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**An Examination of Lithuania's Partisan War Versus the
Soviet Union and Attempts to Resist Sovietisation.**

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree

of

Research MA History

at

York St John University

School of Humanities, Religion & Philosophy

by

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April 2018

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While I have benefited from support and assistance, I alone bare responsibility for this work.

Abstract

The modern history of Lithuania can be described as the Lithuanian nation's struggle for independence from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Lithuania had been a part of the Russian Empire since losing her independence in 1795, when it was divided and occupied by Russian and Prussian armies. Independence was again achieved following the collapse of the Tsarist system after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. Lithuania remained an independent republic until the commencement of the Second World War. Therefore, the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact defines the commencement of the Soviet occupation for Lithuania.

This project is as an examination of the Soviet occupation, aiming to record the testimonies of people who lived under Soviet conditions. Through the use of oral history, a picture of a national resistance tradition emerged. This resistance took on many forms and surfaced at various times throughout the fifty-year Soviet occupation.

Foreign concern in Lithuanian domestic politics has helped inform Lithuanians of their position in the world. Geographically speaking, being isolated between Germany and Russia was a precarious position to be in in the twentieth century. Foreign entanglement in Lithuania stimulated the Lithuanian resistance tradition and fuelled the nationalists cause in the latter days of the USSR. This study argues that the memory of independence and the evoking of this national tradition of resistance have helped shape the Lithuanian nation's collective memory and how they view themselves among the nations of the world.

Nationalist writers depicting the struggle for independence have sometimes ignored the negative experiences and hardships felt by ordinary Lithuanians who lived through the independence process. This thesis encompasses their view of how exiting the USSR affected Lithuanians and examines the interaction between Soviet identity and Lithuanian patriotism.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Violent Resistance	11
Sovietisation.....	11
Post War Resistance.....	12
The Forest Brothers	14
Partisan legacy and new forms of resistance	29
Chapter Two: Nonviolent Resistance, Dissidents and the Catholic Church.....	33
Nonviolent resistance	33
Post-Stalin	38
Dissent.....	39
The Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania	40
Open Dissent to Soviet Rule, the Helsinki Accords, and the Protest era.....	46
The Role of Lithuanian Exiles	49
Chapter Three: The Gorbachev Era.....	53
The Perestroika Period.....	53
Rebirth	56
The Baltic Way to Freedom.....	59
Independence declared	62
The Singing Revolution.....	65
Concluding Remarks.....	72
Appendices.....	82
Appendix One - Interviews.....	82
Appendix Two - Appeal by Vytautas Landsbergis to the people of the Republic of Lithuania December 22 nd 1990:	84
Appendix Four - Appeal to the United Nations Secretary General Mr Javier Perez De Cuellar.	86
Appendix Five - Appeal to the People of Lithuania.....	87

Introduction

Where there is power, there is resistance

Michel Foucault

In 1795 Lithuania was annexed and occupied by Tsarist Russia and would endure being part of the Imperialist Russian empire for 123 years until the end of the Great War offered the possibility for the re-establishment of an independent republic.¹ From the start the Tsarist policy of Russification pursued a course of suppressing separatist currents on the fringes of its expanded empire. In practise this meant compulsory Russification of the existing nationalities in the north-western region of the empire; Lithuanians, Poles, Finns, Estonians, Byelorussians, Baltic Germans and Latvians. As Historian Grazina Miniotaite notes, the Russians saw themselves as the ruling power.² The ideal of the empire was 'one Tsar, one religion, one nation.'³ The imperial policies of Alexander III and Nicholas II were not to strengthen the Russian government's influence over the Baltic States but to 'Russify' them completely by supplanting their autonomous institutions, taking over their education system⁴, and until 1904 forbidding the publication of books in the Lithuanian language.⁵

The Soviet occupations of the 1940's were to mirror earlier Tsarist policies in many ways, particularly the cruelty associated with the Stalinist regime. The history of Lithuania's struggle for independence in the twentieth century can then be understood as part of the history of the Lithuanian nation's historical war against Russia.⁶ Lithuania's struggle for independence was complicated by foreign intervention from major world powers. Many Lithuanians have however resisted occupation and sovietisation, from 1939 right through to 1990. This means of resistance has deployed weapon systems both violent and non-violent at different times. In this context the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact formed the basis of Lithuania's claim for independence and her right to resist. It held as much relevance in 1990 as it did in 1940.⁷

¹ The story of Lithuanian nationhood reaches back to the 13th century. Its first outstanding ruler, Mindaugas, was baptized in 1251 and crowned King of Lithuania on July 6 1253. In 1386 Lithuania forged a union (through royal marriage) with Poland. In 1410 the joint armies of Poland and Lithuania defeated the Teutonic knights at the battle of Tannenberg and their realm expanded to the Black sea and to the outskirts of Moscow. In 1596, the Union of Lublin formed a joint Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, with joint sovereigns and legislatures. During the course of three Russian partitions, 1712, 1793 & 1795, Lithuania came under direct Russian rule.

² Grazina Miniotaite, *Nonviolent Resistance in Lithuania, A Story of Peaceful Liberation*, The Albert Einstein Institution, www.aeinstein.org, 2001, p.9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, (Essex: Yale University Press, 1993), p.51.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.53.

⁶ Romualdas Ozolas, *World War Two in Lithuania: The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds 2005), p.61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.61.

This thesis endeavours to produce an examination of the conflict between Lithuania and Soviet occupational forces in the twentieth century, to research both the violent and nonviolent systems of resistance and contains the views of ordinary Lithuanians who lived through the Soviet occupation.⁸ The research I have conducted for this thesis encompasses eye witness accounts of varying resistance methods and uncovers a continuity between generationally separate resistance movements. My aim is to use the testimonies of witnesses who survived deportation and occupation, and who witnessed the re-birth of the Lithuanian nation, the Soviet admittance of guilt over the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and the shift in perspectives from East to West. I aim to shed light on and contextualise the history of Lithuanian resistance to a process of Sovietisation, and to detail the process of the renewal of independence and examine the Lithuania of the twenty first century, now a full member of the E.U and NATO. A wider scope for further research exists into the study of present Lithuanian nationalism in the context of its position in the EU.

The entirety of Lithuania's historical systems of resistance to Russian and Soviet rule have consciously constructed a national myth which bridges the generational gap between the years of Russian imperial rule, the establishment of Soviet communism and the collapse of the USSR. This national myth, once established, grew organically and fed the most recent independence movement during the final months of the Soviet Union. It informed the population with the knowledge that a populist movement for a democratic Lithuania in the late 1980's, was not an isolated movement of its own era, but part of a larger story portraying a proud independence tradition.

Lithuanian nationalists campaigning for independence in the late 1980's had, like the partisans of the 1940's, continuously asserted that the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was illegal by the standards of international law. International legislation existing in 1940 offers examples to support this prognosis; The Hague Convention of 1907, the Kellogg-Briand pact of 1928, the Atlantic Charter and the Convention for the definition of Aggression adopted in London in 1933.⁹ For Lithuania, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact marked the beginning of their occupation: 'We were very aware of the significance of the date of the pact and what it meant. That was the beginning of our occupation by the USSR.'¹⁰ On each occasion of the partitioning of Lithuania, both in the twentieth century and before, the settlements reached were the outcome of general agreement between the German state and the Russian empire or because of conflict between the German state and the USSR. This bargaining of a smaller state by larger and more powerful nations has had a lasting effect on the Lithuanian psyche, which still

⁸ Further to the scope of the current work, Lithuanian history has been intrigued with events such as the Napoleonic wars & the Great War. A vast amount remains unwritten regarding Lithuania's geographical proximity to and involvement in these huge continental & globally significant events.

⁹ Inesis Feldmanis, *Destiny Crossroads of the Baltic Nations, The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.26.

¹⁰ Interview A.

pertains over seven decades since the last occupation occurred: '{...} We were left to stand alone in 1940 and there was a fear that if that repeated itself in my time our independence could be crushed. Lithuania has always been in the middle of larger powers.'¹¹ Further to this with each consecutive wave of occupation, the elders, public officials, and those in power were segregated, arrested, and often executed or deported to labour camps, weakening the core of Lithuanian society.¹²

During the First World War Former President of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis's grandfather used to remark 'Abu labu tokiu' ('They're both the same').¹³ A popular Lithuanian folk song of the 1940s (probably not sung too loudly) compares the two ideologies which threatened the human spirit during the twentieth century:

Two reed pipers, but the play a single tone. One's from Moscow the others from Berlin. One wears red, he's Satan in a frock, the other's dressed in brown, and he's like a shitty dog.¹⁴

Both the imperial Russian and the later Soviet occupations indicate that the two world wars of the twentieth century had significant roles in shaping the fate of the Lithuanian nation.¹⁵ Both World Wars played an enormous role in influencing how Lithuanians viewed the world which encircled them at the end of World War Two, and hold particular significance in how Lithuanians view their new alliances within the European community of nations.¹⁶ While much of the world celebrated Allied victory in World War Two, a very different mood prevailed in Lithuania. They had already had a taste of Stalin's Soviet rule.¹⁷ In Lithuania, the allegation of dual standards by the west, regarding Lithuania's rights as the cold war developed, is a notion which took root and prevailed throughout the entire occupation by the Soviets, resurfacing in the last days of the Union as Lithuania once again fought for independence. The fundamental concept was that Lithuania required support from, and was let down by, more powerful nations regarding their own national security.

The Atlantic Charter was a joint policy declaration by Roosevelt and Churchill in 1941 that presented the partisans with their main hope of western intervention as they fought vastly superior armed forces.¹⁸ The Atlantic Charter, in part, would form the basis of the U.N Charter, a fact that also connects the generational link between resistance movements in

¹¹ Interview E.

¹² V.M. Leskys, Forest Brothers, 'The Culmination of the Lithuanian Partisan Movement', *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, (2009), Vol.11, p.63.

¹³ Vytautas Landsbergis, *Lithuania Independent Again* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.87.

¹⁵ Interview I.

¹⁶ Interview E.

¹⁷ Dalia Kuodyte, *War After War*, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2005), p.2.

¹⁸ Interview A.

Lithuania. Both relied on foreign support and the non- recognition policies of other nations regarding the Soviet annexation. The history of Lithuanian resistance to Tsarist and Soviet rule, of the independence period from 1918 to 1940, and towards national martyrs, is as important an explanatory aspect of the long story of the struggle for independence, as is economics, tanks or guns.

According to Baltic historian Anatol Lieven, Lithuania's independence struggles only partly took place in the present, as it was then. For underlying everything that the nationalists, dissidents and freedom fighters did was a consideration of how their actions would look in the grand entirety of Lithuanian history, beginning with the Grand Duchy and extending into the future.¹⁹ This interrelationship between the varying resistance movements and the wider historical character of Lithuania's independence reveals itself through the oral testimonies of some of my interviewees, and as a historian is a useful lens through which to view how Lithuanians treat their past, their independence tradition and their place in Europe today. The idea that the collective actions of their ancestors were part of the same grand tapestry of events, certainly affected those at the forefront of the dissident and independence movements in the last decades of the USSR: 'They invoked the spirit of the (forest) brothers to harness the determined will of the masses against evil and for freedom.'²⁰

The first movement for independence against the Soviet Union was a guerrilla war waged against the red army and Soviet security forces between 1944 and 1953. By Lithuanians it is viewed as a war unknown outside of Lithuania²¹, indicative of abandonment by the West. Historian George Reklaitis claims that Lithuanian armed resistance in cold war Eastern Europe is representative of anti-Soviet resistance as a whole.²² His work to date regarding Eastern European cold war history has proven to be of great importance to the understanding of this era, and as secondary sources his articles in the Carl Beck papers have added much to the understanding of cold war Lithuania. A more in-depth analysis regarding the interrelationships of nations swallowed up by Russian, German and Soviet occupational forces does not fit the remit of this thesis but provides a broader scope for further research in anti-Soviet resistance systems. Chapter one of this thesis concerns itself with the active front line partisans, their network systems, their aims, the ebb and flow of their contest against the Soviet security forces, and the impact that their civil war has had on the Lithuanian nation. The publication of a first-hand account of the Lithuanian partisan movement was published in 1975 by Juozas Daumantas. This work, together with the diary of Lionginas Baliukevicius, gives us the most complete insights into life as a partisan and corroborates much of the later historiography surrounding this conflict. These two publications are the most comprehensive

¹⁹ Lieven, p.54.

²⁰ Interview E.

²¹ Dalia Kuodyte and Rokas Travevskis, *The Unknown War*, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2013), p.5.

²² G.Reklaitis, Cold War Lithuania, 'National Armed Resistance and Soviet Counter Insurgency', *The Carl Beck papers in Russian and Eastern European studies*, (2007),Vol.1806, p.1.

primary accounts of life as a partisan opposing the might of the NKVD (forerunner of the KGB²³) and red army. Having met and interviewed a surviving partisan networker, I have found that many of his memories compliment the historiography around the subject of the nature of this violent resistance. His memories and recollections are a vital primary source as this era fades from human memory with the passing of time.

Between the two periods of violent (1944-1953) and non-violent (1988-1992) resistance there is a common thread which links the generations of participants, witnesses and the entire Lithuanian nation. It unites the theme of Lithuania's struggle against human rights violations, for political sovereignty, democracy and freedom of religion. This is the role of underground dissidents and the Catholic Church of Lithuania, which will be the subject of the second Chapter.

Since the eighteenth century Roman Catholic Christianity had permeated the country side of Lithuania. What evolved from the ashes of the last of the European pagan lands was a synthesis of older beliefs mixed with a new religion. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of 1569-1795 had officially retained and promoted Catholicism which would take root within the Lithuanian people and help to form a clear national identity.²⁴ In the nineteenth century several Catholic priests wrote nationalist poetry which would become crucial for the national awakening. Through them the church played a vital cultural and political role in the proliferation of the national language by smuggling books in the Lithuanian-Latin alphabet out of Lithuania.²⁵ The role the church played between 1863 and 1904 prefigured *The Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania* and Catholic resistance to Soviet rule, particularly through the printing and smuggling of books to the west carrying word of repressions in Lithuania.²⁶ The role that Lithuanian language has had in shaping national identity is unquestionably significant, and provides an avenue for further research beyond this thesis.

The strength of sentiment towards the Catholic Church is a definitive aspect of Lithuanian history and exists to this day. The contrast between a nation which is almost exclusively Catholic and the officially atheist Soviet empire set the tone for the important role the Catholic Church would have to perform in the face of repression during the fifty years of occupation. The role that the Catholic Church played in supporting violent and nonviolent resistance and four decades of underground dissident resistance cannot be over stated. Within ten days of the second Soviet occupation, on the 25th June 1940, the Soviet Union

²³ Landsbergis, *Lithuania Independent Again*, p.42.

²⁴ Vejas Gabriele Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, (Tennessee: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.31.

²⁵ Interview H.

²⁶ Lieven, p.53.

ordered the expulsion of Luigi Centoz, the papal Nuncio. Lenin's decree of 1918 on the separation of church and state in effect meant the abolition of the Catholic faith in Lithuania.²⁷

Soviet discrimination, aggression, appropriation of land and destruction of church property seemed to strengthen the will of the Church and its supporters.²⁸ This support survives to this day where it is still a traditional aspect of society to contribute cash to a priest upon weddings, funeral, christenings etc. 'This is a tradition that has survived from times when the church was forbidden to have an income. Church lands and property were all confiscated and without the support and cash from the people there would have been no church and therefore no religion'.²⁹ *The Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania* is still the most wide-spread and comprehensive underground, illegal, anti-Soviet publication to have ever made its way out of the iron curtain and into the west. During a period where being complicit in the production or propagation of the chronicle would guarantee exile to Siberia, the significance *The Chronicle* had in attaining support and distributing knowledge of human rights violations and repressions inside of the USSR cannot be overstated. The chronicle has been a mainstay as a source of information for this project along with some other important works and the insight of a Catholic priest who lived through the Second World War and the entire Soviet occupation.

Author Michael Bourdeaux's book *Land of Crosses*, published in 1979, is alive with examples testifying to the spirit of the people and the resilience and strength of the Catholic Church as the atheist Soviet regime attacked it throughout the period 1939-1978. He describes the persecution of Lithuanian Catholics in terms of a war on religion. His pioneering research highlights the plight of the Catholic enclave inside the USSR and the little known dissident movement in Lithuania. The wealth of sentiment towards Catholic traditions among ordinary citizens is an indication of the importance of Catholicism in Lithuania. Having travelled extensively throughout the Soviet Union, Bourdeaux produced this book which showed the state of religion and communism inside the USSR, allowing Lithuanians to present their own case to the world in their own words.

The second resistance movement against the USSR was a parliamentary, diplomatic and political battle fought by members of the Sajudis party within the Supreme council of Lithuania at Soviet Congresses during the 1980's and early 1990's. This period followed from three decades of underground resistance and civil unrest during the 1950's, 60's and 70's. Conditions for armed resistance had disappeared with the defeat of the freedom fighters and the realisation that new forms of resistance were necessary.³⁰ The political war for independence during the late 1980's and early 1990's was a war of laws met with aggression

²⁷ Michael Bourdeaux, *Land of Crosses*, (Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1979), p.4.

²⁸ Interview H.

²⁹ Interview J.

³⁰ Algirdas Jakubcionis, *The Unarmed Anti-Soviet Resistance in Lithuania*, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2011), p.3.

from the Soviets.³¹ Both these movements saw people take huge risks and express their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice to defend the vital objectives of both these movements. Lithuanian resistance to Soviet rule culminated in a declaration of independence after the national front parties of all three Baltic States managed to achieve recognition in the Supreme Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow, that the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and its secret protocols did exist and were illegal, something which decades of communist party rule had continuously denied.³² This period of resistance is the subject of Chapter three.

The Gorbachev period of rule encouraged the production of increased additional publications and scholarly works concerning the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. Glasnost had encouraged a re-examination of the terrors of the Stalinist regime.³³ The eventual collapse saw former Soviet archives open for the first time and there has been a wealth of Eastern European research relating to this. Authors such as George Reklaitis, Kristina Burinskaite, Dalia Kuodyte, Rokas Tracevskis, Thomas Remeikis and Vylius Leskys have all contributed to the acquired knowledge on the subject, through their personal experiences, interviews conducted and archival research, we now know far more than any other generation about the partisan resistance and the dissident movement. It could be argued that without the surviving first-hand accounts of Daumantas and Baliukevicius, in addition to the work of the national resistance and genocide centre in Vilnius, the scholarly work of the more recent authors could not have been undertaken.

As it is there is a good deal of controversy about the nature of the 1990 declaration of independence that requires analysis in addition to the portrayal of the Lithuanian partisans and their representation in the Lithuania of today. Soviet historians operating before the collapse of the Soviet Union were not able to circulate articles or publications of a negative tone regarding economics, politics or human rights violations inside the USSR to the west before the relaxation of the Gorbachev period and the eventual collapse. Even under the relaxation of the Khrushchev era arrests, deportations and persecutions of any anti-Soviet elements continued, especially towards the Catholic Church. Through first hands accounts by political figures such as Vytautas Landsbergis, journalist and historian Richard J Krickus and Rev. Michael Bourdeaux, an in-depth analysis and narrative of events as they unfolded has been provided. Through the work of the early post-Soviet historians, the risks taken by dissidents campaigning against the USSR can be greatly appreciated for their bravery and commitment. Today Lithuania recalls and honours its dissident tradition and celebrates its martyrs, who have become in-grained in the nations collective memory.

³¹ Robert Strayer, *Why did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change*, (New York: M.E. Sharp, 1998), pp.175-176.

³² Interview I.

³³ Strayer, p.100.

In his book *Resistance and Rebellion* historian and political scientist Roger D Petersen approaches the differences between the two forms of resistance during the two periods of violent and non-violent resistance. Petersen adds a useful insight into what made Lithuanian people choose either violent or non-violent resistance to the Soviet regime. This was one of my main areas of questioning during the interview process. To be able to compare the violent resistance with non-violent forms of protest and relate the rationale behind Lithuanians choice to resist. Petersen's research on the effects of modernization, urbanisation and communist rule, directly relate to some of my later interviews in illustrating why the violent resistance of guerrilla warfare during the 1940's never repeated itself. Instead resistance evolved and transformed into the peaceful resistance of mass demonstrations during the late 1980's.³⁴ This was an age when civil unrest often began with environmental protests across all three Baltic States. When socialism with a human face was built and then crushed in Czechoslovakia in 1968, Lithuanians knew that the conditions for underground illegal resistance were born. These underground protest movements surfaced with a nationalistic edge as Perestroika and Glasnost seemingly encouraged formerly underground movements to surface. The signing of the Helsinki accords also gave added impetus to those dissidents who took the chance to form watch groups, as the dissident movement harnessed the new conditions to openly challenge Soviet rule through protest rallies, petitions, open letters to world leaders, song, verse and broadcasts.³⁵

There is a quantity of scholarly literature accessible today which illuminates the history of Lithuania. One of the most in depth in the English language is *The Baltic Revolution* by Anatol Lieven. In his book Lieven gives the most comprehensive account of the history of all three Baltic nations, from their medieval pagan roots right through to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The history of this path to Baltic independence is little known outside Eastern Europe apart from circles of academia directly concerned with the scholarship of this area. Works by Stanley V Vardys, Thomas Remeikis, Arvyds Anusauskas, Vylius Leskys and Dalia Kuodyte have contributed greatly to the narrative and understanding of the struggle versus the Red Army, NKVD (people's commissariat for internal affairs) and Stavka (Soviet Supreme High Command).

The interviews I have conducted for this study range from elderly Lithuanians who experienced the Second World War and the annexation of Lithuania, to Lithuanians born into the USSR who witnessed and took part in the protest movement and the renewal of independence. The themes of nationalism and resistance emerging from my source data do not always portray a single mindedness of opinion, that of Lithuanian versus the Soviet Union. Many people I have interviewed felt an affiliation with the USSR. The data I have recorded through my interviews sometimes varies along generational lines or those of upbringing,

³⁴ Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion, Lessons from Eastern Europe*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.237.

³⁵ Interview E.

geographical location and ethnic ties to variant nationalities. Lithuanian nationalism, connects throughout all the interviews but has been expressed differently and to various degrees depending on personal experience. For example, when I interviewed a fifty-five-year-old school teacher he remembers fondly the full employment of the 1960's and 70's, whereas a returning Siberian deportee expresses more melancholy recollections in their summation of that period.

The recording of the oral history in Lithuanian resistance is already comprehensive yet incomplete. With the beginning of glasnost in 1986, it politically possible to openly conduct and publish the results of oral history for the first time since before the USSR came into being³⁶. My purpose is to update this expanse of scholarly exertion through new testimonies of Lithuanians who witnessed the fifty-year occupation. My interviews were all conducted in Lithuanian with the assistance of a translator. Working in tandem like this helped to create a conversational atmosphere which supported the actual recording of oral history.

