for the analysis based on two criteria – the research participant belongs to the Soviet generation, and he/she has personally known homosexuals during the Soviet times. The paper presents interviews as a primary source, illuminating several challenges with obtaining the interviews and their interpretation. In addition, common narratives of communicative memories' evidence and their influence on current views of homosexuals in Latvian society, including its historical metanarrative and historical record, which relies on the nation's victimisation during the Soviet times, are analysed.

Keywords: oral history, queers, Soviet Latvia, memory, common narratives

Introduction

Society is a total network of relationships between people, wrote Arnold Toynbee; therefore, "the components of society are thus not human beings but relations between them".[1] It is impossible to comprehend queer lives and experiences without accounting for the societal norms and arrangements concerning the "different" sexuality. According to anthropologist Johannes Fabian, recognising the "other" in society does not mean accepting the "other", therefore,

1 Toynbee 1961, 271.

when describing "other", we unwittingly distance and subjugate the other.[2] Also, the challenge is the necessity to share the past between the actors because it is the only way to consciously witness each other's existence in the present and accept the differences.[3] Heterosexuals' narratives about homosexuals who lived alongside them during the Soviet times could illuminate how society perceived and distanced the "other" from its everyday lived experience.

The attitude of the Soviet authorities towards homosexuality is documented in numerous scholarly writings, mainly reviewing the attitude towards homosexuality within the context of repressive practices[4] of Soviet authoritarianism and its consequences for different sexualities in the former Soviet republics.[5] This topic has gained urgency since, in 2013, the Russian government started campaigning to fortify "the traditional values" and fight against "LGBTQ+ propaganda". In addition, the development of LGBTQ+ movements in the former Soviet sphere, the struggles for LGBTQ+ justice in the former republics of the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe, as well as the homophobic discourse of radical conservatives amplify the urgency of this theme.

In Latvia, the history of homosexuals has been researched by Ineta Lipša, offering both an overall review of LGBTQ+ historical narratives as well as separate investigations of the topic, using autobiographical and criminal case materials.[6] Based on three criminal cases from the 1970s and one from the mid-1980s, Feruza Aripova has mapped clandestine representations of queer lives and existing private and alternative networks.[7] Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš have analysed never before researched queer experiences outside urban setting in the countryside.[8] More broadly known, Rita Ruduša's project "Forced Underground. Homosexuals in Soviet Latvia"[9] offers narratives derived from her interviewing of homosexual people. The project plays a crucial role in contextualising

2 Fabian 2006, 140.

3 Fabian 1983, 92.

4 In the Soviet Latvia, until 1961, the legal framework of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was enforced, which prosecuted men for "pederasty", which carried a punishment of 3–5 years imprisonment. The Criminal Code of Latvian SSR replaced this punishment with imprisonment of up to 5 years. Over 300 men were prosecuted under this law between 1945 and 1989. Homosexuality was decriminalised after Latvia regained independence in 1992 (Lipša 2018).

5 Healey 2001; Mole 2019; Alexander 2021.

6 Lipša 2021; Lipša 2022.

7 Aripova 2020.

8 Vērdiņš 2015; Vērdiņš, Ozoliņš 2020.

9 Ruduša 2014.

the history of the LGBTQ+ community by introducing the experiences of its members. However, it should be considered a popular publication rather than a scholarly research project.

The research question of my article is what non-homosexuals knew and what attitudes they developed towards their contemporaries with different sexualities. Research in this paper is based on an analysis of interviews with non-homosexual persons. The interviews illuminate knowledge about relationships between state authorities and homosexuals and how widespread this knowledge was in society. The study of the interviews yields a reconstruction of the respondents' (and overall – society's) attitude toward other sexualities. The paper, therefore, offers never researched fresh insights into the attitudes of specific groups of society, coexistence, and interactions during the Soviet period.

Memories of the different sexualities as a source

The researchers highly value history's social role in writing about the identities of society's discriminated groups. They consider the role instrumental in minimising inequity for the groups by providing historical places or including them in the metanarratives of the past. In addition, the members of these communities themselves try to create a narrative about their past. Such self-constructed histories, however, might lack criticality towards the community itself, or the stories of their past could be removed from the actors themselves.[10] Another challenge is a generational disconnect. In Latvia, the LGBTQ+ community has been unable to integrate the generation of Soviet homosexuals.[11] Some researchers state that, following the homo-nationalism paradigm, we attempt to incorporate the subcultures of sexual identities within the existing recognised groups,[12] resulting in LGBTQ+ identities becoming acceptable for right wing politics and thus accepted for fortifying the nation. These are, however, contemporary challenges which nevertheless influence the representation of the past. Each specific social group's

10 Manion 2014; Thomson 2008.

11 Latvia's LGBT+ activists are a younger generation, the older members of which have experienced the Soviet times during their childhood. Their connection with the older LGBT+ generation is weak. When trying to reach out to potential interviewees through the community, attempts were unproductive. In addition, some homosexuals of the Soviet generation feel disconnected from the community and reluctantly observe the LGBT+ community's activities, for example, events promoting homosexual visibility.

