

THE REGIONAL STUDIES MOVEMENT IN SOVIET LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT

This article* is dedicated to the regional studies movement in Soviet Lithuania, primarily to ethnography, and argues that Lithuanian ethnographers conducted ethnographic research in different ways. The focus is on the Ramuva movement, founded in 1970 at Vilnius University and continuing until 1994. The activities of the Lithuanian regional studies movement were characterised by diverse education and ethnographic practices. I assert that the key to the success of Ramuva's activity was a creative circumventing of Soviet ideology and practice. Through a discussion of theoretical issues and the results of fieldwork, I analyse the following questions: How did Marxism–Leninism change ethnography in Soviet Lithuania? What were the activities, methods and theory of regional research? Was Ramuva's policy of knowledge production in opposition to the Soviet regime?

KEYWORDS: Baltic countries • belonging • Lithuania • Marxism–Leninism • Ramuva movement • Soviet ethnography

A movement that came to be known as Ramuva was established at the Vincas Kapsukas Vilnius State University in 1970.¹ There was no direct connection between Ramuva and the similar sounding Romuva, a Lithuanian organisation promoting Neopaganism (Mačiekus 1995; Strmiska 2005: 42; FM: VSA SE2).² The Ramuva movement engaged in broad regional studies, including ethnography. On March 4, 1970, the organisation's first event was dedicated to the memory of a pioneer of Lithuanian literature, Martynas Mažvydas. The renowned linguists Jonas Palionis and Jurgis Lebedys delivered lectures at the event. Subsequent Ramuva expeditions featured established Soviet Lithuanian ethnographers, archaeologists, historians, linguists, and folklorists who conducted

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research and held lectures for young participants. According to the long-serving leader of the movement, economist Venantas Mačiekus, Ramuva's programme embraced the following objectives: firstly, "to research traditional Lithuanian culture" and, secondly, "to transform traditional culture into a spiritual treasure for all" (Mačiekus 1995; 2009: 200–204). According to Mačiekus (2009: 208–209), Ramuva expeditions served as a form of opposition to Soviet internationalism and the Soviet regime, and

fostered a feeling of belonging and an understanding that, when united, we can overcome all obstacles, resist others and remain true to ourselves. [...] The collection of ethnographic material, folklore, folk songs, as well as sincere communication with rural people – all of this inspired love for one's homeland and was a good school for developing national identity.

The movement included researchers from different institutions representing the humanitarian, social, natural, and 'hard' sciences, as well as field assistants – in total more than 1,400 participants. (Mačiekus 1995; 2009: 200–204) As asserted by British anthropologist Ernest Gellner (1996 [1983]: 98), the field assistants as 'ethnographic listeners' to old turntable records were not the remaining village inhabitants, but newly urbanised, educated and multi-lingual citizens who expressed real or imagined sentiments and attachments, and embraced their national identity as much as political circumstances would allow at the time.

In Central and Eastern Europe, ethnography was closely linked to ideas of nationalism and was associated with language, religion and rural cultural 'traditions' (Vélius 1964; Gellner 1996 [1983]; Savoniakaitė 2008: 63; Brubaker 2013; Papataxiarchis 2013: 32; Vujačić 2013: 293).

Occasionally, in opposition to imperial ethnographers, the Soviet Baltics interpreted their own realities, which in the cases of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian ethnography also differed. Estonian ethnographer Ants Viires (1991: 128) observed:

One of the main aims of Soviet ethnography was declared to be the discovery of the process by which each nation was born (*ethnogenesis*). The study of folk culture was seen as a means of exploring ethnic history (based on a diffusionist approach to cultural phenomena). To study the ethnic history of different nationalities, extensive interdisciplinary expeditions lasting for years were organised in the 1950s, in which ethnographers, folklorists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and linguists participated. These expeditions, in fact, continued the scientific traditions of 18th-century Russia. Their main aim was to demonstrate the positive role played by the Russian people in the cultural development of other nationalities within the Soviet Union. The contemporary trends in the West were either ignored or criticised as 'bourgeois' and 'idealistic'. As scientific literature published in the West was hardly available, it was not possible to become acquainted with the last trends. From the end of the 1940s onward, there was increasing pressure to conduct research on the newly established collective farms (*kolkhozes*) and, in general, on contemporary Soviet society. The obvious goal was politically propagandist in nature: to demonstrate the happiness of the peoples and friendship among all the nationalities of the Soviet Union.

British social anthropologist Chris Hann (2013: 1–3) has stated that the effects of the demise of Marxist–Leninist–Maoist socialism on anthropological knowledge production across a vast Eurasian space have not been studied equally well. We are aware of only a very small number of specific actions of knowledge production in Soviet Lithuanian ethnography (Savoniakaitė 2015). Is the Ramuva case special?

My thesis is that the key to the success of Ramuva's ethnography, in theory and in practice, was its creative 'nationalistic' (Gellner 1996 [1983]) circumvention of Marxism–Leninism. In academic discussions, religious philosopher Jonas Trinkūnas (2003) and political scientist Ainė Ramonaitė (2013) maintained that regional studies, including ethnography, and such activities as nature walks and hiking were examples of peaceful anti-Soviet activities. Lithuanian social anthropologist Vytis Čiubrinskas (2008: 110) has written that "traditions of Lithuanian national ideology of the 1960–1980s were akin to the Swedish Romantic intelligentsia" of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Expressing an opposing view, Trinkūnas (2003: 137, 142) criticised the identification of Ramuva with romanticism and the movement's adaptation to Soviet ideology.³ Philosopher Vytautas Rubavičius (2016: 29) has defined Lithuanian nationalism during the Soviet era as a cultural resistance to the Soviet regime. In this article, I seek to explore how ethnographers collaborated with 'ethnographic listeners' in the Ramuva movement.

