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**Lithuanian Diaspora:
An Interview Study on the Preservation or Loss
of Pre-World War Two Traditional Culture among
Lithuanian Catholic Émigrés in Western Australia and
Siberia, in comparison with Lithuanians in their Homeland**

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Notre Dame Australia

2008

Submitted by Milena Vico

Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate's knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Candidate's Name

Date

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ABSTRACT

This study is designed to ascertain the cultural changes which have taken place over a period of fifty years within three distinct Lithuanian communities. Of these three, two communities –one in Western Australia and the other in Siberia –were part of the post-World War Two (WWII) diaspora. The third is still living in Lithuania.

I set out to determine the extent to which, during the period of fifty years covered by this study, cultural practices, values and beliefs have been maintained and lost by those who participated in the interviews carried out as part of the methodology of this thesis. This study is an historical empirical investigation which employs qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. In this way, it determines the extent of the retention or loss of those core markers which I have identified as constituting the *essence* of the pre-war Lithuanian culture.

Presentation of the study's research and findings has been divided into four parts:

- an overview of the history of Lithuania from its origins to the end of WWII in 1945;
- a description of the core markers of the pre-war Lithuanian culture in order to set the context;
- three detailed descriptive accounts, one for each group investigated, to examine the difficulties and challenges faced by the participants in each group in preserving their native culture; and
- a conclusion which draws comparisons between the three groups in terms of the study's hypotheses regarding retention or loss of the chief features of the pre-war Lithuanian culture over the set time period.

The findings show that each of the groups investigated has retained at least some of their pre-war cultural heritage. The group which maintains the strongest sense of 'Lithuanian-ness' was the group still living in Lithuania. The two groups of the Lithuanian diaspora in Western Australia and Siberia, although retaining some common core of the pre-war culture, are very distinctive.

The Lithuanian group in Western Australia, has retained a sense of 'Lithuanian-ness', but has also adapted to such an extent to the dominant culture that the traditions, values and beliefs now reflect the new environment. Therefore, although the old *émigrés* were born in Lithuania, they have not been able to preserve their culture in such a way that it could be passed on to their children. It seems likely that the future of the pre-war Lithuanian culture in Australia is close to extinction.

The Siberian group, due to the strong connections formed with the homeland, has continued to maintain a high level of the original culture. The old *émigrés* have been able to keep alive the interest among their children and grandchildren, and thereby preserve a continuity of the Lithuanian culture.

This research reveals marked complexity in the situation faced by the three groups investigated and shows that the broad comparisons implied by the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study represent an oversimplification of what is actually a highly variable and nuanced reality.

If the language, the customs and traditions disappear
and religion is ignored completely ... then you have no hope
of continuing to be a Lithuanian ...

(Alfonas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, Western Australia, 2003)

We could not fight the Russians ... they had the tanks,
but we had our language, our religion, our traditions ...
we maintained our national identity ...

(Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2004)

We lost everything ... our native language was about
the only thing of value we were able to preserve ...

(Jonas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, 2004)