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**The Discourse of the Past and the Role of Memory
in the Lithuanian and Latvian Cultural Press
during the Transition Period (1988–1992)**

**Pagātnes diskurss un atmiņas loma
lietuviešu un latviešu kultūras periodikā
pārejas laikposmā (1988–1992)**

Summary   The aim of the article is to analyze the discourse of the past that developed in the Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press in the late 1980s and early 1990s, discussing the dominant conceptions of history and perception of time. It is generally argued that with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union an era of presentism began. However, the post-Soviet transition materialized in the Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press as a reconstructive, retrospective transformation, dominated by narratives about the past. This research is based on theoretical assumptions about collective memory (Halbwachs 1951; Assmann 2020), the regime of historicity (Hartog 2015; Koselleck 2004), and the inventory of temporal perspective (Zimbardo, Boyd 1999; 2008). Most of the analyzed material is cultural periodicals: weekly *Literatūra ir menas* (Literature and Art) and *Šiaurės Atėnai* (Athens of the North) and monthly *Pergalė* (Victory; in 1991 renamed *Metai* (Year)) and *Kultūros barai* (Domains of Culture), *Sietynas* (The Pleiades), *Nemunas* (The [River] Nemunas); Latvian monthly periodicals *Avots* (Source) and *Karogs* (Flag) and weekly *Literatūra un Māksla* (Literature and Art). These are occasionally supplemented by other periodicals and publications, as well as by the general context. Researching them, ten discursive functions of the interacting (re)constructed forms of memory were identified: communicative/informational, functional/pragmatic, testimonial/justice-driven, emotional/therapeutic, ontological/metalinguistic, reproductive/mimetic, identity-based, social/ mobilizing, ethical/moral, political/ideological.

Kopsavilkums   Raksta mērķis ir analizēt pagātnes diskursu, kas Lietuvas un Latvijas kultūras periodikā veidojās 20. gs. 80. gadu beigās un 90. gadu sākumā, aplūkojot dominējošās vēstures koncepcijas un laika uztveri. Tiek apgalvots, ka līdz ar Berlīnes mūra krišanu un Padomju Savienības sabrukumu esot sācies prezentisma laikmets, tomēr pēcpadomju pāreja Lietuvas un Latvijas kultūras izdevumos pārsvarā izpaudās kā rekonstruktīva, retrospektīva transformācija, kurā dominēja naratīvi par pagātni. Pētījuma pamatā ir teorētiskie pieņēmumi par kolektīvo atmiņu (Halbwachs 1951; Assmann 2020), vēsturiskuma režīmu (Hartog 2015; Koselleck 2004) un laika perspektīvas inventāru (Zimbardo, Boyd 1999; 2008). Analizēto materiālu lielākā daļa ir kultūras izdevumi: lietuviešu nedēļas izdevumi *Literatūra ir menas* (Literatūra un māksla), *Šiaurės Atėnai* (Ziemeļu Atēnas) un mēnešraksti *Pergalė* (Uzvara; kopš 1991. gada *Metai* (Gads)), *Kultūros barai* (Kultūras jomas), *Sietynas* (Sietiņš), *Nemunas* (Nemuna), latviešu mēnešraksti *Avots* un *Karogs*, kā arī nedēļas laikraksts *Literatūra un Māksla*. Tos daļēji papildina citi periodiskie izdevumi un publikācijas, kā arī kopējais konteksts. Pētot minētos materiālus, tika identificētas desmit (re)konstruēto atmiņas formu mijiedarbības diskursīvās funkcijas: komunikatīvā/informatīvā, funkcionālā/pragmatiskā, liecības/taisnīguma, emocionālā/terapeitiskā, ontoloģiskā/metalingvistiskā, reproduktīvā/mimētiskā, identitātē balstītā, sociālā/mobilizējošā, ētiskā/morālā un politiskā/ideoloģiskā.

The transition period:
between the past and future
The so-called *perestroika* and the transition period of the late 1980s were times of multifaceted, accelerated processes of change, an intense and comprehensive transformation. The restoration of independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union are usually seen as one of the main results of the development of the Baltic states and other countries in the region. There were various kinds of liminality and borderline states manifested in society in its near-revolutionary state, including a sensitive perception of temporality and historical time. As the Soviet Union dissolved, the previously promoted visions of the past and future deformed as well. Some contemporary Lithuanian historians and political scientists tend to interpret the post-communist transformation as the dismantling of the Soviet modernity (Ulinskaitė et al. 2022).

However, despite all kinds of crises and an atmosphere of uncertainty, the beginning of the transition period still was a hopeful time full of expectations. A revolutionary "utopia," projects of modernity, space exploration, technology, and fantastical adventures were included in the bright Soviet vision of the future in the 1980s. Some contemporary movies and texts expressed an intention to invent the future or to build a new life. The famous five-part miniseries *Gostya iz budushchego* (Guest from the Future, 1985) by Pavel Arsenov is one of such examples. Similar cases also appeared outside the Soviet Union, for example, the cult movie *Back to the Future* (1985) by American director of Lithuanian origin Robert Zemeckis, in cooperation with Steven Spielberg. Time machines, traveling to the future, and robots from the Institute of Time were quite typical elements of such stories.