To this end, I interpret a theory on Soviet ethnography as well as data from my own ethnographic field research conducted in 1991 and 2018, which allows me to identify new Soviet ethnographic knowledge production. The background for the theoretical analysis of ethnography is Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'participant objectivation'. Participant observation, according to Bourdieu (2014: 556), "designates the conduct of an ethnologist who immerses her- or himself in a foreign social universe so as to observe an activity [...], taking part in it". Bourdieu defines the emerging issues in modern day participant observation, one of them being: "How can one be both subject and object?" His discourse on this aspect of 'participant objectivation' is as follows:

By "participant objectivation", I mean the objectivation of the subject objectivation, of the analysing subject – in short, of the researcher herself. One might be misled into believing that I am referring here to the practice, made fashionable over a decade ago by certain anthropologists, especially on the other side of the Atlantic, which consist in observing oneself observing, observing the observer in his work of observing or of transcribing his observations, through a return on fieldwork, on the relationship with his informants and, last but not least, on the narrative of all these experiences which lead, more often than not, to the rather disheartening conclusion that all is in the final analysis nothing but discourse, text, or, worse yet, pretext for text. (Bourdieu 2014: 556)

The discussion is based on my 1991 ethnographic research during a Ramuva expedition as an interpretation of 'participant objectivation', not in a foreign social universe but in controversial political issues 'at home', and my 2018 ethnographic research as autobiographical narratives of members of Ramuva. In 1991, I worked for two weeks with the Plateliai expedition to western Lithuania, organised by Ramuva's leader Mačiekus. In 2018, I interviewed Mačiekus about Soviet ethnographic ideology, theory, and methods in the activities of his movement and beyond. Attention was focused on Soviet

ideology and the politics of ethnographic and cultural research, ideological strategies and their interpretations, as well as the activities of Ramuva. I also interviewed another veteran participant in Ramuva activities. The interview explored methods of ethnographic research, activity, and memory. 'Reflexivity' is important for my participant objectivation because it is the deliberate position of the researcher to reveal various aspects of social space and to critically analyse the ways in which representatives of social studies construct their research objects. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 213; Okely and Callaway 1992; Marcus 2009: 30; also see Reed-Danahay 2017: 147).

My discussion will first explore the historical theoretical background. I will then concentrate on the theory, activities, and methods of the ethnographic research conducted by Ramuva between 1970 and 1994. I will conclude with comparative analytical assessments of Ramuva's policies on knowledge production in opposition to the Soviet regime.

HISTORICAL THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

During the rule of Joseph Stalin, Lithuanians were afraid of demonstrating any national symbols. In 1941, after the start of the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania, ethnology (*Volkskunde*, *tautotyra* in Lithuanian) in the Soviet Baltic republics became a bourgeois science, similar to *narodovedeniye* in Soviet Russia (Bromley 1988), and was shaped into ethnography, which was considered a sub-discipline of history (Viies 1991: 129; Čiubrinskas 2008: 104–107). The Vilnius Institute of Ethnology at the Academy of Sciences was closed and, as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, studies of ethnology were forbidden (Kodra-Hysa 2013: 130; Risteski and Dimova 2013: 275–276; Hirsch 2014; Savoniakaitė 2015).

In 1945–1946, the Department of Ethnography was established at Vilnius State University to replace the former Department of Ethnology and Ethnography. Juozas Baldžius (Baldauskas), a consistent evolutionist (see Čiubrinskas 2008: 103–104), served as head of the Department of Ethnography until 1951.⁴ Also in 1945, the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography was founded at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences,⁵ to replace the Institute of Ethnology. The Department of Ethnography was established at the Institute of History only in 1961, and was led by renowned Lithuanian ethnographer Angelė Vyšniauskaitė, trained in philology at Vilnius University. Continuity with the interwar scientific approach to ethnology was very episodic in Soviet Lithuanian ethnography.

Much of Lithuanian academia had fled the Soviet occupation and withdrawn to the West. Polish ethnologists Kazimierz Moszyński (known for his functional analysis of material culture), Maria Znamierowska-Prüffer (Prüfferowa), and Baudouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreutzowa, who had worked at Vilnius University and studied ethnic groups and material culture in the Vilnius region, had all left Vilnius prior to 1940. Lithuanian ethnologist Jonas Balys, a graduate of the University of Vienna, was appointed head of the folklore archives at the Institute of Ethnology of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, in 1941 (Kronika 1941: 159). Balys, who had previously worked at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, emigrated in 1944. Other scholars, such as

archaeologist Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė and ethnographers Ignas Končius, Antanas Mažiulis and Juozas Lingys, who had studied ethnology in Sweden, also left the country.

The second Soviet occupation, which commenced in 1944, continued the reorganisation of ethnographic cultural exhibitions at Baltic museums. This reorganisation was pursued in Lithuania on a much larger scale than before the war, particularly during the years 1945–1956. According to Lithuanian museologist Steponas Gečas, the main objective of the reforms was to subordinate the activities of cultural institutions to the regime's Marxist–Leninist and Bolshevik propaganda. With the help of local authorities and museum workers themselves, exhibitions were revised to reflect the spirit of Bolshevik ideology, requiring that such exhibition subjects as socialist construction, organisation of collective farming, the class struggle, and atheist education be well represented at history and regional museums. Propaganda books and articles were discussed and lectures were organised. These activities were similar in all the principal Baltic museums. In 1945, for example, “the enthusiastic reconstruction of the Estonian National Museum was started” (Viires 1991: 128). The Communist Party leadership exercised censorship over all exhibitions (Astel 1978: 252–256; Gečas 1994) and ideological review and selection of all exhibition material became mandatory.