12 Çetin, Voß 2016; Vogler 2022.

historical narrative will be one-sided if it does not include the perspectives of related social groups, institutions or power structures. Therefore, in this paper, dedicated to homosexuals' lives during the Soviet times, other actors' – non-homosexuals' perspectives, revealed in the contemporaries' memories and contemplations, are analysed.

Since the fall of communism, the specifics of Soviet daily life have been forgotten even by those who experienced them, often yielding binary, over-simplified matrices of perception lacking factual validity about life during the Soviet times. Currently, experiences of the Soviet times and everyday lives are often oversimplified or generalised, categorising them within the ideological assumptions of the Cold War's Homo Sovieticus as the product of the Soviet system. It is characterised as submissive, opportunistic, able to comply, with a monistic worldview, etc. Even though researchers reject such a simplified view,[13] this term is employed as a convincing argument in public discourses, blaming the Soviet generation for many of the realities of today.[14]

One of this paper's tasks is to analyse heterosexuals' memories as the primary source and to reveal their knowledge of and relationships with queers specifically. Memories are analysed based on Alistair Thomson's thesis that people continuously either adjust or suppress painful or unsafe memories because they are risky if they do not conform with the public opinion about the past. Even though memories are a private process of composing, their retelling is exposed to the public. We form memories in a publicly acceptable way.[15] In this paper, I will reveal the components that tie in with memories about the 'other' during circumstances when attitudes towards homosexuality are both more accepting and normalising and, at the same time, turned into the weapon of political battles used to mobilise both liberal and conservative voters.

In this paper, I will identify the evidence that characterises the Soviet generation's communicative memory's common narratives about homosexuals. This memory is acquired due to generational experiences, and if its elements are not absorbed by cultural memory or not amplified by metanarratives, it will disappear within the lifetime of the next three to four generations.[16] It is important to note that these narratives are not part of the interviewees' biographical memories. Some of the research participants were interviewed about their life history; however, during those interviews, their relationships with homosexuals were not

13 Zakharova 2013; Sharafutdinova 2019.

14 Zellis 2022, 53–54.

15 Thomson 2013, 14–15.

16 Assman 2013, 50–52; Welzer 2008.

articulated. The heterosexual respondents recalling homosexuals can be defined as episodic memory, which the interviewer actualised by asking questions about homosexuals of the Soviet times.

Family and kin memory is an integral part of communicative memory from which the inconvenient homosexuals are excluded. Families and kinfolk memories in Latvia are essential in forming the individual's self-identity. Therefore, family memory is a noteworthy instrument for forwarding historical experiences. The family's communicative memory is more significant than mere communication – the narratives help form our identities, make sense of the world, and mobilise community action.[17] It is, however, essential to remember that a family's history offers idiosyncratic historical fiction, the retelling of which is not consistent and is prone to unravelling, even more so if there are inconvenient questions[18] that are deemed to be forgotten or misinterpreted. In the University of Latvia Philosophy and Sociology Institute's Latvia's National Oral History Archive, which holds more than 4500 life histories, homosexuality is not mentioned.[19] Even if there were homosexuals in the families, it was formulated as "the person did not have a family" and "he lived on his own", avoiding interrogation of the causes of such circumstances. In truth, the gatherers of the life histories did not ask those questions, focusing on the individual's narrative and prompting or asking clarifying questions about their lives. Also, the families avoided "seeing" their relative's other sexuality. As one of the queer narrators noted, his mother had more trouble with his heterosexual brother, who changed his female partners, rather than him, who lived without women.[20]

For this research, eight interviews have been analysed that have been acquired during 2022–2023. The interviewees were born in the 20th century between the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1960s. Their formative years, upbringing and career started during the Post Stalin era. This so-called "Soviet" generation was raised in the spirit of Soviet ideology during the normalisation of the occupying regime. This generation had to develop a strategy of social integration within completely new circumstances that differed from that of their parents, who had gained experience during the years of the independent Republic of

17 Žilinskienė 2020, 158.

18 Welzer et al. 2010, 21.

19 Describing the biographical narratives of Estonians, Ene Koresaar writes about historical ruptures, "there has emerged a strongly defined ethnic-cultural repertoire. For the life story writer, central concerns are symbols, morality, and national unity. The main markers of "own" and "other" in Estonians' ethnic identification are also articulated in terms of interruptions." (Koresaar 2005, 210).

20 SBK07.

Latvia (1919–1940) and clashed with the official Soviet discourses.[21] Interviewees' narratives focused on experiences that occurred between the 1960s–1980s. The women and men interviewed are primarily ethnic Latvians and one Jew. The geography of their experiences includes the former Soviet republics; however, most of the narratives take place in Latvia, mainly in Riga. The length of the interviews is from half an hour to two hours. The interviews focus on how people learned about other sexualities and how their relationships with people who were homosexual were formed. The research participants belong to various groups of intelligentsia who, during the Soviet times, were either family members, friends or colleagues of homosexuals. The respondents either agreed to or were persuaded to share their memories. It is challenging to find acquaintances and relatives of homosexuals of the Soviet times. Perhaps the reason for that is that even recently, in 2020, 62% of Latvia's population, regardless of their age, did not know a homosexual person, but among older generations, the percentage is even higher – exceeding 75%.[22] Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the assumptions that historically there have not been homosexuals among Latvians, that belonging to the LGBTQ+ community is a novelty which resulted from the expansion of the Western culture during the 1990s, and that it is fashionable for youth to turn to homosexuality, find a willing audience.

