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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

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CHAPTER 9

PRE-WWII LITHUANIANS IN LITHUANIA: THE PRESERVATION OF THEIR IDENTITY

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> 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, 2004).

By the end of WWII Lithuanians were enduring a Soviet occupation for the second time. By occupying Lithuania through military force, the Soviet Union ignored the Ribbentrop- Molotov Pact and the Atlantic Charter once again violated the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939 and the Atlantic Charter, to which all the Allies were to refrain from territorial occupation (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 297). Once more the people of Lithuania had to negotiate the issues of cultural identity and continuity in a shifting political context.

The influence of this occupation in the rural and urban areas with regards to the continuance or otherwise of the traditions, values and beliefs that I have identified to be the key features of the pre-war Lithuanian culture, will be the focus of the rest of this chapter. I will consider this particularly in the light of interviews conducted with Lithuanians who have lived under Soviet occupation for more than four decades.

To survive the New Order imposed upon the country, most of the Lithuanians had to conform to a regime which contradicted their traditional values and beliefs and go into 'internal exile'. According to the English historian Alexandra Ashbourne, in her article *Homo Sovieticus and post Soviet Lithuania*, internal exile means "paying lip-service to the regime in power, while sharing one's real thoughts only with those who are entirely trustworthy – a natural reaction to living in a society riddled with informers" (Ashborne, 2000, p. 53). Asbourne claimed that conformity is a natural human instinct for preservation and often dominates during occupation; and maintained that although there are individuals ready to fight to defend their beliefs and values, the majority traditionally fosters conformity for self-preservation, albeit for the most part only on the surface. In Lithuania internal exile was a stance or demeanour adopted by most of the population, who were living in a society not immune from informers. In this occupied society, every

aspect of daily life was difficult, as the Soviet ruling authorities believed that individuals could be manipulated if kept occupied, struggling to fulfil the most basic chores. Jadviga, who was living in Vilnius at the time of the Soviet occupation, remembered the hardship of all those years.

> It was very hard with the Soviets, everything was difficult and we did not have any freedom … I used to go to work everyday with my husband we both worked hard but we could buy only what we needed … we could not save anything … and at work we could not say anything because there were always someone that could reported you and then they [the Soviets] punished you … only at home with my parents and my husband we could express ourselves freely I couldn't trust not even my sister and her husband (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

Internal exile sustained most of the Lithuanian population and conformity was the easiest way of surviving during these years. Only Lithuanians who were out of the public spotlight maintained their loyalty to the country. Internal exile had a strong impact in the workplace, resulting in the stagnation of the economy and decline of technological progress. However, for the population who went into internal exile, art, music and literature (which mostly eluded the Soviet control) supported and helped them to preserve their national identity.

At the time of the second Soviet occupation (1944), Lithuania was predominantly an agricultural country. Most of the ethnic Lithuanians were engaged in farming and lived in villages and small country towns. The rural areas became the stronghold of Lithuanian national identity and provided both fighters and tactical support to the partisan movement which opposed the collectivisation of the country's agriculture and aimed for the restoration of an independent Lithuania. Thus, it was not uncommon for entire rural families to join the partisans and for some members of the clergy to serve in the movement as chaplains. While most of the active fighting partisans were young workers or farmers, the commanding positions were generally entrusted to former Lithuanian army officers. It was in the village, therefore, where the most significant post-war political, cultural and economic changes took place.

For a long time the Soviets merely controlled the cities and towns, while the resistance in effect controlled the villages and the whole rural area. As a form of retaliation, mass reprisals were launched by the Soviets against entire villages whose inhabitants were

suspected to have given help and shelter to members of the underground resistance. Partisans' families were often deported. In her narrative Regina, an 85-year-old respondent, who lived in a village near Kaunas, recollected with feelings of bitterness:

> When I was sixteen my father was a partisan and he was hiding in the forest. For two years every night at midnight the Soviets came to my father's farm, and took me to the forest and questioned me for one or two hours … always the same questions … it was terrible … I didn't know where my father was … later I found out that they had shot him (Regina, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

Arvydas, who was an 18-year-old young man, remembered what happened in his village not far from Kaunas on a summer day.