At the beginning of *perestroika*, there was still a temporal sensibility based on a belief in the progressive development of society and politics. The ideals of the inter-war period and other "golden ages" also created a myth of the future but, despite political aspirations, this paradise did not arise. Utopian projects, reflected in politics, literature, cinema, and other kinds of art, were changed by dystopian visions still present in the Soviet era. After the Chernobyl disaster, the idea of a happy future and progress completely collapsed into a liminal, pathological in-between state, characterized by a considerable hunger for ideology and future projects. Futuristic, socialist fantasies and romantic poetic images were replaced by motifs of death and suffering.

To this day it is still said that after independence, "the dark side of the Awakening, the other Awakening, crude and painful" appeared (Ēlerte 2005: 450). Among many others, the transition period was described in the Lithuanian and Latvian cultural

presses with destructive titles such as "vacuum", "emptiness", "chaos", "crisis". The Lithuanian historian Aurimas Švedas, discussing this anxious period of change and the prevailing concepts of time, defined the source of this feeling as a lack of institutes, values, and ideas creating and maintaining a sense of certainty, or a lost confidence in these things. "Is it possible to save the future from becoming a posthistorical dystopia?" he asks (Švedas 2020: 59, 113). (Here and henceforth – translations by the author of this article.) Such attitudes also reflect the general tragic and traumatic experiences of the twentieth century. Assmann notes:

> Under these conditions, the future no longer serves as the Eldorado of our hopes and dreams, while at the same time any heady talk about progress has begun to sound more and more hollow (Assmann 2020: 4).

Assmann claims that a continental shift is occurring in the structure of temporality, using the term "anomaly" to describe the unprecedented return of the past. It is worth mentioning a decolonial researcher, Madina Tlostanova, who suggests the notion of post-Soviet experience as a "futureless ontology". She bases her assumptions on the claims of the Soviet immigrant Boris Groys (2008), saying that post-Communist life is lived backwards and that it is a movement against the flow of time: not from the past to the future, but from the future to the past (Tlostanova 2018: 9).

Temporary changes were also noted by Lithuanian and Latvian authors in public space. In 1991, the famous Lithuanian semiotician and essayist Algirdas Julius Greimas (1917–1992), feeling the impermanence of the present and polemicizing the prevailing retrospective trends, wrote a memorandum on the matter of Lithuania's future for the political leader Vytautas Landsbergis. In it, he shared his regret that the struggle for freedom manifested itself more like a desire to recreate the past than to create the future. However, his project on future perspectives did not get enough attention at that time and was published only six years later as archival material (Greimas 1997).

Lithuanian cultural policy is almost exclusively an ideology of memory (the past), 'postmodern' in its own conservatism, futurophobic consciousness manifested in the desire to remain within the 'familiar' semiosphere – art critic and photographer Virginijus Kinčinaitis (b. 1965) noted an important aspect, while discussing Lithuanian postmodernism in *Kultūros barai* (Kinčinaitis 1991: 5). But such polemical remarks and the futurist orientation were exceptional cases rather than a tendency in the dominant discourse of the past, as Greimas was an emigrant and Kinčinaitis was a representative of the young generation at that time. Furthermore, the same Greimas had called history one of the most powerful factors for the rebirth of the Lithuanian nation and historical community (Greimas 1991).

At the beginning of a new stage of development, it is typical to look back to the past, but excessive nostalgia and the Lithuanian and Latvian tendency to connect

the coming modernity with the experiences of the past more than with the horizon of expectation remain paradoxical. The idealization of the past and the preference for preserving and reconstructing the past instead of creating the future may seem surprising even in the wider context of "the memory boom" (Nora 1989; Winter 2007) and the rise of the heritage industry of that time. Nevertheless, all this proves that time and temporality have become key categories in describing modern societies.

This article aims to analyze the discourse of the past that emerged in the Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, as it discussed the dominant concepts of history and perception of time, as well as some fragments of (re)constructed memory in more detail. This paper addresses the following questions: how do people relate themselves to time in the dimensions of the past, present, and future, and how does one's relation to each of these change, given various factors of the transitional moments? How was the discourse about the past and temporal dimensions reconstructed in the Latvian and Lithuanian cultural press in the late 1980s and early 1990s? What role did memory play in Latvian and Lithuanian societies during the post-Soviet transition? As memory has become an all-embracing term, it is also understood here more broadly, covering different categories of temporality: the past, history, and time in general.

Methodological framework and the research material

The concept of time is explored in various fields using different research methodologies: starting from classical philosophy, history, and cognitivism, continuing with narratology, among many others. It is difficult to find a common theoretical basis and converging methodology among them. In the last decades, there has been an increasing interest among historians in temporality (Koselleck 2004; Hartog 2015; Tamm, Olivier 2019; Assmann 2020). Some international research projects on time perspective, which have also included Lithuanian and Latvian participants, adapt the theoretical framework of Philip George Zimbardo and John N. Boyd (Zimbardo, Boyd 1999; 2008). These authors have suggested five main temporal categories: past positive, past negative, present fatalism, present hedonism, and future. While the past positive perspective reflects a sentimental attitude toward the past, a preoccupation with the negative past and a lack of a positive future, particularly characteristic of the post-Soviet Latvian and Lithuanian societies, are associated with psychological pain and pathologies. Although the proposed categorization is generally used to study an individual's views, it can potentially be applied to various cultural and social studies on a collective level. Therefore, it implies

that we can speak not only about an individual time regime, but also about cultural time regimes.