There are natural limitations to the process of recording oral histories. Firstly, some of my interviewees were well into their ninth decade on this earth and the passing of time may have caused some them to lose track of some important details by the time I reached them. Secondly, oral historians need to be aware of the human capacity to forget unpleasant things. This was pertinent to my research as we were dealing with issues of war, deportation and violent insurrection in the terms of some of the interviews. Thirdly, the possibility for my interviewees to embellish their own role in the unfolding events was a valid concern. A variety of media have covered the subjects, particularly since the collapse of the USSR, rendering it not outside of the bounds of possibility that my interviewees may have picked up their 'memories' from the media. Studies by oral historians from the Oral History Centre at the Moscow State Institute into persecutions by the Stalinist regime found that either side of glasnost, and with the vastly improved media technologies helping to inform them, the recollections of individuals willing to be interviewed regarding their roles in repressions at the Vladimir prison camp, altered vastly and were embellished, in the new era of openness.³⁷ Further to this their studies show that events that have exposure to public discourse are more likely to be coherently articulated by participants in oral history and memory studies.³⁸ This demonstrates how an individual's 'memories' can be informed by media and local and national mythology. Therefore, in my research, because the national resistance to the Soviet Union has been so widely and vigorously vocalised, treated and debated by Lithuanians, it could be possible that national public discourse has informed national memory and not the other way around.

³⁶ L. Passerini, *Memory & Totalitarianism, Oral History in the Soviet Union*, (New Jersey: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.89.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.95-97.

³⁸ Melanie Ilic & Dalia Leinarte, *The Soviet Past in the Post-Socialist Present, Methodology and Ethics in Russian, Baltic and Central European Oral History and Memory Studies*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), p.96.

After the fall of communism, eastern European scholars began to re-think Marxist-Leninist concepts and attempted to reconstruct history with the help of well documented sources. It was widely believed that the aspects of history that had been previously inaccessible and forbidden under the Soviet regime would naturally come to light once the archives were open. However Baltic historians such as Dalia Leinarte and Andrejs Plakans found that the content of many of the former Soviet archives was questionable and lacking in objective facts.³⁹ Post-Soviet historians turned to oral history, and, understandably, after the collapse of the USSR a steady flow of memoirs from survivors who had experienced Soviet repression first-hand began to be published. These subjective histories were not viewed as entirely legitimate historical sources or seen as on an equal footing with archival research. However, subjective as they may be, the memories of the people I interviewed are valid and culturally significant sources precisely because they are the life stories of my participants, their memories, of those events and times. Further to this, as noted above, all primary sources have problematic aspects in terms of objectivity, as the early post-Soviet Baltic historians discovered.

Indeed, as John Tosh points out in his revised third edition of *The Pursuit of History*, it is only in the last decade or two that oral history has gained any status compared to archival sources, and still some elements of the mainstream of the historical profession remains sceptical. In his otherwise comprehensive book *The Nature of History*, Arthur Marwick makes no mention of oral history sources.⁴⁰

Perhaps the debate between the value of oral reminiscence and archival sources can never be solved. It can be argued that, as culturally significant recollections, the data I have acquired from the testimonies of Lithuanians who lived through Soviet Lithuania can be seen in a positive light and does, I feel, ring true. Through my interviews I use oral history to examine present-day memories of the Soviet past, thereby extending the knowledge of this era, outside of archival accounts, official rhetoric and popular mythology.

³⁹ Ilic & Leinarte, p.12.

⁴⁰ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (Essex: Pearson Education Books, p.296.

Chapter One: Violent Resistance

It is the cause, not the death that makes a martyr

Napoleon Bonaparte

Sovietisation

The features of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States were those of a totalitarian communist regime;¹ The destruction of the foundation of private property as the basis of the economic system; removal of any anti-Soviet elements; the takeover of the education system and the eradication of religious affiliation thereof²; the decimation of the Catholic Church; compulsory participation in a single party political structure; collectivisation of lands and produce; nationalisation of banks and industrial companies; an intensified class struggle; relocation of military and civil personnel into occupied territory; economic exploitation of the land; the imposition of foreign ideology and culture, are all examples of the particular nature of the Soviet form of occupation that Lithuania suffered from.³

The list drawn up by the Soviets of those suitable for deportation demonstrates a comprehensive program for the annihilation of any Lithuanian elements capable of resisting their security forces; army officers from the Russian civil war; prosecutors; judges and attorneys; government and municipal officials; policemen and prison officials; members of the national guard; town and city mayors; border and prison guards; active members of the free press; active members of the farmers union; business owners; large real estate owners; ship owners; stockholders; hoteliers and restaurateurs; members of any organisation considered to right wing; members of the white guard; members of any anti-communist organisations; relatives of anyone living abroad; active members of any religious society and clergymen.⁴ This is a clear sign of the intent to wipe out Lithuanian nationalism and prevent any possibility of resistance to the Soviet program of occupation. A former university professor and communist party member recalled:

A lot of people moved into the forest as soon as the Germans were pushed back. Sometimes you would hear of whole villages leaving for the forests. They did this to escape from conscription. Others were able to leave Lithuania and escape deportation. They deported anyone who was intellectual or in a leading position in

¹ L. James, *World affairs since 1939, Eastern Europe after 1945*, (Dorking: Blackwell, 1965), p.71.

² Michael Bourdeaux, *Land of Crosses*, (Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1979), p.18.

³ James, p.71.

⁴ V.M. Leskys, Forest Brothers 'The Culmination of the Lithuanian Partisan Movement', *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, (2009), Vol.11, p.77.

the community. I remember seeing my teachers, head teacher, priest all at the church being loaded into Russian trucks. Anyone who had served in the Siauliai Union (independent Lithuanian army formed during independence 1918-1939) was deported. Anyone who served in a political party, basically anyone who may be clever enough, brave enough or spiritual enough to oppose the USSR was deported, and this was all kept secret from the outside world and remained unacknowledged until the late 1980's.⁵

By 1941 the NKVD had implemented this ruthless program of coercion which is etched into the memories of those who witnessed it. Like the former university professor, several of my interviewees remember seeing their school teachers, priests, friends and family members being taken, with only the belongings they could carry, onto trains to a very uncertain future. Between the 14th and 21st June 1941 30,425 deportees in 871 freight cars were deported to various places in Siberia⁶. In total 127,000 or 4.23% of the population was recorded as having been deported during the two Soviet occupation periods of either side of operation Barbarossa.⁷

Post War Resistance

This attempt to abolish Lithuanian nationalism was fiercely resisted from within.⁸ Just as in Poland and the Ukraine, organised resistance units formed in all three of the Baltic States. The first anti-Soviet resistance group in Lithuania was the Catholic oriented,⁹ Lithuanian Activists Front (LAP), formed in October 1940 by Kazys Skirpa, a former Lithuanian military attaché to Germany.¹⁰ As the Second World War increasingly looked like ending in the defeat of Germany, the LAP appealed to the Germans to help them develop a force capable of defending itself against the Red Army. This force would provide the partisan ranks with the majority of its fighters in 1944-1945, as the Second World War drew to a close and the Soviet Union took control of Eastern Europe once more.

The picture of Lithuanian resistance during the Second World War is far from clear as at the time when auxiliary German units were being formed by Lithuanians eager to resist the Soviet invasion, anti-German resistance groups had also formed, led by the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania, to combat the Nazi occupation. The Supreme Committee for the

⁵ Interview I.

⁶ Leskys, P.59.

⁷ Richard Overy, *Russia's War 1941-1945*, London: Penguin Books, 1998) p.60.

⁸ G. Reklaitis, Cold War Lithuania, 'National Armed Resistance and Soviet Counter Insurgency', *The Carl Beck papers in Russian and Eastern European studies*, (2007), Vol.1806, p.2.

⁹ Grazina Miniotaite, *Nonviolent Resistance in Lithuania: A Story of Peaceful Liberation*, The Albert Einstein Institution, www.aeinstein.org, 2001, p.19.

¹⁰ Leskys, p.60.

Liberation of Lithuania was concerned with re-establishing Lithuanian sovereignty and became a symbol of anti-Nazism as a necessary expedient during foreign invasion. The general current of Lithuanian nationalism and resistance was clear at the outset of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, but for reasons of practicality and survival there were many Lithuanian's who collaborated with the side they expected to be the eventual victors.¹¹ This is no less true than of Lithuanian collaboration in the holocaust, an inconvenient fact which stains the history of nationalist resistance and is only regrettably acknowledged by Lithuanians to this day. An eye witness from 1941 recalls:

There were lots of Gypsies and Jews in Lithuania although while the Gypsies were almost in every town, some towns had hardly any Jews. In the communist party there were lots of Jews and when the USSR took over they found more prominent positions in the party. When Germany came some of them managed to escape and formed a 16th division to fight against Germany. Many Gypsies were deported by Germany and many Jews also. There are many monuments which testify to the murder of the Jewish and Gypsies all around Lithuania, particularly the Jews. When the Germans came many Jews blamed Lithuanians for informing on them and so when the Russians came back many Jews got their revenge.¹²

Of all the Baltic nations occupied by the USSR during WW2, violent resistance was most evident in Lithuania. Latvia had a large minority of Latvian-Russians and Estonia had a similar number of Estonian-Russians.¹³ Their role was significant in the social lives of these countries. The lack of ethnic Russians present in Lithuania provides us with an understanding as to why Lithuanian insurgents were most numerous and effective of all the Baltic nations.¹⁴ A female history teacher from Vilkaviskis told me that this strong sense of nationalism and defiance prefigured the Sajudis resistance some fifty years later.¹⁵ The Soviet occupation of Lithuania lasted five decades, during the first decade Lithuania fought its unorthodox war.¹⁶ The peace that followed was not an orthodox peace either, with never a treaty signed or a war declared.¹⁷ In early 1940 Molotov told the Lithuanian foreign minister Juozas Urbys that Lenin's vision for world revolution was unfolding before his eyes.¹⁸ The Soviet authorities underestimated the will of Lithuanians to resist their powerful easterly neighbour.

Early seeds of resistance were sown in 1940 and 1941, when the totality of mass arrests, deportations and executions, coupled with the nationalisation of private property and

¹¹ Interview A.

¹² Interview I.

¹³ Interview A.

¹⁴ Kulo Arjakas, *Half a Century in the USSR, The Baltic way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2006), p.71.

¹⁵ Interview E.

¹⁶ Dalia Kuodyte and Rokas Travevskis, *The Unknown War*, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2013), p.5.

¹⁷ Romualdas Ozolas, *World War Two in Lithuania, The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds 2005), p.61.

¹⁸ Overy, p.54.

preliminary strikes against resistance forces, plus the swiftness of communist integration operations, convinced many Lithuanians that Sovietisation must be resisted by all possible means. It also meant that an absence of civil and military leaders led to a moral and military vacuum of leadership at the forefront of the partisan movement meaning the movement was partially decapitated before it even began.¹⁹ Students and the academic community played an active role in anti-Nazi resistance in 1941 and as soon as the Soviets had re-occupied Lithuania many were compelled to violently resist their new oppressors.²⁰

Another liberation reform immediately introduced by the Soviets was the conscription of all able bodied Lithuanian men and women into forced labour gangs.²¹ This was especially hard in the Summer/Autumn on farmers who lost the ability to bring in the harvest due the lack of resources now at their disposal.²² Those that suffered in the countryside during early months of the second Soviet occupation were more likely to become active supporters of the partisans, although the choice was a difficult one because both sides would violently persecute those who supported their opponents.²³ Farmers spontaneously boycotted the collectivisation of the agricultural system for two years between 1947-48, until they were defeated alongside their partisan allies and suffered from repressive measures, primarily deportation to Siberia. Priests also played a leading role as the ranks of the partisans were swelled with resistance fighters returning from service within German forces, patriotic Lithuanians who would rather die fighting than be deported to an unknown fate in Siberia and peasant farmers facing collectivisation.²⁴ The saying 'give your homeland everything you are obliged to give' was a slogan used not only by the young men and women who travelled into the forests to join the ranks of the partisans, but also by countless mothers and fathers who saw their sons and daughters leaving to risk their lives in opposition to the occupying forces.²⁵

The Forest Brothers

The partisan effort represented a movement comprised of individuals across the social strata and broken down into three categories of freedom fighters; the active front line soldiers who lived in the forests or on farm shelters; the inactive fighters who were armed but who stayed at home and were called upon to join the active ranks when necessity demanded and the

¹⁹ Leskys, p.63-70.

²⁰ Juozas Daumantas, *Fighters For Freedom*, (Toronto: Manyland Books, 1975) p.40.

²¹ Interview F.

²² Daumantas, p.11.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, (Essex: Yale University Press, 1993), p.88.

²⁵ Dalia Kuodyte, *War After War*, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2005), p.3.

supporters of the resistance who lived in the open and did not bear arms.²⁶ A former school janitor, whom I have interviewed recalls:

I was forbidden by the partisans to join as an active fighter because I had rickets which I acquired in a German military hospital as a child. We moved to Germany as the Russian front developed and ended up in Soviet East Germany. We were employed to shepherd animals by the Russians. That's where I became ill and spent three months in a war hospital. I consider myself to be a brother of the partisans, so instead of moving to the forest I became a supporter whose duties were to hide their weapons, pass on information, mostly written letters or telephone calls, sometimes specific pieces of intelligence also. We let them hide and shelter on our property.²⁷

This interviewee is one of very few partisan networkers alive to this day, which made recording his testimony illuminating and significant. He recalled to me a story from around 1950 when he was hiding several partisans in a barn adjacent to his father's property. The support network was set up there to hide the weapons of the partisans and provide cover for them in day light hours when there was a high amount of NKVD present. Some armed NKVD officials came past and were about to enter the barn, which would no doubt have ended in bloodshed and the loss of life, when one of the NKVD spotted a five-year-old girl who was a friend to both his family and theirs. By her presence there that afternoon, and the satisfactory explanation that the two parties had a mutual friend (the girl's grandparents), the NKVD left the property unsearched and nobody died that day. This partisan networker, his brother and father would all eventually be deported to Siberia for their crimes against the Soviet Union.²⁸ To this day he regrets not being able to join family and friends in active military combat versus the Soviet Union, but rightfully takes pride in the role that he played as an active support networker, relaying information between differing sections of the partisan groups, typically by use of public telephones or through hand written messages that had to be destroyed once read.²⁹

His testimony supports the scholarly work of historians Vylius Leskys and George Reklaitis, two of the leading experts in the area of Lithuanian violent resistance, in assessing the important roles that the networkers played in assisting the insurrection. He was able to produce to me some photographs and photo clippings he has kept for over sixty years from his days as a partisan networker. The non-violent network of supporters was a vital facet of the underground resistance movement. He continued:

We could move in the towns with ease and our friends could not, as I had legal status to do this and partisans had that taken away from them. That is why they only went by their code names. I remember having the simple task of going into the town and

²⁶ Leskys, p.64.

²⁷ Interview G.

²⁸ Daumantas, p.40.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

counting the number of soldiers and officials I saw coming and going at a certain building. I spent all day there and then reported back on numbers and vehicle numbers. This building was attacked some time later.³⁰

Both Reklaitis and Leskys refer to partisan counter-violence towards those suspected of collaborating with the Soviet security forces. When I questioned the partisan supporter about this he confirmed:

When you are fighting a war like that you are desperate and there would have been instances where the freedom fighters had to fight back not against those with guns but those with eyes, ears and voices. I don't ever remember seeing anything like that happen myself, but yes, I would have thought it did occur. I know that unlike the Russians the Lithuanian fighters never removed the eyes of the bodies or dismembered them or raped women like the Russians did.³¹

This interviewee remembers the partisans bringing them food daily in exchange for their support, as their family had very little food to eat.³² His memories of the partisans fit into a nationalist explanatory framework, and the fact that he has remained as passionate and resolute about the cause of independence for over five decades points to the continuity of the resistance cause between the varying resistance movements, and the impact that violent resistance had on the collective memory of Lithuanians. For Lithuanian nationalists the forest brothers were, like the independent Lithuanian army that preceded them, national heroes, who have become part of a national myth which manifested itself in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the most recent independence movement. Of course, for Lithuanian nationalists in the 1950s a celebration of the partisans would inevitably lead to incarceration. This is reflected in their representation in Lithuanian culture today. The exploits of the freedom fighters are remembered and celebrated with songs and verse, statues and parliamentary decrees. As a history teacher explained:

As soon as Lithuania could celebrate its true past we did: by re-building the stories of the past and placing monuments in the city centres and on the battle sites. Our government gave honours to the heroes of the past.³³

The aim of the Lithuanian partisans who violently opposed the soviet structure was to challenge the authorities at every possible opportunity by conducting a guerrilla war and sabotage operations with the assistance of their support networks. In the beginning however, the existence of a home guard, established during the Nazi occupation, fed the early tactics of open warfare versus a far superior military machine. In the countryside the Soviets did

³⁰ Interview G.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Interview E.

everything in their power to construct the impression of a class war by confiscating the land of rich farmers and those suspected of being partisan supporters and giving it to poorer farmers many of whom were Soviet collaborators or were recruited into Soviet auxiliary units. In Lithuania these were called *Stribai*, a derivative from the word *Istrebiteľny*, meaning *destroyers*, the name given to demolition units during the Soviet retreat in 1941. Memories of this continued to divide Baltic villages throughout the twentieth century, especially in locations close to frontiers with Poland, Belorussia and Latvia, where ethnicity is more likely to be diverse or of Russian orientation.³⁴ If it is possible to state that Lithuania's national resistance was brave and deserved of titles such as hero or freedom fighter, it can be argued that there is no less truth in the fact that a great many Lithuanian nationals collaborated against the nation as *Stribai* during the civil war.

At the outset the Lithuanian partisans had seven operational and tactical aims:

1. To prevent Sovietisation of the country by annihilating Communist activities and NKVD forces in the countryside.
2. To safeguard the public order and to protect the population from robberies, either by civilians or by Red soldiers.
3. To free political prisoners from detention wherever circumstances allowed it.
4. To enforce the boycott of elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR or the leadership of the puppet state, and thus to prevent the falsification of the will of the Lithuanian nation and the creation of a false base for the legality of the Soviet imposed regime.
5. To disrupt the draft of the Lithuanian youth into the Red Army.
6. To obstruct the nationalisation of landed property and collectivisation of agriculture.
7. To prevent the settling of Russian colonists on the land and in the homesteads of the Lithuanian farmers deported to Siberia.³⁵

In the end they were effective in only one of these strategic aims; large numbers of Russian colonists never settled in Lithuania.³⁶ Census data from 2006 shows that ethnic Russians make up one third of the Latvian population and twenty five percent in Estonia, while only six percent of Lithuania is ethnically Russian.³⁷ This is significant in explaining how the national re-birth occurred first in Lithuania during the Gorbachev period, because, as a Lithuanian history teacher explained:

Nationalism never left the land and our land was always our own. This is thanks to those who fought, those who campaigned and those who got on with their work but

³⁴ Lieven, p.88.

³⁵ Leskys, p.64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.73.

never forgot. That's why the country had a strong moral sense and a togetherness, because of the examples of older generations and the bravery that they showed to give up their lives to fight for freedom. It is like you (English) fighting in Germany. I think to a large degree the effectiveness of the Lithuanian partisans did have a positive influence on future generations. It also meant that unlike Estonia and Latvia, the population of Lithuania remained more or less Lithuanian.³⁸

The partisan's other aims never came to fruition due to the vastly superior forces they fought against, the vacuum of leadership created by deportations and emigration and decentralisation of effort in the vital early stages of their insurrection. The partisan wars waged in Latvia and Estonia were a good deal less organised than their Lithuanian equivalents.³⁹ After initial battles versus red army troops, the strategy of the partisans was to avoid engagement with the Soviet army. This tactic was mirrored by the Soviets who, after the preliminary early battles, were reluctant to use the red army in anti-partisan operations, possibly for fear that their mainly peasant troops may find themselves in sympathy with the peasant partisans.⁴⁰ Instead the soviets used NKVD forces and *Stribai* backed up with Red Army forces whenever it was deemed necessary. The former partisan supporter I interviewed told me that the partisans were helped by the NKVD not knowing the countryside they were fighting in and the fact that the *Stribai* were 'cowardly and undisciplined.'⁴¹ In his research for his book the 'Baltic Revolution' Anatol Lieven met a former partisan from the Siauliai military district who told him:

{...} The Red Army were not really used that often, the Russians used to let us pass by without initiating contact and, wherever they could, would simply ignore us. I even spoke to one once, who told me that whenever they attacked us he was careful not to aim.⁴²

Where possible the partisans wore the national Lithuanian military uniform to project legitimacy in their efforts and used former Soviet, German or Czech guns, mortars and ammunition.⁴³ At the outset of their insurgency they fought open battles reminiscent of large regular forces, but as their numbers diminished and the Soviet counter-insurgency tactics evolved, the partisans avoided engagement of this nature and deployed guerrilla tactics. The early years of the resistance saw the most intense fighting and were the years which produced the largest numbers of fatalities. Hundreds of partisans would assemble in the forest in large fortified camps and attack small towns held by the Soviets and Soviet collaborators. When full-scale engagements became a practical impossibility, their aim was to destroy the offices of the occupation authorities, disarm and close down military units of local collaborators and

³⁸ Interview E.

³⁹ Lieven, p.89.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Interview G.

⁴² Lieven, p.89.

⁴³ Reklaitis, p.5.

release imprisoned Lithuanians. During the years 1944-1945 it is estimated that 10,000 partisans lost their lives.⁴⁴ When these numbers are taken with the totality of an estimated 37,000 Lithuanian deportees in 1944 alone, the scale of the repression of the Lithuanian nation by the USSR emerges.⁴⁵

Yet the Lithuanian partisan leaders chose to continue aggressive and violent tactics of resistance based on the idea of preserving Lithuanian independence. The nature of guerrilla warfare is an important aspect of the resistance movement. It was a large, organised military force that had the characteristics of a regular army yet waged guerrilla warfare, but then, as in 1990, their hopes depended on support from western democracies, as a former professor of social sciences and member of the communist party reflected about the late 1980's/early 1990s:

Everybody had heard rumours on the radio about American support for independence. You never really know if it's just rumours. Dates would come and go, and it was just rumours. People would then talk and say don't get your hopes up, there was a long tradition of America and Britain letting us down, but in those days there seemed to be pressure building from America especially.⁴⁶

The hope of western intervention was based not only on the Atlantic Charter but also on the memory of British intervention in 1919 during the Russian civil war. The absence of British, French and American support from 1944 onwards is one reason for an enduring suspicion of the west still held by some Lithuanians.⁴⁷

The accepted historiography of the conflict's origins has been echoed by my interview with a living partisan networker, that, as with all insurgencies, to begin with the partisan forces possessed advantages over the Red Army such as intimate knowledge of the terrain and locale, the support of the local population and the fact that it was difficult for the Soviet forces to differentiate between insurgent and civilian.⁴⁸ In a strangely medieval gesture some partisans swore never to cut their hair until Lithuania was free again. There are many surviving photographs of partisans with extremely long hair which supports this. This also provided a practical advantage as sometimes partisans would be able to dress up as women to avoid arrest.⁴⁹

Before making the decision to join the partisans' active front line, university architecture student Juozas Daumantas remembers hearing stories of early resistance to the Soviets.

⁴⁴ Reklaitis, p.5.

⁴⁵ Leskys, p.63

⁴⁶ Interview I.

⁴⁷ Lieven, p.88.

⁴⁸ Leskys, p.2.

⁴⁹ Lieven, p.88.

