

The ‘shadow pandemic’ of domestic violence:
The role of women and gender relations in Lithuania in light of Soviet
occupation

Master’s Thesis
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Word count: 12,680

15 June 2021



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Abstract

More than 30 years after regaining its independence from the Soviet Union, Lithuania's public discourse is underlined by a social watershed surrounding the concepts of family, gender, domestic violence, and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which all together lead to some major contemporary challenges of women's rights and gender equality. In order to address these issues in a more comprehensive manner, this research offers a chronological analysis by looking at the Soviet and post-Soviet developments. It relies on an in-depth analysis of the selected primary sources such as the communist propaganda posters from the 1920s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, glorifying females as heroic mothers-workers, yet in reality constituting paradoxical gender models based on patriarchal attitudes and a "pseudo-emancipation" of women. By looking at the historical roots of the female representation and related social norms, this research reflects upon the current public discourse and progress in gender equality which fills the historiographical gaps of the social transformations in the post-Soviet space. In turn, it contributes towards an enhanced understanding of the "shadow pandemic" of domestic violence in contemporary Lithuania.

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis was a great learning experience for me. When compiling primary source material, it was sometimes challenging to really grasp the actuality of Soviet reality. But combined with the memories and insights of the people who experienced it, including my parents and grandparents, I was able to put the pieces together in a more comprehensive analysis of the Soviet legacy on the role of women in Lithuania. At times it was hard to keep emotional distance when hearing and reading these stories. However, during the process I learnt how to keep an objective eye when looking at a collective traumatic past which brought fundamental changes to several Lithuanian generations.

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor Dr. Corina Mavrodin for guiding me through the process, providing insightful feedback, and always keeping it positive in spite of the new norms of remote education.

My final debt is to my family members who shared their stories with me which were a great source of inspiration and motivation. Also, I could not have imagined this without the support of my friends and my boyfriend Enrique who listened, discussed, and always believed in me. Thank you.

Goda Savickaitė

June 2021

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List of abbreviations

BPfA	UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women
CEDAW	UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GBV	Gender-based violence
IPV	Intimate partner violence
IWD	International Woman's Day
LSSR	Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic
OEOO	Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UN Women	UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

On March 26, 2013, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) delivered a judgment in a landmark case, *Valiuliene v Lithuania*. It concerned a Lithuanian national, Ms Loreta Valiuliene, who suffered continuous occurrences of domestic violence from her partner. As stated in the judgment: “between 3 January and 4 February 2001, she had been beaten up on five occasions by her live-in partner”. It further presented that “she had been strangled, pulled by the hair, hit in the face and kicked in the back and in other parts of her body”, along with the repeated instances of verbal and psychological abuse.¹ However, the case was suspended by the national courts due to several absences of the abuser during the court hearings, which eventually led to the dismissal of the case, and any further prosecutions were cancelled. The Lithuanian government added that the domestic abuse suffered did not reach the minimum level of severity needed to fall under the scope of Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), which proclaims the prohibition of torture.² In contrast, the ECtHR highlighted that “at the heart of this case is the question of impunity for the acts of domestic violence”, and that Lithuania failed to protect its citizen from the continuous acts of abuse from her intimate partner in an adequate and timely manner which amounted to a violation of the above-mentioned Article 3 of ECHR.³

This was the first judgment delivered by the ECtHR on the issue of domestic violence in Lithuania, in effect concluding that the country’s criminal law provisions and law enforcement practices were not sufficiently effective. However, almost a decade later, it remains a daily reality for a significant amount of Lithuanian female citizens. According to the Official Statistics Portal, around 47,941 reports of domestic violence were received in 2017, of which almost 11,000 were registered as constituting crimes. From the available data, it becomes evident that 8 out of 10 victims were women and the outstanding majority of them, amounting to almost 80 %, suffered from their current intimate partners.⁴ Even though the amount of such crimes is decreasing, as evidenced by the 7,691 instances registered in 2019, the situation remains alarming. As further stated by the Lithuanian Ministry of Social

¹ *Valiuliene v Lithuania*, no. 33234/07, para. 7, ECtHR 2013.

² *Ibid.*, para. 32 and 54.

³ *Ibid.*, para. 71 and 86.

⁴ “Smurto Artimoje Aplinkoje Statistika,” [“Domestic Violence Statistics,”] Official Statistics Portal, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/infografikas30>.

Security and Labour, there were around 53,000 calls recorded, which equals 145 of them every day.⁵ The statistical reality in Lithuania correlates with the global data. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), domestic violence disproportionately affects women, as almost 1 in 3 of them have experienced some form of violence, usually exercised by their intimate male partners.⁶ A similar phenomenon can be observed when looking at the statistics of homicides worldwide. *A Global Study on Gender-related Killings of Women and Girls* (2019), carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), revealed that despite the fact that the majority of all homicide victims are men (81 %), female counterparts make up to 82 % of victims of domestic violence perpetrated by an intimate partner.⁷ Moreover, a recent dilemma can be noticed in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures keeping people at home in order to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus. According to UN Women, the pandemic has intensified yet overshadowed the issue of domestic violence, naming the latter a “shadow pandemic”.⁸ For instance, in Lithuania there has been a 20 % increase in reports during the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same timeframe in 2019, however, the pre-trial investigations have only risen by 5 %.⁹ It reflects a paradox between the growing prevalence of domestic violence and a lack of effective legislative and social practices aimed at properly tackling the matter at hand. It is important to highlight that the given statistics only represent the tip of the iceberg as the point in question is a complex and multi-layered one. In line with the most comprehensive international instrument to set legally

⁵ “Apsauga nuo Smurto Artimoje Aplinkoje: Pasiūlyta Nauja Priemonė Aukų Apsaugai,” [“Protection Against Domestic Violence: A New Measure Is Proposed to Protect the Victims,”] Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/apsauga-nuo-smurto-artimoje-aplinkoje-pasiulyta-nauja-priemone-auku-apsaugai>.

⁶ “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women,” UN Women, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related Killing of Women and Girls*, (Vienna: United Nations Publication, 2019), 11, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf

⁸ “The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women During COVID-19,” UN Women, accessed May 31, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19#:~:text=One%20in%20three%20women%20worldwide,mostly%20by%20an%20intimate%20partner.&text=As%20COVID%2D19%20cases%20continue,and%20helplines%2C%20have%20reached%20capacity>.

⁹ Dalia Leinarte, “Konfliktai ir Smurtas Šeimose ‘Nurašyti’ COVID-19 Krizei,” [“Conflicts and Domestic Violence at the Price of the COVID-19 Crisis,”] *LRT*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/1179807/dalia-leinarte-konfliktai-ir-smurtas-seimose-nurasyti-covid-19-krizei>.

binding standards, i.e. the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, violence against women is explained as a:

“<...> manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women”.¹⁰

It becomes clear that this practice is largely based on female subordination to male counterparts. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), gender-based violence (GBV) is interpreted as “violence directed against a person because of their gender”.¹¹ However, the actual prevalence of GBV is difficult to measure for several reasons. One of the most significant ones is a widely spread victims’ resentment and fear to speak up and seek help, which is illustrated by a study carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). It underlined that only 14 % of European women that participated in the survey contacted the police after experiencing some form of intimate partner violence (IPV).¹² Thus, in light of the above, there is a growing need to shed more light on the multi-faceted issue of the shadow pandemic of domestic violence in a more contextual and profound manner.

This thesis focuses on the developments of the role of women and social behaviours in Lithuania from a historical point of view while analysing the repercussions of the Soviet occupation and long-lasting communist regime during the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, the Sovietisation period (1940-41 and 1944-1990) plays a crucial point as it brought far-reaching fundamental changes in the lives of Lithuanian citizens, marked by the communist indoctrination techniques and propagandistic claims on gender equality and female emancipation. Thus by zooming in on the adopted Soviet social and behavioural models this thesis provides new guiding insights on the post-Soviet formation of national attitudes towards gender roles and equality in light of the pressing issue of domestic violence against women taking place in contemporary Lithuanian society.

¹⁰ Council of Europe, Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011), 5, <https://rm.coe.int/168046031c>.

¹¹ “What Is Gender-based Violence?” European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>.

¹² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Violence against Women: An EU-wide Survey: Results at a Glance*, (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014), 3, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-at-a-glance-oct14_en.pdf.

In terms of the relevant historiography, there are a general growing number of studies focusing on the post-Soviet member states of the European Union (EU), evaluating their political, economic, and legal compliance with the set EU standards, yet some related areas remain under-researched. The available studies on the post-Soviet developments and compliance with the EU gender equality standards provide a mostly positive assessment.¹³ However, there are some historiographical gaps within the social transformations and national attitudes towards gender roles, and especially the situation of women's rights. A great majority of the studies analysing transitional periods in the post-Soviet space draws a negative picture generalising "East European women" as "losers" in face of the political, economic, and social challenges brought forth after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.¹⁴ However, such generalisation does not provide a complete analysis of the related national transformations needed to better understand the evolution of the adopted social norms and behaviours within the scope of gender power relations and women's rights. More specifically, there is a lack of systemic historical studies in light of the current prevalence of domestic violence in Lithuania. It is mainly the case due to the far-reaching effects of the Soviet indoctrination techniques aimed at ingraining a utopian ideal of a flawless egalitarian society, combined with a scarcity of comprehensive archival material available on the realities of Soviet citizens, in particular women. Jolanta Reingardiene examined the Soviet legacy in the context of GBV, stating that during the occupation:

"a conspiracy of silence prevailed both about the violent acts of the regime as well as the private sphere. Even though the Soviet Union imposed some measures for exposing violent husbands publicly, there was neither socio-cultural discourse conducive to recognizing gender-based violence against women nor effective mechanisms for recording its nature and extent".¹⁵

Thus it is argued that the Soviet ideology not only "had a clear instrumental purpose to mask any unhappiness of Soviet women in a misguided attempt to equalize" but even to

¹³ Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Post-accession Compliance with EU Gender Equality Legislation in Post-communist New Member States," *European Integration Online Papers* 13(2) (2009): 2, DOI: 10.1695/2009023.

