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Us and Them. Racialisation in Lithuania

Introduction

This essay will attempt to provide an account of racialisation in contemporary Lithuania. At present very little is known about the nature of Lithuanian racism, and there are significant gaps in the knowledge regarding the issue. Existing literature is very limited, and available sources are mostly concerned with nationalism and nation formation, paying very little attention to contemporary problems of racism (ECRI, 2011).

Further difficulty lies in the fact that state officials appear to be largely ignorant of the problem and do not seem to be paying enough attention in acknowledging and tackling the issue. The extent of racism in Lithuania is often “unrecognised, unknown and undocumented” (ENAR, 2013, p.6), and indeed Lithuania has been named as one of the countries that has very limited data collection mechanisms (Sabatauskaite, 2011). One might say that the problem is completely neglected. As a result of this, valid and reliable assessment of the ongoing situation is rather challenging. Consequently, establishing viable solutions might prove to be difficult.

The aim of this essay, therefore, is to contribute to the already existing knowledge and hopefully to provide a clearer understanding of how race, racism and racialisation function in modern Lithuania. I will begin this essay by discussing how historical events have had a profound influence on contemporary issues, followed by the history of anti-Semitism, focusing on two time periods: World War II and years following Lithuanian independence in 1991. After, an overview of Roma experiences, the most marginalised ethnic group in modern Lithuania, will be provided. Finally, present situation in Lithuania with regard to racial discrimination will be analysed.

Exclusionary nation-state formation

In order to understand the way in which racism and racial discourse operate in contemporary Lithuania one must consider its historical and political past. Years of oppression, victimisation and occupation by Poles, Russians and Soviets have led to increased sensitivity to questions of national identity among Lithuanians. From 1569 and up until 1795 Lithuania was part of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During this period, the non-Polish ethnic groups, particularly Lithuanians, found themselves under the strong influence of Polish culture (MacQueen, 1998). Polonisation affected almost all aspects of Lithuanian life but most significantly Lithuanian language (Hogan-Brun and Ramoniene, 2005). Polish became an official language in 1697 and became a predominant language among the upper classes while Lithuanian became relegated to being a language for the poor. In 1795 Lithuania fell under the rule of Imperial Russia where Tsar Nicholas I began an intensive program of Russification in order to get rid of the previous Polish influences. Under Imperial Russia Lithuanian identity was further curtailed. Lithuania became known simply as North-western Territory, and with the imposition of Lithuanian press ban all publications in languages other than Russian were prohibited (Hogan-Brun and Ramoniene, 2005). Lithuanian language was banned in schools, and use of Cyrillic instead of Latin alphabet was strongly encouraged. Finally, there was strong religious anti-Catholic discrimination against Lithuanians.

By the late 19th century Lithuanian nationalistic movement began to grow. Writings in newly established national newspapers (*Aušra*) romanticised the past of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, depicting the nation as formerly a great power (Eidintas et al., 2013). Myth of shared descent, stories of great historical past with its emphasis on distinctive customs and traditions, explanations of scientific achievements as well as popularisation of the belief of antiquity and greatness of Lithuanian language have increased nationalistic sentiments among ethnic Lithuanians.

It is worth mentioning that Lithuanian language played an exceptional role in Lithuanian national revival, and it has been argued that the whole nationalist movement was founded entirely on language (Spires, 1999). As been said already, Lithuanian language was heavily downgraded. Lithuanian was only spoken by peasants, while scholars, nobility and upper classes used Russian or Polish. By the time of the national revival one of the most distinctive features of ethnic Lithuanians was their language. Prior to the revival, number of linguists, most notably Kristijonas Milkus and August Schleicher, published several works where the archaism and prestige of Lithuanian language was discussed. Milkus noted the close similarity of Lithuanian to ancient Greek by giving examples of the same sentence in both languages. He went on to discuss the antiquity of the language and the purity of the people who speak it. Schleicher reaffirmed the antiquity of the language, and concluded that