When detained for not having his military exemption papers stamped correctly he heard a tale about an incident in Pakuonis where two young men, namely Tigras and Sarunas, had freed several dozen detainees from a Soviet detention centre using hand grenades. This type of early violent resistance to the Soviet authorities wasn't unique. Ambushes aimed at freeing Lithuanians and wiping out units of NKVD occurred throughout Lithuania in the early months of the second Soviet occupation.⁵⁰ Instead of submitting to Soviet rule, Lithuanians were choosing to resist. Daumantas admits to helping smuggle out a printing press from Kaunas University and handing it to the 'Iron Wolf' brigade. The printing press was used by the partisans to provide a counter narrative to Soviet propaganda through newsletters and periodicals. Before he became an active fighter Daumantas and his friends used it to print military draft exemption cards.⁵¹ Daumantas's book is a uniquely rare collection of memories from an active resistance fighter. He tells of his life before the Nazi and Soviet occupations and how he made the conscious decision to join the partisan movement. He describes how his life changed in terms of swapping his legal life to an illegal existence. Upon joining the ranks of the active fighters, he refers to the fact that ordinary people, whom he knew as teachers, nurses, doctors, labourers etc. were now forbidden to be known by anything other than their chosen code names. Their previous, legal existence became an unspoken, unspeakable memory.⁵²

Lithuanian historian Vylius Leskys, has produced a collection of publications regarding Lithuanian resistance. He counters the conventional acceptance by authors such as Kuodyte that the movement against the soviet forces typically delineates into three phases according to distinguishable patterns of operations and the centralisation of effort. Instead he asserts that the movement can be more clearly divided by defining an unacknowledged culmination that occurred in 1945, when overwhelming Soviet power caused a decline in partisan capabilities.⁵³ Leskys divides the partisan war into two stages: Four years of strength (1944-1948) and four years of gradual decline (1949-1952). Certainly 1944-1945 saw the most open battles between the two belligerent forces. During this phase the collective numbers of active partisans exceeded 30,000.⁵⁴ The partisan strategy of holding out for as long as possible was not an irrational one. If a war had broken out between the Western democracies and the Soviet Union, the existence of Baltic forces hiding out in the forest could have been of crucial importance in reclaiming Baltic independence.⁵⁵ The Vilnius research centre for resistance and genocide claims that four percent of the population were actively engaged in the civil war during this phase⁵⁶, giving it more active participants than the Vietnam insurgency.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Daumantas, p.32.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁵² Lieven, pp.82-83.

⁵³ Leskys, p.58.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.65.

⁵⁵ Lieven, p.89.

⁵⁶ Kuodyte, p.4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

To a large degree ideology defined the partisan struggle.⁵⁸ A strong sense of nationalism, a longing for freedom and independence, an already ingrained hatred towards Russians from the prior Tsarist and earlier Soviet occupations, fuelled the will of the partisans and their supporters. Lithuanians joined the partisan effort enthused by a full spectrum of motives from national pride, self-preservation, to evading Red Army conscription.⁵⁹ Lithuanians were convinced that the Western democracies would rescue them, and the optimistic rhetoric of the Atlantic Charter gave them optimism that the doctrine behind it would mean Great Britain and America insisting upon the implementation of the Charter and demanding freedom for occupied nations.

In 1947, Lithuanian partisan leader Juozas Luksa, code name Daumantas, wrote:

We solemnly believe that freedom and the rights of men were the sacred things they had been declared to be in the Atlantic Charter. We therefore did not even consider the possibility that the Allies might not continue to carry on the fight until that freedom and those rights had been restored.⁶⁰

The partisans also pinned their hopes on the threat of the atomic bomb as a deterrent to the USSR countering the application of the Atlantic Charter.⁶¹ Daumantas recollects listening to a BBC broadcast on the events in Hiroshima, and thinking nothing of the suffering of the Japanese, but only of Lithuanian freedom and the threat that this new all-powerful weapon could pose to the Soviets.⁶²

The ideological front was significantly supported by the fact that ninety percent of the nation was Roman Catholic.⁶³ The obvious Soviet movement to stifle the faith of Lithuanians, merely by including the clergy on the lists for deportation, stoked the fires of resistance.⁶⁴ The resistance movement held prayer meetings, frequented the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church and where possible a priest, usually the group's chaplain, would administer the oath. New partisans kissed a bible as well as a gun.⁶⁵ The repression of religion was typical of the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe, as the atheist communist regime re-established their occupation:

Priests did suffer a lot. In Vilkaviskis region the property of the church was taken, all the clergy were deported or executed, and the property was turned into a mental asylum. This was devastating for the church and the people, it made a lot of

⁵⁸ Interview G.

⁵⁹ Leskys, p.65.

⁶⁰ Reklaitis, p.1.

⁶¹ Leskys, p.65.

⁶² Daumantas, p.87.

⁶³ Interview H.

⁶⁴ Leskys, p.66.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.65.

Lithuanians angry and want to fight back against this injustice. I saw so many things that made me feel like that.⁶⁶

Lithuanian Catholicism is central to Lithuanian nationalism. It influenced the guerrilla fighters' choosing to violently oppose the USSR, in the same way it strengthened the resolve of later dissidents. This dual fidelity towards Catholicism and nationalism is one of the uniting themes between the violent resistance movement, the later resistance movements, and Lithuania's national collective memory.

The efforts of the partisans were decentralised by region until 1946 when they joined forces in a formalised union of the various regional commands called the Movement for Lithuania's Struggle for Freedom (LLKS). By this time their numbers had declined to around 4,000.⁶⁷ The partisans had been forced from their fortified forest camps and now lived in well camouflaged bunkers in smaller groups and usually underground.⁶⁸ The form that their fighting took in this period was surprise attacks on expeditionary units, military convoys or bases, symbolic destruction of Soviet government structures, disruption of elections⁶⁹, assassination or other punishment of enemy collaborators, followed by rapid dispersal deep into the forests to avoid engagement with the large, regular military forces of the enemy.⁷⁰ During this stage some partisans would not be hiding in the woods during day light hours. They would hide their weapons during the day and work the farms of their supporters. The changing tactics from the earlier openly fought battles was a necessary expedient versus a far superior force in the Red Army and NKVD. The killing of the vast majority of active fighters caused the partisans to redeploy their resources in this way and the civil war evolved into a guerrilla insurgency.

Today there are two great examples left for posterity of this guerrilla war. One is a book by partisan Juozas Daumantas, written in 1948 and first published in 1950. Daumantas's book *Fighters for Freedom* is a first-hand account by a Lithuanian anti-Soviet guerrilla, who managed to escape to the west. It vividly describes the conditions in Soviet occupied Lithuania during 1944-1947. It gives eye witness to the daily activities of the guerrilla underground resistance and to the efforts of the Soviet security forces attempting to eradicate it. This work also has a wider significance as it illustrates the difficulties of pacification that the Soviet Union encountered, not just in Lithuania, but also in Latvia, Estonia, Eastern Poland and Western Ukraine, all of which were imbued with the spirit of local nationalism, leading to protracted armed resistance to Soviet control. As one of very few, participant eyewitness

⁶⁶ Interview A.

⁶⁷ Leskys, p.67.

⁶⁸ Kuodyte, p.4.

⁶⁹ Daumantas, p.105.

⁷⁰ Guntis Smidchens, *The Diary of a Partisan*, (Vilnius: Pasauliui apie mus, 2008), p.13.

accounts, in any language, of guerrilla activities in Eastern European countries during the post-war period, *Fighters for Freedom* is a highly significant source of information and insight.

The second is a *Diary of a Partisan*. This work is the published diary that Lionginas Baliukevicius kept as he fought in the partisan ranks. Baliukevicius became regional commander of the Dainava partisan military district, placing him in charge of roughly 250 active fighters.⁷¹ In 1949 the Council of the Movement of the struggle for Freedom of Lithuania (LLKS) was founded. The LLKS declared itself the supreme political body of the nation during the occupation period. The communist party was outlawed and partisan Jonas Zemaitis (code name Vytautas) was elected its chairman. Zemaitis was proclaimed temporary president of Lithuania until after the liberation. All partisan leaders in the territory of Lithuania became subordinate to this body. In 1999 the Lithuanian parliament (Seimas) passed a symbolic law to honour the partisan declaration of 1949. The Lithuanian MPs stated that the LLKS was the sole legal authority within the territory of occupied Lithuania stating; 'The February 16th, 1949 declaration by the LLKS shall constitute a legal act of the State of Lithuania'. Zemaitis was killed in 1954 but on 16th February 1999 a statue of him was erected outside the Lithuanian defence ministry and he was officially posthumously proclaimed Lithuania's fourth president.⁷² The marking of anniversary dates for commemoration is common practice and further symbolises the correlation between generationally separate resistance movements.

Prior to the 1949 congress the partisan military command had been decentralised by geographical region. The smallest partisan group consisted of a squad, several squads made up a platoon, platoons united into a brigade and brigades formed into districts.⁷³ One of the most famous partisan battles took place in Kalniskes forest. This is frequently mentioned in popular folk songs. I have visited this site where hillside crosses represent a national shrine to the events that took place there in May 1945. According to the genocide and resistance research centre in Vilnius roughly eighty partisans were attacked on the hill overlooking the forest by a force some ten times greater. This battle is celebrated for the defiance the partisans displayed and for the fact that women played a predominant role in the battle. The fight lasted many hours and the Russians repeatedly attacked the partisans but failed to separate the partisan positions. The leader of that platoon was code name Lakanas (pilot). Lakanas, his wife and another female partisan Pusele (little pine) were among many Lithuanians who died there. Crosses mark the last resting place of between fifty to sixty partisans. A verse from a folk song depicting that battle reads; 'Sister plait for me a green wreath, bring it secretly. Brother, make for me a black wooden cross. Place it at night.'⁷⁴

⁷¹ Smidchens, p.17.

⁷² Kuodyte and Tracevskis, *The Unknown War*, p.34.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.24.

Counter Insurgency

In the early stages of their counterinsurgency war the Soviet forces focused on military action instead of agent infiltration.⁷⁵ But as the resistance movement gained momentum, and with the Soviets lacking proper intelligence, the Soviet forces suffered serious and unexpected setbacks as the partisans learned that regular armed formations and operations had to be adapted into guerrilla warfare. The Soviets had to look for a more effective means of achieving their objectives.⁷⁶ According to eye witnesses, this increasingly depended on a demoralising operation of fear among the population to deprive the partisans of their support networks.

A former Lithuanian dairy farmer from Alytus recalled to me:

In the end people were just scared of both sides, nobody knew who was genuine or who could be trusted. This came about because Russians would dress up as partisans and test to see which families would lend them support. If you were suspected or it was proven that you supported them, you would be arrested at best. There were spies on both sides. People would naturally support the freedom fighters if they could, but this was dangerous. I heard rumours that both sides committed crimes to make the other side look bad in the eyes of the people. I would have joined them with my brother but everybody who did ended up dead. My brother was older than me, he was killed fighting. I had to help look after my young sister. Some partisans did come to our house once and my father made them go away. I think he may have given them some food or equipment. We lived very close to the forest in Alytus, so we were quite close to some action. We also had the police come around and my father spoke to them. I think this was before the Germans came. The Germans never came to our house, but they did take over Alytus. The Russians would often leave dead partisans in the town with words like traitor or enemy around their necks. They would then look to see who mourned their sons and brothers, and then arrest them too.⁷⁷

His words were echoed in my interview with a former university professor of social sciences and communist party member:

One time they came to my house, Russian agents masquerading. My step father spoke with them and they asked him for uniforms to help the partisans, then they asked him for a lift. We knew they were false. It was quite regular for agents to come and check if we had items belonging to a partisan. In our region the partisans were very active until collectivisation. My step dad was asked several times to be an agent,

⁷⁵ Reklaitis, p.5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁷⁷ Interview A.

but he said no, it was very dangerous, they always looked for reasons (to force him to) but he didn't have anything to inform on. He wouldn't meet with certain people after that to make sure that he didn't know any information. Some people would say yes but then not provide information and some people would say yes but then inform the partisans and provide false information. It was all very dangerous and easy to be killed for.⁷⁸

Early in 1946 MVD Major A. M. Sokolov was relocated from his post in the Ukraine, where he had initiated the use of Special Forces agents into the resistance movement there.⁷⁹ Sokolov's *spetsgruppy* agents would assault and infiltrate the Lithuanian partisan movement at the highest levels and initiate an agenda to clandestinely disrupt and disorganise the partisan effort.⁸⁰ The use of Lithuanians to do this work was a standard Soviet tactic as many Lithuanians collaborated with the occupational forces, often for private gain. However, Lithuanians found it hard to convince the partisans of their commitment to the cause. They did not know partisan terminology, could not correctly present partisan qualities or exhibit insignia, as only a genuine partisan would.⁸¹ Where this change of tactic was radical was that Sokolov planned to recruit from the partisan movement itself.⁸² The recruitment of the sworn enemy of the Soviet State to conduct clandestine infiltration attacks for the Soviet Union against their own people began in earnest in 1946.⁸³

The Soviets turned to this menacing tactic because the use of shock attacks by Red Army units was not bringing about the result of terminating the resistance movement as it had in Latvia and Estonia. A former Partisan networker testified to this devastatingly devious form of infiltration:

In Lithuania the Soviets took great effort to try to suppress the partisans. They didn't expect to have had such a difficult time of it, but the partisans were organised, very patriotic and they had support from the people. They thought that perhaps we would all join in and be good Soviet children, but most people hated the fact that our country was now occupied. We had only been independent from the Russians for a couple of decades. As well as the *stribai* there were also many examples of double agents masquerading as partisans. This eventually caused the forest brothers to lose the war.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Interview I.

⁷⁹ Reklaitis, p.6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.6

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.6

⁸⁴ Interview G.

The atmosphere throughout Lithuania in those days was one of dread and suspicion. Locals could not be sure who they could trust and being associated with a partisan supporter or simply muttering an anti-Soviet phrase could end up in deportation.⁸⁵ Equally locals feared violent reprisals from the Lithuanian partisans if it was exposed that behaviour acting against the insurrection and in support of the USSR had occurred.⁸⁶ The *spetsgruppy* would help to gather information on partisan locations, individuals, their support groups, numbers, weaponry, tactics and procedures and report this to the NKVD. Then the use of Red Army forces would be deployed in coordination with the intelligence gathered. Baliukevicius testifies to this use of betrayal by partisans in his diary:

{...} Linen became a traitor. Lapaitis and Lark were taken alive but betrayed nothing. Rye died because of a traitor. Lightning was killed through a betrayal. Howdy met the same fate. Pakstas and Maple were killed because Linen revealed their bunker. Stork was killed with Smith, Wolf, Lion and little Oak. All of them died at the hands of traitors.⁸⁷

The Soviet disturbance of the partisan order and their supporters required a campaign of measured and gradual incorporation of agents into the movement to gain the trust of the partisans. The recruited former partisans were often corrupted with offers of money, had come from earlier NKVD amnesty programs or had sensitive information held about them or their families.⁸⁸ In return for their collaboration they were assured safety by the Soviet establishment. Some recruited *Spetsgruppy* agents were cooperating to secure the discharge of family members from incarceration. The Soviet security forces used extraordinarily devious means of disorganising and eliminating the partisan groups. A surviving Siberian deportee explained to me that the Soviets would also pretend to be partisans to test which families and homesteads gave them support. Those who acquiesced to their pleas would often; ‘disappear overnight’, deported or otherwise.⁸⁹ Another menacing tactic was to disguise as partisans and commit rape, murder and robbery within local communities, creating a negative impression of the partisans among would-be supporters.⁹⁰

A Siberian deportee, originally from Vilkaviskis, confirmed that in his region: ‘Citizens were equally weary of both sides and could not easily differentiate between who was the lesser of the evils.’⁹¹ This can be accredited to the masquerade operations of the *Spetsgruppy* and to the brutality implemented by the partisans in their punishment of Soviet collaborators. This

⁸⁵ Reklaitis, p.19.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Lioginas Baliukevicius, diary entry March 24th 1949, *The Diary of a Partisan*, (Vilnius: Pasauliui apie mus, 2008), p.113.

⁸⁸ Reklaitis, p.6.

⁸⁹ Interview F.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

occurred throughout Lithuania as one woman from the far north of the country close to the border with Latvia explained:

If you answered your door at night you were mad. If you even frowned at the mention of the secret police you would get a holiday in Siberia. There was nobody you could trust except your own family but even some people couldn't do that. I was lucky my sisters and my mother took care of me well. I always remember seeing the bodies in the town and watching the police stood a little way back watching the people watching the bodies. Everybody was scared to death. You couldn't trust if a person was who they said they were. Even the partisans would attack people or, so they said.⁹²

Lithuanian resistance to Soviet occupation was so resilient and widespread that such clandestine means were the only effective way that Soviet forces could accomplish their objective. *Spetsgruppy* agents would perform their masquerade operations often taking months, sometimes years, to succeed. The faith of the partisans was arduous to gain, and fictitious cover stories had to be created which often required staged gun fights to aid their authenticity and gain the trust of locals and partisans.⁹³ Although the partisans' war efforts had begun to wane by 1949 the war continued until 1953. The last resistance fighter perished in action in 1969. Amazingly, the last hiding partisan died in his hide-out in 1986, having refused to re-enter a society controlled by the occupying communist party.⁹⁴

A former university lecturer and communist party member recalled to me seeing the slaughtered bodies of seven partisans displayed in the farming town of Gizai, itself the scene of a major partisan attack. He recollects how Soviet collaborators and agents would carefully watch the reactions of the townspeople to seeing the bodies, to gain information on the families and associates of the dead. These people would also disappear:

The partisan movement was very active in my town (Gizai), where there was one of the largest partisan attacks. I remember laying down on the floor at night in case bullets would come in through the windows. In this region the partisans were from the Taurus brigade, they attacked at night. The head of the bank had lived in a two-storey building until the KGB had moved in. The KGB had then moved out, but the partisans did not know that and they attacked the building killing a whole family of seven. The next day I went to see: their furniture was still in the garden as they had not finished moving in. I saw the bodies of all of them on the floor outside, the children ranged from three to seventeen years old. The partisans had gone to attack

⁹² Interview J.

⁹³ Reklaitis, pp.6-8.

⁹⁴ Kuodyte and Tracevskis, *The Unknown War*, p.9.

a *Stribai*. From that battle the bodies of the seven partisans were displayed in the town and the KGB were sat watching to see who cried or paid their respects.⁹⁵

Today a monument exists outside the church where their bodies were left. The monument reads 'In this place in 1947 the Bolsheviks left seven dead Lithuanian partisans'. It then names the seven. Candles are perennially lit, and flowers laid to this day. This is just one of tens, possibly hundreds, of such monuments to the civil war against the Soviet Union that occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War and is symbolic of the way Lithuania represents these events.

Another method that the Soviets used to disorientate the resistance movement was to infiltrate foreign émigré supporters and western agents covertly trying to help prevent the tide of Sovietisation. Despite the generally accepted truism that Lithuania had not received any foreign support, there were some minor attempts by foreign security networks to secure links with the underground Lithuanian resistance. George Reklaitis provides an account of the impressive level that the counterinsurgency reached by infiltrating MI6, who had, they thought, established a British-Lithuanian network by 1943.⁹⁶ Catastrophically for the partisan movement any chance that MI6 had of aiding them in their struggle was compromised by KGB elements inside MI6.⁹⁷

In his diary Baliukevicius refers to one of his allies in the partisan ranks who went by the code name Oak. Baliukevicius was aware of the betrayals that had weakened the partisan cause, however he never suspected that Oak had been an NKVD agent. In his research George Reklaitis has uncovered, through the study of previously closed KGB files, that there was a Soviet double agent called Oak who contacted and was able to infiltrate the highest strata of the resistance movement. His actual identity was Juozas Markulis who had, by the late 1940's, achieved one of the uppermost positions in the resistance movement.⁹⁸ The activities of Oak led to the entrapment, murder and imprisonment of several of the partisans' senior commanders.⁹⁹

Reklaitis's account has shown that the United States and Great Britain had tried to intervene and aimed at rolling back the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe in the early stages of the cold war. This intervention was covert, underfunded and thus doomed to fail. Great Britain and the U.S did aim at providing support for partisan movements and their émigré contacts.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Interview I.

⁹⁶ Kuodyte and Tracevskis, *The Unknown War*, p.13.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁹⁸ Reklaitis, p.14.

⁹⁹ Kuodyte and Tracevskis, *The Unknown War*, p.15.

¹⁰⁰ Reklaitis, pp. 2-4.

The comprehensive counterinsurgency operation had, by 1949, seen the Soviet security forces install enemies of the insurgency within the towns and farms of partisan supporters, within the ranks of the partisan movement itself and in the heart of the few foreign connections formed outside of the violently contested areas. Historian J.N. Westwood supports Reklaitis's contention:

{...} The CIA were busy supporting armed resistance in Ukraine, while British intelligence were shipping Soviet emigrants back into the Baltic republics where, it was imagined, they would form the nucleus of an anti-Soviet rising. {...} Hundreds of brave Ukrainians and Lithuanians were sacrificed.¹⁰¹

Lionginas Beliukevicius was posthumously awarded the highest partisan award, the 'Freedom Fighters Cross', and following the renewal of independence, he was promoted to the rank of Colonel by presidential decree and well as being given the Vytis Cross first degree. A monument exists where he was killed.¹⁰² The honouring of past heroes demonstrates how the national identity of Lithuania has been developed and incorporated into a mythologised national memory. Diary entries show how he was conscious of the global diplomatic situation. He listened to international radio broadcasts by the 'Voice of America', hoping, like all the partisans, that the Western democratic powers would support them in their fight against Soviet occupation according to the principles of the Atlantic Charter and international laws which made the occupation illegal. The text of the third clause in the Charter reads: {...} 'the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live {...} to see sovereignty rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived them.'¹⁰³

Partisan legacy and new forms of resistance

Since the rebirth of independence, the resistance movement has been popularised in Lithuania and is a key aspect of their national identity:

In school there is a positive program to represent the partisan war. They are presented as national heroes. This is true of our government as well, there are monuments all around Lithuania. Under the Soviets the whole education system was a system of lies, especially in the subject of history. I was raised not to lie. As a teacher we were routinely examined to test our loyalty to the USSR, but this was just lip service on my behalf. I was not a proper communist; most Lithuanians weren't. The war for Lithuania is part of the history syllabus taught to school children and

¹⁰¹ J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.368-369.

¹⁰² Kuodyte and Tracevskis, p.14.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

promoted through physical landmarks, stories and folk songs which survive to this day.¹⁰⁴

February 16th, 1918 is celebrated annually in Lithuania as one of three national holiday dates which honour Lithuania's independence tradition.¹⁰⁵ The celebrations take on overtly militarist and religious associations. I have attended these parades that begin with the flying of the flag and singing of the national anthem, a procession of young cadets in national military uniforms leads onto a church service and mass. Local politicians and community leaders join the populations of each town and city during these annual celebrations of independence and resistance. This approach to a national day of celebration defines the relationship between nationalism, the military and religion.¹⁰⁶ This relationship was the same in 1939 and 1990 and, although suppressed by an occupational atheist Soviet regime and communist party, throughout the entire period of occupation. Throughout Lithuania's civil war 1944 – 1953 and the decades that followed, ordinary Lithuanians resisted in many ways, some significant, but many small, simple gestures of defiance, not least by those deported to Siberia.¹⁰⁷ The Lithuanian national rituals are strongly associated with the Church, more than in the other Baltic nations, and the Church now plays a major role in all national events and commemorations.¹⁰⁸

In June 1946, just as the violent resistance of the partisans had passed its pinnacle in terms of being an effective violent insurgency, a number of guerrilla units attempted to shift to a nonviolent form of resistance. They formed the United Movement for Democratic Resistance, to achieve more adequate and effective results in the struggle for the restoration of Lithuania's independence and for the realisation of the ideal of democracy.¹⁰⁹ In January 1947 however, a nation-wide consultation of all the insurgent leaders excluded the proposal to reorganise into a movement of nonviolent, passive, resistance. Nevertheless, nonviolent resistance existed alongside guerrilla activity as the insurgency waged on until the numbers of active partisan fighters had receded into an ineffective guerrilla force sometime in 1952-1953.