¹⁴ Andrea Spehar, "Eastern European Women": Winners or Losers in Post-Communist Transitions?" *Centre for European Research at Göteborg University* (2005): 100-101.

¹⁵ Jolanta Reingardiene, "Dilemmas in Private/Public Discourse: Contexts for Gender-based Violence Against Women in Lithuania," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 34(3) (2003): 356, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629770300000131>.

“homogenize the sexes”, which propagated that domestic violence was virtually impossible in the Soviet Union.¹⁶

One of the latest research carried out in collaboration with Margarita Jankauskaitė, a member of the Lithuanian Centre for Equality Advancement, and the representatives from the Lithuanian Human Rights Monitoring Institute exclusively focused on the current social norms and attitudes associated with GBV. It concluded that Lithuanians lack understanding and recognition of it, especially of the economic and sexual forms, and it is also the case among the survivors themselves.¹⁷ Moreover, victim-blaming is still a highly prevalent practice not only among ordinary citizens but even including law enforcement agencies. Such attitudes are based, inter alia, on the widely-spread hierarchical power relations between women and men.¹⁸ The lack of recognition and publicisation of the many forms of domestic violence can be illustrated by the fact that during the Soviet occupation and up until very recently the issue was both legally and socially seen in terms of private family matters. It only partially changed with the implementation of the Lithuanian Law on Protection Against Domestic Violence in 2011. However, the study reveals that it holds several shortcomings, thus it remains necessary for domestic violence “to be addressed as public and societal problem”.¹⁹

Furthermore, historical explorations of the adaptation models and the role of women in Lithuania were presented by a prominent professor and member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Dalia Leinarte. She is one of the few scholars to compile extensive primary source material, such as press releases, propaganda, and first-hand stories into a revealing account of the Soviet realities. In her book, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970*, she divides the interviewees into three groups. The first group consists of the interviewees who shared mostly positive memories of the Soviet times, the second group comprises complicated and painful experiences, and the last one represents women who stressed their highly negative memories of the Soviet occupation. In turn, Leinarte acknowledges that oral

¹⁶ Ibid., 362.

¹⁷ Margarita Jankauskaitė, Ugnė Grigaitė, and Mažvydas Karalius, “Between Experience and Social ‘Norms’, Identification and Compliance: Economic and Sexual Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Lithuania,” *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* 3(3) (2019): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1332/239868019X15623411271876>.

¹⁸ Ibid., 303.

¹⁹ Ibid., 317.

history is a less accurate source of historical facts, but it nevertheless reveals a greatly valuable subjective source of individual and collective historical memory, which, in the case of the Soviet women, is barely written about.²⁰ Moreover, the indoctrination in the Soviet Union was intensified by the massive state-led propaganda machine glorifying them as “mother-heroines” and “heroes of socialist labour”, which affected several Lithuanian generations, deeply distorting their realities.²¹ In turn, the low level of societal recognition of domestic violence and the drawbacks in the development of women’s rights point towards the challenging Soviet times, and the lack of connections drawn between the past influences and the present gender issues in post-Soviet Lithuania.

In order to contribute towards an enhanced comprehension of the multi-faceted social matter of domestic violence, and to fill relative historiographical gaps, the innovative part of this research lies within the comparative analysis of the role of women and gender relations as seen from a historical point of view. By choosing such an angle this research offers valuable insights drawn from the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, pointing towards the far-reaching effects of the communist indoctrination on shaping contemporary social norms and behaviours. They are seen in light of the seeming level of inequality and discrimination based on gender within abusive relationships. In turn, the concepts of violence against women, gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence are used interchangeably. Altogether, the exploration of the propagated communist social ideals is illustrated through the analysis of primary source material which provides an integrated comparison of a few chosen Soviet propaganda posters glorifying women and their significance in the communist movement. The posters represent four different periods, i.e. the 1920s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, mostly focusing on the Stalinist regime. The limitations of this research are mainly situated within the exploration of the social repercussions of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, as opposed to the political and economic ones, as the national adaptation of particular gender models and roles is less comprehensively examined in light of the contemporary challenges in the post-Soviet space. Thus this research is divided into two chronological chapters exploring the role of women in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. Primarily, a brief analysis of some of the related Marxist-Leninist tenets is provided, serving as the foundation for further investigation of the development of gender parity during the

²⁰ Dalia Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Stalinist regime (1927-1953). The analysis of the shifting Stalin's policies, legislation, and propagandistic slogans towards equality, employed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), is carried out in more detail. Finally, the paradoxical nature of social relations, or a "pseudo-emancipation" of women, is explained through an analysis of their realities in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR).²² After providing the historical roots of communist gender models and social behaviours, the second chapter turns to the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the subsequent challenges in securing women's rights in the post-Soviet era. A transitional period (1990-2004), marked by the reconstruction of Lithuania's independence and the eventual accession to the EU, offers a majorly successful view on democratic transformation and gender equality policies. However, the remaining challenges are further addressed, turning to the pressing issue of GBV. It is analysed against the backdrop of a growing public dispute and social polarisation surrounding gender roles, family values, and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The second chapter mainly relies on the examination of the legislative material, recommendations, and public surveys measuring the public opinions and values on feminine and masculine roles, and family matters, while pointing towards the prevention of domestic violence and further improvements of women's rights in contemporary Lithuania.

This research aims to unravel the complex social phenomenon of GBV by examining its underlying layers, i.e. the feminine roles, gender equality, and power dynamics within a family as seen from a historical point of view. More specifically, the study offers a comparative analysis of the development of social values and gender roles in light of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. In turn, this thesis sheds new light and provides important insights on the contemporary issue of domestic violence through a comprehensive historical perspective tracing back the roots of social attitudes and behaviours influenced by the communist ideals.

²² Usha K.B., "Political Empowerment of Women in Soviet Union and Russia: Ideology and Implementation," *International Studies* 42(2) (2005): 141, doi:10.1177/002088170404200203.

Chapter I: The role of women and gender equality in the Soviet Union

The creation of the Soviet Union was sparked by the Marxist-Leninist ideology which played an important role in the communist claims on the emancipation of women. After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 which saw a formation of *de jure* gender parity, the analysis shifts to the subsequent Soviet policies employed during the Stalinist period, while providing an exploration of widely disseminated propagandistic social models. Stalin's regime is seen in light of the industrialisation process, Second World War, and the post-war period, which is relevant in exploring the shifting policies and attitudes towards the role of women and family matters. However, seemingly paradoxical nature of gender roles and power relations reveals a "pseudo-emancipation" of females which is disclosed through the exploration of the alleged *de facto* equality in Soviet Lithuania. The chosen case study is a valuable illustration of the contrasting realities of the Soviet regime. Altogether, the alleged egalitarian communist society is critically examined through an illustrative comparison of a few chosen propaganda posters glorifying women and their emancipation within the USSR, while highlighting discriminatory power relations and the culture of silence surrounding domestic violence.

Marxist-Leninist background

In order to provide an analytical comparison of the legally proclaimed gender equality and its alleged practical implementation in the Soviet Union, it is necessary to provide a brief exploration of the related Marxist-Leninist ideological tenets. Under Marxism, the underrepresentation of female citizens is referred to as a "woman question". It is based on the idea that a patriarchal subjugation of them, seen in tandem with the general oppression of peasants and working-class people, together referred to as the proletariat, are the consequences of social inequality that is noticeable within the capitalist societies worldwide.²³ Thus, it was believed that "not gender but class causes women's oppression" and that they have to, first and foremost, be economically empowered and liberated from their domestic compounds, and to be freed from the subordination to men.²⁴ In other words, they would cease to be oppressed and would automatically be deemed equal to men once a classless socialist society is reached through a communist revolution.

²³ Ibid., 142.

²⁴ Ibid., 143.

Some fundamental developments of the communist emancipation project can be noticed when looked at the policies adopted during the leadership of Vladimir Lenin, the founder and first ruler of the Soviet Union. It was claimed that the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, preceding the Russian Civil War (1917-1922), represented “immediate and marked changes in the legal status of Russian women, making the fledgling Soviet republic preeminent in its official commitment to women's rights”.²⁵ For instance, Soviet Russia was among the first major countries in the world to proclaim female voting rights in 1917, and to legalise all abortions in 1920, which were seen as important steps towards improving their fundamental rights. However, it is documented that abortions were poorly executed and often lacked safety, which, in turn, disprove the glorified legality and significance of such practices, pointing towards a rather degrading treatment of women.²⁶ Moreover, a more liberal policy on divorce was adopted which was a part of the Bolshevik socialist agenda, oriented towards full liberalisation of females. In turn, it represented one of the key pillars of the emancipatory project aimed at creating a classless socialist society.²⁷ Lenin went as far as introducing an idea of a so-called “collective”, which eventually became one of the driving principles of the Soviet society. It was seen in contrast to the concept of individuality based on personal freedom, as increasingly such collectiveness influenced people’s intimate lives, romantic love, and family matters.²⁸ In turn, the propaganda poster below is an illustrative example of the “woman question” and the implementation of the Bolshevik agenda of the empowerment of females during the period of the Russian Civil War, leading up to the eventual creation of the Soviet Union in 1922.

²⁵ Rochelle Ruthchild, “Sisterhood and Socialism: The Soviet Feminist Movement,” *A Journal of Women Studies*, 7(2) (1983): 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷ Marianna Muravyeva, “Bytovukha: Family Violence in Soviet Russia,” *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* 8(1) (2014): 92, doi:10.3167/asp.2014.080106.

²⁸ Lynne Attwood and Olga Isupova, “‘To Give Birth or Not to Give Birth?’: Having Children in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Melanie Ilic (London: The Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 448-49, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54905-1_29.