On the one hand, this could cause confusion; how is it possible in a society where male homosexual intercourse was criminalised not to notice the "other"? An anonymous Latvian queer interviewed by the sociologist Gordon Waitt has explained to him that during the Soviet times, it was easier for homosexuals to remain invisible because of the shortage of apartments. It was expected and acceptable that two men live together, in this context, without fear of being outed as homosexuals.[23] At the same time, during conversations with the potential respondents, they noted that many episodes that currently could be interpreted as queer, they recognised as such only in retrospect – after the collapse of the USSR. In addition, they did not know or had just heard that sodomy was punishable by a prison sentence.

A few interviewees, who did not personally know of a homosexual person but had heard hearsay stories about them, thus formed their experiences using "prosthetic" or inauthentic memories,[24] which would not be possible to use for creating representations of the past. These memories were excluded from the analysis.

21 Zellis 2022, 57, 76.
22 SDKS, Mozaīka 2020, 16.
23 Waitt 2005, 174.
24 Landsberg 2004; Sutton 2022.

Similarly, several potential respondents refused to share their memories about homosexuals' lives during the Soviet times, stating that either they would not discuss "such matters (of sexuality)" or they did not have the right to talk about this because the secret, trusted by their deceased homosexual friend should be kept. In their opinion, the outing of the dead friend will put to shame their honour and respect. A few times, the potential respondents argued that since currently, the political leaders' reaction to the LGBTQ+ movement is "politically correct", they declined the interview because of their opposing (negative) experience; they did not want to talk about this.[25] At the core of this refusal is fear of being misunderstood by the "majority" or sometimes fear of "gay revenge" because gays currently "are in the position of power". The listed reasons for refusal are evidence that memories of homosexuals cause discomfort for their non-homosexual contemporaries of the Soviet times. The memories are also uncomfortable for the homosexuals of the Soviet times, who either refused to share them or, if sharing their stories, chose to remain anonymous. Therefore, in Latvia, due to lack of experience, not only queers feel threatened and unsafe, but also heterosexuals. Such idiosyncratic silence undermines the gathering of memories. I put forth three reasons that promote such silence, characteristic of both heterosexuals and homosexuals of the Soviet times.

First, it is the close-minded and unaccepting attitude of homosexuality both during the Soviet times and currently. The milieu of Soviet sexuality was conservative; however, many things that the population did not advertise – contraception, sex before marriage, extramarital relationships, etc., during the Soviet times provided and offered the people a certain sense of freedom and autonomy within the authoritarian society. The historian Nataliia Lebina recommends defining Soviet sexuality using the term "intimate", which could be interpreted as something hidden from the surrounding world and deeply personal.[26] Therefore, the Soviet generation considers conversations about sexuality inappropriate or, at best, uncomfortable. After completing the interviews, a few respondents acknowledged that it was difficult to discuss sexuality, even if it was the sexuality of other people.

With the collapse of communism, the prejudices against sexuality have not ended and, even more specifically, against homosexuality. This causes a significant hindrance to memory sharing. Even though research shows that attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community is improving, it is still alarming within the European

25 This situation can also be explained by the biases dealt with in the last chapter of the article.

26 Lebina 2019, 171–188; Ilic 2013, 13.

Union, showing one of the lowest approval indicators.[27] In September 2021, Latvian Television completed a small series of short films, "Outside"[28], that reviews the sexualities of the contemporary youth. Upon wrapping the project, the director, Ieva Ozoliņa, noted that due to ignorance, stereotypes about sexualities have a stronghold on society. Therefore, sexuality is a challenging topic which youth refuse to discuss.[29] Also, the government's vague position towards the regulation of the civil union between [same-sex] partners and inconsequential attitude towards homophobic hate crime,[30] as well as instances of hate speech against LGBTQ+ people,[31] undermine the reduction of prejudices against the community.

The second reason for the silence is caused by the traumatic cultural, political, and social experiences of the Soviet times. After regaining independence, the paradigm of the nation's victimisation took hold in Latvia, turning the nation into the central and exclusive victim of the Soviet regime.[32] In this paradigm, there are only two roles – that of the victim or the collaborator. If that helped with the interpretation of postwar Stalinism, then dividing the nation into two positions did not foster comprehension of the period of late socialism. This has resulted in the silencing of past experiences, reduction of the abuser into the KGB[33] or its informers, or cumulative heroisation when the person formulates their collaboration with the ruling power using a narrative of victimhood or a hero.[34] If a person has difficulty discussing their experiences of the post-Stalinism period, then perhaps discussing sexuality and, even more so, homosexuality is more challenging.