In those days, until the Khrushchev period exposed Stalin's criminal nature, even a misplaced word could make one into an enemy of the people overnight.¹¹⁰ Resistance took on other forms, especially in the cities, whilst most the fighting occurred in the countryside. For example, living under a system of forced and crushing conformity, suicide rates were among

¹⁰⁴ Interview E.

¹⁰⁵ Interview B.

¹⁰⁶ Attended in Vilkauskis, Lithuania, 16.2.17.

¹⁰⁷ Interview F.

¹⁰⁸ Lieven, p.110.

¹⁰⁹ Miniotaite, p.21.

¹¹⁰ Interview F.

the highest in Europe. This in fact remained the case well into the twenty first century. Because Lithuania was officially living happily under socialism it was forbidden in some areas to attend the funeral of a person who committed suicide, as this was seen to be a treasonous activity. Openly mourning the death of a friend or family member who took their own life was equivalent to overtly resisting the Soviet structure.¹¹¹

The partisans of Lithuania provided a legacy of nationalist resistance that would publicly re-ignite several decades later, and one which boiled under the surface for the entire Soviet occupation.¹¹² A few partisans rejected amnesty offered to them by the Soviets and continued living in the forests, occasionally attacking the police, in some cases well into the 1960's.¹¹³ In Lithuanian prose the partisan war is often depicted as a battle between 'the city' and 'the forest', the partisans were fighting to defend the traditional way of life. Rimvydas Silbajoris, a Lithuanian literary scholar in exile, wrote that:

Lithuanians remember the war in every agonising detail and can no more stop talking and writing about it than can the Russians stop talking and writing about their great struggle against the Nazis.¹¹⁴

Through the various methods that Lithuania and Lithuanians view and remember the partisan war it possible to attribute some measure of success to those who resisted by means of violent insurrection. While the guerrillas only fully accomplished the aim of restricting the number of Russian settlers inside Lithuania, there is no doubt that the disruptions they caused to Soviet rule up until the mid-1950's were remarkable in that they interfered with what should have been a much smoother take-over by a far superior military administration.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Lithuania has been able to re-write the history of, and pay tribute to, their lost partisans. This is done in various ways. National days of celebration evolve around independence parades and are closely associate with Catholicism. Nationalism and Catholicism go hand in hand on these events. Political figures from past decades speak at these national events and regularly honour Lithuanian martyrs. In education Lithuania positively reinforces the partisan war and history teachers are given freedom to openly teach aspects of this as they see fit.¹¹⁵

On a governmental level, Lithuanian administrations have passed posthumous decrees to honour and award many of the partisan leaders, and in 1999 even declared Jonas Zemaitis

¹¹¹ Vytautas Landsbergis, *Lithuania Independent Again* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.46.

¹¹² Interview E.

¹¹³ Lieven, p.103.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹¹⁵ Interview E.

the fourth official president of the Lithuanian republic. Culturally the partisan war is remembered in melancholy tones in song and verse, and Lithuanian poets such as Tomas Venclova became involved in and symbolic of Lithuanian resistance. The countryside of Lithuania is dotted with memorials and crosses at every known site of a partisan battle. These represent the physical means of remembering the violent resistance to Soviet rule and reinforce the collective memory of the nation. The cause of the mythologised partisans continued to add weight to the next generation of resistance activists, and the memory of the violent insurrection can be viewed as having 'weaponised' the foundation for continued resistance. The terms victory and defeat in this case are not binary and it is possible to view the partisan war as an original battle in a long war of independence. Perhaps the greatest success of the violent resistance movement is that the memory of this civil war continued to flourish over the course of the next few decades of resistance and became ingrained in the current psyche of the nation.

Chapter Two: Nonviolent Resistance, Dissidents and the Catholic Church

No effort in this world is wasted

Bhagavad Gita

This chapter will evaluate other forms of resistance that occurred in addition to the violent resistance of the partisan leaders and their supporters. Popular nonviolent resistance began simultaneously in 1940 and would remain as a forceful undercurrent throughout the Soviet rule of Lithuania. Political boycotts, demonstrations of loyalty to the symbols of Lithuanian independence and noncompliance with the new order were the typical expression of this form of resistance system.¹ In this period the culture of resistance that the partisans devoutly followed carried on as an undercurrent in society and, as the harshness of Soviet punishments began to lessen, began to grow from an underground movement into the mainstream of both political thinking and society at large. In this chapter interviewees testify to the fact that a spirit of resistance evolved and adapted in correlation with the way that ordinary people adapted to life in the USSR. The spirit of resistance refused to leave the Lithuanian collective psyche, and in doing so full the Sovietisation of the Lithuanian nation failed.

Nonviolent resistance

The Soviets contrived to describe the annexation of the Baltics as legal and desired by the Baltic populations. The election of July 14th, 1940 to people's diet was to serve this purpose. On July 7th, 1940 all non-communist political parties were forbidden, except for the Komsomol (communist youth league), trade unions, co-operative and cultural societies affiliated with the CPSU. Four days later 2,000 prominent Lithuanians were arrested. These electoral processes violated all principles of democratic elections. Voters' passports had to be surrendered for signing by the authorities as evidence of a citizen's fidelity to the USSR. The elections were openly administered by the NKVD and Red Army troops.² Yet despite intimidation the population of Lithuania was so uncooperative that the elections had to be extended for a further twenty-four hours. Estimates put the turnout at between 18% and 32%. Soviet officials declared a turnout of 95.5%, with 99.2% of votes cast for the working People's Union of Lithuania.³ A London newspaper, quoting a Soviet news agency, published the results 24 hours before the polls were closed.⁴

¹ Grazina Miniotaite, *Nonviolent Resistance in Lithuania, A Story of Peaceful Liberation*, The Albert Einstein Institution, www.aeinstein.org, 2001, p.16.

² *Ibid.*, p.17.

³ Vytautas Vaitiekunas, *Lithuania*, (New York: Committee for a Free Lithuania, 1965), p.28.

⁴ Michael Bourdeaux, *Land of Crosses*, (Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1979), p.2.

Individual stories, from isolated families and communities emerge telling of the kinds of resistance which occurred in the form of folk songs, stories, the use of language, national prayers and loyalty to the newly outlawed symbols of Lithuanian culture and heritage, passed on from generation to generation.⁵ This resistance could be expressed in the simplest of terms, as a forty two year old music teacher explained to me:

We have always had a positive image in our family that the partisans were fighting for our nation's freedom. This was not the official version because the media and education were completely state controlled. Growing up as a small child we would be told that the partisans were bandits and traitors to their own people, but this was not really believed by the majority. I remember being told at school that we were 'Lenin's little grandchildren'. Through losing the war and the deportations that happened, the partisans were crushed. However, symbolic support for them continued. I was born into the Soviet Union and was never forbidden to be Lithuanian: it was more of a dual nationality, but Lithuanian first, always. You can call it resistance if you like but really you were just showing that we were Lithuanian, by speaking in Lithuanian not Russian, by keeping Lithuanian traditions, by marrying in church and baptising, celebrating Christmas and Easter etc. These things were not allowed but everybody did them. Even local government officials would go into the forest and cut down a Christmas tree to take home, the same as my dad would do. Everybody except the real communists carried on normal traditions like that.⁶

By the second period of post war resistance 1954-1965 Lithuania had lost one sixth of her population due to deportations, executions, migration, war and resistance.⁷ According to Thomas Remeikis the second period was characterised not by the bloody civil war waged against the Soviet security forces but by a change in public attitudes. President Landsbergis states in his autobiography that despite the vast majority of Lithuanians rejecting Soviet dominance and subjugation of their nation, there were many who bought into Stalin's version of Marxist-Leninist communism and truly believed in the Soviet ideology. This was openly demonstrated in an outpouring of mourning shown by some citizens upon Stalin's death in 1953,⁸ although this occurred more in Moscow than anywhere else in the Union. Perhaps this is not surprising as the cult of personality and strict discipline towards Soviet communism had been instilled in the population. In this period, after the partisan war had all but disappeared from both town and countryside, open resistance and opposition turned into an attitude of exposing, exploiting, reforming and adjusting the system.⁹

⁵ Interview E.

⁶ Interview D.

⁷ Vaitiekunas, p.28.

⁸ Vytautas Landsbergis, *Lithuania Independent Again* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.45.

⁹ Miniotaite, p.21.

The struggle in Siberia

In Siberia resistance to Sovietisation had existed since the deportations began. A former Siberian deportee and regional Sajudis organiser told me that his prominent memory, fifty years on, was of Sundays spent with communities of Lithuanian deportees, singing, dancing and praying according to national cultural traditions. He remembers celebrating Easter and Christmas and moving from house to house, family to family to share in the festivities, which he said went unpunished. He said that resistance there was not named as such and was not forbidden or repressed. They were there to work, albeit forcefully, but despite the obvious hardships and injustice he recalled this positive memory first in our conversation:

In Siberia I learned to read from the bible in the Lithuanian-Latin language, this was the first book I ever read. Ironically in Siberia we found more freedom to express ourselves, our culture and traditions and to observe religious formalities and rituals. This was not possible in Lithuania at that time.¹⁰

In Lithuania openly defying the Soviet, atheist, communist authorities by obeying one's faith and conscience would almost certainly lead to being informed upon and becoming an enemy of the people, as any, and all anti-Soviet elements continued to be purged by the communist state.¹¹ Historian J.N. Westwood contends that a significant portion of people were deported not because of what they had done, but because of what the Soviets thought they might conceivably be thinking of doing.¹² My interview with a Siberian deportee eluded to this:

We were deported simply because we had relatives who had left Lithuania and travelled abroad. We did not know where they were. They had tried to get to the U.S and we found out many years later that they had made it across Germany into Belgium, and from there they had managed to get to Britain and then to America. The Soviets would deport anyone they suspected, regardless of the truth. It was the unkindest thing.¹³

This interviewee was deported as a four-year-old child in 1948, with all his family except one older sister. He recalls the day that they were told they were to leave, and that they were allowed to take with them a small amount of clothing and food. The only reason that his older sister avoided deportation was that she was not in the house when the Soviet officials came to give them the news. Waving goodbye to those on the platform, he recalled not ever knowing if he would see her or Lithuania again. He attended a school in Siberia at seven years old which included the possibility to continue to learn his native language. He said that he and his family felt lucky that they were transported to Krasnoyarsk, a town named after the river

¹⁰ Interview F.

¹¹ Algirdas Jakubcionis, *The Unarmed Anti-Soviet Resistance in Lithuania in the 1950's and 1960s*, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2011), p.4.

¹² J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.359.

¹³ Interview F.

which runs through it, where the work undertaken was mostly deforestation and wood work associated with the logs felled. This allowed them plenty of outside freedom and connection with their fellow deportees. Eventually, after a few years, they were able to acquire ownership of a cow, a pig and had a small farm. At this point in the interview he laughed wryly as he lamented that anyone with any wealth had it taken from them and redistributed, concurrent with the ideological lines of the communist regime. He remembers having to bring the animals inside during the winter and that they would sometimes find the skeletons of farm animals which had escaped and had been eaten by wolves or bears.¹⁴ His testimony to me connects to a lot of the historiography concerning Siberian deportees. Anatol Lieven has interviewed Siberian survivors from Krasnoyarsk whose stories are told in *The Baltic Revolution*, and many of the memories there, correlate with those from this interview.¹⁵

The nationalities and ethnicities of the deportees were diverse, Stalin's regime had transported enemies of the state from every corner of their expanded empire. The role that Catholicism and nationalism played in the lives of this deported family, and countless others, cannot be overstated. During the interview the former deportee confirmed that the mood of resistance was not particularly angry or violent, instead it manifested itself simply by staying alive long enough to return to Lithuania. This family lost their father nine years before finally being released in 1960. They exhumed his remains and transported them back to their fatherland to receive a Catholic funeral and to rest in peace in their native soil:¹⁶ a remarkable physical and symbolic gesture indicating the power of emotion felt for their homeland and their associated religion, resisting the program intended to destroy nationalist movements in the Union:

We took him back on the train with us to Lithuania and buried him again. Everybody did that, it was a normal thing to do. My mother was of course insisting that he came back home with us: there was never a question of leaving him in Krasnoyarsk. Never.¹⁷

This act to ensure a final resting place and a traditional Catholic burial demonstrates the significant role religion played in the lives of the deportees and can be viewed as open resistance to the atheist regime. When tied with the links to both the violent insurrection and the dissident movement a picture of the importance of the Catholic Church for Lithuanians emerges. For its role in defending Lithuanian nationalism throughout the fifty-year occupation the Catholic Church possesses immense moral authority for its contributions to Lithuanian history and culture and its consequent links with the very identity of the nation.¹⁸

¹⁴ Interview F.

¹⁵ Lieven, pp.90-95.

¹⁶ Interview F.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ This is not to deny that diverse religious communities have historically thrived and enriched Lithuania.

In Siberia food and clothes were the most vital matters and times were incredibly hard for the first few years. The former deportee recalled: 'My father strove to feed the children, six in total, and fed himself with only the crumbs and peels of potato skins. Mother would speak to us children every day about Lithuania to remind us of our homeland.'¹⁹ He remembers conversations invoking memories of swimming in rivers during the long summers and playing in the snow and frozen lakes in the winter. His mother would sing folk songs and tell the children stories in Lithuanian to keep that language and culture alive in their family.

Towards the end of the USSR, this same man would volunteer in his home town of Vilkaviskis to assist organising rallies for the Sajudis party. He worked as a member of the local party, which involved some risk, as technically the communist party was still the only constitutionally protected political organisation. He told me that the strength of will among the people of Vilkaviskis was so strong that safety in numbers prevented the authorities from taking any serious punitive action. His work was to publicise counter-narrative propaganda, to organise bus trips to the capital city and to assemble crowds of people to peacefully agitate for independence. He campaigned for Sajudis voluntarily, a party whose entire platform was built on the desire for Lithuanian independence.²⁰ Hundreds of people undertook the same voluntary work to assist the nationalist program of independence from the USSR. This movement constitutes a political revolution from the ground up that united an entire nation, as mass demonstrations sprang up in protest against the lack of freedom inside Soviet Lithuania. The involvement of returning deportees in the local Sajudis party movement and the support given to Sajudis by the underground dissident and Catholic protest movements, fed the independence platform and gave it a tangible sense of being representative of the entire Lithuanian nation. This fact is supported by the huge majority Sajudis won in the first free, multi-party elections in the USSR in March 1990. As a former university professor told me:

Everybody voted for Sajudis, even communists. The communist party had failed and was re-shaping and re-naming itself. It's true to say that Sajudis had won the people and it was to be the people who won their victory eventually.²¹

The inclusion and participation of dissidents and deportees in this new form of resistance, highlights the effectiveness of a continued resistance tradition and a national mythology of Lithuanian resistance to foreign rule. The participation of deportees from the 1940s connects the generational gap between violent and non-violent resistance movements in a tangible sense.

¹⁹ Interview F.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Interview I.

Post-Stalin

The first waves of deportees began to arrive back in Lithuania in 1956 following Stalin's death. These were Lithuanian citizens who had been declared as enemies of the people under the Stalinist regime.²² In Lithuania at that time it was almost impossible to meet anyone who had not been personally affected by the deportations, a telling fact that fed the anti-Soviet mood that prevailed in Lithuania for the next five decades²³. The conditions for a violent civil war with any hope of achieving its aim had disappeared. What followed was a non-violent public campaign for freedom of human rights. On All Souls day 1956, to correspond with the Hungarian uprising, the first mass anti-Soviet demonstrations occurred in both Vilnius and Kaunas.²⁴ These were attended by victims of the deportations and their families. This new form of public protest was aiming at reversing the ban on celebrating religious holidays, something that was not rigidly forbidden for exiled Lithuanians to do in Siberia and the far east of the Soviet Union.²⁵

Fear of persecution for taking part in this protest movement meant that most Lithuanians did not engage in anti-Soviet agitation.²⁶ Those that did had every right to feel that they would feature in the tradition of Lithuanian resistance, however the great mass of the Lithuanian public determined to get along with life inside the USSR, despite their natural inclination to agree with the protest movement.²⁷ One deportee told me that he took back to Lithuania memories of independence and began to expose the Soviet regime:

I knew that what had happened was wrong, countless families had suffered and if ever there would be an opportunity to right the wrongs we would take it. After surviving Siberia, losing my father, not being sure if I would ever see my sister again, what is there to be afraid of. When I returned to Lithuania I went to school and university. I was very good at maths and I had to join the communist party to become a teacher. We had always been raised to be patriotic and I remember my mum saying, just go, sign up, pursue a career, but don't believe. Nationalism was raised into us as a family. I only played a minor role, but it was significant because people like me did the same thing all across Lithuania, in every town and region. If the local groups did not join the movement the national command would have been too weak to exist. When we got back it was the era of Khrushchev and much more relaxed than before, although people would still inform on you to the government if you openly displayed anti-Soviet behaviour. Gradually the conditions to be able to speak out and organise

²² Jakubcionis, p.4.

²³ Interviews F & I.

²⁴ Jakubcionis, p.4.

²⁵ Interview F.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

against the Soviet Union came about. It was many years later of course that we joined the regional Sajudis party, my thinking was, well someone has to go.²⁸

I have interviewed people who joined the communist party as a necessary expedient of furthering their careers and providing for their families: people whose natural preference would have been an independent Lithuania, with freedom of religious, political and national rights. A former Doctor of Social Science told me that despite the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact remaining largely secretive until the Gorbachev era, nobody in Lithuania was under any illusion that a forced occupation had not occurred.²⁹ The former university professor pointed out that as teenagers nearly everyone had joined the Komsomol:

I studied Marxist-economics for three years in Moscow and avoided the pressure to join the party for the whole of the first year. The pressure to join was too great though and despite being opposed to forced communism it made sense for me to become a party member. You were not forced to, but your prospects would suffer if you didn't, so everybody joined the youth party and then in my second year at university I joined the party. I never wanted to but to prosper in the USSR you had to. I remained a member right up until the Gorbachev era when, by then, the party had become a joke due to the scandal of the Hitler-Stalin (Ribbentrop-Molotov) pact, and all the killings and deportations. When these were exposed, the party lost any credibility. Actually, by the Brezhnev regime the communist party was already falling down. The leaders were there until they died, and this weakened them also.³⁰

Or as a female teacher of history put it simply: 'We were not real communists.'³¹

Dissent

Lesser restrictions on national and cultural developments inside the Union under Khrushchev, and worsening international relations for the USSR, gave Lithuanian dissidents and the émigré population hope that Soviet attitudes towards the Baltic States might begin to soften.³² The year 1966 saw the issue of Lithuanian independence brought before the U.S senate for the first time.³³ The émigré Lithuanian community in the U.S declared this the year to fight for the liberation of Lithuania. The campaign for Socialism with a human face in Czechoslovakia however, was violently oppressed by Soviet troops in 1968. This was the most serious upheaval in Eastern Europe since the Soviet invasion of Hungary twelve years before. Dr Kristine Burinskaite, from the Lithuanian genocide and resistance research centre, contends

²⁸ Interview F.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Interview I.

³¹ Interview E.

³² Jakubcionis, p.4.

³³ *Ibid.*

that events in Prague, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia throughout the 1950s and 1960s had a big impact on the new forms of anti-Soviet resistance inside Lithuania.³⁴ Through radio broadcasts from Western Europe Lithuanians were able to follow these events.³⁵ The repercussions this had for dissidents and independence activists in Lithuania caused the conditions for the illegal opposition which then commenced in earnest with mass publications of clandestine anti-Soviet material.³⁶

The anti-Soviet dissident movement began in Pushkin Square, Moscow, on the 5th December 1965 (Soviet Constitution day). The protest in the square was followed by publications in several Russian magazines demanding that human rights and the Soviet constitution be upheld. The stimulus that this movement gave to the Lithuanian anti-Soviet rebellion was significant. The positive answer to the Czechoslovakian crisis in Moscow was the founding of the Chronicle of Current events in *Samizdat*. Concurrent with this Russian dissident movement Lithuanian Catholics were inspired to organise. In 1969 there was a large upsurge in protests in the USSR, possibly encouraged by a 1968 decree passed obliging local authorities to reply to letters from citizens within a month.³⁷ This decree was not strictly adhered to and most petition letters remained unanswered. Anatol Lieven argues that Lithuanian dissent never really went away after the violent insurrection was finally crushed. Spontaneous outbreaks occurred, ostensibly under the guise of ecological concerns relating to the mass industrialisation taking place, but usually the real reasons were fear of new Russian colonisation and the lack of recovery for the agricultural industries, which were the mainstay of traditional Lithuanian economy. These spontaneous outbreaks of public anger also highlighted the fact that people had not forgotten their lost independence or their hatred of Soviet rule. Sports victories or musical events often precipitated these protests as they provided young people with a reason to legally assemble in the first place. The first mass demonstration like this in Lithuania occurred in 1956.³⁸ Advances in the radio and television media would revolutionise the impact on Lithuanian society, that these types of demonstrations would have.

The Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania

The most widespread anti-Soviet publication in Lithuania, *The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*, was motivated by events occurring in Czechoslovakia and in the Russian capital. The choice of the title for the journal shows the closeness that the Catholic dissidents of

³⁴ Kristine Burinskaite, 'New forms of Anti-Soviet movement in Lithuania and Challenges to KGB after Prague Spring', *Genocide and Resistance Centre of Lithuania online publication*, (April 2009).

³⁵ Bourdeaux, p.86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.86.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.88.

³⁸ Lieven, p.103.

Lithuania felt with their Russian dissident equivalents.³⁹ The aim of *The Chronicle* was to disseminate the truth of human rights violations and discrimination against the Catholic faith occurring inside Lithuania. According to Rev Michael Bourdeaux and V Stanley Vardys, the hope was to mobilise the support of worldwide Catholicism in general and the Vatican in particular. The practise of priests creating manuscripts to be disseminated by nuns was born out of a total ban on religious literature between 1961 and 1965.⁴⁰ This was contrary to the Soviet constitutions official position on the separation of the church and state. The practise of priests creating written work condemning the USSR became widespread during the 1970's when the *Chronicle* was at its zenith.