> They [The Red Army soldiers] came with a truck, I saw them from the window of the kitchen and they went to a house … they took the whole family in the small square of the village and shoot the head of the family … left him there … nobody could go near … not even his family because it was taken away and deported to Siberia … this family was helping the partisans (Arvydas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

The land nationalised in 1940 of approximately 690,000 hectares, in 1944 was re-allocated to 96,000 landless peasants and small holders (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 405). A class of new farmers was established who were encouraged to join the new system of agriculture co-operative. The geographical setting of the Lithuanian villages would facilitate the establishment of these group settlements, the first step towards the *kolkhozes*. At the same time the *kulaks* (small landowners) were burdened with a system of progressive taxes based on the size of their farms. They were also forced to make large requisition payments.

Finally in 1947 the system of the *kolkhozes* was established throughout the country. The *kolkhozes*, an abbreviation of the Russian words *kollektivnoïé khoziaïstvo* (agriculture cooperative) had been established by Stalin in 1928 in Soviet Russia, in an attempt to eliminate private farming. The kolkhozes' property such as land and farm animals remained under their original owners, but the administration and organization were controlled directly from Moscow. The *kulaks*' salary was paid in part with agricultural products and in part according to the number of working hours, at a low hourly rate. The landowners who refused to join the *kolkhozes* 'voluntarily' had their taxes and requisition payments further increased. This made their ability to farm as independent farmers increasingly untenable. Arvydas recorded:

> We were all working on my father farm … it was not big it was just enough for my family … but we had always to give pigs and other food to the Soviets … it was impossible … they always wanted the best cut of meat, the best crops (Arvydas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

Genovaitė explained that the kulaks unable to pay their taxes or meet the requisition demands were imprisoned, their land confiscated and they were deported to Siberia with their families. She further maintained that some kulaks who did not want to enter into the kolkhozes even sold their farm animals. This happened to her uncle and his family.

> My uncle sold all his animals except a couple of cows … he and his family were deported to Siberia, his farm was taken away … when he returned in 1961, he did not have any place to go … a Russian family was living on his property, the all farmstead was ruined … the stables and the fields the crops, the Russian did not know how to farm (Genovaitė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Between 1948 and 1951, approximately 94% of the rural population 'voluntarily' joined the new agriculture cooperatives system (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 406).

The Built Environment in the Soviet Era

The period of the Soviet occupation imposed considerable changes on the Lithuanian population, still living outside the major cities and towns and dependent on farming. These changes were most evident in the landscape, farm structures and life style. Across the countryside, dilapidated farmhouses and vast empty spaces were all that remained of most of the pre-war farmsteads, the owners having been exiled, fled the country or moved to collective farms settlements. As Veronika explained:

> The isolated *ažuolas* [oak tree] in the middle of the fields … often marked the locations of a *ūkis* [farm] … and most of these *ūkininkai* [farmers] and his family were deported or fled the country … before the Russians arrived. … Some beautiful farms were completely destroyed by the Russian families that took them over … they did not know anything about farming … they lived like beggars … you could see these farms with the fences damaged, glass windows broken … and the clothes that looked like rugs spread on the fence to dry … it was really terrible (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In contrast, the large square grey brick buildings of the collective farms lacked the character of old traditional villages. They were often built alongside the wooden houses with sloping thatched roofs. Pranas remembered a collective farm not far from his father's property.

>They [the Soviets] built one of these collective farms not far from where my parents lived … it was terrible, large rectangular building … just a block of cement … now they are empty and nobody wants them and even the government does not know what to do with them (Pranas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

Gediminas maintained that most of the villages became sparsely inhabited. Much of the population moved to urban areas as his brother and he did, leaving their elderly parents in the village.