To formulate their experiences about a particular problem, the interviewees use language containing the experiences' dominant hierarchies, closely tied to the leading historical discourses. Reducing the Soviet time in public discourses to a simplified, binarised construct complicates comprehension of the Soviet past and understanding of the self during that past. A few publications about homosexuality during the Soviet times[35] and a variety of either domestic or foreign cultural products have not been able to create an adequate space for experiences

27 EU FRA 2020.

28 LTV_16plus (Director). (2021, July 13). *ĀRĀ. DOKUMENTĀLIE STĀSTI. INTRO.* Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kPtUl64jP4 (viewed 26.02.2024).

29 Melberga 2001.

30 Rozentāle 2021.

31 Tumule, Milovs 2022.

32 Bleiere 2012, 33–34; Davoliūtė 2022, 265–267.

33 Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, in English – Committee for State Security.

34 Welzer et al. 2010, 64.

35 Ruduša 2014; Lipša 2018; Lipša 2021b.

and discourses that would liberate people from the urge to stigmatise homosexuals and would offer examples of how to discuss this phenomenon. To use Astrid Erll's concept – the potential for memory travelling is not secured in the nation's cultural memory.[36]

Estonian researchers Rebeka Põldsam and Sara Arumetsa attempted to explain the space of discourse using the semiotic model of explosion developed by the semiotician Yuri Lotman.[37] They wrote that in the 1990s, human rights activists split into believers of social diversity and guardians of national rights. The latter became heteronormative and started loudly marginalising the rights of the minorities.[38]

In essence, the situation in Latvia is very similar; people could interpret the national freedom narrative at the end of the 1980s in many ways. For some, it was freedom from the Soviet Union. Others defined it much broader by including liberal liberties, such as democracy, individual and political freedom, human rights, freedom of speech, etc. A potential research participant, when asked to share her memories about the situation in the 1980s, in our correspondence replied that the subcultures of homosexuals were not an urgent problem, even more so during the Singing Revolution,[39] because it was "the struggle for something greater" which "of course, also included the liberation of sexual orientations".[40] We can use the previously mentioned Lotman's model or any of the theories of poststructural cultural hegemony or collective memory to describe the obvious – namely, the LGBTQ+ history was not written into the national memory narrative. During the pluralisation of national history in the 2000s, accounts of several ethnic groups were included. However, the main narrative preserved its "heterosexual hegemony".[41] The grand narrative of the nation's memory offered space for the victimised Latvian nation, in which sexuality reveals itself exclusively through the lens of the heterosexual family. This has resulted in the Russian speaking LGBTQ+ community experiencing double discrimination, even though feeling secure but unsafe.[42] The findings in sociology questionnaires reveal that in Russian-speaking families, the negative attitude towards homosexuality is nearly

36 Erll 2011.

37 Lotman, Grishakova, Clark 2009.

38 Põldsam, Arumetsa 2023, 11.

39 A series of events that led to the collapse of the communist regime in Latvia and the restoration of independence from June 1987 – August 1991.

40 Correspondence with L., 19 January 2023 (author's archive).

41 Butler 2002.

42 Tkačenko 2023.

twice as prevalent as in Latvian-speaking families.[43] It would be essential for this research project to gather the Russian-speaking population's memories. However, several factors undermine this – the war in Ukraine, which has created dissonance within the Russian-speaking population, which has not been researched yet, and the shared historical experience and attitude towards the Soviet time.[44]

The third reason for the Soviet generation's silence is the challenge to secure complete anonymity, which in small social groups, such as artist or writer communities, is more difficult to achieve. Assurances about the confidentiality of academic research, which is based on a mutual agreement of anonymity, did not always convince the potential participants that they would not be recognised. This includes potential homosexual and heterosexual participants who declined to be interviewed. Researchers who are outsiders and do not belong to the local community could guarantee more secure participants' anonymity.[45] At the same time, implementing such an approach would be limited by several factors – lack of fluency in the language and local sociopolitical contexts, among others.

Regardless of these challenges, the interviews accumulated and in the following two sections, I analyse the themes that appear in the heterosexuals' narratives.

Main narrative threads

In this section, I look at narratives similar to the analysed interviews and offer the theme that could be defined as – the Soviet generation's memory. Previous generations' communicative memory, cultural memory, and the current social environment influence this generation's stories. The stories display similar patterns, interpretations, experiences and attitudes that allow for synthesising the Soviet generation's common narrative.