In all three Soviet Baltic republics, the principles of historical materialism influenced the science of ethnography. Historicism was linked to evolutionism, while folk studies of material and spiritual culture demonstrated evolution of the social order (Eisler and Luts 1967: 329–331; Konksi 2004: 41–42; Kęncis 2019). Soviet ethnography ‘at home’ presented the evolutionary ideas of American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (Viires 1991: 127).⁶ In addition, diffusionism and, later, positivism influenced the methodology of the discipline.

According to Lithuanian ethnographer Vacys Milius, Lithuanian ethnography only became established as a discipline in the early 1960s. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1970s, the Department of Ethnography at the Academy of Sciences' Institute of History focused on research into material culture and the social aspects of life on *kolkhozes* – on collective farms and in rural areas (Milius 1992: 10–11; see also Savoniakaitė 2011). The concepts of the interwar *Volkskunde*-like ‘homeland’ and ‘native village’⁷ were changed by Soviet research on ‘historical-ethnographic areas’. Research priority was given to “progress, work traditions, and producing the values of material culture” (Vyšniauskaitė 1964: 9; Čiubrinskas 2008: 104–106). Ethnography and folklore – “the two sisters of *Volkskunde*” – diverged (Viires 1991: 125; Milius 1994: 45). Research on cultural and religious traditions, officially seen as non-progressive superstitions, was limited. Ethnographers focused on the economic cultural types of material culture. The historical comparative and other methods were used (for more see Savoniakaitė 2011). Soviet Lithuanian ethnographers conducted field research on expeditions organised by the Institute of History (Academy of Sciences), Vilnius State University, and in joint expeditions of regional studies.

A ‘thaw’ in ethnography field research only really began during the 1953–1964 period, during Nikita Khrushchev's tenure as leader of the Soviet Union. In 1961, the Lithuanian SSR Society of Regional Studies, led by culture researcher Vytautas Jekelaitis, was established. The society founded different chapters throughout Soviet Lithuania and it continued interwar regional studies, including ethnography. According to Lithu-

anian ethnographer Jonas Mardosa, the Society of Regional Studies focused principally on interdisciplinary regional research, publications, and methodical activities. Between 1963 and 1973, the Vilnius Chapter of the Society of Regional Studies organised expeditions, particularly in eastern Lithuania; numerous groups of ethnographers and field assistants conducted ethnographic research projects, many of them led by Milius.⁸ This period was marked by the flourishing of ethnography during combined expeditions. In 1963, the Vilnius Chapter of the Society of Regional Studies organised an expedition to Zervynos, led by folklorist Norbertas Vėlius, which resulted in the publication of a book by the Society entitled *Zervynos*,⁹ which, along with parallel discussion of ethnographic topics, became one of the harbingers of a new Lithuanian revival (Trinkūnas 2003: 137).

These combined expeditions had 'national' undertones, in that they demonstrated a fascination with interwar Lithuanian memory. Vėlius was later criticised for publishing *Dubingiai* (Milius 1971) and *Kernavė* (Milius 1972), merely because of his choice of geographical sites. According to Mačiekus, castles of feudal lords used to stand in those places:

Informally, it was not beneficial for Tsarist Russia or for the Soviet Union to have strong national minorities. [...] They tried to assimilate them to eliminate the possibility of an enemy of the 'empire' and to avoid separatism, etc.

To accuse those who valued their national identity and culture was a common practice. It was not very clear what it was: was it the elevation of the Lithuanian nation above all others? This was common throughout the entire 'empire'. (FM: VSA SE)

The objective of Soviet ideology, meanwhile, was to emphasise the class point of view over the 'national' historical perspective. In addition, research on the specifics of Lithuanian history and culture in south-eastern Lithuania was deemed important because of the considerable scope of forced migration and rapid ethnic assimilation occurring there during the Soviet era. Ethnic conflict developed quickly in villages in that region, where many Poles or people of other non-Lithuanian ethnic groups lived. Therefore, any trend in regional studies which sought to preserve ethnic Lithuanian culture was seen as inconvenient for Soviet ideology:

Independent movement became impossible. Soviet policies required that activities pertaining to regional studies remain under 'ideological supervision'. Soviet authorities suggested joining the organisation, for example, the factory of calculating machines. This was a *formal* pretext to stop regional studies activities organised by the Vilnius Chapter. Publication of a survey resulting from the 1969 expedition to Gervėčiai was only released after Lithuania regained its independence. (FM: VSA SE)

An increase in Soviet ideological control by 1965 did not diminish interest in Lithuanian culture.¹⁰ Renowned Lithuanian naturalist Česlovas Kudaba described all the historical locations along the Minsk Highway, including Medininkai and the village of Keturiasdešimties Totorių ('Forty Tartars'). According to Mačiekus (FM: VSA SE), the publication of articles by Kudaba was permitted although supervised by the Soviet authorities. To avoid any trouble and to 'minimise his sins', Kudaba penned an article on how the people of Ežerėliai village had saved a Soviet army pilot.¹¹

In 1970, Soviet ideologues embarked on an effort to shape ethnography, making it more Soviet in nature. The Vilnius City Communist Party Committee department responsible for ideology recommended against organising regional studies events.¹² Soviet ideological institutions banned interdisciplinary expeditions organised by the Vilnius Chapter, led by Vėlius, to the environs of Vilnius, Zervynos, Ignalina, Rimšė, Dubingiai, and elsewhere.¹³ The model used by institutes under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Academy of Sciences was to be implemented in Lithuania as well, i.e. the Institute of History would collect memoirs and ethnographic material and the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature would focus on folklore, etc.