>My father and my mother remained in the village they did not want to move but my brother and I went to the city to work in a factory. The life was easier … we were always working hard but we had a bit more money (Gediminas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Despite the introduction of mechanization, the rural population continued with the traditional methods of farming on the approximately 0.6 hectares of land that was left to them for their private use (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 300). This land supported the entire family and provided an additional form of income, since surplus products (if any) were sold to the local market. Pranas stated:

>This piece of land was not very big, but I used to cultivate potatoes, cabbage, carrots and all vegetable that I could sell to the market … and also apples and plums … and we had also chickens that we sell to the market with eggs … it was not bad but the life was expensive and everything was just enough to keep us going I had three children, my wife and my mother and father to look after … a big family … my wife was working, but my parents were too old (Pranas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

The agricultural production of these private hectares of land was higher than the much bigger *kolkhozes*. Mechanization could not compensate for good management, according to Gediminas who worked in a collective farm for a brief period of time.

>The Lithuanians worked on their private piece of land and were proud of what they could produce … we had also few animals left … but in the *kolkhozes* we worked in a system that we did not like and was not well organized … I remembered the person in charge he could not even communicate with us he was Russian he did not speak Lithuanian … he was not a bad persons but he did not know anything … we did not work properly there (Gediminas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

The rural areas appeared neglected and uninhabited. Agricultural production declined and so did the standard of living of the rural population. Gediminas, with feelings of sadness, went on to describe the rural landscape.

Everything was so grey … the sky, the houses the faces of the people, even the *gandrai* [the storks] were so sad. They stood in the middle of the fields, they were thin, and sad, they looked different ... I remember when I was a child they were nesting on top of the roof of my father farmhouse, they were just beautiful fat and happy (Gediminas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

The Soviets introduced a wholesale programme of urbanisation and industrialisation which mostly affected the urban areas. When they began to industrialize the country, they obtained direct control of the material resources, setting high prices on consumer goods to guarantee high profit for the State. This profit was then re-invested to develop a network of industries throughout the country and to re-build towns and cities destroyed by the war. In a combined interview, Gediminas and Kestutys explained:

During the Soviet period … there were two different type of shops one for the normal Lithuanians and one for the Russians and for the Lithuanians with money … if you had money you could buy even bananas that were very expensive and most of us did not even know that were available … we could not afford anything, just food and the basics to survive … a normal Lithuanian could not afford anything, our wages were not just enough (Gediminas and Kestutys, *Interview Transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

The economy of the country after few years shifted from a traditional agricultural economy to an industrial economy. Gediminas, who was working in a beer factory, recollected:

They built a factory not far from the centre, I used to go there by bus, none of us had a car, we were about five hundred people working there … It was a grey building and nobody was happy, we just worked. I worked there until I retired. We were not free to do anything, we were always worried that someone could report you, and then there were troubles … that's wasn't life … but to work in a factory was better than work in the kolkhose … (Gediminas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

In 1959 approximately 2.71 million people were living in Lithuania, only 38.6% were city dwellers (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 416). The new industrial development gave rise to the need to import labourers. Most of them came from Soviet Russia or from other occupied Republics. In the rural areas remained mostly ethnic Lithuanians with a few Russian families who established themselves on the farms of exiled *kulaks*. Rural Lithuanians who had been driven off the land and who had been unable to find well paid jobs in the rural areas moved to towns and cities, attracted by better working conditions and lifestyle. As this happened, their children began increasingly to attend higher education colleges. Genovaitė, who lived in a village near Kaunas, claimed:

My father and my mother moved to the city. I went to the technical college …
my sister instead married and went to work in an office … the life for us was
better … we did not have much but it was good … I could study (Genovaitė,
Interview Transcript 2, Kaunas, 2004).

The rural Lithuanians became progressively more urbanized. The cities became more
cosmopolitan and Vilnius becoming the headquarters of the Soviet occupying forces
with their families. In her narrative Regina, who has lived in Vilnius for more than thirty
years claimed:

In Vilnius there were more Russians than Lithuanians and lots of Poles … even
today if you ask for a taxi … all the taxi drivers are Russians. They do not speak
Lithuanian …where I lived, on my floor out of four families my family was the
only one Lithuanian, the others were Russians … I have never been friendly with
them for 30 years … I never spoke with them (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*,
Vilnius, 2004).