1. "What the October Revolution gave to the worker and the peasant" (1920). Author: Nikolay Nikolaevich Kupreyanov. Source: The Sergio Grigorian Collection. (The line above the poster reads: *Soviet Federative Socialist Republic*" and "*Workers of the world, unite!*" The inscriptions on the buildings read (from left to right): *Mother's and Child's Home, Council of Worker and Peasant Deputies, Adults' School, Kindergarten, Library, Canteen, and Workers' Club*. The inscriptions on the rocks read: *Land for the Peasants, Factories for the Workers*).

In order to highlight the achievements that the October Revolution provided for the proletariat, the propaganda of the post-revolutionary period was increasingly shifting the focus towards the status of Soviet women. It is important to keep in mind that the Russian

population at that time was largely rural.²⁹ Hence the promised changes brought forth by the revolution were highly prominent, which would empower and liberate peasants from their subordination to the elites. In turn, female citizens were being depicted as the receivers of those positive changes. According to Lenin himself, speaking at the first Congress of Working Women that took place in 1918:

“<...> there can be no socialist revolution unless very many working women take a big part in it. In all civilized countries, even the most advanced, women are actually no more than domestic slaves. Women do not enjoy full equality in any capitalist state, not even in the freest of republics. One of the primary tasks of the Soviet Republic is to abolish all restrictions on women's rights <...>. Over here, in Soviet Russia, no trace is left of any inequality between men and women under the law”.³⁰

In turn, this poster stresses the significance of the socialist revolution and communist principles in offering gender equality and more financial opportunities for the marginalised parts of society, mainly expressed by the enhanced women's emancipation. In order to strengthen the indoctrination tactics, some common communist symbols can be further discerned. Primarily, a hammer and sickle are noticed, representing solidarity between the workers and the peasants united against an oppressive bourgeoisie.³¹ The elements of redness, a symbolic colour of the communist movement, can be distinguished as well. It can be noticed in the rising sun, relating to the idea of the emergence of communism, as well as spotted on a woman's dress which highlights the omnipresence of the communist ideals within the Soviet society. She is holding a hammer, representing the working class, whereas the sickle that is lying on the rocks symbolises the peasants that can be spotted walking into the canteen, or, in a wider sense, could be seen as entering an urbanised city from the rural areas in search of a more economically emancipated life. The woman is pointing towards the city, which is situated behind the cloudy-looking smokes coming out from the factories, leading the people (mainly peasant women with children) towards a better future. Thus this poster depicts the increasing importance of female citizens in building an ideal socialist

²⁹ International Institute for Environment and Development, and United Nations Population Fund, *Russian Urbanization in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (2012), 6-7, <https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/10613IIED.pdf>.

³⁰ Alice Schuster, “Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality,” *The Russian Review* 30(3) (1971): 261.

³¹ Graeme Gill, “Formation of the Metanarrative, 1917-1929,” in *Symbolism and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics*, ed. Graeme Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71.

society of the Soviet Union, which can be supported by the afore-mentioned Marxist-Leninist ideas. However, a scholarly critique argues that the legally proclaimed gender equality was only used as a pretext to fulfil ideological and political communist objectives and it rather constituted a “paradoxical history of Russian and Soviet women”.³² This paradoxical nature will be further explained by turning to the most radical period of Sovietisation, i.e. the Stalinist regime, and the subsequent Soviet propaganda posters pointing towards the fortification of feminine roles, family life, and gender equality.

Stalinist period (1927-1953)

After providing an overview of the significance of the revolutionary period of Soviet Russia in light of the growing liberation of the suppressed female citizens, it is necessary to turn to Joseph Stalin’s rule which saw a new wave of reformative changes in many spheres of life. These transitions account for both the economic and demographic motives of the CPSU. More specifically, it was underlined by the industrialisation process (1929-1941) which was marked by an increased labour force, collectivisation, and planned economy, in order to make the Soviet Union more efficient and self-reliant. From a demographic point of view, the aftermath of the Second World War and a massive loss of Soviet men brought forth the need to strengthen the role of mothers, characterised by Stalin’s ban on abortions and restrictive policies on divorce in 1936, and a system of honourable women’s titles stressing the importance of motherhood and employment.

When talking about the Stalinist Soviet society special care needs to be paid to the ideological tactics and models aimed at influencing the people to believe in a communist emancipatory project. At the beginning of his rule, Stalin stated that women were already fully liberated and gender equality was officially reached so there was no more need to actively seek their emancipation.³³ It was reflected in the Soviet Union’s Constitution dating back to 1936, also known as Stalin’s Constitution. More specifically, Article 122 stated that:

“<...> women in the USSR are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life. The possibility of exercising these rights is ensured to women by granting them an equal right with men to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance and education, and by state protection of the interests of mother and child,

³² Muravyeva, 92.

³³ Ibid., 92.

pre-maternity and maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens”.

In fact, several circumstances can illustrate this alleged progressiveness of the Soviet Union in ensuring more emancipation and equality. At first sight, a multiplication of employed and educated females in the USSR seems to support the official gender equality claims of the CPSU. It is estimated that “close to 90 % of working-age women were employed” around the 1980s.³⁴ The official communist claims were fortified by a public representation of a new liberated and strong Soviet woman that was being circulated by the state-led propaganda apparatus. This was one of the crucial ideological techniques used to appeal to the female citizens and gain their support in order to enhance the authority of the communist regime.³⁵ A few chosen posters from the Second World War and the post-war periods glorifying women and depicting them as mothers-heroines and emancipated socialist workers serve as a source for further analysis of the communist influence on shaping ideal gender models and disseminating alleged equality in the Soviet Union.

³⁴ Suzanne LaFont, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Women in the Post-communist States,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 34 (2001): 205.

³⁵ Virginija Jurėniene, “Sovietinės Moters ‘Kūrimas’ Sovietų Lietuvoje ir Sovietų Sąjungoje,” [“The ‘Creation’ of a Soviet Woman in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic and Soviet Union,”] *Gender Studies and Research* 7 (2009): 37, <https://www.vdu.lt/cris/handle/20.500.12259/82285>.



2. “Glory to Our Mother-Heroine!” (1944). Author: Nina Vatolina. Source: The University of Nottingham’s Collection.

The role of women was brought to the spotlight during and after WWII due to the significant Soviet economic and demographic changes that the USSR suffered during the war. It is estimated that the total amount of casualties rounded up to about 24 million, counting both civilian and military losses, most of them being men.³⁶ It is observed that as a consequence, this led to the fact that women constituted a majority of the Soviet population in 1959, evidenced by 20 million more female than male citizens being registered at that time.³⁷ These disproportional numbers prompted the CPSU to make some fundamental changes in the family-related policies in order to encourage childbirth and to boost the Russian

³⁶ “Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II,” The National World War II Museum, New Orleans, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-worldwide-deaths-world-war>.

³⁷ Schuster, 263.

population. Hence Stalin disseminated a “superwoman” model merging together the roles of mother, wife, and worker.³⁸ This can be illustrated by the fact that since 1944 an honorary “Mother-Heroine” title (in Russian: *mat'-geroinia* or *мать героиня*) was awarded to all women who had ten or more children.³⁹ In fact, the woman in the poster above is wearing a Soviet “Order of the Mother-Heroine” on her dress which can be distinguished by the red star of communism. She represents a wartime mother surrounded by her many children which is an allegory to the many losses of Soviet men during WWII and the importance of female reproduction at that time. It is assumed that one of her sons is a part of the military forces, and the other one is a sailor, which is linked to the wartime period as the red star of communism can be noticed on both of their uniforms. The mother’s dress is bright red which singles her out of the whole picture and resembles the power of the communist ideology. Moreover, it is observable that only the woman is looking directly out at the spectator, while all her children are looking away, stressing the significance of the mother-heroine. By highlighting the distinctive ethnic Russian features of both the mother and her children (blond hair, light skin, blue eyes) this poster addresses the issue of the shrinking Russian population as a consequence of the war, while glorifying large families and the important role of mothers. However, a father-husband figure is left out of the picture which conforms to a conventional patriarchal system of gender roles within a family. In turn, it relies on the idea that women were seen as natural caregivers or “home-keepers”, being in charge of the idyllic domestic life and the care of children, while men were still largely perceived as the traditional “breadwinners” within a Soviet family.⁴⁰ Moreover, the propagandistic mechanisms did not fully reflect the reality of the alleged female emancipation, which can be illustrated by the efforts of the CPSU to “develop heavy industry” that, in turn, prevented the Soviet Union from “the modernization of housework, such as affordable washing machines”.⁴¹ Thus it is argued that the Soviet Union “promoted patriarchy disguised as equality” which questions the proclaimed gender parity and the overall level of women’s empowerment.⁴² The analysed poster is an example of the powerful Soviet propaganda machine which was a source of spreading the ideal female models in order to enhance the state control of its citizens needed

³⁸ Usha K.B., 149.

³⁹ Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970*, 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19

⁴¹ LaFont, 206.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 217.

to lead the class struggle towards a utopian future of egalitarian communist society where gender equality is reached in all levels.