In opposition to this restructuring and re-institutionalisation of the combined interdisciplinary research conducted by the Society of Regional Studies Vilnius Chapter, Kudaba convinced Mačiekus to organise a Ramuva club at the Economics Faculty at Vilnius State University (for more see Mačiekus 1995). That same year (1970), Ramuva was merged with the Society of Lithuanian Regional Studies and Monument Preservation. What special approaches did Ramuva embrace in ethnographic field research?

WHAT WAS RAMUVA'S STRATEGIC AND THEORETICAL APPROACH TO ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH?

When Lithuanians finally capitulate, they say too much – more than they were even asked to say. (FM: VSA SE)

It was important that the First Secretary of the regional Communist Party Committee 'not be afraid' of the expeditions, which were presented as consisting simply of groups of young people. However, if expeditions were not coordinated in advance, they were suspended within several days. In 1970, the first combined regional studies expedition organised by Vilnius State University took place in Dukštos. According to Mačiekus, Kudaba chose the location and led the expedition. Kudaba believed that people in Dukštos were likely to know authentic old Lithuanian songs, and he was right. Lyrics recorded during the expedition included words whose meanings were no longer known by the singers – even though they knew how to sing the lyrics, they could no longer 'translate' some of the words. (FM: VSA SE) As in the other two Baltic republics, Lithuanian singing became a symbol of national culture (FM: VSA SE; Leerssen 2015). Soviet policies had resulted in considerable integration, particularly in the territories of south-eastern Lithuania, through measures such as the deployment of Soviet military units, intensive industrial development, and the Sovietisation of culture (Anušauskas 2005: 126). The influence of Soviet integration became an obvious factor in ensuring cultural change. Expedition participants, including renowned scholars from Vilnius State University, institutes of the Academy of Sciences, and trained students (field assistants) representing various professions used their work to make considerable contributions to the field of Lithuanian philology.

In 1971, Kudaba directed researchers to the town of Tverečius, because he himself had gone to school there. Intellectuals hoped to record the specific culture of south-eastern Lithuania. The movement grew. The Tverečius expedition included some 70 participants and was led by renowned philosopher Arvydas Šliogeris. Ethnographic

and sociological research were combined. 15 economics students performed sociological research into recreation and leisure habits. Ethnographic questionnaires were given to participants by religious philosopher Trinkūnas (FM: VSA SE; FM: VSA SE2; Mačiekus 1995: 148).

In 1972, a third combined expedition was organised, this time to Sariai, in the region of Švenčionys. This expedition and subsequent visits were led by Mačiekus. 45 people participated and their combined research was presented for the first time together with the findings of a subsequent fourth expedition. The research focused on subjects such as family and cultural life, folk culture education, local culinary dishes, and blacksmithing (Bauža et al. 1979: 3–42).

In 1973, 95 people participated in an expedition to Luokė, in the Telšiai region, and, in keeping with Soviet ideological requirements, they recorded authentic morphological and syntactic dialect texts. Other texts, such as information about surrounding neighbourhoods and other stories revealing the mentality of local inhabitants, and the everyday life of social structures, were also recorded (Girdenis et al. 1978: 51). Research topics included family life as well as beekeeping and fishing in the Luokė region (Bauža et al. 1979). In addition, stories about local family life and culture were recorded and summarised in detail from a methodological point of view. The ethnographic research was clearly meant to foster a sense and appreciation of national culture among Lithuania's young people.

In 1974, 93 people participated in an expedition to the region around Joniškėlis, in the Pasvalys district.¹⁴ Dialect and folklore research was conducted by 19 participants, led by Regimantas Pranaitis (Garšva et al. 1981: 3). Because the collection and dissemination of information was controlled and limited during the Soviet era, it was not possible to easily acquire tape recorders to capture folklore texts, stories and place names. Pranaitis, a physicist and member of Ramuva, 'procured' tape recorders and magnetic tape for expedition participants. He also received support from his father, then a high-ranking official at the Ministry of Higher and Special Education. The ministry allocated money to Vilnius and its rector, Jonas Kubilius, who provided financial support to Ramuva, allowing the group to buy nine tape recorders for regional studies research. It was also nearly impossible to find the tape needed to record such things as songs and historical accounts, although the organisers were able to acquire a supply from the official Radio and Television Committee (FM: VSA SE). During this expedition, broader ethnographic research was initiated.

74 participants performed research in the area around Joniškėlis, focusing on the specific characteristics of the local population. Ethnography turned to aspects of material and spiritual culture of the contemporary countryside as well as the historic countryside (Mačiekus et al. 1980: 3) and encompassed a wide range of subjects from the traditions of honouring Soviet activists to religious rites, collective cleaning events, beer, folk meteorology, and places of interest.

In subsequent years, the Lithuanian ethnographer Milius, an active expedition enthusiast, led ethnographic research and oversaw its methodical collection. In addition, Milius had numerous correspondents in different Lithuanian cities and villages. He also eagerly advised interdisciplinary scholars and student field assistants on how to conduct ethnographic research, collect material, and compile inventories (FM: VSA SE1).

Expeditions performed annual research activities in various Lithuanian towns – when permitted to do so by local authorities.¹⁵ In one instance, organisers were persuaded not to conduct an expedition to Žagarė, because the Catholic archbishop Julijonas Steponavičius had been exiled there for alleged anti-Soviet activities:

Tauragė and Skaudvilė refused. [...] They said they could not take us in – the school was undergoing major repairs.