Memory plays a key role in the processes of change and transition, as it is flexible and has a transformative quality (Assmann, Shortt 2011: 3). Time and memory also appeared to be among the agents of change at the turning point of the late 1980s. Assmann discusses those changes in time consciousness in her book "Is Time out of Joint?" (Assmann 2020). Through literary examples, she reveals the complexity of the relationship between time and modernity. According to French historian François Hartog (Hartog 2015: 3), since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union our relationships with time have been suddenly and irreversibly shattered and the question of time has become an important issue, occasionally to the point of obsession. Exploring such crucial moments and reflecting on the ways individuals and groups situate themselves in time, the scientist suggests the hypothesis of present-ism, indicating "a crisis of the future", and defines a methodological instrument – "the regime of historicity". Using his own definitions, Hartog studies the way in which a given society approaches its past and the modalities of self-consciousness that each society adopts in its perception of time (Hartog 2015: 9). Hartog's assumptions are partly based on theories of the German historian Reinhart Koselleck (Koselleck 2004), exploring how the temporal dimensions of the past and future are related in any present. Some theoreticians use the term "present past" (Huyssen 2000). When the future is not so clear, the past becomes more relevant as a resource for the present. Similarly, a return to the past is provoked by a sense of a lack of authenticity in the present. The questions raised and topics addressed by the mentioned authors are not limited to historiography or historiosophy, but also include some intriguing aspects of the sociology and anthropology of the time, even mentality studies. Therefore, a comparative perspective enables one to note cross-cultural similarities and differences in time perception and explore forms of temporal experience in a particular society or community.

The gap and crisis described by Hartog and other predecessors, as well as existential dramatization in the late 1980s, were felt strongly in the Baltic states and beyond. Reflecting on the flow of historical events, the American writer and political theorist Francis Fukuyama asked, whether this was "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1989; 1992). However, unlike Hartog's assumptions, the past and not presentism dominated Latvian and Lithuanian public discourse at that time, because "it turned out that there was nothing to say about the present" (Jermolajeva 1991: 4). The literature that appeared during that time also witnessed the liminal situation, but the very events were hardly reflected. Reflections on the positive and negative past supposed some interpretations of the fatalistic present but did not suggest clear

perspectives on the future. Such interest in history and memory has come, among other things, from the effort to overcome the past mankurtization of the Soviet era and to restore historical continuity. The New Historicism and works of American literary historian Stephen Greenblatt, especially his famous phrase "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" (Greenblatt 1988), should be mentioned here as well. The metaphor of the conversation with the dead was also paraphrased in some literary texts by the Lithuanian and Latvian authors. For example, Lithuanian poet Marcelijus Martinaitis (1936–2013) expressed disappointment that the place of the then-present writers was taken by those who were far away or dead (Martinaitis 1990: 2) and titled his book of poetic essays *Papirusai iš mirusiųjų kapų* (Papyri from the Graves of the Dead, 1992). Likewise, the documentary novel *Ekshumācija* (Exhumation, 1990) by the Latvian writer Anita Liepa (1928–2022) symbolically conveyed the motive of exhuming the dead as a recalled memory. These are just two examples of expressive titles, proving the historical function of cultural press as such and of the literary texts that also appeared in the cultural press. Recalling the past, making sense of memory, and cultural/historical reconstruction became essential components of self-perception in the modern society of the late 20th century.

Therefore, at the end of the 1980s an impulsive shift from the discourse of the future to the past and from the progress ideology to the generation of memory and historicism occurred in the Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press. Hereby, the transition materialized as a retrospective, reconstructive movement, dominated by narratives about the past and motifs of "preservation" and "restoration". Lithuanian philosopher Arvydas Šliogeris (1944–2019) symbolically nicknamed the year 1990 "a time of returning" and perceived this retrospective tendency as an ontological form of being. "A repeatedly re-born nation first returns to the past, turning away from the present and looking to the future only from the corner of the eye [..]. Without reviving the past and recovering the first rebirths, it is impossible to be reborn again. The return or recovery of the past binds together the broken chain of time and restores a coherent historical self-consciousness" (Šliogeris 1990: 155), he wrote, defining the national revival movement. The doctoral thesis (Jonkutė 2020) on which this article is partly based has shown that the cultural press used peculiar memorial communicative rituals to develop a distinctive culture of memory. One of the key tasks that emerged was the search for authentic memory and the filling-in of the so-called "white spots of history". Periodicals were full of memory topics. They published numerous archival post-war Soviet documents, lists of the exiled and repressed, biographies, memoirs, interviews with witnesses, various testimonies and documentary literature, as well as intense discussions about cultural heritage and monuments, among many other historical texts. For example, the memoirs of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė (1927–1987),

a Lithuanian who had been deported to Siberia, published in *Sietynas* and *Pergalė* in the summer of 1988 with the mediation of writers Kazys Saja and Justinas Marcinkevičius and a few editors, were the first literary and historical text of this kind, as well as a political resistance gesture. Among such publications, a special role was played by *Via dolorosa* (1990), the first collection of memories and poems about Stalinist repressions published in Latvia. Some publications of banned texts, written by foreign authors, were also sensational and risky. The novel *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, translated by Silvija Brice and published in *Avots* in March 1988, is one of such examples. Especially considering the fact that the editor Klāvs Elsbergs was found dead under mysterious circumstances in 1987. Writers, editors, and authors – and also readers – actively participated in the process of (re)creating collective memory.