3. “Milkmaids, let’s achieve high milk yield from each forage-fed cow!” (1950). Author: Boris Alexandrovich Zelensky. Source: Arhive. The top left corner reads: *A Hero of Socialist Labour, A.H. Ananieva, A Milkmaid from Telmana Kolkhoz, Moscow’s Region, On Average Made 5,213 kg Milk/Year From Each Cow.*

The after-war period, i.e. the 1950s, focused more exclusively on the economic grounds and the woman’s representation as a worker. The poster above represents a “Hero of Socialist Labour” (in Russian: *geroi socialisticheskovo truda* or *Герой Социалистического Труда*), as it can be discerned by a medal seen on the woman’s chest, indicating exceptional achievements in the national economy and culture. It was introduced by a decree issued by

the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR in 1938.⁴³ The poster's focus on the amount of milk made corresponds to the centralised Soviet economic system based on the five-year plans, which was one of the ways the CPSU used to incentivise people to work, as well as to increase women's participation in the Soviet economy and labour force.⁴⁴ However, it illustrates the highly physical and low-skill nature of female jobs, in this case focusing on the milkmaids, which was one of the most common professions that Soviet female citizens occupied. In fact, even in the later years, around the 1970s, they employed the majority of "the least attracted agricultural jobs", which can be substantiated by the fact that "more than 90 % of swineherds, poultry workers, and milking personnel [were] women, while only 20 % of women [were] engaged in some kind of administrative agricultural work".⁴⁵ Thus it is argued that "Stalin's idea of a "superwoman" who combined the roles of mother, housewife and worker brought about a double burden for women", and that such state-led award system only resembled "tactical moves to promote necessary gender role models" to increase the credibility of the oppressive communist regime.⁴⁶ Thus the nexus between the ideological claims and Soviet practices provides a paradoxical conclusion. To illustrate, an incongruity is noticed in the claims surrounding the rising levels of the employment of female citizens. It can be explained by the widespread discrimination and "a gender-specific gap in income <...>, with women in the USSR, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary earning 66–75 % of male salaries".⁴⁷ This phenomenon is generally referred to as the "gender paradox", which reflects that they largely remained underrepresented in Soviet politics and that the reality rather constituted a noticeable disempowerment of female citizens in terms of higher professional positions and occupations requiring strong leadership skills.⁴⁸ The so-called liberation of women was mainly reached in physical, low-paying, and low-skilled jobs, which were based on a deeply entrenched patriarchal attitude towards females as being less capable of occupying more high-skilled professions and being in charge of important decision-making processes. Notwithstanding the various nuances relating to the nature of female jobs, it was nevertheless stated that the Soviet Union reached its goals to empower women to seek emancipation through enhanced education and labour. However "freeing them from their traditional domestic responsibilities

⁴³ Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR, Decree of December 27, 1938 on Establishment of the Medal for "Labor Value," http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_4175.htm.

⁴⁴ Schuster, 263.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 264.

⁴⁶ Usha K.B., 149.

⁴⁷ LaFont, 206.

⁴⁸ Usha K.B., 141.

to participate equally in work outside the home <...> was not practically achieved, creating a system of “pseudo-emancipation”.⁴⁹ It portrayed females as liberated and fully employed, yet in reality, they were being oppressed and exploited by the totalitarian system. In turn, besides the celebrated rise in women’s employment, they had to juggle work, family, children, and public life at the same time.⁵⁰ After having provided an in-depth analysis of the alleged equality of all citizens proclaimed under Stalin, as seen through the lens of the propagandistic posters, slogans, and ideological tactics, the research turns to a further examination of a practical communist implementation of gender parity in light of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

Soviet Lithuania (1940-41 and 1944-1990)

Before undertaking a further exploration of the Soviet influence on women’s roles and related social behaviours, it is suitable to provide a brief context of the most relevant changes in Lithuania’s statehood during the past 200 years. After the last partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, the country was ruled by the Russian Empire until the end of the First World War, altogether lasting more than a century. The interwar period marked a short break from the Russian control and direct influence when Lithuania claimed its independence on February 16, 1918.⁵¹ However, this period of freedom only lasted until the beginning of the Second World War, when the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed on August 23, 1939, dividing Poland and the rest of the East European countries into two spheres of influence between the Nazi Germany and USSR.⁵² Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union on the 15th of June 1940, and later re-occupied in 1944 from Nazi Germany which controlled the country in 1941-1944.⁵³ As a consequence, Lithuanians experienced a long-lasting Russian influence which was strongly reinforced during the Soviet occupation in the second part of the 20th century. Thus this section looks at the methods of social adaptation

⁴⁹ Ruthchild, 5.

⁵⁰ LaFont, 205.

⁵¹ Laima Žilinskienė, “Women’s Social Adaptation Models in Soviet Lithuania,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Melanie Ilic (London: The Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 318, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54905-1_21.

⁵² Alain Blum, and Emilia Koustova, “A Soviet Story: Mass Deportation, Isolation, Return,” in *Narratives of Exile and Identity: Soviet Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States*, ed. Violeta Davoliūtė and Tomas Balkelis (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), 19.

⁵³ Žilinskienė, 318.

towards the totalitarian regime and the implementation of communist ideals while paying specific attention to the life stories of Lithuanian women.

The Soviet occupation affected and fundamentally changed many levels of the LSSR's society as it was forced to mimic the state ideology of the USSR. The CPSU imposed harsh repressions to its occupied territories during the period of the 1940s-1950s, including the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), which primarily resulted in massive purges and deportations of the intelligentsia, wealthy citizens, and dissidents to Siberia, counting women and children as well.⁵⁴ According to the Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia, more than 130,000 people from Lithuania alone were deported to the remote parts of Siberia, and another 151,000 – to the Gulag's forced labour camps.⁵⁵ This planted a seed of fear and it forced Lithuanians to comply with the occupying power and to adopt communist ideology and social attitudes in basically every part of their lives. Indeed, “in a changed political environment, earlier behavioural patterns become ineffective, and new, adaptive behavioural patterns emerge or are imposed”, which is reflected in a project called the “Memories of Soviet Times in Life Histories” aimed at recollecting first-hand experiences and constructing historical memory surrounding the Soviet era.⁵⁶ The communist ideology affected even the deepest nooks and crannies of every individual, especially women, who “gradually adopted the Soviet models of gender roles and a reconciliation of family and work, as well as the Soviet attitudes towards friendships and romantic love”.⁵⁷ When talking about the societal effects of the Sovietisation on Lithuanian society one has to keep in mind the far-reaching influences of the propagandistic tools of totalitarian regimes used to indoctrinate and create a unified collective perception of reality. In her primary source research, Dalia Leinarte highlights that almost all of her interviewed women could make little chronological sense of the personal facts and they did not want to talk openly about their experiences referring to their family relations.⁵⁸ This reveals that there is a certain level of historical amnesia spread among the Lithuanian female citizens who witnessed the Soviet occupation, which in turn benefited the creation of new identities in the post-Soviet era. However, this is a dangerous

⁵⁴ Jurėnienė, 36.

⁵⁵ Arvydas Anušauskas, “Lietuvos Gyventojų Trėmimai,” [“Deportations of Lithuanian Residents,”] Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/lietuvos-gyventoju-tremimai/>.

⁵⁶ Žilinskienė, 317.

⁵⁷ Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-16.

practice, as it obscures an insightful reflection on the historical influences on the progression of women's rights in the post-Soviet space. An excerpt is presented below which summarises a chilling account of one of the interviewees sharing her experience during the Stalinist regime. Stefanija Kučinskienė was sentenced to five years and sent to Siberia as a political prisoner for collaborating with Lithuanian partisans who fought against the Soviet occupation.⁵⁹ While on trial, Stefanija found out that she was pregnant. She recalled how she lost a child whilst in prison:

“That was horrible. I started bleeding after the interrogation and that night I had excruciating cramps. I sent for a doctor, and he very coldly suggested that I use cold compresses. <...> I asked the doctor to hospitalise me, but that required a permit from the prison director. It was night-time and the doctor didn't leave, he didn't inform anyone. I lay on the mattress curled up and kept suffering <...>. The blood kept coming and then I suddenly didn't feel anything. Perhaps I passed out. In the morning, I was awakened by the sun. <...> I felt so relieved – no pain at all. <...> I was entirely soaked in blood, and when I stood up, a big black mass fell out of it onto the floor. <...> I'd been pregnant for three months. <...> When I was detained, I remained dressed in the same clothes: Nobody brought anything. <...> we felt like we were no longer humans, some kind of zombies”.⁶⁰

This story depicts the degrading nature of women's rights during the Soviet occupation. Thus it is highly important to recollect and spread the first-hand stories not only among the post-Soviet societies but also in other countries, as they perpetuate Soviet crimes committed against humanity, very often targeting female citizens as well. In turn, this draws a more complete picture of the women's realities in the Soviet Union. However, the communist state-led propaganda depicting ideal gender models played an important role in Soviet Lithuania, distorting any mistreatments and violations of fundamental human rights. The female visualisation perceived as the “caretaker, worker and builder of socialism” was adopted on a wider scale in the post-war period which resulted in the growing internalisation of the Soviet propaganda.⁶¹ As follows, a Lithuanian Soviet-era poster below illustrates a glorified representation of typical patriarchal characteristics attributed towards women.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 54-55.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 55-56.

⁶¹ Ibid., 19-20.



4. “8th of March – International Woman’s Day” (1960). Author: Juozas Galkus. Source: Lithuanian Museum of Applied Arts and Design.

This poster uses several visual symbols to depict a widely accepted traditional idea of a woman which to a large extent resembled some of the Soviet ideals. It depicts a female figure holding a white dove, commemorating an International Woman’s Day (IWD), which was made a public holiday in the Soviet Union under Lenin in 1917, then referred to as the International Working Women’s Day. In fact, in 1921 Lenin highlighted the importance of their emancipation and proclaimed that:

“<...> on this international working women’s day countless meetings of working women in all countries of the world will send greetings to Soviet Russia, which has been the first to

tackle this unparalleled and incredibly hard but great task, a task that is universally great and truly liberatory”.⁶²

It is important to keep in mind that the poster above corresponds to the period known as the “Khrushchev Thaw” (the 1950s-1960s), which experienced a so-called de-Stalinisation and a general decline in the state-led repressions. However, “the propagandistic efforts were aggressive” as it was very common to disseminate ideal Soviet female models in order to further strengthen the communist movement.⁶³ Also, the division of the woman’s face into two sections, one representing darker features, and the other – lighter ones, is likely to represent a multicultural nature of the Soviet society pointing out to the equality of all ethnicities. The author of the poster chose an allegory of a white dove representing a gentle, emotional note and a noble simplicity which brings the concept of femininity even closer to an iconic image of Madonna (Mary) that can be noticed in both the Catholic and Orthodox iconographic traditions.⁶⁴ It can be said that the poster slightly diverges from the previously examined ones, as no direct politicisation of the role of the heroic mother-worker can be immediately discerned. However, a representation of strong religious female traits can be identified as the focal point of this poster. According to Leinarte, such representation distracted women from the harsh everyday realities, as most of the Soviet policies aimed at benefiting motherhood and child care did not actually reach Soviet Lithuania. In turn, it is accounted that most of the post-war families were rather small and resembled a nuclear family, consisting of two parents and one or two children, thus they were not eligible for the Soviet state aid targeting larger families. Moreover, a widespread stigma surrounded single mothers, and they were seen as “someone who had been abandoned by her husband and was raising the children alone”.⁶⁵ In general, Lithuanian women largely adopted Soviet social attitudes regarding private family relations when it came to dealing with drunk and violent husbands. According to J. Reingardiene:

“it was an official position that private matters could be controlled and regulated in a form of spouses' complaints against each other in cases of alcoholism, adultery or violence.