Most of the respondents gained knowledge about homosexuality in childhood and teenage years. Most often, such knowledge was not acquired from direct interaction with homosexuals, which was extremely rare and random, but rather from the available literature. The literary works were published during the Soviet period and before the Second World War and kept in the family libraries. One of the respondents mentioned that he found out about homosexuality from the book *Across the River and Into the Trees*[46] by Ernest Hemingway, published

43 Spundiņa 2023.

44 Zellis 2017.

45 Taavetti 2019, 214.

46 Hemingvejs, Ernests (1963). *Pāri upei, koku paēnā.* Rīga: LVI.

in Latvian in the 1960s. The respondent liked the novel very much. He mentioned that the author identified one of the characters in Italian as *pederaste* without any further clarification. The respondent then reached for the dictionary, published during first Latvia's independence,[47] in his parent's bookcase and learned the meaning of pederasty.[48]

The second means of obtaining knowledge was gossip spread in various social groups about homosexually inclined people.

To quote the respondent: "Our neighbours were a family of a director, and his wife often visited to borrow sugar or other stuff. The visit would drag on for several hours. With careful eavesdropping, I could hear various stories about artists and their personal lives through the wall. In the midst of it, I could vaguely make out something about it. I didn't understand much about [homosexuality], but I comprehended that it was something unusual and not very nice." "However," the respondent immediately adds to her story, this "information was not judgmental, but rather sensational".[49]

Another respondent revealed that she found out about different sexuality – in her words, most likely about a "hermaphrodite" – while in the countryside. She explains: "And then I heard for the first time – half man – half woman" (…) And then I simply imagined – yes, she was always wearing pants and a man's jacket. And worked somewhere – perhaps, as a stable hand. But it was not meant to be an attitude. Simply put, it is how it is – somebody is a drinker, another person is a lousy neighbour, yet another is a hermaphrodite."[50]

In several interviews, different visual appearance, such as a masculine woman or a feminine man, was mentioned as one of the indicators to identify homosexuals, which in some instances turned out to be incorrect.

It is important to note that several research participants when asked when they first encountered a homosexual person, reduced their experiences to instances of paedophilia, when during their teenage years they experienced sexual advances, or when some of their educators were caught for indecent behaviour. People of this generation assume that paedophilia and homosexuality, if not synonyms, are closely linked concepts, as indicated in their narratives. The two concepts are viewed as the same, corresponding with the legal interpretation

47 1920–1940. See *History of Latvia: A brief synopsis*. (n. d.). Accessible at: https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/usa/culture/history-of-latvia-a-brief-synopsis (viewed 26.02.2024).

48 SBK02.

49 SBK06.

50 SBK017.

during the Soviet times, where homosexual relationships were defined as "pederasty".[51] Also, the prewar and Soviet publications etymologically define pederasty as the love for boys and male youth.[52] For the Soviet generation, this interpretation might have formed an associative link that pederasty and paedophilia are identical concepts. Latvian sexologist Jānis Zālītis wrote that pederasts are actual homosexuals, which are dangerous and criminal because they do not give up their desires even after a marriage to a woman. They are extremely dangerous to boys during puberty.[53]

The respondents talk about both – homosexuality of men and women. They discuss gay homosexuality more frequently, however, women's same-sex relationships they talk about less often and less judgemental (and in more neutral terms). Overall, the respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality range from extremely negative to reserved neutral. The interviewees used indefinite pronouns such as "they" or "them" to avoid using the person's name. That could be explained in many ways: on the one hand, it is a strategy to avoid causing discomfort to themselves and the person they are talking about by the information derived from their narrative. However, perhaps it could be unconscious depersonalisation at the core of homosexuals' marginalisation. At the same time, the interviewees similarly reflected on homosexuality in general, avoiding as much as possible this term. For the Soviet generation, the words "homosexual", "gay", "lesbian", etc. seem inappropriate and obscene, which are to be avoided by using the terms "they" or the metaphors such as "two faced", "player of the opposite team", "the representative of that Internationale".

The analysis of the narratives also presents homosexuals in the role of seducers. Usually, the predator seduces a heterosexual male youth to become homosexual, using their charm or the position of power in a particular social group. Another narrative explains that homosexuality "in our weird world is a question of advancing one's career".[54] Circulation of such revelations promotes the established myths about the role of LGBTQ+ in the current state's governing system and homosexuals as seducers of heterosexuals.

The interviewees explain that a person becomes a homosexual due to historical circumstances. When analysing a colleague's homosexuality, the respondent contemplates that he likely became like that during his rehabilitation in

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51 Alexander 2018, 31–35.

52 Švābe u. c. 1937, 30358.

53 Zālītis 1982, 80. About Zālītis writing on homosexuality in the book *In the Name of Love* see the article by Ineta Lipša (Lipša 2022, 110–113).

54 SBK02.

a sanatorium, where he was forced to stay in the company of young men.[55] Therefore, becoming a homosexual is explained as a social adaptation to outside circumstances (the homosocial environment of the sanatorium), and hardly ever contemplated that a person could be born that way. In addition, homosexuality is characterised as a "misfortune" or "ailment", and the person is "tormented" by their sexuality and suffered from it. Often these narratives create a peculiar binary scene, where genuine happiness equals traditional family, whereas homosexuality is misery and misfortune.[56] Perhaps such comparisons are inherited from the Soviet reference literature where "homosexuality" is defined as "tragedy".[57]

Between the urban legends and conspiracy theories

Urban legends are formed when people attempt to comprehend and simplify a complicated reality. During such attempts, the legends fill the information vacuum that develops due to various objective and subjective circumstances. These legends contain sentimental charges that can trigger different emotions and fulfil specific social communication functions. The Soviet urban legends can usually be interpreted as a reaction to the state's economic, social and political ventures' side effects;[58] however, it appears they existed about homosexuals as well.