From the very start of the occupation the Soviets had tried to neutralise the Churches' power. A governmental proposal to sever the Church's ties with the Vatican was vigorously resisted by the clergy. Despite intimidation and seductive offers not a single priest could be found to support this initiative. According to historian Tomas Remeikis, one report claimed that a priest sentenced to twenty-five years imprisonment was offered freedom, the parish of St John in Vilnius and a 100,000-ruble bribe to take on the initiative. He did not accept.⁴¹ The Soviets closed all Lithuanian monasteries and chapels, totalling 142. Catechistic schooling, religious processions and Catholic charity functions were all prohibited. The Soviets established parish committees, subordinate to local government administration, to keep watch over the priests and parishioners.⁴² An elderly Catholic priest told me:

The church was always important in the hearts of the people. After the occupation all property was nationalised. Somehow the church survived but during the occupation lots of priests were killed or deported, nearly all of them suffered from this or from being moved far away to another parish where they didn't know anyone. I can remember lots of my friends and people I knew who disappeared. It was forbidden to teach about religion, and you had nowhere to teach them except in their own homes. I did this as everyone did, but if you were caught or informed on then you would be arrested and put on trial. It is the job of a priest to teach children and to prepare them for Holy Communion. This was strictly forbidden. The Soviets basically thought that if they couldn't make adults believe in atheism they can at least deny the next generation any access to God.⁴³

When I asked him whether the church had contributed to Lithuanian nationalism and independence he answered:

Yes, I believe so, it was the church who recorded and published all the crimes that happened inside Lithuania. Bishops, Nuns and Priests were the first ones to stand up to the authorities and set that example. Of course, you had to be brave to do it as

³⁹ V. Stanley Vardys, *The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*, Vol.1, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1981), p.13.

⁴⁰ Jakubcionis, p.4.

⁴¹ Miniotaite, p.21.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Interview H.

many priests were arrested and exiled. It's hard to imagine exactly how many people were persecuted because of their faith. There were virtually no Bishops or Priests left inside Lithuania, but there were just enough faithful people left to carry out the important work of writing the truth and publishing these works. This had a big effect in America, where there were strong Lithuanian communities constantly campaigning. We got a victory later when the Pope visited Lithuania and then of course when we won our independence. The church was always involved at both national levels and local levels with the protests. It was illegal to print anything religious, but we did. It was illegal to marry people, but we did. You could not celebrate Christmas or Easter, but of course we did. Lithuanians have a lot to thank the church for from those days, and vice versa. We were not allowed to perform the normal functions of the church but that did not stop us.⁴⁴

By 1969, 40,000 fewer people lived in Lithuania than in 1897, according to the census data of that year.⁴⁵ This is despite of the great industrialisation process and related colonisation drive to create a Lithuania without Lithuanians.⁴⁶ The physical repression of the Lithuanian nation under Stalin had turned into the spiritual repression under Khrushchev, as the atheist communist regime rigorously pursued its attack on the Catholic faith. By 1947 only one elderly bishop, Kazimieras Paltarokas of Panevezys, was left alive in Lithuania, all others had been deported or killed. Despite the well documented de-Stalinisation and relaxation process that occurred with the ascendancy of Khrushchev, this did not translate to those struggling for freedom of faith. By 1960 the number of priests had almost reached its 1945 level of 929, until a new anti-religious campaign, culminating in the 1961 'program for the building of communism' rolled back these gains.⁴⁷

Religious education was banned, praying in school outlawed, crucifixes removed from school buildings along with prayer books, all church lands were confiscated by the state leaving just seven and a half acres including cemeteries and church buildings, compared to seventy five acres allowed to be kept by private land owners.⁴⁸ The Church was forbidden to have an income.⁴⁹ Between 1958 and 1965 thirty two churches were closed, entrance into seminary school was restricted and numbers reduced from seventy five to sixty, several sacred pilgrimage sites were destroyed; in 1961 the crosses on the hill of three crosses, and in 1963 the stations of the crosses in Vilnius.⁵⁰ Churches were routinely nationalised and turned into museums of atheism. Bishops were customarily sent miles from their own diocese including two famous cases, those of Vincentas Sladkevicius to Nemunelio Radviliskis and Julijonas

⁴⁴ Interview H.

⁴⁵ Census data collected from the Vilnius Centre for Genocide and Resistance, August 2017.

⁴⁶ Bourdeaux, p.86.

⁴⁷ Miniotaite, p.23.

⁴⁸ Bourdeaux, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁹ Interview H.

⁵⁰ Jakubcionis, p.9.

Steponavicius to Zagare.⁵¹ These cases ignited the population through petitions campaigning for them to be returned to their usual places of work. The petition letters that related to the cases of these two Bishops represent a tangible demonstration of how religion united the protest movement, which in effect fed Lithuanian nationalism.

Within four months of the official transfer of power, from independent Lithuania to the USSR and the LSSR in 1940, the church lost its legal rights. The position of the Church in pre-war Lithuanian society was of great importance.⁵² During my interview with a Catholic priest he helped develop the significance of the position of the church within local and national communities, and later interviews directly relate that this sentiment was reciprocal, but in the Kremlin's empire the legal status of the church was dictated by Lenin's 1918 revolutionary decree on the separation of the church and state.⁵³ The decree proclaimed freedom of conscience and religion, but deprived religious organisations of any property rights and the rights of a legal entity. The decree would not be rescinded until the 25th October 1990.⁵⁴

The Soviet constitutions of both Stalin (1936) and Brezhnev (1977) officially allowed the freedom of performance of religious ceremonies but denied the right to disseminate religious information.⁵⁵ In practise articles 124 and fifty-two of these constitutions served to prevent the faithful from practising their religion.⁵⁶ The repetitive persecution of bishops and clergymen caused a revolution in popular protest and created the conditions for *The Chronicle* to disseminate its material. At first *The Chronicle* was concerned only with the religious situation, but it expanded its coverage to the social and cultural scene and to other dissident activities, to be, as an English publication has phrased it, the true 'uncensored voice' of Lithuania and a sort of shield for the still-free or emigration bound dissidents. It urged the peaceful struggle for the guarantees of canonical rights to teach, preach, and administer the sacraments. Politically *The Chronicle* preferred an independent Lithuanian state in the conviction that this would guarantee the rights of all citizens, including religious believers and the church. In its first illegally published edition *The Chronicle* vowed to never cease publication until the restrictions on the church and religious rights of the faithful were reversed.⁵⁷ As *The Chronicle* developed, its program for religious freedom became inexorably linked with speaking out for freedom of nationality.⁵⁸ There is clear evidence in *The Chronicle* of an increasing attention being paid to nationalist questions with only marginal religious associations. This is symbolic of how the national religion of Lithuania is inextricably linked with Lithuanian nationalism. The assistance of Russian dissidents and Lithuanians in exile was

⁵¹ Jakubcionis, p.9.

⁵² Interview H.

⁵³ Vardys, p.6.

⁵⁴ Karen Dawisha, *Eastern Europe Gorbachev and Reform*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.167.

⁵⁵ Vardys, p.6.

⁵⁶ Data collected from the Vilnius Centre for Genocide and Resistance, August 2017.

⁵⁷ Vardys, pp.11-13.

⁵⁸ Bourdeaux, p.295.

of considerable importance to the survival of *The Chronicle*, as well as support from several other underground religious dissident publications including *Tiesos Kelias* (The Way of Truth), *Dievas ir Tėvyne* (God and the Nation), *Ausra* (Sunrise) and *Rupintojėlis* (Statue).⁵⁹

Publication of *The Chronicle* required great personal courage and devotion as it had to be collected, processed and distributed under a tight net of KGB agents and informants.⁶⁰ Such was the strength of feeling against Soviet repression of the Catholic faith in Lithuania that arrests and trials of those responsible for *The Chronicle* did not halt or disrupt its publication.⁶¹ In 1974-1975 the communists held four trials of the uncovered supporters of *The Chronicle*, sentencing: Petras Plumpa-Pliuira to eight years hard labour; Ms Nijole Sadunaite to three years in prison and three years of exile; Polvilas Petronis to four years' incarceration; Juozas Grazys to three years imprisonment; Virgilijus Jaugelis, V. Lapienis and Ms. O. Prancunaite to two years each. The harshest sentence was meted out to Russian Sergei Kovalev who incorporated *The Lithuanian Chronicle* into the editing of *The Russian Chronicle of Current Events*. He also supported Lithuanian dissidents in other ways. Kovalev was sentenced to seven years in a strict-regime prison camp followed by three years exile.⁶²

In 1978 the Soviets tried two other Catholic activists, Viktoras Petkus and Balys Gajauskas. Each received fifteen-year sentences. *The Chronicle* embodies a catalogue of events in Lithuania that would not otherwise have been acknowledged outside of the iron curtain. It lists circumstances of discrimination against students for their religious beliefs, fines and punishments imposed upon clergymen and laymen for the teaching of religion, KGB activities designed at intimidating the clergy and governing theology students, persons arrested for Lithuanian cultural activities, petitions made to each level of state authority within the LSSR and the USSR, open letters of protest written to both the Vatican and to the Secretary General of the United Nations.⁶³ In 1978 a group of priests formed the 'Catholic Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Believers' (CCDRB). Its goals were essentially equivalent to those of *The Chronicle*, but it did not act clandestinely. In the first five years of its existence it prepared fifty-three documents, primarily letters of protest and appeals to diverse audiences, such as Pope John Paul II, U.S President Jimmy Carter and other world governments, the U.N, leaders of World Council of Churches, the CPSU, and the hierarchy of the Lithuanian Church. The documents mirrored what *The Chronicle* had been circulating abroad about human and religious rights violations inside Lithuania. One after another the priests who formed the committee were arrested and imprisoned for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. The arrests of the priests had wide repercussions in Lithuania and in early 1984, 123,000

⁵⁹ Miniotaite, p.24.

⁶⁰ Interview H.

⁶¹ Arunas Streikus, *The Church In Soviet Lithuania*, (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2015), p.35.

⁶² Vardys, pp 12-14

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

Lithuanians signed a declaration of protest against the incarceration of the priests from the committee.⁶⁴

The sheer weight of numbers concerning the signing of this and other petitions during the dissident years demonstrates clearly the strength of support for the Catholic Church in Lithuania, and the role that the church played in igniting the flames of dissent which would eventually lead to independence. When I asked the question of the churches relevance to non-church going mother of two she responded:

We only go to church on Easter and Christmas but that doesn't mean that the church is not important. It is easily identifiable as part of Lithuania because the population is not so diverse like USA or England, so basically everybody is Catholic. When the country was living under Soviet rule, which technically forbid you to be Catholic, it is easy to see why protecting the Church became the same as protecting Lithuania.⁶⁵

To a historian studying post war and cold war Lithuania *The Chronicle* is a goldmine of previously rarely accessible information.⁶⁶ Nearly all *The Chronicle* has been published into English by Lithuanian-Americans in Chicago, as the diaspora, particularly in the U.S, took up the fight for human rights and an independent Lithuania from abroad. No fewer than 3,000 articles, documents, petitions, memoranda and letters were published by *The Chronicle*, in addition to sixty articles on religious persecutions in other parts of the USSR. *The Chronicle* remained an illegal, underground publication for seventeen years (1971-1988), making it the longest serving and most widespread anti-Soviet dissident publication in the history of the USSR.⁶⁷ Michael Bourdeaux argues that it is impossible to separate Lithuanian Catholicism from Lithuanian nationalism. He states that the Catholicism was the religion of the people, the only institution that was entirely Lithuanian and that the USSR could not assimilate into their totalitarian structure:

Attempts were made to by the Communist party to split up the synthesis between Church and nationality in Lithuania by emphasising class links with the 'brotherly' Russian nation and by propagating the concept of a new 'Soviet nation', these attempts failed.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Miniotaite, p.24.

⁶⁵ Interview C.

⁶⁶ The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania has provided much of the post-communist historiography with its raw data. Since the collapse archives have become more readily accessible, but prior to this the Chronicle was the main written account providing a counter narrative to the official atheist Soviet history of this era. Publications of a similar nature to the Chronicle would not be available without the endeavours of the contributors to the Chronicle and its translating into English.

⁶⁷ Miniotaite, pp 21-24.

⁶⁸ Bourdeaux, p.294.

Open Dissent to Soviet Rule, the Helsinki Accords, and the Protest era

The revolutionary protest movement which began with open letters to the various tiers of authority within the LSSR and USSR originated with the objection the citizens felt towards persecution of clergy. Revolutionary changes in communication technology provided a further organisational influence for the emergence of the Lithuanian dissident movement. Recordings, copying techniques and telecommunications in many ways eroded state regulation over the individual. A microfilm of a book smuggled abroad could be broadcast to millions of people worldwide through radio stations such as Vatican radio, Voice of America, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe.⁶⁹ The dissident and protest movement was suppressed by the KGB and communist party by means of threatening organisers collecting signatures as well as the signatories themselves. Nevertheless, the letters and signatures kept flowing relative with the continued Soviet religious and human rights violations occurring under the premierships of Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

On the 12th of September 1971, 2,010 believers from Prienai signed a letter addressed to the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Council of Ministers of the USSR asking for Father J Zdebskis to be released from his unfair imprisonment, followed by a second petition with 1,190 signatories. On December 11th, 1971, 1,344 believers signed a petition against the incarceration of Rev. Prosperas Bubnys from the parish of Girkalnis in the Raseiniai region. On the 24th of December 1971, 134 residents from Panevezys, including 47 members of the clergy petitioned Brezhnev for the release Bishop Steponavicius from exile, having been removed from his diocese for more than ten years. In February 1972, 17,054 citizens signed a protest letter addressed to Kurt Waldheim, the Secretary General of the United Nations, appealing for global support against the repressive penalties and imprisonments taking place inside Lithuania. The foreign press, television and radio widely publicised this document. The world's press reported the 17,000 Catholics who had dared to publically demand their rights. The memorandum noted that the KGB sought to disrupt the collecting of signatures and consistently failed to allow petitions to reach the head of the CPSU. The letter pleaded with the U.N to forward the correspondence and all its signatures to the Kremlin.⁷⁰

The struggle for religious rights in Lithuania became synonymous with the struggle for human and national rights.⁷¹ After the USSR signed the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, Helsinki monitoring committees began to sprout all over the empire. The human rights provisions of the Helsinki accords provided a new legal basis for Lithuania's struggle against the Soviet regime.⁷² The

⁶⁹ Miniotaite, pp 21-24.

⁷⁰ The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania *Underground Journal of Human Rights Violations*, Vol.1, no 1-9, 1972-74, originally published in Lithuania 1972-74, Translation published in Chicago, 1981, pp 4-59.

⁷¹ Richard J. Krickus, Showdown, *The Lithuanian Rebellion and the breakup of the Soviet Empire*, (Washington: Brassey's Inc, 1997), pp.37-39.

⁷² Miniotaite, p.24.

Lithuanian Helsinki watch group (LHG) was set up in 1976. It comprised of a wide range of the social stratum; experienced activist Viktoras Petkus, priest Karolis Garuckas, poet and former political prisoner Ona Lukauskiene-Poskiene, poet Tomas Venclova, and scientist Eitan Finkelstein.⁷³ The group cooperated with the Moscow-Helsinki group, and strongly emphasised its nonviolent character. In its first manifesto the LHG stressed that it sought the 'restoration of the independent Lithuania as it existed before its illegal occupation by the Soviet army on June 15th, 1940.⁷⁴ This was one of the foremost, overt, public declarations announcing the intent of independence that had occurred in Lithuania since the violent insurgency of the Lithuanian partisans 1944-1953. The fact that the manifesto evoked the same aim that the partisans had taken up arms for during the violent insurrection, points to a principle of continuity between these movements as one single, national desire for an independent Lithuania. This was a significant moment which did not go un-noticed. Arrests of members of the LHG, by the KGB, would eventually destroy the Lithuanian Helsinki Group. What followed was a more radical organisation called the 'Lithuanian Freedom League' (LFL). The explicit aim of the league was for independence from the Soviet Union. This was a precursor to the Sajudis political movement, who shared the LFL's goal.

In this period Lithuanian dissent was the most active in the entire Soviet Union. Grazina Miniotaite's analysis of public protests in the period 1965-1978 shows that 10.3% of all protests movements in the USSR were acts carried out by Lithuanian dissidents, despite the Lithuanian population comprising only 1.5% of the USSR's population. Over 66% of these protests were regarding religious rights, 33.3% were for national rights.⁷⁵ Dr Kristine Burinskaite's research for the genocide and resistance centre of Lithuania has shown that young people were the catalyst for these protests:

{...} In 1966, 43.2% of persons arrested for anti-Soviet activity were under twenty-five years old. In 1968 this reached 61.4%. They were writing articles, poems, leaflets, flying flags and founding groups.⁷⁶

The most notable of the youth protests was in 1972 in Kaunas. This ended in violent clashes with the militia. On the 14th May 1972, a secondary school student, Romas Kalanta, committed public suicide. Shouting 'Freedom for Lithuania', he set himself on fire in the centre of the city, outside the building where, in 1940, the 'Peoples Seimas' had declared the establishment of the Lithuanian SSR. The suicide was planned to coincide with President Nixon's visit to Moscow. To avoid political disturbances, the authorities kept his burial a secret, which provoked thousands of protesters onto the streets using the slogan 'Freedom for Lithuania'. Dozens were injured, and 500 arrests were made.⁷⁷ Kalanta's suicide and the

⁷³ Miniotaite, p.24.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.24-27.

⁷⁶ Burinskaite, p.6.

⁷⁷ Data collected at the Ninth Fort Resistance Museum in Kaunas, August 2017.

subsequent disturbances helped to further stimulate resistance.⁷⁸ A further thirteen cases of self-immolation were recorded in Lithuania in 1972.⁷⁹ Before setting fire to himself Kalanta left a note that read: 'Blame only the regime for my death'.⁸⁰ Interestingly *The Chronicle's* coverage of the Kalanta incident was almost submissive, showing the general conservatism of Catholicism in its view of suicide as a sin. The Lithuanian nation however has revered and remembered Kalanta as a hero in the fight against Sovietisation.

In accordance with the approaches Lithuania takes to honour martyrs, the site where Kalanta committed self-immolation has become a national memorial, and in the year 2000 Kalanta was awarded the Order of the Cross of Vytis by the Lithuanian Seimas. I have spoken with an eye-witness who remembers the days after Kalanta's suicide:

It was not published by the authorities, so mainly word of mouth spread the news. There were hundreds of arrests and possibly thousands of protestors in Kaunas in the days after Kalanta. Mostly young people took part, this is proven by the photographs that survived from those days- lots of young people with long hair as it was the height of the hippie era. The government would never publish facts like this that show that the situation in the Soviet Union was not as perfect as they wanted to portray. You could almost guarantee to be locked up just by being in the crowds protesting, and once you had a criminal record in the Soviet Union, especially for anti-Soviet crimes, you could say goodbye to a good job or a happy family life. I believe it is even more remarkable that so many people did protest, and it shows the strength of the people and the hatred they felt. They tried to make us believe that Kalanta was mentally insane but in fact it turned out that he was trying to become a priest, which was obviously a difficult path to choose in those days. Much later I read a book by his only brother that was written about Kalanta. In these days there were a great many protests, in Lithuanian.⁸¹

As well as staging the highest concentration of public anti-Soviet protests, Lithuania also had the most highly developed underground publishing network in the entire USSR. Further to those already mentioned were *Ausrele*, *Alma Mater*, *Ateitis*, *Salin Vergija*, *Vytis* and *Lietuvos Kulturos Archyvas*. Lithuania led the whole of Eastern Europe in the printing of underground dissident publication.⁸² In 1979 alone nineteen separate periodicals were in production. More than 2,000 book titles were published, including Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* and the *Memoirs of Juozas Urbys*, the last foreign minister of pre-war Lithuania.⁸³ All the underground press were resolutely embedded in the principle of independence. The secret

⁷⁸ Thomas Oleszczuk, *Political Injustice in the USSR, Dissent and Repression in Lithuania 1969-1987*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.155-177.

⁷⁹ Data collected at the Ninth Fort Resistance Museum in Kaunas, August 2017.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Interview C.

⁸² Bourdeaux, p.321.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp 318-322.

protocols of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact were therefore of significant concern. The pact was denied by the USSR until the Gorbachev era, and the majority of the nation did not know of its existence,⁸⁴ but it was in fact first published in the Lithuanian press in 1972. In 1973 more than 100 people from Lithuania and Latvia were arrested for copying and distributing the text of the pact.⁸⁵ The grass roots of the communist party were indeed shocked at the revelation of the pact's existence and this further weakened an already fragile party.⁸⁶

The most important Baltic documents of the struggle for independence appeared in 1979 and 1980. The appeal of the 23rd August 1979, on the anniversary of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, was signed by forty-five Baltic citizens, of whom thirty-six were Lithuanian.⁸⁷ It was the first time that the pact had been publically denounced and was addressed to the United Nations specifically challenging the illegality of the Soviet occupation. The dissident program in Lithuania became so large that by the late 1980's it could be said to have achieved the status of a national movement⁸⁸ however, many Lithuanians lived through this era with only the obscurest acquaintance with its existence. This can be attributed to the fact that many people lived through the Soviet era in Lithuania without wishing to ostensibly protest a system that they did not believe would ever really change to benefit them more than it already did.⁸⁹

Interestingly, of all the names that have gone down in the celebrated dissident history of Lithuania, few played a role in the politics of the nation after independence was achieved, and none have become a national leader, despite Lithuania having a tradition of publically honouring their dissidents and revering their martyrs.⁹⁰ One obvious reason is that those who took power in Lithuania after the collapse of the USSR were not dissidents, so may feel embarrassed when confronted with the heroism of others. This does not lessen them in the judgment of the public, for the similarly obvious reason that the mass of the public were not dissidents either.⁹¹

The Role of Lithuanian Exiles

After the Second World War, much of the political life of Lithuania moved west. Political and diplomatic representatives of Lithuania remained recognised in the United States, Great

⁸⁴ Interview I.

⁸⁵ Miniotaite, p.26.

⁸⁶ Interview I.

⁸⁷ Lieven, p.105.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁸⁹ Interview B.

⁹⁰ Interview E.

⁹¹ Lieven, pp.104-106.

Britain, Canada, Australia and France. This fact highlights that the vacuum left inside Lithuania of people able to intellectually and politically resist the occupying regime. In exile, political parties, journalists, diplomats and academics undertook activities on Lithuania's behalf.⁹²

In 1949 Lithuanian exiles in Germany reconstituted The Supreme Committee for Lithuanian Liberation (VLIK) and published The Lithuanian Charter. This document stated the main political and cultural objectives of resistance: the restoration of state independence and the preservation of national values. Lithuanians abroad contrived to strengthen Western resolve to refuse recognition of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States, only Germany and Sweden eventually granted *de jure* recognition.⁹³ As early as 1940, Lithuanians had visited President Roosevelt, who later confirmed that the U.S would not recognise the legitimacy of Soviet rule in the Baltics. Upon the initiative of Lithuanian-American groups, several U.S senate committees sat to consider the occupation of the Baltics.⁹⁴

In 1967 a conference in the U.S brought together all the political structures of Lithuanian exiles and produced a manifesto to mark February 16th, Lithuania's independence anniversary. The conference petitioned the U.N for support in restoring an independent democratic Lithuanian state. The United States took a strong verbal position in support for Lithuanian independence. This support strengthened during the Reagan administration. President Reagan proclaimed June 14th, 1982 - the commemoration day for mass deportation from the Baltic States – 'Baltic Freedom Day.' In 1985 Reagan again drew the world's attention to the issue by signing a special act which reminded the Soviet Union of its obligations, under the Yalta agreement of 1945, to allow free elections in the countries it occupied. Thanks to the activities of Lithuanians in exile the issue of the Soviet annexation did not vanish from the international agenda. The exiles served as a vital link between the underground activity in Lithuania and the wider international community.