⁶² Vladimir Lenin, “International Working Women’s Day,” in *Lenin, Collected Works: Volume 32*, ed. Yuri Sdobnikov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 162.

⁶³ Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970*, 2-3.

⁶⁴ “Juozas Galkus’ Poster Exhibition,” *15min*, accessed June 12, 2021. <https://www.15min.lt/media-pasakojimai/juozas-galkus-898>.

⁶⁵ Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970*, 22-23.

Individual women who were very active in raising the issue of their husbands' violence in public and protecting their personal well-being often were attacked in media campaigns that reasserted the rationale of national over individual interests and attacked the "unhealthy" spirit of individualism as unacceptable in Soviet society".⁶⁶

It relates to the Soviet "conspiracy of silence" revolving around family violence which resulted in the absence of effective legislative mechanisms and socio-cultural discourse addressing this issue in the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ In turn, this created the lack of knowledge and spread the feeling of fear among the victims to openly speak about such instances. This was strengthened by the socially adopted gender roles within the family realm, which largely saw men as the "patriarchs of the sofa", formally maintaining the status of the "breadwinners"; whereas women were the ones who were actually in charge of children and domestic chores, which largely remains the case in contemporary Lithuanian families as well.⁶⁸ Thus it can be said that even though gender equality was officially proclaimed in the Soviet Union, its implementation proved a significantly different reality which can be better observed from the perspectives of women's lives in Soviet Lithuania, illustrated by the state's violations of their rights and a subsequent lack of systemic mechanism tackling such social issues as domestic violence.

The historical exploration of the Marxist-Leninist tenets surrounding the "woman question", combined with the Stalinist "superwoman" model, and the realities of Soviet female citizens highlight a paradoxical nature of their emancipation. It is supported by the analysis that the communist principles based on a classless society and communal good not only discredited the idea of true female emancipation but also rejected the importance of individual human rights as seen in practice. The leaders of the Soviet Union failed to acknowledge the paradoxical gender parity which resulted in seeming exploitation and disempowerment of female workers who were simultaneously expected to perform as caring mothers, obedient wives, and socially active citizens, while largely disregarding their femininity, intimacy, well-being, and security. This is illustrated by the state-controlled,

⁶⁶ Reingardiene, 358.

⁶⁷ Reingardiene, 356.

⁶⁸ Domantė Platūkytė, "Gyvenimas Sovietmečiu – Vyrai Tapo Sofos Patriarchais, o Pasekmes Jaučiame iki Šiol," ["Life During the Soviet Times – Men Became Sofa's Patriarchs, and We Can Still Feel the Consequences Today,"] *LRT*, September 12, 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1221515/gyvenimas-sovietmeciu-vyrai-tapo-sofos-patriarchais-o-pasekmes-jauciame-iki-siol>.

oppressive, and indoctrinated lives of Soviet Lithuanian citizens who witnessed the turning of “women’s bodies into instruments to be used in the service of the state”.⁶⁹ Moreover, the use of propagandistic female ideals played a crucial role in steering the forced social adaption models in Soviet Lithuania, in reality resembling a distorted socialist system wrapped up in the alleged gender equality and the lack of actual social benefits and emancipation. Thus by providing a comparative analysis of the ideologically shaped claims of the full emancipation combined with the absence of systemic policy aimed at addressing the remaining hurdles of women’s rights in the Soviet Union, it allows for a further historically informed exploration of the adopted gender roles, social norms, and the prevalence of domestic violence in post-Soviet Lithuania.

⁶⁹ Reingardiene, 357.

Chapter II: Developments in post-Soviet Lithuania

This chapter focuses on the transformations and further challenges of the reconstruction of a democratic Lithuanian society after regaining its independence on March 11, 1990. It provides a chronological overview of the most important national and international legislation adopted during the transitional period which saw a largely positive shift in securing the legal framework for women's rights and gender equality. The analysis mainly relies on the recommendation brought forth by the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, as well as such international bodies as the United Nations and the Council of Europe. Thus this chapter evaluates the situation of female representation by dwelling deeper into the related current challenges. They are seen in light of the high prevalence of domestic violence and a growing societal fragmentation over the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. In turn, it encompasses a so-called "war of ideas" over the traditional family values and gender roles which is further explored by drawing parallels between the influence of the Soviet models and the social transformations that took place after breaking away from the communist regime.

Transitional period (1990-2004)

Before diving into an overview of the transitional road to a democratic restoration of post-Soviet Lithuania, it is important to address the significance of historical memory in the context of the nation-wide traumatic experiences. According to Danute Gailienė, such experiences as Lithuania's Soviet occupation and the oppression brought forth by it amount to a collective cultural trauma which is still felt in today's society, as its far-reaching effects influenced several generations, and continue to affect the attitudes of their offspring as well.⁷⁰ In turn, it is explained as a "trauma [that] occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways".⁷¹ Thus a comparative historical analysis of the progress reached in women's rights and gender equality after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and before the eventual accession to the EU, provides important insights. These are used in order

⁷⁰ Danutė Gailienė, "When Culture Fails: Coping with Cultural Trauma," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 64(4) (2019): 531.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 531-32.

to dwell deeper into the social behavioral models and attitudes adopted in the current Lithuanian society pointing towards the remaining discriminatory issue of domestic violence.

The transitional period is marked by a massive national unification as well as some pivotal moments in securing women's rights and setting an international framework for gender equality. One such example is the participation of the Lithuanian delegation in the Fourth World Conference on Women during which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was signed in Beijing, China in 1995. It is arguably the "most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights" as it presented a shift in the long-standing lack of the unified global strategy aimed at addressing discrimination on the basis of gender in all public and private spheres. Moreover, it stressed the importance of female empowerment and laid down a visionary agenda of actions needed to achieve universal equality by unanimously identifying the issues, strategic objectives, and recommended actions to be taken by the governments worldwide.⁷² According to the UN review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration, which evaluated the progress achieved during the period 2000-2004, Lithuania continued to adhere to and implement the actions laid down in the aforementioned legislation. It is mainly highlighted by the significance of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1998) and the National Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2003-2004).⁷³ The former legislation was among the first ones to be adopted in the post-Soviet space. It laid down the anti-discrimination principle on the grounds of sex and ensured enlarged gender mainstreaming in all the relevant areas.⁷⁴ Moreover, the transitional period is also highlighted by the establishment of a key equality body, i.e. the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (OEEO) of the Republic of Lithuania, which took place in 1999. It was one of the first independent gender equality bodies to be created in Europe.⁷⁵ However, the remaining challenges were addressed in light of domestic violence and the lack of victims' reportedness of such experiences.⁷⁶ Despite the seemingly positive changes

⁷² "The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20," UN Women, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>.

⁷³ United Nations, *Lithuania: A Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) Period 2000-2004*, 1, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/LITHUANIA-English.pdf>

⁷⁴ Sedelmeier, 10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁶ United Nations, *Lithuania: A Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) Period 2000-2004*, 11, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/LITHUANIA-English.pdf>

adopted during the EU accession process, it is observed that the transitional attempts resembled a “paradox of gender mainstreaming” contrasting the legal and institutional attempts “with the lack of progress in terms of acknowledging women’s diversity, and women’s participation in the national reformist agendas”.⁷⁷ The UN experts recognized that even though most of the 198 countries that signed the Beijing Declaration showed some improvement, the overall process was still “unacceptably slow and uneven”, the violence against women being one of the examples of the most-widely spread violations of their rights in contemporary societies around the world, including Lithuania.⁷⁸ Thus despite the somewhat successful transitional legal-institutional attempts to proclaim gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities in line with the international framework, the practical implementation saw several shortcomings in securing women’s rights in post-Soviet Lithuania.

When evaluating the transitional progress in ensuring equal power relations a few substantial challenges are noticed. In fact, the “economic reality [was] showing a picture of increased poverty, large falls in real wages, a reduction in jobs, and a substantial increase in criminal activities”, which is said to have led to more mental health problems, alcohol abuse, instances of domestic violence, and divorce across the post-Soviet Baltic societies.⁷⁹ Suzanne LaFont argues that the democratisation process in the post-communist states has expanded the gender gap due to unemployment and the lack of political representation of females.⁸⁰ She points out that their right to self-determination often goes hand in hand with nationalist agenda and patriotism in the post-Soviet societies, which majorly perceive the “idealization of motherhood <...> as the new governments tried to re-establish and recreate a national identity, largely from their pre-communist pasts <...> and encouraged women to return to their “traditional” place within the domestic domain” as means to employ a strong post-

⁷⁷ Irna van der Molen, and Irina Novikova, “Mainstreaming Gender in the EU-accession Process: The Case of the Baltic Republics,” *Journal of European Social Policy* 15(2) (2005): 141, DOI: 10.1177/0958928705051507.

⁷⁸ United Nations, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against Women (1995), https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf.

⁷⁹ Molen et al., 140.

⁸⁰ LaFont, 203.