However, the generation of new urban dwellers were still closely related to their former
villages, rural traditions and customs. This connection was very important for the
preservation of the Lithuanian national consciousness during the years of Soviet
occupation.

The Lithuanians in urban areas lived in apartment blocks built in the immediate
suburban areas of the city and according to a common design throughout the country.
These grey multi-storey apartment buildings were clustered in groups of approximately
four or five to form a residential complex with a common courtyard and a children's
playground. Typically, in one of these buildings there was a general state store, open all
days of the week, and a medical clinic. Within walking distance there was a
kindergarden, a primary school and a local market. A bus network transported residents
to and from their residential areas. Each family lived in a two or three-roomed
apartment with a sitting room that doubled a bedroom, a small kitchen and a sanitary
room separate from washrooms, with all rooms having built-in cupboards and
wardrobes. Regina gave a description of her apartment in Vilnius.

I lived in this apartment with my parents and my sister all my life, I bought this
apartment now. It was small … but this was because we were four people, but
we were lucky … some Lithuanians had smaller apartments. Now I am on my
own with my cat … my father was a very good carpenter and he built other
cupboards that are in the kitchen and in the corridor. My mother was a very clean
woman and she kept the house in very good condition … everything was just
spotless (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Typically each apartment had a balcony that was used as a storeroom; a glasshouse to maintain the traditional Lithuanian close association with nature; and a double timber front door built for a practical purpose as Regina described in her narrative.

> Most of the houses and apartments in Lithuania have double doors to keep the cold winter weather out … with the Soviets it was very good to have the double doors avoiding people stopping in front of your flat and listening to what you were saying and then reporting you to the authorities. It was very dangerous in the past, every building had a sort of spy but it was difficult to discover the person … even the walls had ears. … Now we do not have the informers any more but we have the thieves … it is a better security system (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

On a similar vein Dana remembered her life in one of these residential complexes, also in the city of Vilnius.

> I lived in this apartment for fifty years … this is a big apartment … three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom … we lived here in six … my husband, my mother, my father and my two children … and me … we were very lucky … my sister lived in a smaller apartment and they were six with a baby (Dana, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In contrast, Irena who lived in Klaipeda claimed:

> As soon as we married my husband and I we lived for few years with my parents and then we went to live in a small apartment not far from the school were I was teaching … the rent was cheap … during the Soviet period the rent was not high as it is now … we had two children and my children that were already married and living in their own house, bought us this apartment in the centre of the city for an investment … this building … before the Soviet occupation was one of the best hotels in Klaipeda … then the Russian authorities with their families and army officers came to live here (Irena, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

Most of these apartments which were occupied during the Soviet period are still owned or rented by the original recipients.

Typically the Lithuanians living in urban areas just beyond the city limits had a *soda* (garden) with a summer cottage to spend the weekend with their family. Most of them maintained the old tradition of growing their own vegetables, berries and fruits that would be preserved and consumed during the winter period. They would continue to preserve mushrooms and made wild berry jam from the nearby forest. Children and grandchildren would help also to prepare traditional winter conserves and pickles during the summer period. In a joint interview Irena and her husband Jonas, with feelings of pride, described a summer Sunday at their country cottage:

My daughter and her family they all come on Sunday morning … and sometimes on Saturday night. After having worked all week … my granddaughter that studied law at the University at that time sometimes comes with her friends … my son-in-law likes to work in the garden digging potatoes or planting new seeds or to mow the lawn … my daughter and my granddaughter come to gather berries … we have a lot of them and different types … and we make jam … my daughter loves flowers and we have always beautiful flowers during the summer and we take them home or to the cemetery to my parents' graves … now we have finished building the house and my daughter thinks to come and live here when she retires. My son-in-law likes to live in the country and he likes to buy fresh milk, cheese and butter and bread from the farms around here … at the end of the road there is a lake where he can swim and go fishing … we have everything here … but we worked hard to built this house and we had to came here every weekend [especially in summer] to look after the vegetable garden and fruit trees. Now we have running water … before he had to walk 3 kms to take the water home … it was very tiring (Irena and Jonas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