The First Secretary of the Communist Party in Biržai said that there was no need for a regional studies expedition because there would be a pioneer camp taking place – even though it had already ended, etc. (FM: VSA SE)

The attitude of ‘class struggle’ was revealed through the viewpoint of one official, who refused to organise expeditions to study cultural heritage:

The First Secretary of the Communist Party demanded that ‘the roofs be stripped’ from windmills and ‘other relics of kulak farms’ be removed, and that nature would ‘take care of the walls.’

[...] It was important that the subject was correct. [...] It was important to create an impression that the subject was correct. (FM: VSA SE)

Students of Pranė Dundulienė, professor of ethnography at Vilnius State University, also performed ethnographic research on Ramuva expeditions. Renowned ethnographers, historians, and researchers into related areas Zita Kelmickaitė, Vingaudas Baltrušaitis, Vladas Braziūnas, Viktorija Daujotytė, Vytis Čiubrinskas, Vida Jukniūtė, Eugenija Šimkūnaitė, Arūnas Vaicekuskas, and other academics participated in the activities of the Ramuva movement (FM: VSA SE; Mačiekus 1995).

In the period between 1974 and 1994, ethnographic research was performed systematically. Milius was my adviser in 1991. What was the theoretical approach to ethnography? For understandable reasons, ethnographic research performed ‘at home’ in villages and towns was conducted on a face-to-face basis (LIIBR F-73, b. 1465). In the words of the Norwegian anthropologist Anne S. Gronseth (2010), personal inter-subjective relations established during fieldwork embodied a shared experience between the researcher and others (see also Davis and Davis 2010). Field assistants recording ethnographic data from questionnaires explored cultural issues (Gronseth 2010: 143–144; see also Berreman 1962), gained knowledge of their history, and could evaluate the present environment created on the basis of Soviet internationalism, Marxism–Leninism, and Soviet moral and political values. The policies of knowledge production gained during Ramuva expeditions – attended by scholars of various institutions as well as their field assistants, other intellectuals, and academic youth – influenced and fostered Lithuanian national ideas among the participants themselves.

It should also be noted that ethnographic research focused more on the history of culture and other aspects pertinent to the Lithuanian nation rather than subjects related to the Soviet Marxist–Leninist model. Ramuva ethnographers generally researched homestead landscaping, homes, other dwellings and their interiors, as well traditional trades (such as beekeeping and fishing), agricultural and seasonal rites, family customs, folk manuals (on astronomy, education, veterinary medicine, etc.), and customary law (Mačiekus 1995: 151) – in other words, focusing more on spiritual than material Lithuanian culture.¹⁶

According to Mačiekus, a similar special regional studies movement was also active in Soviet Estonia, although on a smaller scale. After 1970, regional studies researchers from Tallinn Polytechnic Institute came to Lithuania, and Lithuanians visited Estonia. International academic contacts were still either very limited or prohibited altogether. Throughout the Soviet Union, international cultural cooperation became “a theoretical as well as a historical puzzle” (Gould-Davies 2003: 203; see also Robinson 1970: 305; Milius 1992: 11). The Ramuva movement did not have any contact with Balys or other academics working in the United States. In 1986, Mačiekus was able to establish an enduring academic collaboration only with ethnologist Gerhard Bauer of West Germany (FM: VSA SE; FM: VSA SE2).

In May 2017, Mačiekus invited me to his birthday celebration. I was surprised by the number of Ramuva members who gathered on a beautiful Saturday morning in the verdant Kairėnai Botanical Garden of Vilnius University. Guests included researchers from various social and humanitarian fields as well as specialists in the hard sciences, museum professionals, like-minded supporters and renowned Lithuanian intellectuals. I listened to interesting stories about the history of their expeditions and about ethnography (FM: VSA TE). Close collaboration on expeditions had blossomed into enduring personal relationships.

“THINK AS YOU WISH, BUT WRITE AS REQUIRED”:
THE RAMUVA POLITICS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE
PRODUCTION IN OPPOSITION TO THE SOVIET REGIME

How did academia attempt to creatively evade the demands of Marxism–Leninism during the Ramuva expeditions and in the course of ethnographic research? According to Hann (2009: 134–135), the ‘Second World’ of Marxism–Leninism–Maoism that spanned Eurasia was difficult to penetrate, at least for Western scholars:

The obstacles were numerous. Some countries were virtually closed to researchers until Soviet socialism finally collapsed, a fact which precludes any systematic comparative analysis of this form of human social organization on the basis of observational data. Where access was possible, it was necessary to negotiate with the gatekeepers. [...] In numerous Eastern European cases only a thin veneer of Marxism had been added to a romantic nation-orientated ethnology (‘national ethnography’) with 19th-century origins. In the Soviet Union, by contrast, *etnografiya* was redefined into a rigorous evolutionist science, based on the doctrines of historical materialism. In short, Western anthropologists in the second world had to tread as carefully in the research institutes and universities of the capital as in their more remote field sites.

The Marxist–Leninist model brought new controversial research ideas and subjects into the field of ethnography. It was not easy to change the traditions of ethnography so drastically as to introduce a new political regime. Research that adhered to Marxist–Leninist ideology was narrow (Bauža et al. 1979). Anti-communist movements and ethno-national dimensions were also actively engaged in other former socialist Central and Eastern European countries (Hann 2013; Risteski and Dimova 2013: 274). Ramuva’s

interpretations of the Marxist–Leninist model, formulated as a tribute to Soviet ideology, were associated with a ‘tacit understanding’ of the theory of ethnography due to the realisation of their ideas. Nigel Rapport (2010: 1; see also 2012) has commented: “Tacit understanding is a source of a compassion that can in turn give rise to tolerance and peaceful co-existence based on a recognition of commensurate embodiment.”