Soviet national identity.⁸¹ Moreover, LaFont underlines two hurdles of such nationalist ideology:

“(1) by emphasizing women’s role as the reproducers of future citizens, the conservative nature of nationalism relegates women to a secondary role in civil life, and (2) by granting primacy to the importance of the ethno-nation, nationalism masks gender-based (as well as class-based) inequality”.⁸²

In turn, similar nationalistic attitudes were also shared among the women’s organizations in post-Soviet Lithuania. The first ones that appeared in the transitional phase were based on Christian principles, being represented by a confederation of Catholic organisations known as “Caritas”, which mainly stressed the role of females primarily seen as “family custodians, nurturers and disseminators of goodness”.⁸³ This came as a resemblance with the Soviet models of heroic mothers being disseminated throughout the propagandistic posters and slogans analysed in the previous chapter. However, in post-Soviet Lithuania, the feminine roles were largely based on nationalistic ideals without focusing that much on their emancipation through enhanced employment. By trying to break away from the totalitarian communist system and its socialist society, the country tried to reinforce the more familiar traditional gender roles. According to Reingardiene, it correlates with the consolidation of women’s roles within the private sphere and a clear division between the masculine and feminine attributes. Thus the transitional period reflected a general “re-traditionalization” process marked by a “professed return to traditional values and family life, including national identity and religion”.⁸⁴ This renders that the ideological and propagandistic claims directed by the CPSU formed a significant implicit influence in the perception of women’s rights and the privatization of domestic violence even after Lithuania proclaimed its independence in 1990. Reingardiene points out that domestic violence remained de-publicised and left to be resolved within the private family sphere.⁸⁵ It is defined by the perception of gender differences highlighting a woman’s natural tendency to such attributes as nurture and caring, seen within the private family domain.⁸⁶ She points out that such attitude “gives considerable

⁸¹ Ibid., 212.

⁸² Ibid., 213.

⁸³ Virginija Jurėnienė, and Justė Ibišskienė, “Lietuvos Moterų Veikla 1988-1992 Metais: Iššūkiai ir Galimybės,” [“Lithuanian Women’s Activities 1988-1992: Challenges and Opportunities,”] *Information Sciences* 82 (2018): 98-100.

⁸⁴ Reingardiene, 363.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 360.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 363

freedom for the practice <...> in families away from the watchful eye of the state”.⁸⁷ In fact, this patriarchal division of female and male roles played an important function in shaping the present Lithuanian society. It can be further explained by looking at the current gender models and the remaining hurdles of women’s rights.

A contemporary issue of domestic violence

Despite the significant albeit challenging transitional progress in reinforcing democratic norms and gender parity, some related areas remain problematic. A few controversial statistical findings shall be taken into consideration before analysing the matter of domestic violence against women in more detail. According to the most recent study carried out by the World Economic Forum, “Global Gender Gap Report 2021” revealed that Lithuania has achieved its best result so far as it soared to 8th place (from 33rd place last year) and made it to the top ten leaders in regards to gender equality.⁸⁸ Such a leap is impressive, however, it mainly accounts for an increased political representation of women in the current Lithuanian government, thus pointing towards a lack of systemic progress.⁸⁹ In contrast, the last year’s report “Gender Equality Index”, represented by EIGE, concluded that Lithuania ranked 22nd out of the twenty-eight countries of the EU, scoring only 56.3 out of 100 points (100 points represent full equality). It found itself below the EU’s average score which constituted 67.9 points. The index further indicated that the country saw very little improvement since 2010, as its score has increased by mere 1.4 points since then. Despite some improvements noticed in the financial, educational, and political representation of women, the findings reveal that they are still facing a greater risk of poverty and inequality at work than men, especially in light of the important decision-making processes.⁹⁰ However, these studies did not include any data on GBV which hinders the evaluation of *de facto* gender equality. This creates drawbacks in the consolidation of female emancipation and security, taking into account the alarming amount of domestic violence in contemporary Lithuania.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 359.

⁸⁸ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, 6, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf.

⁸⁹ “Pasauliniame Lyčių Atotrūkio Indekse Lietuva Pateko į Valstybių Lyderių Dešimtuką,” [“Lithuania Is Among the Top Ten Countries in the Global Gender Gap Index,”] Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/pasauliniame-lyciu-atotrukio-indekse-lietuva-pakilo>.

⁹⁰ “Gender Equality Index: Lithuania,” European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/country/LT>.

As already mentioned, intimate partner violence constitutes the shadow pandemic as the number of violent acts has significantly increased during the novel coronavirus and lockdowns worldwide. It is one of the most common violations of women's rights and dignity within modern democratic societies.⁹¹ In turn, it violates several fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, the prohibition of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, the right to liberty and security, the right to respect for private and family life, the prohibition of discrimination, and the right to a fair trial. All of these are enshrined in several international instruments, such as the ECHR.⁹² These rights comprise some of the most fundamental principles unifying democratic societies that seek to guarantee the dignity, security, and freedom of their citizens. However, women comprise the majority of the victims of family violence which can be explained by the long-standing unequal power relations, structured under the deeply rooted patriarchal system, as well as the persistence of gender stereotypes.⁹³ In turn, these practices often manifest themselves in the instances of IPV which has many forms, including physical, psychological, economic, and emotional. As stated by the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, physical violence is generally the most identified form as it can be discerned by an unlawful corporal action against a person's will causing damage to health and physical pain, and depriving of personal liberty, which sometimes ends up in taking the victim's life. Accordingly, sexual violence is a situation in which someone is forced to engage in an unwanted, unsafe or degrading sexual activity, even if the perpetrator is a spouse. It often goes hand in hand with physical and psychological violence. However, the latter is the least recognized form as it manipulates and affects another person's psyche, making her fear that further actions will have some deeper negative consequences. Lastly, economic violence is also among the less identifiable types of violence as it can take various forms, such as "not allowing a partner to work, depriving of one's earnings, forcing to ask for money <...>, not giving money for basic necessities, controlling family budgets and making unilateral financial decisions". All the above-mentioned forms are said to form a "circle of violence" which is divided into three self-repeating stages of: "brewing of tension", "outbreak of violence", and "honeymoon phase".⁹⁴ They explain why a

⁹¹ "What Is Gender-based Violence?" European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>.

⁹² Council of Europe, European Convention on Human Rights, Articles 2-3, 5-6, 8, 14, https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf.

⁹³ "What Is Gender-based Violence?" European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>.

⁹⁴ "Smurto Artimoje Aplinkoje Prevencija," ["Prevention of Domestic Violence,"] Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos->

lot of the victims of domestic violence remain stuck in abusive relationships and why the issue continues to persist. In fact, it is categorised as a type of coercion pointing to the “more subtle and complex nature of IPV which does not only constitute physical abuse but also includes practices of manipulative and controlling coercive conduct”.⁹⁵ The contemporary Lithuanian society faces substantial difficulties in identifying and effectively preventing such violations of women’s rights and security. It turns out that up until the adoption of the Law on Protection Against Domestic Violence in 2011, making it one of the last European countries adopting a law like this, “Lithuania considered IPV to be an internal family matter with the exception of extremely severe injuries or assaults”.⁹⁶ Moreover, this law did not prevent the rapidly increasing instances of domestic violence, illustrated by the multiplication of calls made to the police from around 18,000 reports registered in 2012 to more than 53,000 calls received in 2019.⁹⁷ It is acknowledged that in Lithuania domestic violence amounts to the “highest percentage per women’s population among other European countries”.⁹⁸ In light of this, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour pointed out some of the much-needed amendments to the said law in order to reverse such a gloomy situation surrounding the development of women’s rights. Most importantly, the Ministry offered to include the concept of “domestic violence” and the descriptions of the above-mentioned forms, which do not exist in the current law, as it only offers separate notions of violence and domestic environment.⁹⁹ In turn, these legal shortcomings point to the lack of attention paid to a correlation between domestic violence and gender inequality which would aid to solve the problem at hand more efficiently. The lack of recognition and effective measures needed to tackle the issue at hand relates back to the “conspiracy of silence” surrounding domestic violence which was adopted in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰ Thus the deeply rooted traditional gender

[sritys/socialine-integracija.lt/veiklos-sritys/seima-ir-vaikai/seimos-politika/smurto-artimoje-aplinkoje-prevensija/specializuotos-pagalbos-centru-kontaktai#kas%20yra%20smurtas](https://socialine-integracija.lt/veiklos-sritys/seima-ir-vaikai/seimos-politika/smurto-artimoje-aplinkoje-prevensija/specializuotos-pagalbos-centru-kontaktai#kas%20yra%20smurtas).

⁹⁵ Jankauskaitė et al., 304.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 305.

⁹⁷ “Apsauga nuo Smurto Artimoje Aplinkoje: Pasiūlyta Nauja Priemonė Aukų Apsaugai,” [“Protection against Domestic Violence: A New Measure Is Proposed to Protect the Victims,”] Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/apsauga-nuo-smurto-artimoje-aplinkoje-pasiulyta-nauja-priemone-auku-apsaugai>.

⁹⁸ Jankauskaitė et al., 306.

⁹⁹ “Kovos su Smurto Prieš Moteris Dieną – Dėmesys Lyčių Nelygybės Problemai,” [“During the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women – Attention Paid Towards the Issue of Gender Inequality,”] Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/kovos-su-smurtu-pries-moteris-diena-demesys-lyciu-nelygybes-problemai>.

¹⁰⁰ Reingardiene, 356.

roles, fortified as a part of the new post-Soviet Lithuanian identity, point to the formation of largely stereotypical social norms in regard to the representation of women and their position within the society.