“Lithuanians were the closest living nation to the historic Aryans, and had preserved more of the old language and culture than anyone else” (Spires, 1999, p.492). The implication was that if the Lithuanian language was great, by virtue of its character, then the speakers of the language were great too. This belief in purity and uniqueness of the language nourished nationalistic attitudes, and was used by nationalists to promote the idea of superiority and exceptionality of the Lithuanian ‘race’. By the early 20th century there was an energetic revival and redevelopment of Lithuanian culture which aimed to form a unique Lithuanian identity. Construction of a nation where none had existed inevitably leads to the construction of an ideal ‘national character’. However, in order to define oneself (‘us’), there has to be a parallel construction of others (‘them’). A Nazi publication *Der Gegendtypus* (1938) put it clearly: “through the counter image we obtain the greatest clarity of what our own ideals should be” (Mosse, 1995, p. 169). Those who did not share the myth of common origin as well as common language and common religion were immediately excluded, and perceived to be alien to Lithuania’s unique national identity, as one can only be born into a nation. Following the long awaited independence in 1918, the newly established state was meant to be dominated by ethnic Lithuanians. Almost immediately the role of non-Lithuanians, especially Poles and Jews, was reduced in various sectors of life but particularly in the economy (Eidintas et al., 2013). Such exclusionary nationalism provided a foundational platform from which national racism has been shaped in modern Lithuania.

Anti-Semitism: The Unspoken Genocide

Holocaust chapter

For centuries there had been no serious anti-Semitism in Lithuania. In the first years following the independence, Jews enjoyed considerable autonomy, and long-lived friendship between Jews and Lithuanians was celebrated and fostered by the government (MacQueen, 1998).

Historically, Lithuania was a home to a very large Jewish community (250,000) (Donskis, 2005). Vilnius was known throughout the Europe as “Jerusalem of Lithuania”, or even “Jerusalem of North” due to its large Jewish population and rich Jewish culture (Brook, 2015). By early 20th century Lithuania was home to more than 100 synagogues, numerous Jewish schools, theatres, and music institutes as well as the largest library in the Eastern European Jewish world (The Strashun library), and the second school in the world to teach in Hebrew, Yivo (the first one being in Jerusalem) (Porat, 1994).

At the time of the Lithuanian national revival, ethnic Lithuanians mostly comprised the peasant component of the social pyramid (Eidintas et al., 2013). The other sectors (nobility, military class etc.) were made up almost entirely of non-Lithuanians. Lithuanian peasants were highly dependent on mostly Jewish merchants, and lots of the Jews made their living by dealing with Lithuanian peasants. In cities, professional and business class was almost entirely Jewish, and most of the sectors of the economy were dominated by the Jews (MacQueen, 1998). Large number of Jews were members of the liberal professions such as lawyers, doctors and bankers (42% of Lithuania’s doctors were Jewish).

Following the independence in 1918, many Lithuanians believed that the newly established state should be controlled and dominated by ethnic Lithuanians. One of the nationalist’s main goals was the creation of an urban Lithuanian professional and business class which was virtually non-existent at the time (Porat, 1994). In the 1920s and 30s, and especially after the world economic crisis, large numbers of Lithuanians moved out of rural areas and flooded into cities in attempts to find jobs in industry and commerce. This resulted in an increased competition for employment, as most of the urban professions were occupied by the Jews. Such competition that was based on ethnicity led to frictions between the two communities, and the very first ‘ill’ feelings towards the Jews became observable.

Language, of course, was a further source of tension. As mentioned earlier, at the time of national revival, language was the most visible marker of Lithuanian identity, and the use of Lithuanian language was heavily propagated. Most of the Lithuanian Jews on the other hand, did not speak any Lithuanian and used either Russian or Polish in their daily lives. This led to further estrangement of local Jews from the Lithuanian population. Generally speaking, there were very few bonds that connected Lithuania’s Jews to the linguistic community that defined the Lithuanian nation.

Eventually as cities became more Lithuanian, anti-Semitic manifestations became more widespread. Jews were prevented to participate in local government elections (attempts to prevent the Jews from increasing their influence) as well as denied employment in civil services (Eidintas et al., 2013).