“You will never be praised for combined regional studies – who needs more problems?” commented one employee of the Soviet Lithuanian Ministry of Higher and Special Education (FM: VSA SE). According to Mačiekus, books for publication had to be approved by Glavlit (the official Soviet censorship agency) and different forms of official ‘bullying’ were commonplace.¹⁷ Regional studies specialists were monitored by KGB agents. Ramuva was able to continue its activities because it had been incorporated within the Faculty of Public Professions at Vilnius University. Soviet ideology sought to create a new kind of Soviet Lithuanian rural community (Girdenis et al. 1977: 3), and thus it became necessary to record historical¹⁸ and contemporary narratives about various professions in Soviet society, etc. As part of this effort, specific dialects, culture, folklore, biographical and historical stories, which had developed diverse concepts of a historical belonging to the Lithuanian nation and not to a Soviet national construct, were also discovered and recorded.¹⁹ Local Lithuanian cultural research was a clear act of ‘secret opposition’ to narratives meant for Soviet ideology:²⁰ “Considerable attention is devoted to improving the well-being of the rural population and to changes in cultural life under socialist conditions [...] there is plenty of local factual material” (Bauža et al. 1979: 3).

Marxist ideologues were successful in their attempts to isolate such social movements as Ramuva in the Baltic republics. Contacts with leaders of regional studies (including ethnographic expeditions) at Tallinn Polytechnic Institute were scarce. However, unlike their Lithuanian colleagues, Estonian ethnographers actively participated in seminars for ethnographers in the Baltic Sea region, first organised by East German ethnographers in 1966 and later revived in 1980, until the final conference in Riga in 1990 (Viires 1991: 130).

In addition, knowledge standardisation policies advanced by Soviet ethnography had different effects on various institutions working in ethnographic research. In all three former Soviet Baltic republics, regional ethnographic research methodologies maintained in joint Baltic atlases were similar (Alsupe 1981; Karlson 2007; Savoniakaitė 2015), and reminiscent of collectivisation, which produced the historical trajectory that still informs the world view of former *kolkhozniks* (Rausing 2004: 2). The result of two decades of academic collaboration was a joint publication entitled *Istoriko-etnograficheskii atlas Pribaltiki* (see Atlas 1985; 1986).

According to critical assessments by contemporary authors, it was actually possible to circumvent the Marxist–Leninist model, and there were examples of innovative, European-minded academic decisions being advanced by academia.²¹ Individuals such as Dundulienė avoided consistent historicism (Merkienė 1999), unlike many ethnographers in the Soviet Union, and studied ethnic ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ culture as the culture of an entire nation. The renowned Lithuanian ethnographer Izidorius Butkevičius critically examined the positive and negative effects of former government policies on Lithuanian rural communities in the latter half of the 20th century (Merkienė 2001: 140–141; Savoniakaitė 2011). These studies were similar to research carried out in Norway.

The Polish ethnologist Moszyński's discourses on functional analysis influenced late Soviet Lithuanian ethnography. Saulvedis Cimermanis analysed the cultural contacts and diffusion of Finns and Latvians, ethnic assimilation processes, and cultural changes in rural material culture in Latvia's Vidzeme Region (Cimermanis 1964: 186). Viires (1964) explored the history of the specifics of Estonian folk art in certain geographical areas. In Latvia, the collections of individual folklorists represented opposing attitudes to official Soviet folklore (Kęncis 2019: 221). Soviet semiotics was also a clearly understood alternative to Marxism as a regime of truth in which the signification system was the autonomous base of societal reality. The anthropological significance of semiotics was broader politically as well as intellectually (Ssorin-Chaikov 2019: 330).

Ramuva fieldwork continued to endure as a group phenomenon even as it creatively circumvented Marxism–Leninism. Ramuva's activities were reminiscent of Gellner's (1995: 26) statement that it was now anthropology's duty "to work out the social options of our affluent and disenchartered conditions" (see more Sandal 1997;²² Rapport 2010).

The term 'disenchartered' relates to face-to-face research conducted by ethnographers and their field assistants in different ethnic communities. Ramuva's younger participants, born in Soviet Lithuanian cities, sought to learn about the culture of the countryside through ethnography in order to understand their national heritage and culture in a broader sense, not only as ethno-nationalism or the romantic idealisation of 'culture' (Anderson 1991 [1983]; Gellner 1996 [1983]; Trinkūnas 2003; Leerssen 2015: 3; Juknevičius 2016: 15, 18). According to Gellner (1964), nationalism is not the awakening of nations, rather it invents nations where they do not exist; nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can be best defined as "the feeling of anger aroused by violation" (Gellner 1996 [1983]: 13; see also Eriksen 2002: 98). The 'nationalistic' movement sought to grasp the concepts of belonging to the Lithuanian nation through ethnography. Research was linked to the issues and constructs of the Lithuanian cultural and historical past as well as to resistance to Soviet ideology.

CONCLUSIONS

The key to the success of Ramuva's ethnographic research in theory and practice was the creative 'nationalistic' (Gellner 1996 [1983], Hann 2013; Hirsch 2014; Leerssen 2015) circumvention of Marxism–Leninism in academic ethnographic discourse, conducted jointly with the local political elite, academia, and academic youth serving as field assistants and ethnographic listeners. Soviet Marxism–Leninism brought new controversial research ideas, theories, and internationalisation into ethnography through the reorganisation of academic institutions, museum exhibitions, and regional studies. Continuity of the interwar *Volkskunde* scientific approach was occasional. The Ramuva movement was interdisciplinary.