Attitudes towards positive foreign influence regarding Lithuania's independence claim in the late 1980's and early 1990's, often take on an American centric view point. This can be explained in several ways. Firstly, the U.S took the firmest anti-recognition policy of the Baltic annexation after the Second World War and most other Western countries decided to follow the American position.⁹⁵ The position became known as the Stimson doctrine after the then U.S Secretary of State, and the non-recognition policy towards the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The U.S also allowed all three Baltic States to maintain their embassies in the United States for over half a century and treated them as legitimate representatives of the free and independent pre-war republics. Secondly, the vast cultural and political influence

⁹² Miniotaite, p.26.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Krickus, pp.38-41.

⁹⁵ Juris Dreifelds, *The Baltic States and the World, The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.376.

that the U.S was able to exert on a global scale has lent itself to many Lithuanians holding pro-Western ideals through an American dominated perspective, especially for those who viewed the USSR as illegally occupying their country. America seemed to represent a freedom that should be aspired towards, especially in its approbation for basketball: the national sport of Lithuania. Thirdly, due to the fact of mass emigration of Lithuanian nationals to the U.S and the continued activities of those Lithuanian-Americans, the situation inside Lithuania never completely disappearing from the agenda. Baltic-Americans played a major role in lobbying congressmen to issue statements supportive of Baltic independence,⁹⁶ and special recognition should go to the many publications that flowed from university press publishers across America, not least *The Chronicle*, translated into English in Chicago.

Perhaps the earliest catalyst for Baltic independence came when Baltic-Americans were able to convince U.S President Gerald Ford to include the Baltic States in the Radio Liberty broadcasts of 1974. These broadcasts were elevated to a new status in 1983 when they were incorporated into a separate Baltic radio division called the Baltic States Service of Radio Liberty, soon to be further incorporated into Radio Free Europe. This increased the administrative operations of the Baltic States and reinforced the distinct identities of the Baltic nations as separate from that of the USSR.⁹⁷ The political and psychological impact this had on its listeners cannot be overstated. Resulting radio broadcasts played an historic role during the violence in Vilnius in 1991, when Russian leader Boris Yeltsin publicly appealed to Soviet troops not to follow orders to shoot at unarmed civilians. Through Radio Free Europe, Yeltsin's words were able to be broadcast across the whole of the USSR to dramatic affect. Yeltsin gained new status in the eyes of democrats, Russian and non-Russian alike, and the crackdown that hard line conservatives in the Kremlin wanted fizzled out ingloriously.⁹⁸ When I asked one of my interviewees about American political support he told me I should assume that millions of Baltic votes probably convinced U.S politicians that supporting Baltic independence was a worthy endeavour.⁹⁹

The history of resistance in the era between the partisan war and the Gorbachev period can be viewed as linking the two movements into a continued process of anti-Soviet resistance. Both domestic and international events stirred the illegal protest movement inside Lithuania. Despite a relaxation under Khrushchev, the KGB was highly active in administering punishments to anti-Soviet dissidents. The level of repression of the Catholic church in this period was substantial, and relative to the influence that the church had on Lithuanian society. The arresting and deporting of clergy, nationalisation of church grounds and restriction of the administering capacity, strengthened the spirit of resistance and support for Catholicism. This directly influenced the increasing number of dissident publications and protests against Soviet rule. Before the period of open anti-Soviet protests, the activity of

⁹⁶ Dreifelds, p.378.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.379.

⁹⁹ Interview B.

underground dissident organisations, through their environmental, cultural, religious and historical activity, encouraged people to become more interested in history¹⁰⁰. The impact that this had was to popularise the protest movement to the point where an alternative power structure came into being.

¹⁰⁰ Burinskaite, p.7.

Chapter Three: The Gorbachev Era

A good nationalism has to depend on a principle of the common people, on myths of a struggling commonality

Andrew O'Hagan

Between 1985 and 1991 a large part of Soviet policy became a far-reaching determination to salvage the country from the accumulated difficulties of its past.¹ The reforms connected with this attempt to revitalise a stagnant economy and a bureaucratically entrenched communist party, have developed into Mikhail Gorbachev's legacy and are assigned to the last days of the USSR. His restructurings were aimed at keeping hold of the world super power status which the USSR had recently acquired, but had, in fact, the opposite effect. The Gorbachev reforms had specific meaning for the Baltic States, in particular Lithuania, which would become the first Soviet republic to announce its independence. This was an era where the national front parties in all the Baltic States would gain control of their national assemblies, signalling the end of communist rule within the SSRs. In Lithuania this was the Sajudis party. This chapter will assess how the Lithuanian protest movement developed into the announcement of independence, and how Lithuanian national resistance developed as the USSR attempted to hold on to the retreating republic. I will look at how the Supreme council of Lithuania promoted their independence campaign through the processes of re-nationalising Lithuanian institutions and through the passing of laws which invalidated the constitution of the USSR. The nationalism that arose in Lithuania in the mid-1980s can be viewed as a continuation of the anti-Soviet resistance that formed in the 1940s. The spirit of resistance had existed throughout the occupation, waiting for the opportunity to rise into the mainstream of public consciousness. Whereas the two previous resistance movements had been limited to their participants, the movement for an independent, democratic, Lithuania, was to captivate and encompass almost all the nation.

The Perestroika Period

The key reforms that Gorbachev introduced added impetus to Lithuanian nationalists' challenge for independence. Glasnost (openness) accepted that the Soviet Union had vast, varied and differing viewpoints, and permitted more freedom of their expression. Perestroika (restructuring) pursued the limiting of state authority over the economy and aimed to develop room for private economic initiatives. Democratisation provided for a reduced role of the communist party in Soviet society and Gorbachev's foreign policy reversed the quintessential

¹ Robert Strayer, *Why did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change*, (New York: M.E. Sharp, 1998), p.86.

Soviet assumption that the world was an arena of hostile rivalry between two enemy camps.² The implications for the independence movements which were gathering momentum in the three Baltic States were colossal. The national awakenings which erupted in the late 1980's forced themselves to the front of the political agenda of the Soviet Union against the wishes of its leadership.³ In 1985 there seemed to be no fresh crisis of nationalism in the union. By the end of 1991 every one of the fifteen union republics had declared their sovereignty.⁴ Gorbachev's reforms loosened the control of the communist party to the point where a one-party system no longer existed. This demonstration, that, after all, the communist party was not necessarily permanent or irreplaceable provided extra stimulus to the growing independence movement.⁵ This is a vital fact when explaining how Lithuania was able to win democratically elected independence, as the communist party had been the glue which held the union together.⁶

In 1952 Lithuanian membership of the Lithuanian communist party was at thirty percent, as opposed to ethnic Russians, who made up the majority. By 1957 it was fifty percent (this trend continued in later years: by 1970 it was sixty seven percent, and in 1985 it was eighty percent Lithuanian.)⁷ While some Lithuanians undoubtedly identified with the aim of Sovietisation and benefited from the system, the ever increasing number of Lithuanian nationals in the Lithuanian communist party led to the development of a nationalist segment of the intelligentsia within the party, which began to actively strive for the enhancement of national values.⁸ This coupled with the fact that the Soviet Union had failed to Sovietise Lithuania, ever since the occupation occurred, meant that a dormant national culture of resistance once more rose to the surface.

The potential of glasnost was first seized upon by intellectuals, writers, artists, and scholars. In the perestroika period the circulation of literary magazines exploded in Lithuania. At first many focused on the exposure of Stalinist atrocities, still an unhealed wound in the Lithuanian psyche. These turned into a more general critique of the Soviet socialist system. The first expressions of openness in Lithuania were tinged with nationalism. Concern for ecological matters, among other issues such as the disrepair of the old part of the capital city, and the proposed Soviet expansion of a Chernobyl type nuclear reactor at the Ignalina power station, led to a group of scholars and writers establishing the *Zemyna* and *Talka* environmental

² Strayer, p.87.

³ *Ibid.*, p.150.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.149.

⁵ J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.509.

⁶ Strayer, p.94.

⁷ Grazina Miniotaite, *Nonviolent Resistance in Lithuania: A Story of Peaceful Liberation*, The Albert Einstein Institution, www.aeinstein.org, 2001, p.21.

⁸ *Ibid.*

protection groups. As the environmental protest movement gained scope and influence, its social criticism and concern for national identity became more explicit⁹.

A secondary school principal remembers the change when politics could be openly debated. This was a stark change, which seemed to encourage anti-Soviet elements.¹⁰ He described to me how this new and exciting era of mass demonstrations began after such a long period where behaviour of this nature could mean certain incarceration:

Attending protests was exciting and very popular. I believe that normal people wanted reform and some recognition for the individual nationalities. The leaders of the protest movements wanted complete independence. Regime change seemed impossible and was not on my agenda. Soon it came into the forefront of the news though.¹¹

Many Lithuanians were caught up in the wave of protest and participation that organically evolved, having begun with Sajudis. I have interviewed people who contend that a wave of nationalism surfaced, developed and spread throughout Lithuania, evoking the memory of the partisan war and the cruelty associated with the Stalinist regime, and clearly identified the struggle of their generation with the previous insurgent movement:

We were aware of the movement for environmental concerns relating particularly to Chernobyl, this movement became an opportunity for us to protest for the exposure of the illegal occupation of Lithuania.¹²

Both these interviewees voted for Sajudis and both participated in the public protest movement. Seemingly though, their shared experiences of the protest movement vary in their desired outcomes and the degree of their support for platform of independence that Sajudis stood for. I interviewed a Sajudis party activist who was influential in his local area:

From about 1987 onwards it was possible to have heated debates and discussions on history and political philosophy. These started to occur in magazines and newspapers. This was also the case in Russia itself, there was a huge protest movement there too. Groups like the Writers' Union and Union of Social Sciences would publish articles condemning the Soviet authorities. That is how I remember Sajudis starting. By 1988 there was an active opposition to communist rule in Lithuania, and I am proud to have played my part. The party started in Vilnius and Kaunas and spread to all the towns across Lithuania. There were no professional politicians in the Sajudis at first, it was full of writers, journalists, philosophers, artists, musicians etc.¹³

Sajudis began its life with no funds, meeting rooms, or means of communications, yet within three months of its foundation it had become an alternative power structure to the ruling

⁹ Miniotaite, p.28.

¹⁰ Interview B.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Interview E.

¹³ Interview F.

communist party. At its first ever public gathering on June 21st, 1988 it displayed the tri-colour Lithuanian national flag for the first time since the Second World War, with 500 people in attendance. Three days later 20,000 people attended a Sajudis rally in the historic Gediminas square in Vilnius. The ability to organise a meeting on this scale without access to media communications revealed both the organisational potential of Sajudis and the gathering momentum of the nationalist cause. The rally was attended by Vytautas Landsbergis and Algirdas Brazauskas, two men who were to become leading political figures. In his speech Landsbergis stated that the goals of perestroika were the goals of Sajudis. Brazauskas, a member of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, took the opportunity to express solidarity with Sajudis, and thus began a new political career as a reformer and populist.¹⁴

Rebirth

The Nineteenth Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow in May 1989 concluded with a commitment from Gorbachev on the principles of perestroika. On the 9th July 100,000 people attended a Sajudis organised rally to welcome back the Lithuanian delegates to the Congress. National flags fluttered among the crowd and for the first time since the end of the war the national anthem of Lithuania was sung.¹⁵ Sajudis had printed 30,000 copies of the anthem and these were distributed by local party activists all around Lithuania.¹⁶ Brazauskas, in his address, demonstrated that the Soviet authorities were willing to concede some of the people's wishes, confirming that the funding for the expansion at the nuclear power plant at Ignalina had been withdrawn. I have interviewed an eye witness who attended that rally; 'That was the biggest one so far yet there was no trouble there. Sajudis volunteers kept the public order.'¹⁷ At the rally people were urged to boycott the Communist party newspaper *Tiesa* for its biased and deceitful information. Circulation of the newspaper is said to have fallen by 40,000 copies by August.¹⁸

Sajudis continued to hold rallies and every opportunity to invoke the struggles of the past was taken by organising their events to coincide with historic anniversaries. In this way the connection between Lithuania's past resistance and the present day was established in the minds of the people now taking part. The 20th July marked forty-eight years since the establishment of the Lithuanian SSR and saw various Sajudis orientated protests around the nation. Then on the 49th anniversary of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, on the 23rd August 1988, Sajudis held an event which is of particular importance to the growth of their authority in Lithuania. The Soviets had always claimed that as a result of a socialist revolution Lithuania

¹⁴ Miniotaite, p.30.

¹⁵ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, (Essex: Yale University Press, 1993), p.235.

¹⁶ Interview F.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Miniotaite, p.30.

had voluntarily joined the Soviet Union. They had denied the existence of the secret protocols of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, which were first openly published in Lithuania two days earlier on the 21st August¹⁹ (as noted earlier the protocols had been printed by underground press in 1972). Some 250,000 people attended the anniversary rally, making it by far the largest public gathering in post war Lithuania. I have interviewed a person present:

National flags were everywhere, we tied black ribbons to ours like we were mourning, which we were. The rally lasted about three hours and there were speakers from Sajudis, historians, representatives of the Catholic church, government officials.²⁰

There were corresponding rallies in Kaunas (50,000 participants), Siauliai (6,000), and Kretinga (5,000). After this day Sajudis support groups such as the one my interviewee belonged to, had a huge influx of support, both morally, physically and financially:

Sajudis was basically a second government after that. Not legally yet, but morally, they had mass support that no other organisation, including the communist party had. This support came from different sections of society, intellectuals, writers, philosophers, clergymen, teachers, professors, factory workers, literally everybody joined the Sajudis movement.²¹

The open anti-Soviet resistance of the late perestroika period differed from the violent resistance of the partisans through its non-violent nature and the comparative lack of community-based cells that was a common theme of the earlier organisations motivations. As discussed in Chapter one, whole villages would often leave for the forest together out of a sense of obligation and to defend the rural way of life. The civil war was viewed by many as a war between the country and city. The essence of the mobilisation to resist in the 1980s did however share the same theme of individuals accepting risk in resistance action against an opponent holding superior force.²² Participation in mass rallies during the mid to late 1980s was less likely to result in violent repressive powers of the government, yet this still held some consideration for those participants. More likely by far was the prospect of losing one's job, or even to have the same fate bestowed upon one's family.²³ This consideration affected many who chose to attend rallies during this protest period.²⁴ A former Siberian deportee and Sajudis activist told me:

Throughout the entire Soviet occupation of Lithuania, openly protesting or defying the authorities was a perilous prospect. In 1940 it would mean either loss of life or expulsion from your homeland. During the 1960's and 1970's punishments were less likely to include losing your life. By the time Gorbachev came to power huge numbers

¹⁹ Miniotaite, p.31.

²⁰ Interview F.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion, Lessons from Eastern Europe*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.236.

²³ Interview C.

²⁴ Interview B.

of Lithuanians could get together and protest. What we wanted was the same that those who went before us wanted. A free and independent Lithuania.²⁵

In 1940 Lithuania was a rural nation of strong communities. Villages maintained cooperative work ties and dense social ties. In some cases, families had existed on the same land for several hundreds of years.²⁶ In contrast fifty years of Soviet communism had destroyed many of these communities by the time of the perestroika period. Roger D Peterson argues that collectivisation and deportations obliterated the pre-World War Two rural societies, especially given the type of modernisation and state growth that occurred under the conditions of Soviet Communism.²⁷ The result being that a weakening of ties within communities occurred concurrent with Soviet command plans. This is reinforced by the fact that the Soviets banned social organisations, such as the Union of Sauliai and, as shown, worked to diminish the influence of the Catholic Church in society. The Soviets also sped up urbanisation which had a devastating effect on traditional rural communities. While acknowledging that, even in west, normal economic development in the twentieth century always resulted in the growth of urban centres at the expense of the countryside, the alteration was highly pronounced in Lithuania, precisely due to its rural and traditional nature. The result of dramatic and accelerated urbanisation was that by the time the protest age emerged more and more people lived in high-rise apartment blocks and were far less likely to know their neighbours or share the affiliation to one another, as did their countrymen forty years previous.

The formation of resentment, aimed at the Soviet regime, played a strong role in the reasons for people to openly resist, just as it had in the 1940's. However, the weakening of traditional rural based communities caused a decline in what Petersen terms hero status rewards. He states that status seeking did not play a huge role in motivating people to join the protests of the late 1980's. Also, Petersen argues that societies with less face to face contact generally do not dole out punishments for being a coward. Likewise, the value of being a hero in the eyes of a complete stranger was less appealing than in the eyes of intimate and long-standing family and communal associations. Although hero status remained important for potential leaders operating in a larger political arena, within the weakened communities of 1980's Soviet Lithuania, status was not easily translated into local influence. Lithuanians did not condemn one another for failing to take risks against the regime.²⁸

Peterson contends that this this lack of community-based cells could have nullified the possibility for the mass demonstrations that occurred against the Soviet regime, if it wasn't for the threshold logic that is safety in numbers, and a belief that under the new conditions

²⁵ Interview F.

²⁶ Petersen, p.236.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.241.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.242.

of perestroika and glasnost the Soviet regime would react less strongly than at any other time since the occupation. My interview with a Sajudis activist supports the contention that the expectation of severe punishments for openly protesting against the Soviet regime had all but disappeared by the time that the underground dissident movement turned into the period of mass protests.²⁹ Petersen's work on the reasons why Lithuanians chose to once again resist the Soviet authorities provides an interesting study on sociological reasons why people joined in a protest movement. However, it ignores the possibility that a continued tradition of Lithuanian resistance united the entire period of Soviet occupation. It can be contended that a national mythologised past, encompassed by the guerrilla fighters, the underground dissident movement, the impact of the Lithuanian diaspora, and the propensity for young people to act upon resentment they felt towards an occupational regime when armed with the knowledge of the violations that occurred particularly against national institutions such as the Catholic Church, imbued Lithuanians in the late 1980s to act upon anti- occupier fervour. While acknowledging that the anti-occupier zeal that existed in the 1940s was greater than it was in the 1980s, the popular nature of the mass protest movement demonstrates that the enthusiasm to protest had not vanished from the Lithuanian psyche.

Petersen argues that a mundane acceptance of the current situation existed in Lithuania in the 1980s. It could be argued that a sense of nationalism, stirred by the mythologised past of resistance, rose to counter this apathy. When the conditions for mass protests became available, huge numbers of Lithuanians chose to continue this tradition of resistance. This is reinforced by the number of participants who joined the protest movement and challenged the USSR. The communist regime of the 1980s did not deport people on anything like the scale of their 1940 equivalents, this meant that the need for secrecy was less prevalent and this gave the mass demonstrations added impetus to evolve themselves from a movement started by influential writers, journalists and other dissident leaders, into an organic, people led, protest movement. By the time that the movement gained mass support dissident leaders were only needed to set plans in motion and to negotiate with the authorities after the event.³⁰ I interviewed a local Sajudis agitator, who took part in organising protest events:

I only played a minor role, but it was significant. People like me did this across Lithuania. My own thinking was, well someone has to go, might as well be me, after all that I had been through (in Siberia) I was not going to miss the opportunity.³¹

The Baltic Way to Freedom

The memory of Baltic independence, of the forcible takeover and the brutal processes of Sovietisation had provided a moral and political basis for Baltic nationalism.³² The effect of

²⁹ Interview F.

³⁰ Petersen, p.240.

³¹ Interview F.

³² Strayer, p.152.

Glasnost on the Lithuanian bid for disclosure of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was that it enabled the re-evaluation of Soviet history. This re-examination was significant for the rise of nationalism in Lithuania, if not shattering for the chances that the union had of sustaining its status.³³ It led to the call for the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact to be declared null and void, with obvious implications for the questionable legality of the occupation of Lithuania:

The deal between Hitler and Stalin to divide the territory of Eastern Europe became the main cause of the independence politicians, the new openness in society meant that this news was broadcast throughout Europe. In those days we started to get excited that things were beginning to move forward. Sajudis was gaining momentum and was supported by similar groups in Latvia and Estonia.³⁴

This was the central symbolic demand of the Baltic delegates at the congress of people's deputies in Moscow in 1989.³⁵ A series of mass public demonstrations climaxed on the 23rd August 1989, the 50th anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet pact, in an event which bought the plight of the Baltic States in front of the world. It became known as the Baltic way. A human chain which linked the three capitals of the Baltic nations and stretched for over 370 miles and involved as many as two million people.³⁶ Nationalist and Catholic songs were sung, and the word freedom was passed down the chain.³⁷

The Baltic Way attracted international news coverage with its originality, scale and euphoria.³⁸ The event involved such large scale popular participation that practically all of my interviewees remember whole towns leaving to head towards the chain as it formed.³⁹ An eye witness and participant of the Baltic Way described it to me:

It was organised by local Sajudis activists, we told people where it would be possible to join the line. Nothing like this had ever occurred before. It was exciting, people held banners with anti-Soviet slogans on and sang old Lithuanian songs. Slogans like 'freedom' and 'red army go home' were held high. Helicopters flew overhead. I feared that they may be military helicopters, but they weren't they had journalists in them. This, above all else, bought the occupation of the Baltic nations into the minds of the international community. It was on the radio afterwards and soon we heard that it was a world record for people uniting like that over such a large distance, spreading for that many miles and over three different nation's capital cities. I am very proud to have been a part of that.⁴⁰

³³ Strayer, p.100.

³⁴ Interview E.

³⁵ Strayer, p.153.

³⁶ Uffe Elleman-Jensen, Denmark and the Baltic States, *The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.397.

³⁷ Interview B.

³⁸ Kulo Arjakas, Half a Century in the USSR, *The Baltic way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2006), p.73.

³⁸ Interview E.

³⁹ Interview B.

⁴⁰ Interview F.

The experience of those that travelled to the human chain, knowing the significance of the date, reinforces the connection between events in 1939 and 1989. This is significant in explaining the resistance tradition that existed throughout the Soviet occupation. Although most participants in the Baltic Way had not lived through World War Two or the Soviet take-over, it was part of their shared national experience, it belonged to the collective memory of all Lithuanians, and provided further impetus for the leaders of the independence movement. The Baltic way also demonstrated the political power that this purely symbolic act had in a media age.

The date of the demonstration was significant, purposely planned and everybody knew what it meant. This was how Sajudis did things. We always planned events for special occasions, anniversaries etc. This way, we would get more support because the significance elevated the protest to be part of a bigger picture. We also knew that television and radio would convey the story of the protest around the world, and with the inclusion of our friends Estonia and Latvia, the occasion grew in significance.⁴¹

A few months after the Baltic Way demonstrations, the elected Soviet Congress of people's deputies admitted the existence of the secret protocols of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, long denied by the Soviet government, and declared them illegal and invalid. This was a signal of triumph for Baltic nationalism, as it undercut the moral and legal basis for the Baltic States incorporation into the USSR. This triumph for the Baltic delegates took a year and a half of intense struggle in the Congress alone and had been ongoing ever since a 1985 U.N resolution on Baltic self-determination.⁴² Finally on the 24th December 1989, in a dramatic second vote, 1,435 delegates of the congress voted for declaring the secret protocols of the pact illegal, 251 voted no and 226 abstained.⁴³

The growth of Baltic patriotism was advanced, reflected and stimulated by the national elections of 1989 and the republic elections of 1990. The obvious reality of the wide spread support for Sajudis persuaded local communist party organisations to embrace major elements of their platforms and to enact them through law through the republic's supreme Soviets.⁴⁴ Highly conservative leaders were removed, and the Lithuanian Communist party officially severed relations with the CPSU. On the 10th March, under the conditions of Gorbachev's perestroika, the first multi-party, multi-candidate elections in Soviet Lithuania took place. The result was a defeat for the communist party and a gigantic victory for the Lithuanian popular front, Sajudis. One theme to come out of my interviews is that virtually

⁴¹ Interview F.