Most of the research material consists of literary periodicals published by the Lithuanian and Latvian Writers' Unions: the weekly *Literatūra ir menas* (Literature and Art) and the monthly *Pergalė* (Victory; in 1991 renamed *Metai* (Year)) and their almost analogous Latvian counterparts *Literatūra un Māksla* (Literature and Art) and *Karogs* (Flag). They are occasionally complemented by cultural publications such as the Lithuanian monthly periodicals *Kultūros barai* (Domains of Culture) and *Nemunas* (The [River] Nemunas). Some of the periodicals, such as the Lithuanian weekly *Šiaurės Atėnai* (Athens of the North), monthly *Sietynas* (The Pleiades), and the Latvian monthly *Avots* (Source), began to be released during the transition period and were more conditioned by it. The most popular cultural magazines and newspapers were in extremely high demand. By 1991, the circulation of some of them had reached even 100,000 copies, which in some cases is about fifty times more than now.

Latvian periodicals	The largest circulation	Lithuanian periodicals	The largest circulation
Avots	87 000 Latvian lang. 53 000 Russian lang.	*Nemunas*	94 000
Karogs	40 000	*Pergalė* (later *Metai*)	30 000
Liesma	200 000	*Šiaurės Atėnai*	51 000
Literatūra un Māksla	108 536	*Literatūra ir menas*	73 369

Table 1. The largest circulations of the Latvian and Lithuanian cultural periodicals in 1990, indicated in the editions.

The research conducted by Lithuanian literary scholar Loreta Jakonytė has revealed that writers were treated as a distant social group which was closely tied to political, social, and economic changes in Lithuania and the general atmosphere of the literary field in the 1990s (Jakonytė 2005). Editors and writers actively

participated not only in the literary and cultural field, but also in environmental and historical heritage activism, the Green Awakening, the battles over street names, and other civil movements. Therefore, the cultural press was an active medium and a tribune of intellectuals, which had a significant impact not only on the field of literature, but also on national and social processes of cultural development. It became an intense and influential cultural, social, and political force, performing much more functions than before or after the transition period.

Perception of time and concepts of the past in cultural press

The transition period distinguished itself through its concentration of time and a sensitive perception of historicity. The time seemed to speak for itself. Some reflections contained direct references to the coming changes and a new age. Such terms as "the fateful hour", "the New Era", "the great Time", and "our time" were used in the press. The expression "the new time" also referred to historical contexts of previous national movements and newly actualized symbolic figures: the poet Rainis (Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865–1929) in Latvia and the poet Maironis (Jonas Mačiulis, 1862–1932) in Lithuania. Abstract titles, sometimes even capitalized, indicated the intangibility of the time and the search for greater articulation.

A sense of breakthrough, a fear of sudden changes, and pains of transition pre-cipitated the belief that the outcome of historical events is not only a result of con-scious determination and responsible behavior, but is also predetermined by external forces and fate. "We are the blood of the age [..]. Man is a blood cell of his time and age," wrote poet Ojārs Vācietis (Vācietis 1984: 19).

Many who were actively involved in the transition processes highlight an emotional upheaval and symbolic, poetic actions. The term "Awakening" was com-monly used as an imaginative metaphor, characterized by abstract idealistic, spiritual, and moral dimensions. Such words as "miracle", "dream", "magic", "cosmic", and "spiritual aura" were also used to describe it, indicating its unexpectedness and mys-ticism, and also showing a lack of precise and original expressions. Some authors even interpreted the awakening as a manifestation of the mystical essence or as a gift of destiny (Ūdre 2019: 165). It was strengthened by images such as the crossroads or a child at the crossroads (Zālīte 1988). This perspective of the fatalistic present formed a dramatic, helpless attitude towards the future and life (Zimbardo, Boyd 1999) which manifested itself both in everyday life and in literary and cultural reflections.

The more one's willpower is exhausted, the more attractive the theory of a person's dependence on historical circumstances seems. We do not choose time, but

time chooses us, so it is hopeless to resist. The common sense advises us to adapt and obey. The editors of *Sietynas* wrote this in the first issue of their magazine ([Anon] 1988: 4). Similar declarations also appeared in the Latvian press.

"We often transfer cultural teleology (the future) to cultural archeology (the past), and I do not deny the significance of its restoration. But there is an element of fatalism in believing that the past itself will bring the future", Latvian philosopher Ella Buceniece (b. 1949) has stated when discussing contemporary cultural determinations (Buceniece 1989: 129).

Latvian sociologist and anthropologist Vieda Skultans considers fatalism to be a part of folk tradition and claims that much of Latvian history has been represented as the working out of a cruel destiny (Skultans 1998: 61). Collective history and individual lives were perceived as interdependent factors.