Further, a number of groups began boycotting Jewish businesses. Due to restrictive measures throughout the 1930s, a number of Jewish students in universities declined significantly, and some

'local' students were actively proposing the segregation of the Jewish community (Eidintas et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, despite the obvious increase in anti-Semitic sentiments throughout the 1930s, it was not until after the series of international and political events that took place in 1939 and 1940 that anti-Semitism became properly embedded in the Lithuanian minds. In 1939, Stalin and Hitler secretly divided Eastern Europe (Molotov-Ribbentrop pact). For the right to station Red Army and Air Force troops in Lithuania, Soviets promised to return the historical capital Vilnius back to Lithuania. This was an offer Lithuanians could not refuse. The result, however, was almost immediate imposition of the Soviet rule within the next 8 months, and Sovietisation of almost every possible sphere of Lithuanian life (Kwiet, 1998). Sovietisation ultimately led to the complete "displacement, destruction, replacement, or recasting of virtually every social, educational, political, state, and religious organisation in Lithuania" (MacQueen, 1998, p. 32). Everything that Lithuanians fought for, for the last twenty years, suddenly became meaningless and irrelevant. Soviet occupation inevitably polarised the country. On one side there were right Lithuanian youth organisations that became more radical and nationalistic. On the other, there were Jews and small number of Lithuanians that openly sympathised with Soviets. When Red Army entered Lithuanian cities, Jewish youth were greeting them with flowers and Russian songs about bravery and heroism of Soviet soldiers (Brook, 2015). Jews understood that for them presence of Soviets meant salvation because it could have been the Nazis that entered instead. "Life imprisonment (Soviet rule) is better than life sentence (Nazi rule)", as the Yiddish saying goes.

Once Soviets started to form their local government, lots of Jews were given posts in trade unions, institutions and municipal governments, mostly due to them being fluent in Russian but also because of their open support and sympathy towards the Reds (Eidintas, 2000). Jews started to participate in pro-Soviet demonstrations, as well as being noticed among local political leaders. Being unable to gain support from native Lithuanians, the Soviets strongly encouraged Jews to get involved, and some were even offered posts in NKVD (Soviet secret police) and the militia. The presence of the Soviets also meant dismissal, arrest or exile of some 25,000 Lithuanians for "anti-Soviet" thinking (Kwiet, 1998). Such chain of events eventually led to the strengthening of anti-Semitic attitudes among native Lithuanians, and Jews were labelled as communists and traitors of independent Lithuania and its ideas. Despite the fact that Jews were in no way responsible for the occupation and Sovietisation that followed, their visibility in the government caused Lithuanians to associate Jews with the Soviet regime. On the eve of the Nazi invasion anti-Semitic feelings heightened, and following the German invasion hatred towards Jews became universal. From the moment Nazis entered Lithuanian soil, Jews were blamed for virtually every other evil which had befallen the Lithuanians and were made responsible for everything bad that was happening in the country, both socially and economically. Since there were so many Jews in the communist party, Jews were blamed for the Soviet occupation and all the atrocities committed by the Reds, including mass deportations and executions of civilians. With the spread of the 'Judeo-Bolshevik' myth anti-Semitic trends further intensified among the population. Apart from propagating the view that Jews were the agents of the USSR, such myth fostered the idea of the Jewish guilt in Lithuania losing its independence (Eidintas, 2000). Jews became public enemy number one, betrayers of the nation and were seen as a major barrier on the way to national liberation.

Following the Nazi invasion, anti-Semitic literature was widely distributed and public book burning was staged in marketplaces in numerous cities (Kwiet, 1998). On the eve of the German invasion, a number of Lithuanians left their posts in the police and army, and took a refuge in Germany, where they assisted Germans in preparation of the Operation Barbarossa, with hopes of regaining the national independence (Kwiet, 1998). They also participated in the distribution of the anti-Semitic literature, and linking the re-establishment of the Lithuanian state to the removal of local Jews. At the same time, Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), a short-lived resistance organisation, identified three main priorities in its program for the liberation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union (Donskis, 2006). First and foremost was the preservation of the Lithuanian nation's racial purity. Second on the agenda was the promotion of Lithuanian ethnic domination in the country's largest cities. Last priority was "the strict and uncompromising battle against trends within Lithuanian culture that are insufficiently loyal to and respectful of Lithuanianess..." For many, racial purity of the nation and domination of ethnic Lithuanians meant the removal of the Jews.