Several narrators reveal the link between homosexuals and the Soviet nomenclature. One could contemplate why distinguished and known homosexuals were not repressed by Soviet authorities or repressed only after repeated reporting delivered by militia.[59] The explanation for that is revealed in the speculation that even in the upper echelons of the Soviet power, there were homosexuals who had created a secret network. These stories are enriched by secretive deaths of homosexuals, which are tied to breaking the code of silence or mysterious circumstances of their death, directly or indirectly linking them to nomenclature or the KGB.

If there is some uncertainty about homosexuals' influence on the Soviet nomenclature, it is replaced by assumptions that they are a tight-knit and closed community in which everyone supports each other, "just like Jews".[60] Even though none of the research participants could be considered antisemitic,

55 SBK02.

56 SBK03.

57 Zālītis 1982, 79.

58 Kalmre 2013; Arkhipova, Kirziuk 2020.

59 SBK03.

60 SBK05.

the structure of such a narrative echoes the traditional antisemitic conspiracy theories. While everywhere else in the world it is possible to draw direct and well-founded parallels between radical conservatives' discourses and their attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community,[61] in Latvia it is not noticeable either in the public space or in the interviews. Hypothetically, this could be explained as an archetypal atavism, on which basis most of the conspiracy theories are built. Much the same as the stories about homosexuals as seducers, it is possible to draw similarities with how Jews were rendered as immoral and promiscuous. However, these are fragmentary speculations that do not create the structural basis for the story, which could be recognisable in some conspiracy narratives.

While there is no concrete evidence for the stories about homosexuality in the Communist party nomenclature, they sometimes appear in the field of memoirs, stating that the Second Secretary of the Latvian Communist Party's Central Committee (LCP CC), Valentin Dmitriev,[62] was homosexual. Also, in some interviews, the same is mentioned about the First Secretary of the LCP CC Augusts Voss.[63] Whether it is true or just hearsay, one could only guess. The historian Saulius Grybkauskas, in his monograph about the institution of the Second Secretaries in the USSR, points out the political tandem of Dmitriev and Voss and the overall formal reasons for their dismission.[64]

Situation is slightly different with the engagement of homosexuals with the KGB. After the publication of the KGB archives,[65] several Latvian homosexuals were disclosed [as informants or agents], who refrained from publicly explaining their possible collaboration with the KGB.[66] The narratives also reveal suspicion that colleagues or friends might have had ties with the KGB since the aforementioned could be blackmailed for their sexual orientation. However, the threat of criminal prosecution was a serious argument to force a homosexual to become an informer or an agent for the KGB. Perhaps imagining such a scenario is one of the reasons why the collapse of the USSR prohibited the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in the narrative of the victimised nation.[67]

61 Kerl 2022; Heinemann 2022.

62 Valentin Dmitriev (1927–2020) – the Second Secretary of LCP CC (1980–86).

63 Augusts Voss (1919–1994) – the First Secretary of LCP CC (1966-84); SBK04, SBK019.

64 Grībkausks 2020, 232–234.

65 Latvian SSR KGB Archive https://kgb.arhivi.lv/

66 A series of publications "Bags are open" (Maisi vaļā) developed by journalists of Delfi.lv https://www.delfi.lv/delfi-tv-ar-jani-domburu/kolekcijas/maisi-vala/

67 It must be noted that during the interview with a homosexual of the Soviet time it was revealed that there had been an attempt to recruit him for the KGB. The respondent, however, denied that his sexual orientation was used as a blackmail (SBK06).

One of the research participants talks about the gay provocateurs sent by the KGB to protests in 1987 and 1988. She admitted that somebody "more informed" had told her that they were "pidrillas",[68] but she indeed remembers vividly an outgoing, flamboyant, well-dressed man wearing high heels (SBK17). Perhaps such a viewpoint could have been formed based on the attitude of the Soviet authorities, which did not attempt to prosecute all the identified homosexuals criminally but instead just placed them under surveillance, making them the target of various manipulations. [69]

Of course, we can debate whether these assumptions were legends or mere gossip. If we deduce that gossip lacks narrative structures, which the legends have, then in my opinion, the social significance of these stories lacks proper critical appreciation. Stories about homosexuals' connection with the Soviet nomenclature and the KGB have not ended after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The maintainers of the discourses of radical conservatism sometimes use these parallels by creating narratives about homosexuals at the upper echelons of power and their attempts, through the seduction of heterosexuals, to destroy gender roles and the institution of family. It is more likely random; however, one could contemplate if the Soviet authoritarianism's practice of using sexuality as a manipulative instrument against itself could be comprehended in contemporary contexts. It is worth investigating further to which degree these narratives are the legacy of the experiences in the Soviet time and to which degree they were fed by the Russian propaganda[70] or the churches and global conspiracy theories.