⁴² Arjakas, p.71.

⁴³ Juhan Aare, Baltic Delegates at the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, *The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.305.

⁴⁴ Strayer, p.155.

everybody voted for Sajudis.⁴⁵ This demonstrates the populist nature of the independence revolution that occurred in Lithuania.

Independence declared

On March 11th, 1990 the democratically elected Parliament of Lithuania declared the will of the nation – the restoration of the independent State of Lithuania.⁴⁶ March 10th is now one of three Independence Day holidays in Lithuania. The way to achieving this legal status had been a long and testing one, and one which the USSR would not accept without a fight. The Soviet Union immediately placed an embargo on Lithuania and blocked supplies of vital medical equipment, cut off the supply of fuel and limited the supply of gas. Hardships like this were almost devastating to endure for some families, and made some people question the intelligence of the independence declaration:

Life after the USSR was extremely hard. There were shortages in fuel, transport links were closed, many people suffered from skin disease due to the lack of warm clean water. For some people these hardships were blamed on Moscow this hardened their spirit of resistance, but for many, like me, I blamed our government, because they are supposed to protect the people, and they clearly couldn't.⁴⁷

On the 23rd March the Soviet Union sent military air craft carrying three thousand paratroopers who headed in tanks to surround the Palace of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania.⁴⁸ They only backed down when US President George Bush and defence secretary Dick Cheney delivered an ultimatum to Gorbachev on the 24th March, based on a threat to end an on-going US-Soviet trade agreement which included a clause on the USSR discontinuing military manoeuvres and lifting the economic sanctions recently placed on Lithuania.⁴⁹ The stance taken by the U.S. here was counter to the previous inaction of the administration, and was gained largely by the continuous struggle of the Lithuanian diaspora in the U.S. The position that the international community took, particularly the U.S. would gain significance as Lithuania proceeded along the road to complete independence.

Lithuania quickly enacted laws into the Lithuanian Republic's constitution, to invalidate the previous Soviet constitution. One of the most pressing tasks facing the Supreme Council was the issue of nationalities in the multi-ethnic republic, whose borders had been subject to such

⁴⁵ Interviews A, B & C.

⁴⁶ Vytautas Landsbergis, Reestablishment of Independence in Lithuania, *The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.203.

⁴⁷ Interview B.

⁴⁸ Kazimieras Motieka, Parliamentary Road of Restoration of the Independence of the Baltic States, *The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.224.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

frequent change. The first Lithuanian nationality law was adopted on the 3rd November 1989. The Law identified categories of persons who were or could become nationals of Lithuania:

1. Persons who were nationals or permanent residents prior to 15 July 1940, their children and grandchildren who are or have been permanent residents of Lithuania.
2. Persons who had a permanent place of residence in Lithuania if they were born in Lithuania or they were Lithuanian descendants provided they were not nationals of another state.
3. Other persons who at the time of the adoption of the Law were permanent residents for at least two years and had employment in Lithuania⁵⁰.

Thus, the law permitted individuals who arrived in Lithuania during the Soviet era to obtain Lithuanian nationality. Upon registration they had to swear an oath of allegiance to the Lithuanian Constitution and laws.⁵¹ Soviet era immigrants were measured only as potential nationals as they were guaranteed the right to freely decide on their nationality. After they accepted nationality they too had to take a pledge of loyalty to Lithuania. The latter never had firm permanent legal status in Lithuania as they were immigrants holding Soviet nationality.⁵² After the restoration of an independent Lithuania they became foreigners if they did not use the option provided for by the 1989 Law. It must be recalled that this choice was not obvious or easy at the time. In 1989 or even 1990, it was still difficult to foresee the collapse of the Soviet Union, and many people did not believe it would happen in the manner that it did.⁵³ Taking an oath of allegiance to Lithuania required certain convictions and the law did not provide for the possibility of dual nationality.⁵⁴

A second Citizenship Law in Lithuania was adopted on 10 December 1991. It established those who were to be considered Lithuanian nationals. The new law ended a liberal period when any resident could apply for nationality after two years of residence and introduced stricter requirements. It was subsequently amended several times; 19th November 1992, 16th July 1993, 3rd October 1995, and 6th February 1996.⁵⁵ The law identified groups of individuals eligible for Lithuanian nationality. Initially those included:

1. Nationals of Lithuania prior to 15th June 1940 including their children and grandchildren if they had not acquired nationality of another state.
2. Permanent residents of Lithuania between 9th January 1919 and 15th June 1940 within the territory of the present Lithuania, their children or grandchildren if they continue to reside in Lithuania and are not nationals of another country.
3. Persons of Lithuanian origin who left Lithuania prior to the 16th February 1918, if they have not acquired nationality of another state.

⁵⁰ Kristine Kruma, *Citizenship Policies in the New Europe*, (Riga: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), p.90.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.91.

⁵³ Interview B.

⁵⁴ Kruma, p.91.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.92.

4. Persons who acquired nationality in accordance with the Law on Citizenship effective prior to 1991.⁵⁶

The writing of these new nationality laws further shows the link between the most recent independence movement and the partisan war for independence. Evoking the 16th February 1918 declaration of independence and highlighting the illegality of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, establishes the central arguments for the entire period of Lithuanian resistance 1940-1990. These historic connections, dating back to 1918 and 1940, hold obvious connotations on the collective memory of Lithuania and the national traditions of independence and resistance to foreign rule.

Former President Vytautas Landsbergis states that the approach of going through the U.N, with a decolonising principle based on the doctrine of self-determination, was resisted by Sajudis as they knew that a Soviet Veto would spell the end of the Baltic Assembly's chances. Nothing but a full, comprehensive declaration of independence would gain enough attention and state irrevocably that Lithuania was no longer to be ruled by the USSR.⁵⁷ The next and vital step in achieving what they had already pronounced to be true was to be recognised by other nation states. Without recognition Lithuania's name could not reappear on the maps of Europe and indeed of the world.⁵⁸ This process had been started by the elected delegates of the Sajudis party to the Congress of People's Deputies. Meetings with diplomats from Sweden, Germany, USA, Great Britain and others took place in 1989 and 1990.⁵⁹ The message that came back was one of caution. The political situation was that no one could interfere with the domestic policies of the USSR and nobody wanted to ruin the chances of the newly proclaimed democratisation process began by Gorbachev. The involvement of the wider international community in this vital recognition process provides a link to the nature of the Lithuanian Soviet experience of foreign influence and support. The situation mirrors the partisan war fifty years earlier, through the legal implications in regard to the status of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and the Atlantic Charter, which would provide the basis for the U.N Charter. The necessity for foreign involvement in the crucial domestic organs of Lithuania, whether through sympathy, support or annexation are an ingrained feature of the Lithuanian psyche regarding their national battle for independence.

The position of Iceland regarding recognition of Lithuanian independence was different to all other nations. On September the 24th 1990 during a session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the Icelandic minister of foreign affairs J. B. Hannibalsson openly

⁵⁶ Kruma, P.92.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.204.

⁵⁸ Ineta Ziemele, The Occupation of the Baltic States from the aspect of International Law, *The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.65.

⁵⁹ Bronislovas Genzelis, The Baltic States and the World, *The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), pp.389-394.

declared the need to open dialogue with the Baltic States.⁶⁰ His words were the first public support for a situation which Moscow was using all means possible to obstruct. On the 2nd February 1991 the Icelandic government passed a resolution to officially establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Lithuania.⁶¹ It was the first nation to do so. The date is significant as the Icelandic Foreign minister had recently travelled, illegally, to Vilnius on the 19th January 1991 after hearing of the tragic events of the night of the 13th January.

The Singing Revolution

That night, a column of Soviet T72 tanks rolled along the streets of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. Their objective was to take control of the broadcasting and parliamentary capabilities of the newly independent state of Lithuania. In the days leading up to the 13th the President of the Supreme Council of Lithuania and head of Sajudis, Vytautas Landsbergis, had made appeals for the people of Lithuania to travel to the capital to stand vigil and form a human barricade against the impending military force of the USSR.⁶² Local networks of the national party were vital in that they organised buses to ensure that people from all corners of Lithuania could respond to the call.⁶³ Tanks had already surrounded some strategic buildings, as the USSR again stepped up its military preparedness between the 10th and 13th of January.⁶⁴ Mikhail Gorbachev sent a telegram to the Supreme Council of Lithuania on the 10th January delivering an ultimatum to re-establish the constitution of the USSR.⁶⁵ The ultimatum accused Lithuanian leaders of creating the difficult situation which may require a military response⁶⁶, and the instigation of direct rule from the Kremlin.⁶⁷ The voice of America radio broadcast events in the days before and after 13th January, as did Radio Free Europe and France Radio International.⁶⁸ US Secretary of State, Baker, gave Moscow a warning that the USA would not tolerate the continued build-up of Soviet units in the Baltic States and urged Gorbachev not to confuse the two countries partnership in Iraq as a green light to storm the Baltics.⁶⁹

The Lithuanian response to the Gorbachev ultimatum was that the elected Supreme Council of Lithuania did not have a mandate by the Lithuanian people to re-establish the constitution of the USSR. An appeal was made by Vytautas Landsbergis and signatories from the Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Russia, including Boris Yeltsin, to the UN, from Tallinn, on the 13th

⁶⁰ Genzelis, p.393.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.394-396.

⁶² Interview C.

⁶³ Interviews F.

⁶⁴ Ignas Simulionis, *Lithuania 1991.01.13*, (Vilnius: State Publishing Centre, 1992), p.59.

⁶⁵ Appendix 3.

⁶⁶ Landsbergis, *Reestablishment of Independence in Lithuania*, p.247.

⁶⁷ State publishing centre Vilnius, *Lithuania 1991.01.13*, (Vilnius, 1992), p.320.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.318.

January 1991.⁷⁰ The appeal rejected any foreign coercion by the USSR and outlined that the use of force would constitute an international crime on the sovereign territory of Lithuania, and asked the U.N to summon an international conferences on behalf of the Baltic States.⁷¹ The Gorbachev ultimatum made a political miscalculation by insisting that the constitution of the USSR was to be re-established. By using the phrase re-established, he was admitting that the constitution of the Lithuanian Republic was already in effect in Lithuania, thereby unwittingly acknowledging the situation of Lithuanian independence. Sajudis had made pledges in the elections and received the voters mandate to renew independence.⁷² The Lithuanian government prepared to form in exile to protect the constitution as the intensity of the situation increased, while Soviet forces began to block communications and transport, and secure strategic buildings in and around the capital.⁷³

I have interviewed a participant from that night in the Lithuanian capital:

It started a day or two before, I can remember that on the Saturday I heard the radio call by Landsbergis making an appeal for the people to defend important buildings in Vilnius. Every night thousands of people gathered and sung songs, laughed, joked and built fires to keep warm. We blocked the buildings so nobody could get into them. We held hands and formed human chains. I remember speaking with my Father and saying to him that nothing would happen to me because the Russians would not fire on unarmed civilians. I left the house on Saturday saying that I would be fine. In the end that was the case for us, but for others it was not. Landsbergis knew that the Soviet army was coming.⁷⁴

On the orders of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Chairman of the Peoples' Council of the Soviet Parliament Rafik Nishanov and his Deputy Chairman B. Oleinik, ordered Soviet armoured vehicles and loaded personnel carriers to rehearse manoeuvres on the 9th of January, four days before the television tower, radio tower and parliament building were attacked. On the 10th January Gorbachev accused the Supreme Council of Lithuania of trying to re-establish a bourgeois system and insisted that the mass of Lithuanians were demanding a return to direct Presidential rule.⁷⁵ During the hours that followed there was a dramatic build-up of military preparedness in and around the capital city Vilnius and the second city of Kaunas, as the Soviets gradually stepped up their preparations by eliminating National Defence buildings and isolating transport capabilities, before targeting the communications and governmental capacity of the Lithuanian nation.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Vytautas Landsbergis, *Lithuania 1991.01.13*, (Vilnius: State Publishing Centre, 1992), p.30.

⁷¹ Appendix 4.

⁷² Landsbergis, *Reestablishment of Independence in Lithuania*, p.248.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.247.

⁷⁴ Interview C.

⁷⁵ State publishing centre, p.18.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.18.

My interviewee continued:

On Saturday night I had been in a disco with friends and it was late when we got out I remember being very cold. As we were walking back to the radio building we heard gun shots and explosions, which we later found out were grenades. We went towards the noise cautiously and saw the tanks. From one of the tanks there was a loud speaker announcing that the Supreme Council of Lithuania had been overthrown and was no longer in charge, and that we were all to go home. It was hard to know what to do, some people were shouting not to leave, because the announcement was false. They announced that a curfew was in place. The crowds broke when the shooting happened and then formed again. I remember thinking they cannot shoot at unarmed people, but they did. I remember seeing people rushing to get bodies out, passing bodies over fences and into cars. Everybody else stayed and shouted at the Russians to stop. It was very frightening, the most scared I've ever been.⁷⁷

The Lithuanians who stood up to the Soviet forces in that period, did so in defence of their nation. That the sentiments for acting in this manner were so strong, is testament to a continued resistance tradition. When called by the political leader of their republic to form human chains against Soviet tanks, thousands did, in a remarkable demonstration of loyalty and commitment to the independence movement.

Historian J. N. Westwood has provided a formative account of Russian history in the twentieth century. In his book *Endurance and Endeavour*, he describes the importance of the disclosure of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact as the fresh stimulus that the independence movement needed. Regarding the January attack in Vilnius he states:

{...} The Red Army's participation was excused on the grounds that too many Lithuanians had refused to obey their conscription orders, but the use of tanks and security police against unarmed citizens surrounding public buildings in the Lithuanian capital was really a lethal show of force.⁷⁸

Westwood contends that hard line conservatives in the communist apparat had hoped that the January incident would lead to widespread riotous protest. When the Lithuanian people followed the orders of Landsbergis and continued to peacefully protest, they won a victory for non-violent means of resistance: 'The Soviet authorities were unwilling to convert a bloody confrontation into a massacre'.⁷⁹ This was a significant triumph for non-violent means of resisting, first advocated by a section of guerrilla fighters in 1946, when they formed the United Movement for Democratic Resistance. As discussed in Chapter one, the partisans voted against this in 1947 and continued to violently resist. The same cause that the partisans

⁷⁷ Interview C.

⁷⁸ J. N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, Russian History 1812-1992, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.539.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.540.

fought and died for united the entire period of Soviet occupation, eventually gaining success through non-violent means.

At 2.00 am on the 13th January a voice from a loud speaker on-board one of the tanks made an announcement in the name of the National Salvation Committee of Lithuania; a Moscow backed puppet regime which intended on re-taking the national parliament and re-installing communist authorities. The voice of the NSC said that all power had been taken into its own hands and that the Supreme Council of Lithuania had ceased to exist. The NSC announced Presidential rule and a return to the constitution of the USSR and the Lithuanian SSR.⁸⁰ Without warning the Soviet paratroopers opened fire on the unarmed crowds gathering around the television tower. The Lithuanian radio and television broadcasts aired until the Soviet troops, which included elite Special Forces, took the buildings by force and in the process murdered 14 unarmed civilians and injured hundreds more. One of my interviewees remembers hearing the shooting through the radio, as it broadcast to the whole nation:

We had heard tanks passing through Alytus on their way to Vilnius throughout those few days. I was too old to go, but my sons were both there. I stayed at home and listened to the radio all the time. It was terrifying because as they were broadcasting the radio, with news of what was happening, we could hear gunshots in the background. When Vilnius radio was taken over the line went dead, but a few minutes later we heard a broadcast from Kaunas radio, stating that Vilnius had been occupied but Kaunas was standing in solidarity with us. It's quite emotional remembering it.⁸¹

According to Eduardas Razgauskas, head of public relations for the Ministry for Health, a total of 642 people were recorded as wounded that night; 416 people from acoustic injuries resulting from tank and gun fire, fifty two from gunshot wounds, 136 from traumas relating to beatings with guns, eleven from burns relating to grenade blasts, twenty one from mixed traumas, fractures and contusions, and six from poisoning related to gun powder, smokescreens and gas from blasting charges. Eleven men died on the spot, one woman and two men died later hospital. Another victim died several days later in hospital from a gunshot wound sustained that night. One Soviet soldier lost his life, and another was treated in a Vilnius hospital for a leg injury.⁸²

Lithuanian writers refer to the night as a massacre, comparing it to the Kraziai massacre of 1893, where Cossack troops attacked that Lithuanian centre of Catholicism⁸³. This is further evidence of how historic, mythologised events are evoked to encourage a spirit of resistance that has been woven into the Lithuanian consciousness and contributes to the conscious

⁸⁰ State publishing centre Vilnius, p.21.

⁸¹ Interview A.

⁸² State Publishing Centre, pp.366-367

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.367.

narrative of Lithuanian history and the collective Lithuanian memory. The Lithuanians who stood in front of Soviet tanks, did so to protect the vital national institutions and their nations independence, knowing, consciously or not, that as they acted they too were becoming part of that resistance and independence tradition.

On that night in January nonviolent resistance achieved a significant victory in a remarkable demonstration of determination:

The crowds began to shout louder and louder, 'Lietuva, Lietuva' (Lithuania, Lithuania) and 'Freedom, Freedom'. We were only armed with songs. We never ran, we stayed brave, we stayed and protected the buildings even though tanks had crushed people and we had seen the bodies. I was asked to give my testimony to a national newspaper which I did. The newspapers had photos of everybody who had been killed. We went back for days after to stand and defend the parliament and the press houses. The newspapers from all around the world were writing about the tragedy. Landsbergis came back onto the steps of the Parliament to give a speech to raise the morale of the crowds. This was his style, he always speaks very poetically. For days thousands of Lithuanians stayed to protect these buildings.⁸⁴

Foreign television and radio journalists inside Lithuania broadcast the events they witnessed to the whole world. Despite the 13th January coinciding with the commencement of desert storm, President Bush made an urgent appeal to Gorbachev to practise tolerance and peacefulness to the people of the Baltic States.⁸⁵ The discovery of the presence of Special Forces troops was a blow to the Moscow regime, which was to attempt to display the events as an act of provocation by Lithuania, and to deny all knowledge of prior planning of the assault. In his memoirs, one of Gorbachev's former secretaries confirms that he did indeed give his permission for the attack to occur.⁸⁶ The USSR Internal minister Boris Pugo announced on the 14th January, from the Ministry of Internal affairs, that neither the CPSU nor the USSR Supreme Council had given orders to fire on unarmed civilians.⁸⁷ Despite Gorbachev denying this, to the Lithuanian independence movement this meant that either the General Secretary of the USSR and Supreme Commander of her armed forces was either lying or had lost control of his military.⁸⁸

The National Salvation Committee had been established by members of the communist party of Lithuania and was founded as the new Lithuanian government. This was a tactic of disinformation used to give the impression that the constitution of the Republic of Lithuania

⁸⁴ Interview C.

⁸⁵ Landsbergis, *Reestablishment of Independence in Lithuania*, p.247.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.246.

⁸⁷ State publishing centre, p.321.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.323.

was not in effect, meaning that the situation in the country was unstable, thereby signifying that the elected Supreme Council of Lithuania were not in control of their state.⁸⁹ These were familiar Soviet tactics aimed at spreading confusion, to allow the military to restore the favoured Soviet condition.⁹⁰ It has gone down as a failed coup in Lithuania, and is viewed as illegal aggression by a foreign power.⁹¹ The head of the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania telegrammed Gorbachev protesting against the unlawful and brutal military intervention and evoking Gorbachev's Nobel peace prize in a plea to end the violence and to allow the prosecution of the perpetrators.⁹²

The Sajudis movement, under the conditions of Perestroika, became so popular that almost an entire nation voted for its independence platform. After the disclosure of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and in an era of enhanced tele-communications, the broadcasts Landsbergis gave, pleading for ordinary people to openly resist in extraordinary ways, culminated with the events in January 1991 in Vilnius. This event captivated the entire nation, through television and radio and on the streets of the Lithuanian capital.

Following the facts of Soviet aggression and the broken promise Gorbachev had made to resolve national problems in a peaceful manner, the obstacles to recognition of Baltic independence had been removed. In the days between 14th and 22nd of January 1991 the leaders of Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Finland, USA, Netherlands, Moldova, Poland, Georgia, Germany, France, Great Britain, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Israel, Australia, Romania, Austria and Switzerland, all expressed their support for the Lithuanian Parliament, their solidarity with the Lithuanian people and their condemnation of Gorbachev's handling of the recent nationalist uprisings.⁹³ On The 18th January, Pope John Paul II expressed his deep concern and affection for the people of Lithuania, encouraging them to believe that their independence would be restored.⁹⁴ NATO threatened to break off relations with the USSR if the violence continued. There were anti-Soviet demonstrations at Soviet embassies in New York, London, Canberra and Paris.⁹⁵ Further demonstrations around the world followed, enabled by the vast coverage from international journalists. Support for the democratic process also came from the European Parliament when they suspended aid programmes with the Soviet Union; they did so to express their solidarity with the Baltic States and the democratic forces in Russia.⁹⁶ The lack of Baltic unity in the 1920's and 1930's became a precondition of the subsequent occupation of the Baltics. The shared suffering, the need to survive the post-war period, to resist Russification and preserve their own cultures and traditions, created a widespread receptiveness in areas of cooperation during the

⁸⁹ State Publishing Centre, p.88.

⁹⁰ Landsbergis, *Reestablishment of Independence in Lithuania*, p.248.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² State Publishing Centre, p.29.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.322-343.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.343.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.339-341.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.343.

national awakening of 1989-1990.⁹⁷ The most widely recognised moment of this was the Baltic Way on the 23rd August 1989.

All fourteen of the unarmed Lithuanians who lost their lives defending the vital interests of their nation's freedom on night of 13th January 1991 were posthumously awarded the Vytis cross first degree. Their names are etched into Lithuanian resistance history as part of the continued struggle for independence, that for many dates to 1795 and Lithuania's incorporation into the Russian empire. The January martyrs are viewed as among the last victims in a fifty-year war for independence.⁹⁸ The songs that they sung while gathered around the television and radio towers, press houses and parliamentary buildings have caused these events to go down in Lithuania's history as the singing revolution.

Twenty-eight years have now passed since Lithuania declared its independence. The whole point of Sajudis was to underline for the world that Lithuania was not, and never had been, legally part of the Soviet Union. In the year 2000 the Lithuanian Republic registered her right to claim, through international law, on the Compensation of Damages Resulting from the Occupation by the USSR. It is the only Baltic State to have done so.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Romualds Razuks, Unity of the Baltic States, *The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005) p.464.

⁹⁸ Interview E.

⁹⁹ State publishing centre, p.67.

Concluding Remarks

There is no such thing as part freedom

Nelson Mandela

The history of modern Lithuania has been that of an incessant struggle for survival and the preservation of the country's existence and identity.¹ Violent uprisings have been crushed by the far superior forces of occupying powers. Less spectacular, but more effective, have been the solid and recurrent nonviolent mass resistance movements to endeavour for ethnic, cultural, political and religious accommodation. Through nonviolent confrontation, Lithuanian leaders, dissidents and activists have facilitated the preservation of the nation's self-image and have imparted to people the awareness and determination needed at critical historical turning points, particularly in the years 1990-1991. The participation of hundreds of thousands of Lithuanian nationals during the campaign for withdrawal from the Union gave the independence movement popular legitimacy and has become a part of a national conscience.