Over the next couple of years, but especially during the six month period from June to December of 1941, around 230,000 Jews (95% of total Jewish population) were murdered – "a more complete destruction than befell any other European country" (Brook, 2015). Such rapid and near-absolute destruction was largely possible due to an extreme cooperation of the local population (Porat, 1994).

“The Germans were not there, Lithuanians did it themselves”, one veteran Jewish partisan remembers (Brook, 2015). Whereas in other places like Denmark, where the country’s local resistance to the Nazis helped to save the lives of most Danish Jews, in Lithuania, help of the local units in cleansing operations ensured almost complete extermination of local Jewry. It is approximated that around half to two-thirds of Lithuanian Jews were killed by natives (Porat, 1994).

The executions started almost immediately. In Kaunas, before the German forces entered the city on the 24th of June, Lithuanian activists had already murdered several Jews (Kwiet, 1998). During the next four days almost two percent, around 4,000 people, of the total number of Holocaust victims were murdered (MacQueen, 1998). Lots of Jews were slaughtered in an unspeakable cruelty with the use of iron rods and wooden clubs, often in public places. In some places, Jews were slaughtered publicly, attracting enthusiastic large audiences, and creating carnival-like atmosphere.

“Women with children on their arms pushed their way to the front rows, while laughter and shouts of “bravo!” echoed to the sound the iron rods used to beat the Jews to death. At intervals, one of the killers struck up the national anthem on his accordion, adding to the festive mood of the day”

(Kwiet, 1998, p.14).

According to different sources, at the time of the pogrom there was no visible presence of German soldiers (Porat, 1994). In other places, Germans filmed the massacres of the Jews by the Lithuanians to show the cruelty manifested by local units and to make it clear that it was native Lithuanians that voluntarily took the first steps against the Jews and not the Germans.

At the beginning, German units were mostly killing Jewish men, whereas Lithuanians seemed not to bother much and killed unselectively. It was Lithuanians that showed them how to murder women and children, and possibly familiarised them with it (Porat, 1994). Such eager participation of Lithuanians further encouraged the German command to make additional use of local units. One of the largest killing sites and burial place of some 40,000 Jews, The Ninth Fort, was entirely organised and supervised by Lithuanian police volunteers (Eidintas et al., 2013). Descriptions of massacres by local people in which the Germans are hardly mentioned make it clear who was responsible for torture and killing.

Finally, there was a trend of killing Jews over property (as lots of them were richer than average Lithuanian) rather than politics. Some of the criminals engaged in massacres in order to be able to steal Jewish property after, including jewellery, clothes, household goods and even houses (MacQueen, 1998). One Pole, living in close proximity to the site where Jews of Vilna were frequently killed, observed the behaviour of the Lithuanian murder squad (Ypatingas Burys) and made notes of his observations. One of them said (MacQueen, 1998, p. 36):

“To the Germans, 300 Jews means 300 enemies of humanity. To the Lithuanians it means 300 pairs of pants, 300 pairs of boots.

The main question today is not whether there was a substantive local participation but why? In the space of two years (1939-1941) Lithuania managed to lose its independence without a fight, experience three ultimatums and two occupations. During this time Lithuanian society experienced a substantial moral and psychological crisis that severely distorted their perceptions of life and human values. Everyone was unhappy, and people looked for whom to blame fault on. In such climate of social and economic catastrophe, part of society, suffering from the loss of their independence, directed much of their hatred towards Jews. Many began to consider them as ultimate enemies, a national threat, and developed a distorted understanding of patriotism.

“It was terrible to shoot, but I thought that was necessary for Lithuania’s independence.”
(Eidintas et al., 2013, p. 238)

During the first Soviet occupation Jews openly supported the communist regime. By contrast, Lithuanians hoped that by assisting and collaborating with Nazis they would be able to regain their independence as a reward. To put it shortly, “the Germans provided the framework and the legitimation for the killing of Jews, while national aspirations and the hatred for communism provided the fuel” (Porat, 1994, p.166).