The intensity and fatality of the transition period was expressed by paraphrasing the insights of philosopher Heraclitus on change and flow. The Latvian poet and playwright Māra Zālīte (b. 1952) used the motif of running water, comparing it with the flow of time in her libretto of the rock-opera *Lāčplēsis* (The Bear-Slayer), published in *Avots* in 1988. Time – or, symbolically speaking, the river of time – participated like an active agent, symbolizing an internal time. The flow of the river Daugava interacted with the flow of historical, mythological and inner times in these poetic lines:

> That is not the water that flows in the Daugava.
> That is Time.
> That is not the blood that flows in your veins.
> That is Time.
> That is not the wave that swashes us.
> That is Time.
> That is not a maelstrom that is turning around.
> That is Time.   (Zālīte 1988: 16)

Although Zālīte was mostly reflecting on the long-term, cyclical and mythological time, she also indirectly referred to the manifestation of intensive present – the dynamic moment of a historical breaking point and diverse events in the flow of time.

The title of a poetry book *Labrīt, Heraklīt!* (Good Morning, Heraclitus!) by Latvian poet Māris Čaklais (1940–2003), published in 1989 and actively presented in cultural press, was also very symbolic, emphasizing the passage of time and the moment of awakening. The transience of the moment brings back fragmentary childhood memories, "holy scriptures of human memory". Heraclitus appears not only in the title, but throughout the text. The most obvious paraphrase of the philosopher appeared in the poem "*Tumsā pie upes*" (In the Darkness by the River; Čaklais 1986: 14): Heraclitus invites the lyrical subject to explore the river at night and to experience that *you cannot step in the same river twice*, and it becomes a revelation and an awakening.

The transition was described as a flowing river in Lithuanian press as well, but a sense of fatalism and dependence on external factors were expressed in a more subjective and defined way.

"Lithuania is once again going through a time when *You can't stop the river from running [..]*. We can try to stop those people, detain them, arrest them like before, slander them, blackmail them, but they are going to live", claimed the famous Lithuanian poet Sigitas Geda (1943–2008), invoking Maironis in one of the first rallies in 1989. There were much more such reflections of the transition as a flowing water. The river, being an archaic mythologized and universalized symbol in Baltic cultural tradition and a constant feature of the landscape, became the dominant metaphor, describing intensive historical events and representing time as a factor of change.

There were also some reflections where the transition period was defined as an intangible "present continuous" (Živitere 1987: 49) – paraphrasing Chingiz Aitmatov, *the day lasts more than a hundred years*. Latvian literary critic Ausma Cimdiņa (b. 1950), discussing Latvian literary tendencies, defined such duration as a present past: "We carry within us all that has been [..]. The moving from the present to the past, becoming a peculiar archeology of the consciousness," she noted in *Literatūra un Māksla* (Cimdiņa 1990: 6). Thus a mixed, multiple time regime, covering the present and the past, was (re)constructed.

Although some moments of criticism appeared in the unified discourse, signaling changes in time regime and attitudes, it was still quite monologic, and the greater part of temporal reflections in the Lithuanian and Latvian press were past-oriented. There was not only a flood of dramatic and romantic personal and collective memories, documentary and historical literature, journalism, but also some historiosophical reflections on the past or time in general. A few characteristic examples of the dominant positions are briefly discussed below.

> What are we looking for when wandering among the shapes, silhouettes that are reflected in the depths of memory, what do we try to hear when we are listening to the echo of silent voices, why are we worrying about what is no longer there? Going back where it is impossible to return is a paradox, but not an absurdity (Papievis 1989: 7).

Lithuanian prose writer Valdas Papievis (b. 1962) noticed this in *Nemunas*, discussing his new book and the analogies with the Proustian time. The phenomenon of the lost time was poetically described using auditory, sensory motifs of oblivion – "silence", "echo". The author defined it as a directly intangible phenomenon that no longer exists in the present but still opens its perspective. The past is perceived as a causality of the present.

A traditional, romanticized approach, usually expressed in poetic images, was felt in most reflections published at that time. For example, the audience greeted

the speech of philosopher, publicist, and politician Arvydas Juozaitis (b. 1956), given in 1988 at one of the first gatherings of the Reform Movement, with loud applause. "When we think about the history of Lithuania, even without knowing it – after all, they hid it so diligently from us – we feel that it runs in our blood", he claimed.

Lithuanian prose writer Saulius Šaltenis (b. 1945) was also poetic and defined a person in the past by a hyperbolized parallel of a mouse and mammoth:

> We are so small in the world, like a mouse, but the shadow of our history is long and falls as if from a giant mammoth of the ice age. We have been protected and are still protected by the past! It will be our rest and shelter. The past is spacious and safe, without oppressive uncertainty like our present and tomorrow (Šaltenis 1990: 1).

Greimas, despite his usual critical approach, has described the greatness of the past similarly, even chosing analogous images and comparisons – "the shadow of history", "the smallness of humanity" (Greimas 1991: 331). Such concept of the past expressed not only retrospective cultural tendencies, but also futurophobic senses. Intensified memory culture and historical self-concept reflected the effort to create a sense of stability and safety.

In 1991 Martinaitis suggested a similar interpretation of temporality, expressing an alienation from the present and describing the past as a protective space in which to hide or to escape to: "Our man in a way had to leave the present, to get somewhere, go through difficult times with the nation, but he could only go to the past, inhabited by the dead ancestors" (Martinaitis 1991: 3).

However, when following the public discourse, we can notice some changes in reflections. Two years later Martinaitis sounded more skeptical and called the actualization of memory and cultural martyrology arising from it paranoid. "When will the past pass?" he asked at the beginning of 1993, stating that only then the present had finally started.