Conclusion

Memory about homosexuals in Soviet Latvia exists only at the communicative level, and more so, during its last years, due to the lack of a process of the travelling of these memories. Homosexuals of the Soviet times could not often disclose their sexuality to their families, or they would not mention it publicly because it was an indiscreet topic. Also, the families attempted to either ignore or hide their relatives' other sexuality. Therefore, it is essential that the memories and testimonies about the lived experiences would be documented by both homosexuals and heterosexuals, securing their formation with the proper tools of cultural memory. Memories about homosexuals are episodic and not articulated

68 Jargon for pederast or pedophile.

69 Lipša 2023.

70 Moriss 2023.

within non-homosexual persons' biographical memories. And even more so, access to these memories is restricted by the Soviet generation's prejudice against discussing sexuality, specifically homosexuality, during the Soviet times and in the present day. The fear of being recognised, which is the problem of anonymity, hinders storytelling.

A significant obstacle in sharing memories about homosexuals, as well as homosexuals' memories, is a lack of support by the metanarratives, which often serve as matrices when a person forms their life history. The narrative of homosexuals' oppression by the Soviet regime would fit seemingly well into the account of Latvia's victimised metanarrative. Such inclusion, however, has not happened after the collapse of the USSR when the national narrative developed, or currently. I believe this could be linked to the oversimplified binarity of this historical narrative, an overall conservative attitude toward it, and the sign, as recognised in the stories, indicating the possible, even though coerced, collaboration of homosexuals with the Soviet militia and the KGB.

The memory narratives offer knowledge about heterosexuals' comprehension and prejudice, as well as attitudes toward Soviet queers, as well as specific events in LGBTQ+ history. Recording these memories and analysis are crucial in learning about the social relationships that prevailed during the Soviet authoritarian years, specifically within the specific group of people whose difference was their sexual orientation. Evidence from the interviews reveals that the people knew about homosexuality – the knowledge was acquired from literature, gossip, and observation of the "other" people in an everyday environment. The research participants have formed a prejudice against their homosexual contemporaries. However, the degree of the judgement varied from regarding homosexuality as a perversion, illness, or misfortune to reducing homosexuality to an "idiosyncrasy". The narratives directly or indirectly reveal contemporaries' marginalisation of homosexuals. However, the reason for distancing from them is not only their different sexuality but also rumours and hearsay circulated about homosexuals' ties with the power elites and the KGB.

The research findings were based on interviews with ethnic Latvians, which revealed views of only one side of the Soviet society. To broaden perspective, interviews with the Russian-speaking population should be conducted. Their historical narrative, as well as attitudes toward homosexuality, are different, which is evident in sociological questionnaires as more judgmental than Latvians'. I hope that this paper will serve as a launch of the narrative about society's attitude toward different sexualities during the Soviet times.

Translated from Latvian by *Anna Romanovska*

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Interview	Year of birth	Gender
SBK02	1948	m
SBK03	1931	m
SBK04	1943	f
SBK05	1944	f
SBK06	1953	f
SBK17	1955	f
SBK18	1942	f
SBK19	1942	m
SBK07	1943	m /queer

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KVĪRU SEKSUALITĀTES KLĀTBŪTNE PADOMJU LAIKA LATVIEŠU NEHOMOSEKSUĀĻU ATMIŅĀ

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Zinātniskās intereses: propagandas vēsture, Latvijas 20. gadsimta vēsture, mutvārdu vēsture, kolektīvā un individuālā atmiņa

Rakstā ir analizētas heteroseksuālu cilvēku mutvārdu vēstures intervijas par viņu pieredzi ar homoseksuāļiem padomju laikos. Pētījuma mērķis ir paplašināt kvīru vēstures stāstu, lai tajā būtu ne tikai viņu vai varas struktūru perspektīva, bet tiktu parādīta arī citu laikabiedru pieredze. Raksta uzdevums ir analizēt gan šīs atmiņas kā avotu grupu, gan atklāt to vēstījumu specifiku par zināšanām un attiecībām ar kvīriem. Analīzei tika izvēlētas astoņas intervijas, balstoties uz diviem kritērijiem: a) intervējamie bija dzimuši 20. gadsimta 30. gadu beigās – 60. gadu sākumā, tādējādi viņu pieredze var tikt uzskatīta par padomju paaudzi raksturojošu; b) stāstītājiem bija personīgi pazīstami homoseksuāļi – draugi, paziņas, kolēģi vai radinieki – padomju laikā. Raksturojot šīs intervijas kā avotu, norādīts uz virkni problēmu gan interviju iegūšanā, gan interpretācijā. Tāpat ir analizētas komunikatīvās atmiņas kopīgo stāstījumu iezīmes intervijās, kā arī to ietekme uz šodienas homoseksuāļu uztveri Latvijas sabiedrībā un tajā skaitā tās vēstures metanaratīvā, kas balstās uz nācijas viktimizāciju padomju gados.