In order to examine the underlining social norms and behaviours in terms of gender roles, stereotypes, and domestic violence, it is proper to turn to the public at large. For this, a few recent surveys will be briefly presented and analysed below. It can be illustrated by looking at a poll carried out in 2019 by the OEOO of the Republic of Lithuania aiming at evaluating how citizens perceive the issue of domestic violence and gender models in general. Out of 1000 participants, a staggering 58 % agreed that it is a woman's responsibility to take care of the husband's domestic life. Moreover, 41 % believed that it is a woman's duty to have sexual intercourse with her husband; however slightly more than half of the women participating in the survey were more likely to disagree with it.¹⁰¹ These results reveal that a traditional patriarchal worldview is still greatly prevailing across the Lithuanian population. According to one of the OEOO's experts, it explains why domestic violence is a widely spread phenomenon in the country. In the words of Mintaute Jurkute, there is a lack of information available to the public and a significant amount of support centres do not even have their own websites, which obscures the overall awareness of the matter at hand.¹⁰² Another survey presented similar results received during a project called "BRIDGE: reinforcing local communities to take action against gender-based violence in their close environment", implemented by the OEOO, Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, and the Centre for Equality Advancement in 2020. During the project, a total of 612 respondents were surveyed and asked to give their opinion about certain statements relating to gender roles, stereotypes, and related violence. When asked whether the following phrase: "A husband forces his wife to have sex with him" constitutes some form of violence against females, almost a unified majority of both men and women agreed that it does (71%). However, when given another statement, which read: "In a family, a father has a bigger authority than mother", it is noticeable that male respondents were more leaning to agree with it than their female counterparts.¹⁰³ Finally, when asked "Do women often provoke violence

¹⁰¹ "Visuomenės Apklausa: Iškreipti Lūkesčiai Moterims Gali Paskatinti Smurtą," ["Public Survey: Distorted Expectations for Women Can Incite Violence,"] Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://lygybe.lt/lt/visuomenes-apklausa-iskreipti-lukesciai-moterims-gali-paskatinti-smurta>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania, *Tikslinių Rajonų Gyventojų Smurto ir Lyčių Stereotipų Suvokimo Sociologinis Tyrimas*, [*Sociological Survey of the Perceptions of Violence and Gender Stereotypes in Target Areas*,] (2020), 39,

themselves?” almost 20 % of men agreed, whereas less than 10 % of females did.¹⁰⁴ This survey concludes that men are more prone to shape their opinion influenced by the hierarchical power relations which put them in a superior position, whereas women are less likely to support such stereotypical patriarchal attitudes. Indeed, much of the successful tackling of gender stereotypes and related discriminatory attitudes depend on awareness-raising, increased publication, and prevention of such norms by paying more attention to the role of the society at large.

Public discourse and social divide

In order to better understand the development of women’s rights, it is necessary to turn to Lithuania’s public space which has recently fallen into two camps, mainly concerning the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The proponents are increasingly being challenged by the protectors of traditional conservative family values. In turn, Lithuania remains one of the six EU member states that still have not yet ratified the said document that lays down some of the most comprehensive frameworks for the prevention of violence against women, including domestic violence. The legislative impasse is being reinforced by the lack of political will and the conflicting information surrounding the content and impact of the said document.

Even though the country has signed the Istanbul Convention in 2013, in order for it to enter into force it must be ratified by the national parliament (Seimas). However, the opposing national camp stresses the alleged hidden harm of the said legislation, comparing it with a “Trojan horse”. It argues that the fight aimed at tackling the violence against women is just a cover-up and that the adoption of the Convention would be a serious blow to the concept of traditional family and a worrisome step towards legalizing same-sex marriages.¹⁰⁵ In fact, Lithuania is one of the six European Union countries where civil union is still not legally envisioned in any way.¹⁰⁶ This corresponds to the ongoing political disagreement encircling the adaptation of the civil partnership legislation, while the voting for the question

<https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/05/tiksliniu-rajonu-gyventoju-smurto-ir-lyciu-stereotipu-suvokimo-sociologinis-tyrimas-2020.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁵ Gediminas Jakavonis, “Stambulo Konvencija – Trojos Arklys Prie Valstybės Vartų,” [“Istanbul Convention – Trojan Horse at the State Gate,”] *Respublika*, February 16, 2021, https://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/nuomones_ir_komentarai/bus_isklausyta/stambulo_konvencija_trojos_arklys_prie_valstybes_vartu/.

¹⁰⁶ “Civil Unions and Registered Partnerships,” Your Europe, accessed June 12, 2021, https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/family/couple/registered-partners/index_en.htm.

of the Istanbul Convention was postponed till the next parliamentary session. CEDAW highlighted the importance of its ratification and that “Lithuanian human rights and gender equality institutions did not function to their full potential”.¹⁰⁷ In the meanwhile, a recent vote at the Seimas rejected the legislative project on civil partnership amidst the concerns over such an act being unconstitutional and encroaching upon the concept of the traditional nuclear family.¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that the civil partnership act would only expand and secure the rights of both heterosexual and homosexual couples living together without getting married, e.g. it would ensure better coverage of the EU immigration rights for the non-European partners.¹⁰⁹ However, such reasoning has little endorsement amongst the majority of Lithuanians. Accordingly, more than half of the population, amounting to almost 60 %, supports the idea of a traditional family, and only around 20 % uphold a broader concept, including unmarried partnerships.¹¹⁰ A similar situation can be noticed when looked at the social division over the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. According to a recent public survey, only 22 % of Lithuanians support it, and nearly 50 % do not, while almost 30 % do not have any solid opinion about it.¹¹¹ In turn, the heated discussions over such fundamental matters as family values culminated in the “Grand March for Family Defence” that took place on May 15, 2021. The organisers of the protest underline that their main goal is to unite against the methods of “ideological warfare” and “aggressive genderism propaganda” in

¹⁰⁷ “In Dialogue with Lithuania, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Calls for the Full Implementation of the Istanbul Convention and Improvements to Gender Equality Legislation,” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, published on October 31, 2019,

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25246&LangID=E>.

¹⁰⁸ Indrė Jurčenkaitė, “Partnerystės Įstatymas Seime Neįveikė Net Pirmojo Laiptelio,” [“The Partnership Law Did Not Even Break the First Step in the Seimas,”] *15min*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/seime-teikiamas-partnerystes-istatymo-projektas-55-1508908>.

¹⁰⁹ “Civil Unions and Registered Partnerships,” Your Europe, accessed June 12, 2021, https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/family/couple/registered-partners/index_en.htm.

¹¹⁰ “Politologė apie Partnerystės Įstatymo Svarstymus Seime: Buvo Naivu Tikėtis, Kad Tai Nesukels Neigiamos Reakcijos,” [“Political Scientist on the Deliberations of the Partnership Law in the Seimas: It Was Naive to Expect That It Would Not Have Caused a Negative Reaction,”] *LRT*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1350924/politologe-apie-partnerystes-istatymo-svarstymus-seime-buvo-naivu-tiketis-kad-tai-nesukels-neigiamos-reakcijos>.

¹¹¹ Dalia Plikūnė, “Dokumentas, Kuris Padalijo Visuomenę: Tyrė Pozicijas Skirtingais Pjūviais,” [“Document That Has Divided the Society: Examined the Positions from Different Angles,”] *Delfi*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/dokumentas-kuris-padalijo-visuomene-tyre-pozicijas-skirtingais-pjuviais.d?id=87052489&fbclid=IwAR0Mx7ItpASWZWa5YX6b8whY4uCcVez2X1magXZ37UbCFprFyXFZULcfpcg>.

regard to the adoption of such laws as the civil partnership law and Istanbul Convention.¹¹² The newest report submitted by the Lithuanian Human Rights Monitoring Institute highlighted that the opposing camp is largely supported by the religious community and bishops, who argue that: “the Convention would distort “natural” differences between sexes and suggest strengthening the institution of the family by emphasising the difference between men and women”. In turn, it is stressed that it forms one of the biggest hurdles for the ratification of the Convention and a more effective fight against domestic violence, as the Catholic Church has a relatively strong influence in the Lithuanian society.¹¹³ It reflects social attitudes largely based on religious, nationalistic ideas and neo-patriarchal traditions secured within the concept of a “perfect family” which was largely adopted during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania.¹¹⁴ Given the deep social fragmentation and the worsening situation of violence against women worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to debunk some of the social myths surrounding fragmented Lithuania’s public discourse.

As already mentioned, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention mainly raises concerns over the concept of traditional family and the social construct of gender. In order to challenge the alleged threats, a brief overview of the document follows. The Convention is divided into several pillars, such as the protection of women and all victims of (domestic) violence, the development of a comprehensive international prevention system, measures and policies, promotion of national and international cooperation between the institutions, non-governmental organizations, and civil society, and prosecution of the perpetrators. Together these are referred to as the 4 Ps: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Integrated Policies.¹¹⁵ More importantly, the document clarifies that traditional gender roles, behaviours, characteristics, and certain social factors are the causes and consequences of GBV. Its preamble states that: “recognising that the realisation of *de jure* and *de facto* equality between women and men is a key element in the prevention of violence against women”.¹¹⁶ Thus domestic violence is understood as historically formed unequal power relations that remain a

¹¹² “Didysis Šeimos Gynimo Maršas,” [“The Grand March for Family Defence,”] Šeimų Sąjūdis, accessed June 12, 2021, https://seimusajudis.lt/didysis-seimos-gynimo-marsas/?fbclid=IwAR3r3MWqLX5bLy_F3-bw5clMf8GUu8B38YcyL_39ARq57XSJ865J6MYANok.

¹¹³ Human Rights Monitoring Institute, *Human Rights in Lithuania: 2018-2019*, 110-111, http://hrmi.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ZmogausTeises_170x249mm_EN-FINAL.pdf.

¹¹⁴ Jankauskaitė et al., 317.

¹¹⁵ Council of Europe, *Recommendation in Support of the Istanbul Convention* (2020), <https://rm.coe.int/conf-ple-2020-rec2-en-istanbul-convention/16809fe020>.