For comparison, it is worth quoting here some critical thoughts of the Latvian painter Miervaldis Polis. Almost at the same time, he stated the following in a discussion about the idealization of the past and utopian model of the future:

> What does it mean to 'live in the past'? It is like an illness. The same is true for life in the future. We need to live only and only in the present. (Polis 1993: 5):

Lithuanian writer and translator Tomas Venclova (b. 1937) has also expressed a critical attitude towards the glorification of the past. Speaking of the period of independence, he mentions that filling in the white spots of history sometimes turned into an uncritical apology and that political and cultural mythologies were supported by "romantic ritual gestures" (Venclova 1990: 3).

Such statements were not only an intellectual dynamics and an encouragement to start polemic discussions, and/or a form of provocative criticism, but also an

expression of (self)reflection and (self)analysis, a way to participate in the reflected reality, and sometimes even an opportunity to change it.

Excessive romanticization of the past, a past negative perspective, and present fatalism dominated in the reflections in the Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press. The loss of a coherent link between the past, present and future, a disbelief in the idea of the future, and the lack of perspectives resulted in a number of pathological consequences, but also enhanced creativity and caused some essential changes in the social and cultural mentalities of Latvian and Lithuanian societies. The limited scope of this article allows us to discuss only a few textual examples, but these examples give an insight into their temporal context. The final part of this article summarizes the role of memory in the cultural press.

Functions of (re)constructing memory in press

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the notions of the past and memory dramatically increased their range of meanings. As Assmann has noted, now cultural memory is not just a passive "storage memory", but also an active "functional memory" (Assmann 2020: 211), referring to a broad spectrum of cultural practices and involving all the possible forms that the social use of the past can take. Since the public discourse of the cultural press in the late 1980s allows as to identify the Latvians and Lithuanians as past-oriented fatalistic societies, some related questions may arise. What were the reasons why the past was so actualized? What role did the memory play? What distinguished the cultural press and literary texts from other memory contexts and media?

The discourse of (re)constructed memory and the content forms were very diverse: pure factography and documentary, archives, emotional individual and collective testimonies, imperatives to remember, appeals to morality and justice, and poetic reflections, among others. Reading the Lithuanian and Latvian periodicals, it is possible to identify at least ten interacting functions of memory. They are briefly presented below.

Communicative/informative. Starting with the *glasnost*, the censorship gradually weakened. The laws on the press and other mass media that were adopted in Lithuania and Latvia in 1990 created conditions for the formation of a new press culture and journalistic writing tradition (Vaišnys 2020).

> Now is the time of freedom. Write what you want and almost wherever you want. [..] Militia and security police, and even more the censorship, can not control anything for a long time. The "internal censor" that faithfully accompanied the knights of the quill, now seems to have disappeared by itself ([Anon] 1990: 2).

This is how the editors of *Šiaurės Atėnai* described the changing situation of the press and writers.

The intense processes of disseminating information that took place at that time were labeled in such terms as "the flood of publicity" (Landsbergis 1989), "the information banquet, feast" (Ardava 2015), "the golden honey period of journalism" (Veinberga 2010), and "magical rituals" (Ēlerte 2005). Poet Imants Auziņš, reflecting on the period at the Writers' Union Congress, defined it as a time of collecting and synthesis (Auziņš 1990).

The Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press became a kind of a bulletin board, medium, and historical source. In this way, an open public sphere and a dynamic mass communication channel was created. Gradually, archives and special library funds were opened. Previously hidden historical and political documents, various lists, letters, and other information from the deported and the people who disappeared in the diaspora were published through the mediation of writers and editors. There were intensive discussions on heritage and memory-related issues. More and more foreign authors began to be published.

Functional/pragmatic. The cultural press helped to collect and archive memories, becoming not only a static storage of memory, but also an active tool employed to actualize and structure the past and to (re)construct heritage. For example, in March 1988 the Writers' Union of Latvia formed a commission to assess the crimes of Stalinism, which aimed to collect and systematize the documentary archive of the deported and to prepare a book of memories. Deportees and their relatives constantly sent their letters, memoirs, and documents to its editorial board. Various new sections devoted to memory and the past appeared in the cultural press.

Testimonial/justice-driven. Editorial boards of cultural media were flooded with documentary texts striving for historical accuracy and social justice. Writers and editors became mediators and carriers of the past and memory. Not history and historians, but eyewitnesses of the events, their memories and testimonies took a central position at that time. As is typical for transition processes, the voices of the victims moved from oblivion to the center of society.

In most cases, the memory of suffering was actualized. It often appeared in the reflections of deportations and exile in the Lithuanian press. The memories of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė is one such example. Her personal existential experience acquired the features of a community narrative, the individual intertwined with the collective. Memory and remembrance became a moral duty. The author felt obliged to convey her experience, to testify, to speak for the dead, to commemorate them, and to give the meaning to the tragic events of the past in this way: "It is my duty to talk about them" (Grinkevičiūtė 1988: 150).

Similarly, writer Antanas Kryžanauskas (1908–1992), paraphrasing Chilean poet and politician Pablo Neruda, wrote in his memoirs, published in *Pergalė*: "I testify! I was, / I was there, I suffered. / And now I confirm everything again! / If no one remembers, / I am the one who remembers" (Kryžanauskas 1989: 78).