Ethnographic theory was developed by Milius from the Institute of History, and ethnographers (Milius 1992; Gould-Davies 2003) who had recently begun working in the field. Milius profoundly influenced the methodology of Ramuva's ethnographic research in the period between 1963 and 1994. Well-known Lithuanian scholars from different academic institutions and trained field assistants collaborated in this effort.

Important ethnographic data enriched various Lithuanian archives, including libraries at the Lithuanian History Institute and the Soviet Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, as well as museums. Contacts with specialists who had fled Lithuania to work in the West, as well as with the West German ethnologist Bauer, were infrequent. However, after most of Lithuania's academia had emigrated to the West to avoid the Soviet occupation, a new academic generation emerged.

Acting in opposition to Soviet Marxist–Leninist policies, Ramuva ethnographers devoted more research to spiritual rather than solely material culture. It was not so easy to change the 'traditions' of ethnography so drastically as to introduce a new political regime. Individuals avoided consistent historicism. Innovative, European-minded academic approaches were being advanced by academia. The Polish ethnologist Moszyński's discourses on functional analysis influenced late Soviet Lithuanian ethnography. Research corresponding to Marxist–Leninist ideology was narrow. The Ramuva movement remained quite isolated within the Baltic region. Ramuva fieldwork continued to endure as a group phenomenon even as it creatively circumvented Marxism–Leninism.

NOTES

1 According to Jonas Trinkūnas, the name Ramuva is a Lithuanian equivalent (Trinkūnas 2003: 139, 141) of Romuva, which was, during the Middle Ages, the main Baltic pagan sanctuary in Prussia.

2 The Lithuanian pagan organisation called Romuva was repressed by the Soviet authorities for political reasons, but was re-established in the early 1990s. Ramuva and Romuva were linked by Trinkūnas. He was active in early Ramuva, then repressed by the Soviet authorities, and became one of the leaders of restored Romuva in the 1990s.

3 There were also other youth organisations, such as *Žygeiviai* ('Hikers'), *Alkas* ('Holy Hill'), *Raskila* ('Lady's Mantle'), etc. The aim of these movements was to develop national self-awareness and to create peaceful resistance methods. Patriotic and often partisan songs were sung during hikes, so later the participants had to explain their actions at government offices. (Trinkūnas 2003: 136–149)

4 This department was reorganised into the Department of Museology and later into the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography, which functioned until 1966.

5 For more see *Lietuvos istorijos institutas*.

6 Estonian archaeologist Harri Moora assumed responsibility for educating and directing a younger generation of ethnographers by using a historical–geographical method developed in the pre-war Republic of Estonia, and added obligatory elements of Marxism. Unfortunate outcomes were avoided by maintaining close contact with the Moscow Institute of Ethnography. In close cooperation with Moora, the Institute launched a joint Baltic expedition to explore the ethnic history of local peoples. Young Estonian ethnographers also took part in the work of this expedition. One of the results of the project was that, in 1955, Moscow ethnographers Maksim Levin and Nikolai Tcheboksarov developed one of the essential theories of post-war Soviet ethnography: the theory of economic–cultural types and historical–ethnographic areas. The best elaborated example of an historical–ethnographic area was that of the three Soviet Baltic republics. One cannot help thinking that the concept of historical–ethnographic areas is an adaptation of the cultural area theory developed at the beginning of the 20th century in America, although the Russian authors neglected to mention this connection (Viies 1991: 128–129).

7 In Lithuania, the ethnographic approach during the inter-war period (see Savoniakaitė 2015) focused on fields related to the nation and especially the history of villages, settlements, and regional studies; the concepts of 'homeland' and 'native village', their social characteristics, the social interests of the population, their lifestyle, *homo economicus*, mutual relations between neighbours and material culture, history, memories, narratives, traditions, folklore, etc., were analysed. Discussions included religious aspects (Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė 1943), the social characteristics of the nation (Petruolis 1996 [1944]), and other issues.

8 Mardosa wrote in 1993 that members of Society were called *talkininkai* ('assistants') – they assisted in scientific research. These assistants believed that the known facts of folk culture, interesting events of their villages or personal lives should not disappear without a trace. On the basis of their collected material, local monographs and articles were published, the first of which was *Zervynos* (Milius 1964). In 1963–1991, a collection of articles entitled *Kraštotyra* was published. The Central Board of the Society organised expeditions the 1976–1980 and 1987–1991 periods (see more Mardosa 1993: 7–9).

9 In 1964, a modest book, *Zervynos: kraštotyros bruožai* ('Zervynos: Elements of Regional Studies'), compiled by Milius (members of the editorial board were Juozas Aidulis, Kostas Aleksynas, Eugenijus Dirvelė, Milius, Leonardas Sauka, Antanas Stravinskas, Vėlius), was published by the Lithuanian SSR Society of Regional Studies (for more details, see Trinkūnas 2003: 137). The leader of the first expedition, folklorist Vėlius (1964), wrote about those who provided the folklore, characterising them aptly and assessing how much folklore and how many linguistic facts were collected. Naturalists, archaeologists, historians, ethnographers, medical practitioners, linguists, folklorists, artists, and musicians worked in the expedition and published their articles there; the publication was prepared and edited on a voluntary basis.