Modern times

Present-day Lithuanian anti-Semitism may best be described as insensitivity or indifference to certain inconvenient aspects of the past (Malinauskaite, 2013). Many Lithuanians are still prone to portray their country as a definite victim of the 20th century. People who were killing Jews are now seen by

ultra-nationalists as people who fought the Soviet regime, people who fought for national liberation and independence.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuanian authorities have failed to bring Nazi collaborators to justice and provide a legal assessment of those who participated in Jewish annihilation. After years of complaints from Jewish groups, Lithuania's Museum of Genocide has only recently created a section dedicated to the Jewish community that perished during the war (Katz, 2011). Until then, museum was entirely devoted to the Lithuanian victims of the Soviet occupation. Unfortunately, struggle over the accuracy of the past is not the only problem concerning the present Jewish community. The ongoing battle regarding holocaust related matters is also a backdrop for an alarming increase in anti-Semitic behaviours (Zuroff, 2012). Although modern anti-Semitism is by no means as violent and overt as it used to be, systematic and persistent attacks on Jewish institutions (pig head with a hat and ear locks placed in front of the synagogue), vandalism of cemeteries and sites of murder (swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans), denial and obfuscation of holocaust, neo-Nazi and skinhead demonstrations and decision of authorities in Klaipeda to consider the swastika a traditional Lithuanian symbol (Donskis, 2006) indicate the current state of affairs and demonstrate the patterns of racism and discrimination that Jews in Lithuania still face today.

Roma experiences

“The problem in Lithuania is about the Roma ‘species’ as we call them here; they simply don’t want to work. They don’t want to work, they don’t want to learn, and they don’t want to respect the country’s laws.”

(Woolfson, 2009, p. 6)

While the historical destruction of the most numerous minority group in Lithuania is a matter of history now, hostility towards another historical minority, Roma, is real and intense, openly displayed in public and fostered by negative media portrayal.

Today, Roma remain the most marginalised racial minority in Lithuania (ECRI, 2011). They experience discrimination with regard to employment, housing, health care and education (Šukevičiūtė and Bakker, 2013). Most of the Lithuanians do not want to work, communicate or be neighbours with Roma. Recent public opinion poll showed that 69% of Lithuanians do not want Roma as their neighbours (Andriukaitis, 2008). Roma members are not only isolated from the ‘Lithuanian’ society but also ignored and openly discriminated, and can only express themselves in their very segregated community.

At present around 3,000 to 4,000 Roma reside in Lithuania (0,1 % of population), with the biggest community, consisting of about 500 people, living in the Kirtimai settlement which is located next to the Vilnius city international airport.

Housing

The housing conditions of Roma are among the poorest in the country (Šukevičiūtė and Bakker, 2013). Majority of the houses in the Kirtimai settlement lack the basic facilities such as gas, water, electricity and sewerage system due to an inability of some families to pay the fees (ECRI, 2011). Roma members have to rely on firewood as a source of heating. Almost all the houses in the settlement are registered under one address either because many Roma lack the necessary documents or because the houses were illegally built (wooden shacks). Because of this, in cases of emergency precious time is lost, and there have been incidents when ambulances could not locate a specific house, and as a result persons waiting for medical help died. Because Roma typically live in large families, sometimes including members of several generations, their living space is often limited. A typical Roma household consists of 6-7 people, and usually such family would live in a one- or two-bedroom apartment. This demonstrates that Roma experience very harsh, and sometimes dangerous, living conditions.

Roma's poor living conditions significantly affect their health, and it has been found that Roma people on average have a shorter life expectancy than the rest of the Lithuanian population, and higher infant mortality rate (Social Exclusion: Lithuanian Gypsies, no date). Although citizenship is required in order to enjoy health care benefits, and many Roma do not have the necessary documents, in cases of emergency they are allowed to receive services free of charge. But as have been noted above, they are not always able to receive them in time due to poor connection between the city and the settlement, as well as the nature of the settlement (non-registered houses), with ambulance being hour or two late.

Furthermore, the Kirtimai settlement often suffers from regular police raids, supposedly because of drug trafficking that happens in the area, which sometimes affects innocent citizens (Šukevičiūtė and Bakker, 2013). Many Roma report that police behave rather inappropriately, often not showing a search warrant, and using racist and abusive language.