Therefore, he perceived the storytelling as a testament left by the dead, which he had to fulfill. It became a duty to recall such testimonies and the imperatives of memory resulted in autobiographical literature – a similar concept to the Hebrew *Zachor*. In this way, witnesses and their testimonies created connections between individuals and the collective, which is especially important in post-conflict societies.

Emotional/therapeutic. Most of published testimonies were traumatic. Hartog has claimed that traumatized victims as emotional witnesses have replaced historians as the authentic authority concerning the past (Hartog 2015). Witness took a similar position in the Latvian and Lithuanian cultural press. For example, a member of the commission for the evaluation of the crimes of Stalinism, writer Rimants Ziedonis, publishing letters and other material from the repressed in *Karogs* in 1988, called them "emotional documents". He encouraged emotional openness and empathy in the following words:

> We would like to invite historians to not be shy, not to suppress their emotions when writing about the children who died in Siberia and about everyone who was forcibly taken away from their homeland (Ziedonis 1988: 121).

Writing and publicizing such memories worked as an alternative therapy for past and history, a way of self-reflection and self-reconstruction. Narration was like a repetition of events in words, turning an authentic and alive experience into the past.

Ontological/metalinguistic. Reconstructing and sharing memories were a kind of a symbolic, secondary existence in the forms of memory communities. Latvian-born German writer Margita Gūtmane (b. 1943), reflecting upon her experience of post-war emigration, defined the historical interruption and mythological dimension as follows: "After 1945 [..] we could no longer be the continuers of our history, because the exiled one finds himself beyond history. Therefore, we tried to be a memory, a mythical memory of our past" (Gūtmane 1996: 180). Thus, the perception of history as a myth was developed, emphasizing the metonymic, metaphorical nature of that time. The mythical memory, transcending the boundaries of historical time and experience. Such features remind of the behavior of the so-called "cold" societies, as defined by the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (Levi Strauss 1962: 313, 348), and the pre-modern world, focusing on the space of experience (Koselleck 2004).

These tendencies appeared both in literature and criticism. For example, exiled literary critic Rimvydas Šilbajoris (1926–2005), discussing the mythologies of Lithuanian writers, emphasized the poetic reflection of the past and the metaphorical nature of national existence (Šilbajoris 1986). Therefore, such an existence was defined by two

dimensions of time: an external, historical, fatalistic present and a boundless internal archetypal time characterized by ritualistic practices of mythologizing and constant returns to certain images and states. The human presence in time and space was perceived not only as an individual experience, but also as communal and social.

Reproductive/mimetic. Although the transition, among other names, was also called a revolution, and although it had a modern and innovative stage, the Restoration of independence and statehood was of restitutive nature. Despite some tension between the followers of conservatism, traditionalism, and modernism, the re-awakening of the interwar heritage and the cyclicality of traditions prevailed. "Without reviving the past, without recovering the first rebirths, it is impossible to be reborn again," philosopher Šliogeris wrote in 1990.

The cultural press intensively generated the discourse of the past by using commemorations and other memorial communicative rituals. This was particularly noticeable in reflections on exile in the Lithuanian press. Some of them emphasized the illustrative, mimetic, or simulative aspects of the discourse and forms of expression. The meanings of the content of public memory and commemorative culture did not always coincide with the meanings of personal testimonies. "The massive wave of transportation of corpses from Siberia, which often turns into a theatrical action — is it not an indicator of the same path? In this way, the very idea of memory can be compromised," Lithuanian painter Vytenis Rimkus (1930−2020) pointed out (Rimkus 1990: 1). "We are dominated by oblivion. The louder and more often we shout about historical memory and restored justice, the less of that memory and justice remain in us," poet and literary critic Valdemaras Kukulas (1959−2011) stated (Kukulas 1992: 9). Therefore, the patriotic rhetoric of tribunes, oratorical poetics, and theatricality began to dominate over personal, silent, tragic, authentic, deeply felt — rather than publicly expressed or demonstrated — experience. Furthermore, the element of imitation was conducive to hiding a complicated reality and to reducing feelings of uncertainty.

Identity-based. According to the prevailing cognitive and narrative theories, memory serves as a tool of self-creation by constructing individual and sociocultural identities. Identity narratives actualized by communication are a kind of practice of collective memory, and the circulation of shared meanings of the past create a sense of commonality (Assmann 2008). This was strongly noticeable in reflections upon deportations, exile and other traumatic memories. As Assmann and Shortt noted, individual memories of the victims create a new authoritative account of a nation's past, effectively transforming the nation's self-image into an "imagined community" (Assmann, Shortt 2011). The cultural press functioned as a mediator of various memory-based national communities.

Social/mobilizing. Collective memory theorist Maurice Halbwachs claimed that the main function of group memory is the maintenance of the unity of the collective (Halbwachs 1951). So-called mnemonic socialization strengthened the sense of belonging and socio-cultural integration during the transition. Even individual memory was more often used as a part of collective narratives and was strongly affected by social frameworks. Latvian historian Vita Zelče, with colleagues, has traced how history became one of the main tools for national political mobilization and how social memory functioned as a driving force within Latvian society (Zelče 2014). The activities of the cultural press proves that memory played a key role in nation-building during the transition period. The emerging nation-states attempted to establish continuity with a suitable past. Heroic episodes of the past, mythical motifs, dramatic, traumatic experiences of deportations, the exile, and horrors of the Soviet era were used to build national communities.