10 According to Trinkūnas (2003), in 1968 the renowned archaeologist Gimbutienė visited Lithuania and gave a lecture on Lithuanian mythology at Vilnius University. She later wrote about her impressions to Vytautas Kavolis: "I couldn't refuse to deliver the lecture. [...] The Great Hall of Columns at Vilnius University was full – if someone wanted to sweep up Lithuania's best and brightest in one swoop, it would have been a good opportunity. Probably all artists, writers, scientists, young and old, from Vilnius, from Kaunas, and from other places were there, but most of them were young students, looking at me with excitement in their eyes. Surely, one only gets to appear before such an audience once in their life." (Trinkūnas 2003: 139)

11 Kudaba, who was a professor at Vilnius University, was a regular contributor to the magazines *Mūsų gamta* ('Our Nature'), *Mokslas ir gyvenimas* ('Science and Life'), and *Nemunas* (FM: VSA SE).

12 In 1969, the Council of Regional Studies, headed by Kudaba, was established at Vilnius State University. The Regional Studies Days were held between November 26th and 30th, 1969. The importance of regional studies for culture and the protection of cultural heritage was discussed, a sightseeing tour was organised in the Vilnius environs, and there were ethnographic music ensembles concerts at Vilnius University. (FM: VSA SE)

13 Vėlius withdrew. The Society of Lithuanian Regional Studies and Monument Protection was led by a researcher in regional studies, Stravinskas; Jekelaitis, who supported the ideas of regional studies, became the official director. Eventually, Stravinskas was replaced by Jurgis Tornau, a librarian. Later, Vytautas Uogintas, Leokadija Diržinskaitė-Piliušenko, Vanda Klikūnienė, Kazimieras Račkauskas, Irena Seliukaitė, Antanas Šidlauskas, and Libertas Klimka acted as deputies (FM: VSA SE; Berezauskienė 2011). The Society of Lithuanian Regional Studies continues to operate today.

14 Ethnographic data went to the Manuscripts Unit at the Institute of History's Department of Ethnography, etc. (for example LIIBR F-73, b. 681–684, 697, 700, and others). The material from all expeditions went to the departments of manuscripts of the Institutes of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR and of the Scientific Library of the University and some republican museums.

15 Expeditions took place in Pasvalys (1974, at the initiative of the linguist Kazimieras Garšva), Žagarė (1975, at the initiative of Mačiekus), and Kvedarna (in 1976). During the latter expedition, someone placed flowers at a monument to medieval Lithuanian ruler Vytautas the Great, so participants in the expeditions fell under surveillance (FM: VSA SE).

16 According to Mardosa (1993: 11), Soviet ethnography focused mainly on material culture and much less on businesses and spiritual culture, and only superficially explored everyday life, folk art, and the methodology of ethnography. The subjects were ideologically directed towards research on folk art. In Albania, ethnography was also oriented towards the material and spiritual culture of the pre-industrial countryside. "Enough of description and collecting the material culture, we have to build socialism, and you, ethnographers, are not doing a good enough job" (Kodra-Hysa 2013: 139).

17 Soviet censorship had a huge impact on the press and academic thought, seeking to drown out research into the Lithuanian nation. First, ethnographic papers disappeared from the journal *Kraštotyra* ('Regional Studies'). In 1975, the section devoted to ethnography was abolished. Only individual articles appeared in separate volumes (see Mardosa 1993: 11). Articles for the journal *Kraštotyra* (1981, 1985, 1988) and publications of *Lietuvos valsčiai* ('Lithuanian Counties') were written based on research from three expeditions (Mačiekus 2009: 207).

18 The greatest attention in ethnography was devoted to the past, not the present. Original records and copies of this ethnographic research were stored in different places. Members of Ramuva collected approximately 3% of the material of this nature stored in the depositories of language and ethnographic facts; they gave around 4,000 exhibits to Lithuanian museums and 200 old books to Vilnius University Library (Mačiekus 2009: 211).

19 People who methodically collected folklore sought to preserve the 'authenticity of the language' and to record any changes taking place; they recorded the specifics of morphology, syntax, and phonetics (Girdenis et al. 1977: 3–4).

20 Five teaching materials were published: Girdenis et al. 1977; Girdenis et al. 1978; Bauža et al. 1979; Mačiekus et al. 1980; Garšva et al. 1981.

21 On the other hand, in the atlases of the Soviet period we can find commonalities with the scholarly research on other European countries. Atlases were prepared in Poland, Finland, and elsewhere.

22 Roger Sandall (1997: 95) wrote: "In the essays *Past and Present* and *Anthropology and Europe*, Gellner locates the immensely influential Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski within the decline of Habsburg rule and 'an age of irredentist nationalisms (where) the limits of a culture were soon to become the limits of the territorial claims of the state which found its *raison d'être* in protecting that culture'. In this setting, Romantic idealisations of 'culture' certainly made themselves felt, and Malinowski's anthropology, which defined cultures as institutionally interrelated organic wholes, can be seen as a natural enough intellectual reflection of this environment. This conception of the internal unity of cultural systems descends in an unbroken line from the 18th-century pioneers of romantic nationalism, Herder and Hamann."

SOURCES

- Manuscripts in the Ethnology collection (LIIBR F-73) at the Library of the Lithuanian Institute of History:
LIIBR F-73, b. 681–684, 697, 700.
LIIBR F-73 b. 1465, 1991 year.
- Fieldwork materials of the author. Vida Savoniakaitė's personal ethnographic research archive:
FM: VSA SE – Interview with Venantas Mačiekus, April 26, 2018
FM: VSA SE1 – Interview with anonymous respondent A, April 26, 2018
FM: VSA SE2 – Interviews with Venantas Mačiekus, May 24; June 12 and 14, 2018
FM: VSA TE – Interview with anonymous respondent B, May 27, 2017.

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