Government attempts to relocate some of the Roma away from the Kirtimai settlement into the social accommodation were unsuccessful, as most of the Roma preferred to stay in the settlement in legalised houses, or move to rural parts of the country (Kavaliauskaite, 2008). Such reluctance of Roma people to live in close proximity with ethnic Lithuanians further indicates the tense relationship experienced between the two communities.

Employment

Roma are among the least employed group in Lithuania (ENAR, 2013). Despite the fact that up to 74% of Roma are actively looking for employment and are eager to work, almost 60% of Roma adults do not have a job (Šukevičiūtė and Bakker, 2013). While not being able to speak Lithuanian (60% cannot speak Lithuanian) is one of the problems, majority of them are unemployed due to prejudice and discrimination towards them. Latter finding is confirmed in a survey of employers' attitudes where 47% of respondents clearly stated that no Roma person would be employed by their company (Lithuanian Social Research Centre, 2012).

Employers do not want to hire Roma as they do not trust them and hold beliefs that Roma are lazy and unwilling to work. As a result many Roma are forced to be self-employed or to take irregular jobs. Those who were lucky enough to get employed, usually work at low-skilled jobs such as cleaning, dishwashing, housekeeping and the collection of scrap metal (ENAR, 2013). Others, who remain unemployed, sometimes turn to more criminal means of making money and often engage in drug-dealing and theft.

Individual cases of discrimination where Roma citizens were denied employment once the employer discovered their ethnic origin are not uncommon. One of the reported cases involves a Romani woman (A.B.) who was refused to be employed in a café as a cleaner and a dishwasher (Woolfson, 2010). When the café administrator saw her, she immediately asked A.B. if she was from the Kirtimai (Roma settlement). After receiving positive answer, the administrator openly expressed her antagonistic feelings, saying out-loud that "now they even teach these Roma to speak Lithuanian" to her colleague, and promptly saying that the dishwasher position is taken and they do not need anyone. The same day, ethnic Lithuanian woman was 'sent' to apply for the same job by the non-governmental Human Rights Monitoring Institute. She easily got the job place, and was informed in a derogatory way about the earlier visit of the Roma applicant. Following this event, the complaint of discrimination was upheld, and Romani victim was payed 800 Euros in compensation. This was, however, only one of the few cases of discrimination that was properly recorded and reported. Majority of incidents of discrimination remain ignored and unchallenged.

Media

Attitudes to Roma people and their representations in the media further highlight the prejudice and discrimination experienced by Roma. Public opinion towards them is stable and negative (most hated minority) (Frejute-Rakauskiene, 2006). In the mass media, Roma receive the harshest stereotypical representations of all ethnic minorities present in Lithuania. They are portrayed as segregated and asocial, deceitful and rude, lazy and ignorant. Further, Roma are the most heavily criminalised ethnic group in Lithuanian media, and are often associated with crimes such as drug-trafficking, pickpocketing and professional hypnotising. In criminal reports, Roma ethnicity is highly emphasised. By presenting Roma as criminals for whom crime is the only source of income, the image of Roma as criminals is further reinforced in the Lithuanian mass consciousness. At the same time, virtually no news reports are dedicated to positive contributions made by Roma people to the country (Tereskinas, 2002).

The idea to eliminate the Kirtimai settlement and to resettle Roma was met with great enthusiasm among internet users (Kavaliauskaite, 2008), although there was some worry regarding the possible co-existence with such group. On the internet portal delfi.lt, readers were suggesting to move local Roma to poorer area of the country, or an area dominated by other ethnic minorities, or if possible to simply deport all the Roma from the country (). Many expressed thoughts that Roma are unwilling to take part in any decent (legal) activities, and hence most are criminals. Others stated that "to make a Romani work is a 'Sisyphian task' (Kavaliauskaite, 2008, p. 163), and such traits (laziness, prone to crime etc.) are genetically coded in the nature of the Romani race. Because of that, any attempts to civilise them were thought to be fruitless.