¹¹⁶ Council of Europe, *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, 5, <https://rm.coe.int/168046031c>.

form of discrimination against females, making it more difficult for them to be fully empowered. It is a crucial legal act offering a set of tools necessary in order to unify clear-cut international regulations and mechanisms aimed at the effective prevention of violence against women and domestic violence in general.¹¹⁷ It needs to be stressed that the Convention does not pose a threat to the traditional family as it does not regulate family life, its definitions, or other related provisions. On a similar note, legal recognition of same-sex marriage does not fall within its scope either, though it does provide protection against violence for all.¹¹⁸ Another disputed point is related to the fear of the alleged “aggressive genderism propaganda based on the ideological war methods”.¹¹⁹ However, it boils down to a mere nuance of translation and misinterpretation. The concept of *gender* in the English version of the Convention is explained as the “socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men”.¹²⁰ Yet the Lithuanian language does not provide an equivalent separation between the English terms of *gender* and *sex*, as the same word, *lytis*, is used to describe both social and biological aspects of the related concept. It is important to stress that the purpose of the drafters was:

“not to replace the biological definition of “sex”, nor the terms “women” and “men”, but to emphasise how much inequalities, stereotypes and – consequently – violence do not originate from biological differences, but rather from a social construct, namely from attitudes and perceptions of how women and men are and should be in society”.¹²¹

Thus the biological concept of gender is not disputed – the Convention only points out that females are significantly more likely to experience violence due to the stereotypical norms

¹¹⁷ Elena Narkevičiūtė, “Stambulo Konvencija: Mitai ir Realybė,” [“Istanbul Convention: Myths and Reality,”] *LRT*, March 13, 2021, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/pozicija/679/1363377/elena-narkeviuciute-stambulo-konvencija-mitai-ir-realybe>.

¹¹⁸ Council of Europe, *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention): Questions and Answers*, 7, <https://rm.coe.int/istanbul-convention-questions-and-answers/16808f0b80?fbclid=IwAR2ck0PmpMZ4W-Zcp0kfQcZHb6hDpUoqHyQqv0Ygww3vf-Xih4iF9Udi-ro>.

¹¹⁹ Justinas Šuliokas, “Šeimų Maršas, Supriešinęs Lietuvą: Kas Organizuoja ir Prieš Ką Protestuoja?” [The Family March That Divided Lithuania: Who Is Organising It and Who Are They Protesting Against?] *LRT*, May 14, 2021, <https://www.lrt.lt/lituanica/aktualijos/751/1409632/seimu-marsas-supriesines-lietuva-kas-organizuoja-ir-pries-ka-protestuoja>.

¹²⁰ Council of Europe, *Istanbul Convention*, Article 3(c).

¹²¹ Council of Europe, *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention): Questions and Answers*, 6.

and behaviours associated with the traditionally accepted roles within a given society. In the words of two notable feminist scholars, international relations and security studies experts Ann Tickner and Laura Sjoberg, *gender* is a set of socially constructed characteristics that describe how males and females are being generally identified. Strength, power, rationality, independence, security, and publicity have traditionally been associated with masculinity. Meanwhile, such qualities as weakness, emotionality, privacy align more naturally with femininity. Though they emphasize that not all of the above characteristics are static and can be applied to both men and women, in many societies such gender dualism is still a widely accepted norm, which is the case in Lithuania as well. This means that males are still largely considered to be “natural breadwinners”, whereas females – “natural care-takers”.¹²² This parallels with the propagandistic Soviet gender models analysed earlier, which perceived them as heroic mothers and workers, in turn placing a double burden on them. It also correlates with the lack of attention paid towards the issue of domestic violence in the Soviet Union which mainly ignored it as it was said to not be possible to take place in the egalitarian and emancipated Soviet society. In turn, “to admit that women were being beaten or killed by their husbands meant admitting that the whole project had failed”.¹²³ Thus the comparative historical analysis of the female and male roles and related social norms become extremely important in terms of understanding gender-based violence in post-Soviet Lithuania. It shows that even though the transitional democratic period was largely seen as successful, the country’s legal system and the public at large still lack the necessary tools and ability to recognise that gender inequality plays a prominent role in the issue of domestic violence. In turn, the considerable prevalence of such practices and socially accepted stereotypical norms point towards a compromised overall progression of women’s rights which largely faces the Soviet-infused formation of gender roles and behaviours.

After having analysed the pivotal moments of the transitional period in light of Lithuania’s post-Soviet democratization process in ensuring equality, the remaining drawbacks become apparent. In turn, the exploration of the highly fragmented public space over the ratification of such important legislation as the Istanbul Convention points to the significant social effects of the Sovietisation period. The far-reaching communist legacy along with the substantial impact of the propagandistic claims placing women on an equal

¹²² J. Ann Tickner, and Laura Sjoberg, “Feminism,” in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 180.

¹²³ Muravyeva, 93.

footing with men play a significant role in contemporary Lithuania in regard to stereotypical gender roles, fragmented family values, and the seeming disempowerment of females. In turn, it is marked by a high prevalence of domestic violence which is stalling the important legislative and practical processes aimed at enhancing effective protection and empowerment of female citizens. Thus it is presented that violence against women is associated with and exacerbated by certain traditional, cultural, religious practices and socially accepted norms.

Conclusion

When a given society is forced to adopt a totalitarian regime it faces far-reaching radical changes in virtually all levels of public and private life. In the case of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the country was a part of the grand communist project aimed at establishing a utopian egalitarian society, which in hindsight resembled a rather dystopian reality of women's rights and gender roles. The ideological Soviet models of a *mother-heroine* and *hero of socialist labour*, illustrated by the state-led propaganda machine which lured them to believe in the emancipatory claims of the CPSU, played a significant role in shaping the social values and behaviours both in the Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania. In turn, the social repercussions can still be felt more than three decades after the reclamation of its independence which is seen in light of the highly prevalent issue of domestic violence and the relatively desensitised social attitudes towards it.

The historical analysis of the Sovietisation period combined with the paradoxical nature of gender relations is especially relevant in the consideration of the developments of women's rights in contemporary Lithuania. It becomes clear that *de facto* gender equality in the Soviet Union "was not seen as gender-specific but as a universal precondition for advancing into communism", i.e. it was purely based on ideological and political grounds, without a genuine interest in actually empowering women and improving their rights.¹²⁴ Even though it is difficult to measure the full extent of the Soviet repercussions due to a relatively widespread historical amnesia and the lack of comprehensive historical research, it is clear that the propagandistic communist ideals and social norms were deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of several Lithuanian generations.¹²⁵ In turn, the Soviet regime effectively manipulated women's rights and freedoms by creating the practices of pseudo-emancipation marked by a double female burden that combined work and family duties. It is evident that even though their level of employment skyrocketed, which highlighted their alleged emancipation from domestic compounds, yet in practice, Soviet society was built upon double standards as the Soviet Union firmly secured the patriarchal power relations within the family and society at large.¹²⁶ It created an environment where real issues of women's

¹²⁴ Muravyeva, 92.

¹²⁵ Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970*, 9-11.

¹²⁶ Reingardiene, 355.

rights, like the continuous instances of domestic violence and the alcoholism of their husbands, barely acquired any protective state attention as it was uniformly claimed that they enjoy full equality which in turn “was considered a remedy against domestic violence”.¹²⁷ However, the collections of primary source material, mainly illustrated by the experiences of the Soviet Lithuanian women, prove differently. Marked by the oppressive and harsh nature of the Soviet occupation that lasted for almost half a century, the lack of actual social benefits and emancipation, and the violation of their rights and privacy highlight the deeply negative impact on the recent developments of social coherence, women’s empowerment and equality in Lithuania.

Indeed, the decades that followed after the liberation from the Soviet rule in 1990 not only experienced a complete shift in economic terms, switching from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist model based on private ownership, but it was also a crucial moment for the re-establishment of the democratic social norms and behaviours. The accession to the EU underlines a highly successful transitional period that saw the adoption of important international legislation and principles on women’s rights and gender equality; however, some fundamental drawbacks remained. More specifically, the transitional framework was built around the nationalist ideology which in turn ensured the placement of females within the modern neo-patriarchal system based on deeply rooted stereotypical gender roles, primarily perceiving females as the “reproducers of future citizens”.¹²⁸ It is further noticed in light of the recent public fragmentation over the ratification of the Istanbul Convention which symbolises the lack of strong unifying societal values on women’s rights and equality. In turn, the effective fight against the pressing issue of domestic violence is further compromised. It is highlighted by an increased dilemma surrounding the matter at hand, as its prevalence has spread during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a relatively wide lack of recognition of such derogatory practices is further noticeable not only among the ordinary Lithuanian citizens but amid the religious communities, and law enforcement agencies, as seen from the ECtHR case *Valiuliene v Lithuania*. Indeed, gender-based violence is a complex and systemic social issue, relying on hierarchical relations, societal behaviours, and patriarchal traditions. It affects all economic, political, psychological, social, and judicial aspects of women’s lives, as well as the overall quality of society at large. In spite of the relatively successful integration and otherwise significant improvement in the economic and

¹²⁷ Muravyeva, 94.

¹²⁸ LaFont, 213.

political representation of females, Lithuania needs to follow a more progressive and effective path in securing *de facto* gender equality and fortifying a society free from stereotypes, discrimination, and violence.

Providing a comparative historical perspective on the role of women and social transformations in Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania leads to a valuable observation. It underlines the importance of such an analysis in order to unravel the complex social issue of domestic violence and the remaining challenges of gender equality. The relevance of drawing parallels with the past is well put in the words of Mark Rupert:

“For if we understand history as an open-ended process of social self-production under historically specific circumstances, then we are led to inquire about the historical context of social relations in which actors are situated, to ask about the historical processes that generated that kind of social context, and to look for structured tensions in those historically specific forms of life, tensions that could open up possibilities for historically situated actors to produce social change”.¹²⁹

In turn, the historically informed comprehensive approach towards the role of women provides that understanding and willingly breaking free from the Soviet-infused stereotypic gender roles, social norms, and behaviours are necessary steps to be taken in order to secure both *de jure* and *de facto* equality. Thus this research helps to enlighten a road for further social developments in Lithuania and the post-Soviet space at large.

¹²⁹ Mark Rupert, “Marxism,” in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 130.

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism



entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.

Name: Goda Savickaite

Student number: 3314413

Date and signature: 15 June 2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Goda Savickaite'.

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.