Gorbachev's reforms had already mitigated some of the harshness of the Soviet regime and had created the strategic opportunity for action. However, the Lithuanian contagion could have precipitated a backlash and an immediate reversal to former totalitarian practices had it been different in character. This is supported by the weight of the international response to the violence of January 13th. On the 14th January the Prime Ministers of Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Denmark and Finland lodged protests to Gorbachev, followed by NATO representatives in Brussels declaring that the actions of the Soviet army in Vilnius could harm the good will that currently existed. These denunciations were followed by radio broadcasts and articles in newspapers across Europe, the U.S. and Canada. Radio Free Europe reported a White House statement condemning the use of force against unarmed civilians at 8:00am on the 15th January. By 7:00pm that night, political leaders from Georgia, Moldavia, Kazan, Germany, USA, and Canada were all widely reported to lend their support to Lithuania and to condemn the use of force that had occurred in Vilnius.² The nonviolent character of the movement made the difference. It bought sympathy from the international community and created support in Russia itself. It led to division within the Moscow power elite and, ultimately, it made the use of force appear preposterous.³

¹ Grazina Miniotaite, *Nonviolent Resistance in Lithuania: A Story of Peaceful Liberation*, The Albert Einstein Institution, www.aeinstein.org, 2001, p.53.

² State publishing centre, *Lithuania 1991.01.13*, (Vilnius: State publishing centre, 1992), pp.324-327.

³ Miniotaite, p.66.

Lithuania was the first nation to declare its full independence from the USSR and did so through a war of laws.⁴ The example Lithuania set was followed by Latvia and Estonia. Just one week after the bloody night in Vilnius, Soviet OMAN forces attacked the Interior Ministry of Latvia in Riga, killing four.⁵ As the reality of the failed reconstruction of the USSR dawned on Gorbachev, he instructed the OMAN forces to act. This manifested itself in several organised attacks on customs posts. Because of the lack of official international recognition, which the Baltic States were still waiting for, the USSR was able to make an argument that the constitutions of these Baltic Nations had not received legitimacy, and as such the constitution of the USSR still existed, making the borders involved illegal.⁶ On the 31st June seven Lithuanian border guards were murdered by Soviet forces at the Midininkai border with Byelorussia.⁷

Lithuania honours the fatal casualties of 1991 as fallen heroes in the same manner as the partisans, the martyrs persecuted in the dissident years, and the fallen protestors from January 1991. Statues, street names, posthumous decrees and military decorations are typical forms this honouring takes. Annual independence-day celebrations continue to evoke their names and pay respect to those who gave their lives in the struggle versus the USSR. In this way the continuation of a struggle for freedom from the USSR connects the entire fifty years occupation and unites the nation's collective memory and shared national experience. While far from being alone among nations who suffered inside the Soviet bloc, the particular way the various resistance movements united through religion, nationalism, and their shared history, despite being decades apart, feeds the national identity and resistance tradition. The fact that Lithuania was the first of the Soviet republics to withdraw from the USSR, also signifies the culture of resistance that had formed inside the nation. This is an important fact for Lithuanians today who take pride in their freedoms hard fought for. As a history teacher from the South-West of the country, close to the Polish frontier told me:

Through the early years when I began my teaching career you could be bullied if you expressed a fondness of independence or any sentiments which contradicted the Soviet Union. It was career suicide and possible physical punishments could follow. It was still possible to be imprisoned and exiled. I always held onto the belief that Lithuania was illegally occupied and should be independent. I was raised to be patriotic and for Lithuanians that meant resisting being Sovietised. That's why we remember the forest brothers, the priests, and the activists. They are heroes in our nation. But even as I attended the rallies and the protests, like the Baltic road (Baltic Way) I never dared to dream that the regime would go. I think this is because the Soviets controlled the information to such an extent, that even though we could see that things were changing, we were force fed lies that the Union would evolve, reform

⁴ Robert Strayer, *Why did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change*, (New York: M.E. Sharp, 1998), pp.175-176.

⁵ Lubova Zile, *The Last Act of Totalitarianism, The Baltic Way to Freedom*, (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p.259.

⁶ Miniotaite, p.60.

⁷ *Ibid.*

and survive. That's why I teach about the struggle to children today. It is important for Lithuanians to understand and respect our history. The one thing that I always hated about the USSR was that it tried to remove the individual personality of each person and thereby removing the identity of the nation."⁸

Her words are echoed in the nationalist writing of the long struggle for independence and are typical of an individual who believes in the nationalist mantra, the opposing force that nationalism is to Marxism. However, I have found that these unfaltering nationalist views are not representative of all her generation. Another teacher, of a similar age, told me:

I'm not sure about the real politics of the protest movements in Vilnius and Kaunas, but I think a lot of people just went along because it was exciting. If anyone had asked me to speak out alone against the Soviet Union I would not have done it. I don't believe many would. It was not like a revolution was in my mind, but when people had the chance to demonstrate with impunity, they did so. I never imagined that the Soviet Union would ever finish. It seemed to me to be too large to just vanish. I also do not agree that leaving it was necessarily the best thing to do. Afterwards we had no fuel, no heating, not food, no hot water because Gorbachev turned them all off and life was very hard. Idealists and romantics either forget that or didn't have to suffer those problems. We had children who needed food. That is always the main concern, not who makes the laws or what currency you use. Leaving it without much negotiations meant that normal people suffered greatly by the standards of the day. I do think that Lithuania was one of the main reasons that it ended, as we were the first brick in the wall to create a gap, if enough bricks fall the wall will collapse. However, I felt that life was very hard after the Soviet Union. You may read that the USSR was bad but really it was not. Everybody had a job, every factory produced one type of something. One brand of car, one brand of clothes, one brand of washing up powder, one type of bread, one type of meat etc. That was Communism in practical terms. Before independence there was never anything in the shops accept the Soviet style of products, and we had everything we needed. After independence there were a lot of new products in shops, but nobody had any money to buy any of them.⁹

The juxtaposition of these views from two people of similar age and the same profession is symbolic of a divide in the Lithuanian psyche, and a contradiction of history. Lithuanian nationalists writing of their historic battle against occupation, have often failed to note or admit that a certain sovietisation did occur. Patriotism and pride in the national resistance tradition are tangible however, identification to the safety of life inside the USSR, when compared to the turmoil of leaving, has resulted in this juxtaposition. There exists a natural inclination, possibly through geographical and ethnic ties, towards identification with Russia, as Slavic peoples, as opposed to any western democratic nation. This sense of identification

⁸ Interview E.

⁹ Interview B.

with the USSR, despite all the facts of aggression, repression, and human rights violations throughout the occupation, are in stark contrast from the official history of the independence movement, which evokes and emphasises its continuation of, and correlation to, earlier Lithuanian nationalistic challenges to foreign invaders. When I asked about the way the partisans are represented in modern Lithuania an interviewee remarked:

You have seen all the battle grounds, crosses and monuments and read the testimonies and the books, but personally I feel that it has been a bit exaggerated. In Ukraine there was a very big war against the Soviets but I'm not sure how big Lithuania's was."¹⁰

It could be argued that this view stems from the controlling of information that the Soviets established and the effect this can have on people's views of the world around them. On the ideology of communism, my interviewee continued:

I think in theory communism is a great idea, it only failed because the leaders failed, not the idea of communism, has capitalism not failed also? During Soviet times the state looked after people a lot better than it does now. I am not referring to Stalinist times, or times of war, but the years I lived through were not anything like that.¹¹

Having been born under Soviet conditions the normalisation of the relationship between his nationality and membership of the USSR are not circumstances that he struggled with. He continued:

There was a dual nationality, Lithuanian first, but Soviet dominated. This was the way it was and to get along you should respect that condition. In language for example, nobody ever forbade you to speak Lithuanian, but if you didn't speak Russian, you could not travel or work etc.¹²

Without a more heightened research endeavour on this topic, one struggles to conceive how representative this is of his generation as a whole, yet his views on Soviet dominated nationality and on the safety of life inside the USSR, are a tangible reflection of the Sovietisation that did occur.

Where Sovietisation failed however is in its aim of wiping out Lithuanian nationalism, Catholicism, and its drive for a colonised and Sovietised Lithuania. Those that suffered deportations, violence and other harsh repressions, were far more likely to hold stronger nationalist views about independence from the Soviet Union. Those that did not personally suffer these hardships, have tended to express more dissatisfaction with the immediate conditions that independence offered. However, this interviewee still participated in the largest ever anti-Soviet protest, voted for Sajudis, attends all independence ceremonies, and

¹⁰ Interview B

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

follows the custom to hang the tri-colour national flag outside his house to mark these occasions.

Some of the hardships felt in the immediate aftermath of independence can be explained by the position that Lithuania was in as independence was declared. The republic lacked its own currency, armed forces, border guards, diplomatic services, and its economy was wholly integrated with that of the Soviet Union and overwhelmingly controlled from Moscow. When compared to Eastern European satellite states, who possessed these formal attributes of statehood, Lithuania was not ready for the full, unequivocal declaration of independence that the nationalists demanded and achieved. Even if good will had existed on behalf of the Soviets, the task of separating Lithuanian institutions from Soviet ones would have been a hideously complicated process.¹³ Lithuania had to construct these institutions from scratch, rapidly and under precarious political insecurity. The long struggle with Moscow for political reform had effectively delayed effective economic reform and the presence of Russian minorities made that reform more difficult.

The independence reforms that Lithuania had to rapidly undergo, were also conducted in economic conditions worse than the great depression of the 1930's. Industrial production declined by more than thirty percent two years on a row, 1989–1991, real wages fell by forty five percent, fuel prices rose by 10,000 percent, while inflation climbed for a time to more than 1,000 percent per annum and real unemployment soared.¹⁴ During the initial period of independence, struggling to survive, could inevitably lead to the conclusion that independence was not as great achievement as the nationalists suggested it was:

Social welfare systems protected normal people and, generally, poverty didn't exist, as the staple foods etc were all available. Expectations of material wealth did not exist as they do in a capitalist society, so nobody felt poor. We all worked hard, we all grew a lot of our own food, in the traditional ways, and everybody had what they needed to survive. The first years outside of communism were close to chaos in Lithuania. The threat of war, the disintegration of stable living conditions and economic uncertainty made exiting the union far harder than living in it had been."¹⁵

The abrupt change from life in the USSR to life as a European State was not an ideological shift in the lives of ordinary people. A natural inclination to affiliate and identify with other ethnic Slavs exists, despite having a place in the European community. It was rather a change in perspectives necessary in a stagnant, declining union of States, and a chance to re-establish a proud tradition of independence that had been repressed over many years. The testimonies of contemporary Lithuanians, when taken with the volume of secondary evidence regarding

¹³ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, (Essex: Yale University Press, 1993), p.316.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.317.

¹⁵ Interview B.

the brutality that the Soviet Union practised, are paradoxical to the fond nature that many remember of life in the USSR:

There was more security provided by the Soviet Union than there is in the EU. In the E.U prices are rising, and wages are falling. We never needed much money in the Soviet Union, whereas now, money is everything to everyone.¹⁶

The national myth of Lithuanian resistance to powerful adversaries and foreign invaders has become part of the Lithuanian psyche and is reinforced to this day through national celebrations and ceremonies that salute Lithuania's fallen heroes and dissident activists. Young cadet groups continue to emerge and honour a continuous nationalist program to supplement the history of Lithuania's struggle for independence. Lithuania refers to its medieval ancestry to further evoke its nationalism and to provide a continued narrative of this path through the ages, to present day Lithuania. Interestingly the nationalism that formed in Lithuania and grew strong enough to produce the independence movement went hand in hand with the importance of the Catholic religion to Lithuanians. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is a seminal work on nationalism. Central to his argument on the rise of Nationalism is that, as the importance of religion in societies has lessened over time, Nationalism has risen to replace the space that religion once occupied.¹⁷

This makes Lithuanian nationalism particular, in that the national religion of Lithuania is central to Lithuanian nationalism. Catholicism and nationalism went hand in hand throughout the period of resistance. Historian Robert Gildea's definition of nationalism also suggests that Lithuania's indistinguishable duality of nationalism and religion may be a form of nationalism that defies the accepted historiography surrounding the phenomenon:

{...} Nationalism is the feeling that belonging to a nation is more important than belonging to a province, class, social order or religious group, it's the struggle for a state to defend the interests and identity of that nation.¹⁸

Both Anderson and Gildea state that nationalism is a relatively new phenomenon, only emerging over the past two or three centuries.¹⁹ However, it is contended that all nationalisms construct and imagine themselves as the contemporary epoch of an ancient line. This fits the nature of Lithuanian nationalism, which always evokes its ancient past. This imagining of the past aided the continuation of the fight for independence that began with the forest brothers, united the dissident years and the eventual political battle for an independent republic. Without this imagining, in relation to their national ancestry, these movements could have been separated into the era of their being and not become the

¹⁶ Interview B.

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 2006), pp.10-12.

¹⁸ Robert Gildea, *Barricades and Borders*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.52.

¹⁹ Anderson, p.24.

national tradition or culture that they are. It is precisely in the way that Anderson describes nations as imagining that they belong to a history which connects them, that Lithuanian's view themselves regarding the independence struggle. Anderson also places nationalism as the opposing force to communism, with obvious inferences for the Lithuanian experience of forced communism and the rise of nationalism to challenge that way of life. The patriotism that nationalism inspires²⁰ was a certain feature of the self-sacrifice that Lithuanian citizens displayed in the partisan war, through the sacrifices of Catholic dissidents, and again in January 1991.

In early 2017 I spoke about this research project with a group of thirty or so fifteen-year-old history students, in the small rural secondary school in Virbalis. The talk was arranged by one of my interviewees who works in the school. The subject matter was my project and the historic links between both World Wars, the occupation and present-day Lithuania. I wanted to gauge how young people felt about the Soviet era, that they didn't live through, but their parents did. They had been studying the Second World War, so I began with Lithuania's position on the eve of World War Two and incorporated this thesis into the hour-long seminar. Interestingly in the last ten minutes of our discussion the questions that arose were not particularly related to the partisan war, the Catholic Church or the independence movement. They all orientated around Lithuania's position in the twenty-first century, Putin, Trump, and the situation in the Ukraine. The young Lithuanians I spoke with do feel an increased threat from present day Russia, despite full NATO and E.U. membership.

The history of Lithuania's independence struggle against the Russian nation was not lost on them. In 2015 Lithuania re-introduced nine-month national service for males aged eighteen who do not take up a place at a university. They do this with NATO backing. This move is tantamount to providing an increased defence force. One of the lasting legacies of the partisan movement is that large numbers of Russians did not settle inside Lithuania, and perhaps that fact could still have repercussions in the twenty-first century. Russian speaking majorities in areas of the Ukraine gave President Putin a pretext to occupy those areas. Similar regions exist in Lithuania today although they are fewer and less pronounced than in the Crimean Peninsula. If this fact does prevent Russia from conducting a Ukraine esc occupation of territory inside the Lithuanian Republic, it could be possible to attribute this to the legacy of the forest brothers.

Lithuania has made efforts to distance itself from Russia politically by applying for full E.U and NATO membership. This has lessened reliance on Russian energy and agriculture. However, Lithuania cannot distance itself geographically, geopolitically or historically from her large

²⁰ Anderson, p.141.

more powerful neighbour. The threat of Russian involvement in the domestic policies of the Republic of Lithuania remains their primary national security concern.

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Appendices

Appendix One - Interviews

Interview A (1926 – 2016)

Interview A was a former dairy farm manager and communist party member. He witnessed a Jewish massacre near Vilkauskis in 1941. His brother fought with the partisans and died in combat in 1945. I interviewed him on the 26th October 2014.

Interview B – Born 17th February 1957

Interview B is currently the principle of a secondary school. He served in the Soviet Army in 1979. I interviewed him on the 11th March 2015, 27th July 2016 and 14th February 2017.

Interview C – Born 14th December 1967

Interview C is currently a hair dresser in Lithuania's capital city Vilnius, mother of two, Grandmother of two. She witnessed and participated in the Baltic Way and the events of January 1991. I interviewed her on 4th April 2015 and 18th February 2017.

Interview D – Born 11th June 1976

Interview D is a music teacher in Lithuania's capital city Vilnius. She was present during the protest movement that erupted in Lithuania during the late 1980's. I interviewed her on 4th April 2015.

Interview E – Born 27th October 1958

Interview E is a secondary school history teacher and member of the nationalist cadet group, the Sauliai society. She is well known locally for her role in organising annual independence parades with the youth section of the cadet group in Vilkauskis, and for supporting the independence movement during the national re-birth. I interviewed her on 13th February 2017 and 16th February 2017 (Independence Day).

Interview F – Born 22nd May 1943

Interview F was deported to Siberia as a four-year-old in 1948 and returned to Lithuania in 1960. He became an influential local Sajudis activist and campaigned for independence

during the Gorbachev period, attending all of the major rallies that Sajudis organised between 1988 and 1991. I interviewed him 13th February 2017.

Interview G – Born 19th May 1931

Interview G was a former partisan networker who conducted espionage for partisans in and around the Alytus region. He passed on vital information and his family allowed partisans to hide themselves and their weapons in the family barn. He was deported for his anti-Soviet crimes in 1952. He returned to Lithuania in 1963 and worked as a school janitor. One of his brothers fought and died with the Lithuanian partisans'. I interviewed him on 21st February 2017.

Interview H – Born 2nd May 1925

Interview H has dedicated his life to the Catholic church of Lithuania. He has been a priest with the dioceses of Vilkaviskis for over sixty years. As such he lived through the entire period of Soviet occupation, and as a member of the clergy witnessed the compressive attempt that the Soviets made to reduce the importance of Catholicism inside Lithuania. This attempt failed. I interviewed him on 18th February 2017.

Interview I (1929-2017)

Interview I worked as a university professor following his Ph.D. in Marxist economics in Moscow. He remembered seeing his school teachers and local priest being deported in June 1941. He witnessed a major partisan attack in Gizai in 1947, to which a monument still exists. He was a card carrying communist for reason of expediency, but relinquished his membership following the exposure of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact in 1989. I interviewed him on 9th August 2015, 25th July 2016 and 11th February 2017, three weeks before his death from Cancer.

Interview J – Born 21st July 1935

Interview J lost her father in the Second World War and lived in one of the most turbulent districts in the civil war, close to the border with Latvia. She speaks fluent Russian, Latvian and Polish as well as her mother tongue Lithuanian. Two of her brothers joined the partisans, both perishing between 1948 and 1952. I interviewed her on 1st July 2017.

Appendix Two - Appeal by Vytautas Landsbergis to the people of the Republic of Lithuania
December 22nd 1990:

In case the Soviet Union resorts to violence and forcibly terminates the legal operation of the Lithuanian state authorities, the people of the Republic are asked to:

1. Adhere to the principles of disobedience and non-cooperation with the occupation authorities.
2. Give no support for the occupants' and their collaborators' efforts at creating a constitutional basis for their authority.
3. Take no part in referenda, rallies, demonstrations, meetings and celebrations organised by the occupation authorities.
4. Give no support to the occupants' and their collaborators' press.
5. Lend support to the underground press.
6. By labour and enterprise help the country avoid chaos and hunger,
7. Help preserve the archives, of the resistance period in particular, that have national and historic value.
8. Resist all provocations and harbingers of misinformation.
9. All deputies and Sajudis activists are asked to give no testimony to the occupation authorities who have no right to administer justice.
10. Administrators of law and order are asked to give no support to the imposed legal order.
11. Let everyone remember the only Lithuanian laws are valid in Lithuania and that no citizen can be charged with an offense against Soviet law, such an act being an offense against the Lithuanian state.
12. Keep records of crimes committed by the occupation forces and the collaborators: acts of violence, arrests, plunder and destruction of state, cooperative, and personal property.
13. Lend moral and material support for the victims of repression by the occupation authorities.
14. Lend assistance to people hurt by physical violence.
15. Resist the Sovietisation of culture and education.
16. Use any opportunity to demand unconditional restoration of the activity of democratically elected state institutions.
17. Until independence is restored all political parties and organisations that have supported the Act of March 11th are asked to refrain from internal political strife and to pursue the common goal, end of occupation.
18. Regional and municipal councils, Sajudis councils, and Sajudis groups are expected to prepare plans of action in case the "X" day arrives.

Vytautas LANDSBERGIS.

Appendix Three - Telegram to the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.

January 10, 1991

The situation which has developed in your republic, as well as its sharp aggravation in the past few days, compels me, as President of the USSR, to appeal directly to the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR.

It is necessary to look the situation in the eye and see its real causes. They are stipulated by flagrant infringements and deviations from the constitutions of the USSR and the Lithuanian SSR, by the violation of the political and social rights of citizens', and by the aspiration, cloaked by democratic slogans, to implement a policy which is aimed at re-establishing a bourgeois system and which is opposed to the interests of the people. Responsible for this is the Supreme Council of the Republic, as well as those who ignore constitutional laws, resolutions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, and the decrees and appeals of the President of the USSR.

The situation has essentially reached a standstill. The necessity of finding a way out of the current situation requires that a speedy measure be taken. All-union bodies are receiving appeals of public political organisations, industrial collectives, and citizens of all nationalities from the republic. People are demanding the re-establishment of constitutional order and guaranteed organisation of security and normal living conditions. Having lost faith in the policies of the current leadership, they are demanding that presidential rule be introduced.

I propose that the Supreme Council of the republic immediately and completely re-establish the validity of the constitutions of the USSR and Lithuanian SSR, and revoke the anti-constitutional acts which have been adopted.

The Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR must fully understand its responsibility for the people of the republic and of the USSR.

Mikhail GORBACHEV

President of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Appendix Four - Appeal to the United Nations Secretary General Mr Javier Perez De Cuellar.

We the undersigned Supreme Council Chairmen of the Republics of Latvia, Lithuania, the RSFSR, and the Republic of Estonia, in executing our signed statement of January 13th, 1991, appeal to you requesting:

1. The immediate summons of an international conference of the United Nations to solve the problems in the Baltic States.
2. In connection with this, the postponement of the November 29, 1990, U.N. Resolution No. 678, concerning events in the Persian Gulf.

With deep respect and hope that we will be understood,

Anatolijs GORBUNOVS

Chairman

Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia

Vytautas LANDSBERGIS

Chairman

Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania

Boris YELTSIN

Chairman

Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

Arnold RUUTEL

Chairman

Supreme Council of the Republic of Estonia

Tallinn, 13 January 1991

Appendix Five - Appeal to the People of Lithuania

Government of the Republic of Lithuania

Printed February 2nd, 1991

The foreign aggression against the Lithuanian state and the Lithuanian nation continues. The behaviour of Soviet troops may become more brazen, cruel, and provocative.

We are convinced that in this decisive period of trial Lithuania has only one effective and undefeatable weapon, expressive of our Baltic and Christian culture – that of nonviolent protest, of people's self-control and calm endurance. We appeal to all the people of the country, the youth in particular, who are the most conscious of injustice, and we urge all to resist provocations of the foreign troops, to refrain from any acts of physical resistance so desired by the enemy. We shall win by maintaining the honour of the Lithuanian state in the face of the world community of nation.

Vytautas LANDSBERGIS

Chairman of the Supreme Council of Lithuania