Everyday racism

According to Eurobarometer (2008), only 7% of Lithuanian population have experienced discrimination on racial or ethnic grounds, compared to the EU average of 19%. In 2011, some 10-12% of racial minorities claimed to have experienced discrimination in the areas of employment, education and healthcare (ECRI, 2011). Further, whereas 62% of EU respondents consider it to be a disadvantage to 'belong to a different ethnic group', only 27% of Lithuanians feel this way. Such findings might lead to an erroneous conclusion that widespread discrimination based on racial grounds seems to be much less prevalent in Lithuania than in the rest of the EU. However, when you look at the results of a national survey that measured attitudes to 'others' in terms of social distance, it becomes clear that discriminatory attitudes are much more apparent and widespread among Lithuanian citizens. In a survey, respondents had to state which ethnic minorities they do not wish to have as neighbours (Andriukaitis, 2008). The least desired neighbours were Roma (69%), followed by Chechens, Muslims and Refugees (51-59%), followed by blacks (31%), and lastly Jews (30%). Moreover, 80% of respondents further stated that they do not want to work or communicate with anyone who is 'different' (with respect to race, sexuality or religion). Such findings not only uncover the state of racial climate but also confirm the presence of racial hierarchy or the "hierarchy of enemies" that is apparent in contemporary Lithuania.

Evidence of actual racist behaviours rather than simply expressed attitudes further indicates the prevalence of hostility and racial hatred. The belief that Lithuania should remain 'Lithuanian' (and if possible white) is yearly promoted during the now-infamous nationalist march that takes place on Lithuania's Independence Day (Lankauskas, 2010). First parade happened in 2008, when around 300 people marched through the capital's main avenue carrying banners and shouting slogans such as "Jews out!", "Lithuania will remain white" and "Lithuania for Lithuanians", as well as openly displaying Nazi symbols such as Swastika. In 2014, same event was attended by some 3000 to 4000 supporters. The worrying thing, is that such neo-Nazi parade was held legally, with a full permit issued by the city municipality, and with no public protest from leading political figures. Moreover, one of the leaders of 2008 march was a member of parliament, Kazimieras Uoka, who was marching at the very front (Pammer, 2011). In a survey conducted in the aftermath of the march 32% of the respondents stated that they approved of the slogans (Zuroff, 2012). When a group of activists applied to hold a counter march to protest against racism and xenophobia, local municipal authority refused the permission (Woolfson, 2010).

Increasing manifestations of racist behaviours during the sporting events, as well as physical attacks on visibly different foreigners have also been noted in recent years (Sabatauskaite, 2011). One such incident took place during a football game when a French football team was greeted by a huge banner made by Lithuanian fans, that depicted a map of Africa coloured in blue, white and red (French national flag) (Woolfson, 2010). Below the map was a sign that said 'Welcome to Europe' – a witty reference to a high number of black players in the French team.

Following the 2008 Independence march, a number of violent racist attacks increased significantly. Most famous and publicised incident involved a young black South African woman residing in Lithuania, a TV persona, who was viciously beaten at a downtown park at night by one of the attendees (skinhead) of the Nationalist parade earlier that year (Lankauskas, 2010). Following an attack, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that the incident was undoubtedly an act of violence but it was not racially motivated and had nothing to do with race. In another incident, four foreign tourists, two of whom were dark skinned were attacked in Klaipeda (ECRI, 2011). Once again, authorities claimed that the attack took place in the context of robbery, and there was no racist motivation on behalf of the attackers. Finally, in December 2009, a Somalian student attending Kaunas Medical University has died after having been assaulted several times in October and November of the same year (ECRI, 2011). Despite the fact that all of the xenophobic attacks were based on the way victim looked (dark skinned), in most cases the racist motivation has not been confirmed by the Lithuanian authorities.