Ethical/moral. The Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press fragmentarily actualized memories of national minorities and communities (Baltic Germans, Jews, Poles, Russian speakers, and others). Therefore, not only the demand, but also the right to remember was manifested. Transnational memory highlighted the tensions of the competing memories of the multicultural Lithuanian and Latvian national communities and conflicting moments in the collective memory of the Baltics. It also included some problematic cases of interaction between collective memory and national identities, as well as the divide between the official, homogenized, national, commemorative culture and the dynamic, inertial, social memory. Most of the time, this meant the division into "them" and "us" or "our own" versus "other".

> Does another nation (not necessarily Russians) have the rights to memory? Why is the memory of one's own nation considered "right" and the memory of other nations "wrong"? (Popovs, Adžubejs 1988: 189).

Such questions were raised in the discussion about activities of the Latvian society "Memory".

Tensions were most evident in the discourse of guilt, often in the motifs of victimization and appealing to historical truth, especially in reflections upon Soviet crimes and the Holocaust. Some of the shared memories related to these events had a postscript, "for truth and justice". In Assmann's words: "A past that is associated with trauma and guilt continues to make demands on the present: it calls for recognition and the acceptance of responsibility" (2020: 216). Such collective memories included a moral judgement that directed action, although the attribution "moral memory" can be subjective.

Political/ideological. The Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press actualized some political aspects of collective memory. Oft-discussed was how the ideological,

politicized memory of the Soviet era caused a "memory crisis". The press also published some discussions on Holocaust commemoration and other fragments of commemorative discourse, as well as the memory of national minorities. "It was not the Lithuanian nation that killed the Jews, and it was not the Jewish nation that took the Lithuanians to Siberia," said the chairman of the newly established Jewish Society in Lithuania, Emanuelis Zingeris (b. 1957), emphasizing it in both in Lithuanian and Latvian (Zingeris 1989: 2).

Memory was used as an instrument of politics, and the control of memory was perceived as a form of power. Political leaders participating in commemorative events sometimes tended to reflect conflicting memories in their speeches. For example, the speech of politician Anatolijs Gorbunovs, given during the commemoration of the Rumbula Massacre in Latvia, caused emotional reactions of Latvians and the Jewish community:

> It was not a nation of Latvians. Even not a part of it. Here we must talk about individual criminals [..]. The Jewish nation could also look critically at the role played in history by some its personalities of previous generations, especially in the revolution of 1918 and in the events in Latvia in the 1940s (Gorbunovs 1992: 45).

Such statements sounded like self-defensive excuses and expressed an attempt to restore a positive national self-image. Although they caused conflicts, only in this way an open discourse and dialogic culture of memory, including different versions of the past, can be addressed and collectively formed (Cohen: 2001). A shared truth about injustice and crimes is necessary to understand the traumatic past and create a stable future.

The above-stated functions of (re)constructing memory define not only the Lithuanian and Latvian cultures of memory and its features in the late 1980s, but also serve as a reflection of the societies at that time, revealing their development and perspectives. This gives a hope that the cultural perception of time in these nations will be stabilized and the continuous temporality – connecting the past, present, and future – some day will be renewed. This is probably the only way to turn communities of traumatic memory into living communities; to bring historical and cultural time closer to real, lived time; to heal various kinds of chronophobia, and at the same time to reduce the historical and social conditionality of literature and other arts.

Conclusion

The transition period of the late 1980s was a multi-temporal historical era which was characterized by a concentration of time. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought changes to the experiences of time and historicity in

post-Soviet societies. The Baltic states were no exception. Memory and time were agents of change there. Although presentism was supposed to dominate alongside ideas of the expected future, the transition materialized as a reconstructive and retrospective transformation. Periodicals were full of texts containing memories and narratives from the past. The Lithuanian and Latvian cultural press of 1988–1992 testifies that reflection of the past was one of the most important components of the individual and socio-cultural identity of that time. Thus, national historical narratives became a tendency of the contemporary Lithuanian and Latvian culture, which until now is quite problematic and always provokes debate. A shortage of present experience in literature and culture is still felt.

Although there were some cases of polemical criticism and instances of change, the public discourse generated in the cultural press was quite monologic and unified. Lithuanian and Latvian societies were mostly associated with past positive and past negative time experiences in their contemporary reflections. The first reflections were characterized by a traditional, romanticized approach to the past and an anti-historical conception of time. The perception of history as a myth emphasized the metonymic and metaphoric nature of that time. The intensification of memory culture attempted to create a sense of stability and safety. Therefore, the past was perceived as a protective space and an alternative reality. The second wave of reflections mostly focused on traumatic memories and painful experiences. These past perspectives also supposed some interpretations of the fatalistic present, which was more frequent in Latvia than in Lithuania.

When reading the cultural press of that time, it is possible to identify at least ten predominant and interacting discursive functions of (re)constructed forms of memory: communicative/informational, functional/pragmatic, testimonial/justice-driven, emotional/therapeutic, ontological/metalinguistic, reproductive/mimetic, identity-based, social/mobilizing, ethical/moral, and political/ideological.

The conducted research highlighted only a small part of the past discourse, noting its static and dynamic moments and discussing some individual reflections on time and temporality. However, it is a starting point for further, more detailed comparative investigations on the concepts of memory, time, and historicity, including comparative studies of the Baltic societies of different generations and eras.

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