Atslēgas vārdi: mutvārdu vēsture, kvīri, padomju Latvija, atmiņa, kopīgie stāsti (*common narratives*)

Kopsavilkums

2022. gadā, uzsākot projektu “Starp valsts iestāžu uzraudzību un neiejaukšanos: viendzimuma seksuālo subkultūru prakses Padomju Latvijā, 1954–1991”, viens no uzdevumiem bija apzināt arī homoseksuālu cilvēku laikabiedru liecības. Šis raksts balstās uz daļu projekta laikā savākto interviju, un tās tiek izmantotas kā primārais avots, izgaismojot vairākas problēmas saistībā ar interviju iegūšanu un to interpretāciju. To analīzei lietotas mutvārdu vēstures metodes. Pieredzes par kvīru esamību padomju laikā Latvijā pastāv tikai komunikatīvās atmiņas līmenī, piedevām tās norietā, jo netiek nodrošināts šo atmiņu pārneses/ceļošanas process, vispirms jau caur ģimenes atmiņu. Padomju laika homoseksuāļiem bieži nācās savu seksualitāti no ģimenes slēpt, vai par to viņi nerunāja publiski, jo tā bija neērta tēma. Arī ģimenes centās savu radinieku citādo seksualitāti ignorēt vai slēpt. Tādējādi ir būtiski, lai atmiņas un liecības arī par šīm praksēm gan no nehomoseksuāļu, gan homoseksuāļu puses tiktu fiksētas, kas ļautu nodrošināt to

"ceļošanas" procesu jau ar kultūras atmiņas instrumentiem. Atmiņas par homoseksuāļiem ir epizodiskas un nav artikulētas nehomoseksuāļu biogrāfiskajā atmiņā. Turklāt šķērsli pētnieku piekļūšanai šīm atmiņām rada padomju paaudzes aizspriedumi pret runāšanu par seksualitāti kopumā un īpaši pret homoseksualitāti kā padomju laikā, tā šodien. Dalīšanos stāstos apgrūtina arī anonimitātes problēmas nelielā sabiedrībā, bailes tikt atpazītam.

Būtisks traucēklis stāstu dalīšanās praksēs ir tas, ka atmiņas par homoseksuāļiem, tāpat kā homoseksuāļu atmiņas nerod pastiprinājumu metanaratīvos, kas bieži kalpo kā matricas, cilvēkam veidojot savu pieredzes stāstu. Latvijas vēstures viktimizācijas metanaratīvā šķietami labi iekļautos arī stāsts par homoseksuāļu vajāšanām no padomju režīma puses, tomēr šāda iekļaušana nav notikusi – nedz laikā, kad pēc PSRS sabrukuma tika veidots šis nācijas stāsts, nedz šodien. Manuprāt, to var saistīt gan ar paša vēstures stāsta vienkāršoto binaritāti, gan visumā konservatīvo attieksmi pret šo stāstu, gan arī iezīmi, kas nojaušama stāstos, proti, par homoseksuāļu iespējamo, lai arī piespiesto kolaborāciju ar padomju milicijas un valsts drošības iestādēm.

Atmiņu stāsti sniedz informāciju par nehomoseksuāļu zināšanām un aizspriedumiem, kā arī attieksmēm pret padomju laika kvīriem, tāpat par noteiktiem notikumiem LGBT+ vēsturē. Šo atmiņu fiksācija un analīze ir nepieciešama, lai mēs spētu pietuvoties tām sociālo attiecību praksēm, kas valdīja padomju autoritārisma gados šķietami vienas sabiedrības locekļu vidū, kuru atšķirība bija to seksuālā orientācija. Intervijas liecina, ka zināšanas par homoseksualitāti cilvēkiem bija – tās tika iegūtas gan ar literatūras palīdzību, gan ar baumām, gan arī saskaroties ar citādiem cilvēkiem ikdienā. Intervējamo paustās attieksmes pret homoseksuālajiem laikabiedriem bija aizspriedumainas, tomēr to gamma variējās atkarībā no stāstītāja – sākot ar uzskatiem par homoseksualitāti kā izvirtību, slimību, nelaimi un beidzot ar tās reducēšanu līdz "dīvainībai". Stāsti gan tiešā, gan netiešā veidā norāda uz homoseksuāļu marginalizāciju no laikabiedru puses. Tomēr šīs distancēšanās iemesls ir ne tikai citādā seksualitāte, bet arī tā laika sabiedrībā pastāvošās baumas un nostāsti par homoseksuāļu saistību ar varas elitēm vai Valsts drošības komiteju.

Tomēr jāuzsver, ka rakstā ir analizēta tikai latviešu sabiedrības perspektīva, tajā netiek atsegti krievvalodīgo pagātnes stāsti, kuri, kā liecina kvantitatīvās aptaujas, ir aizspriedumaināki pret homoseksuāļiem nekā latviešiem, bet piekļuvi šiem stāstiem apgrūtina virkne objektīvu un subjektīvu faktoru.

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