Media representations of racial minorities have a great potential in influencing public views of such groups, and with the increasing number of articles covering problems and difficulties that are associated with certain ethnic minorities, negative attitudes towards these groups are strengthened and further reinforced. Apart from the negative media portrayal of Roma group that was outlined above there is clear hostility towards other groups such as Muslims and immigrants (Frejute-Rakauskiene, 2009). In Lithuania, immigrants have not yet become associated with all the foreigners. So whereas immigrants from post-soviet republics are considered 'local' and favourable, and media reports on such group of immigrants have mostly been positive, the same cannot be said about visibly different

migrants from third world countries. This group is considered to be the most exotic, deviant and problematic by the media (Kovalenko et al., 2010). News reports describe immigrants in a mistrustful or openly fearful manner, often using frightening headlines such as: “Immigration – a time bomb”, “Lithuanians become a minority” and so forth (SFR, 2011). Scare stories and legends about migrants are common place in Lithuanian tabloids. Some of the stories refer to the so called marriages of convenience, where some man from a third-world country (mostly Muslim) tricks Lithuanian woman to marry him in order to get a European residence permit, and then run away to Western Europe (SFR, 2011). In such stories the assumption is often made that marriages out of love are not possible with a foreigner, and all they (migrants) want is to rob Lithuanian women and then disappear with their money and kids. Of all the marriages, those with Muslim men are especially criticised. Most of the stories regarding immigrants discuss the possible threats (terrorism, unemployment, riots) and problems (cultural incompatibility, illegal work, crime) that they can cause. This is particularly true with regard to Muslims, who in the light of recent events, became closely associated with terrorism (Frejute-Rakauskiene, 2006). Public opinion about them has changed the most radically. Whereas a third (34%) of respondents did not desire Muslims as their neighbours at the turn of millennium, by 2010 this number rose to almost 60% (Woolfson, 2010).

At the same time, very little attention is given to minorities’ experiences of problems, prejudice and racism in the media. Virtually no articles discuss positive contributions made to the society by Lithuanian historic minorities, Jews, Roma and Tatars (Tereskinas, 2002). It has been argued that by not paying sufficient attention to racial minorities in everyday lives, the Lithuanian media contributes to their marginalisation (Frejute-Rakauskiene, 2009). In this regard, the non-recognition of certain groups can be one of the many forms of oppression, and hence such non-recognition (or misrecognition) can be regarded as a discursive form of racism and victimisation. In general, Lithuanian media regards ethnicity as a problem, and not as a positive quality of a Lithuanian ‘multicultural’ society’.

Although Lithuania agreed to accept up to 1000 refugees from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea as part of Europe’s effort to deal with the migration crisis, latest opinion polls show that population is very divided on the issue with 49% of the respondents being against such initiative (Kirkilas, 2015). While part of the population is becoming more understanding towards people coming from war zones, others argue that Lithuania has its own external borders to protect, and that government should care about its own people in the first place. Drawing on evidence from print and electronic media, Lankauskas (2010) confirms such protectionist, exclusionist and defensive ideology where many Lithuanians expressed their views that ‘others’, both internal and external, could undermine and eventually destroy Lithuanian *tuatiskumas* (nationness). Many noted that Lithuania would be so much better place if it were ethnically more homogenous and pure. Racial nationalism practiced by Lithuanian skinhead subculture (Kavolis, 2010) further confirms the exclusionist state logic, with their desire to defend national dignity, retain racial and cultural entity and preserve Lithuanian ‘race’.

Conclusion

Discrimination and marginalisation of the Roma populations, exclusion of minorities from national identity, obfuscation of holocaust, neo-Nazi and skinhead demonstrations, manifestations of hate speech and violent attacks on visibly different foreigners show that racism is active and well alive in contemporary Lithuania.

At present, however, state officials do very little to resolve the problem. While discrimination is reluctantly acknowledged in certain aspects of life and with regard to specific groups, it is completely ignored with respect to race and ethnicity. “A worrisome tendency to equate racial attacks with hooliganism” (Woolfson, 2010, p. 559). It is a common situation that those who consider racial discrimination to be a major concern are the ones who have experienced it personally. Majority of the population does not realise what discrimination is, thinking it would not happen to them.

In order for Lithuania to make progress towards post-racial future, a number of steps must be made. The first step would be the recognition of racist motivation in racist attacks. Once this is done, a strict and rigid system must be developed that will properly investigate and record racist crimes, bringing offenders to justice.

Until then the situation is unlikely to improve, and Lithuanian racism characterised by its exclusionist and protectionist ideology and the desire of people to preserve the purity of their nation will continue to flourish.

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