Traditional herbs would be gathered from the forest or from the fields and used to prepare herbal teas, medication and ointments, more cheaply than buying them at the pharmacy. As Irena maintained:

I never buy teas, I always make my own with the herbs of my garden or from the fields there are plenty of them but you have to know which one is the right one … I know how to mixed different types of herbs, I saw my mother and my grandmother doing this and I do it too, my granddaughters, they are young but they asked me to make for them my tea … I also prepared some tea to help digestion and other stomach problems … I have been brought-up to use them … I lived on a farm we did not have a lot of money and the medicines were expensive and now that I am a pensioner they are still expensive. … I always kept under my bed chestnut and oak leaves, my mother used to do it. They give strength and good health (Irena, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

The Lithuanian Family: During Occupation

By comparison with pre-war Lithuania, the size of the immediate family both in the rural and urban areas was generally small, with an average of one or two children. The lifestyle, work commitments and new roles of family members (in particular the woman) prevented the growth of larger families. Typically the position of the woman as mother and wife was considered unproductive by the Soviets. It was regarded as reminiscent of a traditional agricultural society that was to be replaced by a modern industrial society. Women were in employment and were expected to contribute to the wealth and development of the country in the same ways as men. Both husband and wife worked in

the collective farms, in urban factories, or as public servants. Regina who worked in an office in Vilnius affirmed:

> I was working in an office in the opposite side of the city near the airport … I used to get up very early at five o'clock every day of the week except on Sunday, I had to take two busses and in winter it was terrible they used to go very slowly … I was in this work for all my life it was hard … my husband was lucky because he used to work in an office in the city … he used to arrive home earlier and he could spend more time with the children than me … but we had my father and my mother living with us and they looked after the children, they helped us a lot … they did everything for us and for the grandchildren … my sister had her mother-in-law and father-in-law to living with her … they helped her as well life was difficult you had the time only for work … when you arrived at home you were too tired for doing something different then go to bed (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

The size of the extended family at the time of the Soviet occupation was also smaller than in previous times. Most Lithuanian families had relatives who had fled the country before the occupation, or were killed during or after the war, or had been deported to Siberia. Most of the immediate and extended family members were the elderly and the youngest, who at the time of occupation were not allowed to or could not leave the country. Pranas in his interview gave reasons why he could not flee his home village.

> My mother did not want us to go … my sister and I we were too young … during the war we lived on a farm not too far from the border with Germany when the Soviets arrived my mother was pregnant, she could not travel we did not have a cart, she could not walk … I was only twelve years old and my sister eight. My mother gave the permission to leave only to my eldest brother he was eighteen, he could not make it with us … my brother was lucky he escaped through the forest with another friends and went to Germany … now he lives in United States with his family (Pranas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Kaunas, 2004).

In the same vein Jonas, with evident feelings of anxiety, explained in his narrative:

> In my family we were only two children, my sister and I and we were both married. All my family has been deported including my grandparents I was the lucky one because with my wife we were not at home that day … from Siberia my mother, my sister and one of her daughter returned all the others died there. My uncle and his wife were deported ... he was an officer in the Lithuanian army they were my godparents … they never returned … I was able with the help of other relatives to bring all of them back and to bury them in the cemetery of the village where they were born (Jonas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

By contrast Vytas, an 88-year-old respondent, claimed:

> We were a big family, we were not a rich or educated family … we were just simple workers … nobody in my family was deported we did not have big farm … we did not employ other people to work for us … we had to go to work for

other wealthy farmers … the ones that had been deported (Vytas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

Breaking up the family unit in this way was an option and much depended on the circumstances and profile of the family at the time of occupation.

Childrearing was traditionally the responsibility of the mother. However, retired grandparents if living with the young family often had the chore of tending the grandchildren when both parents were working. Traditionally the family home has always been the place of informal learning during times of cultural oppression. Regina maintained that grandparents were considered an important source of knowledge, as they were responsible for teaching their grandchildren aspects of the Lithuanian culture, folklore and traditions.

> My mother lived with us all the time until she died and she taught to my daughter to cook typical Lithuanian dishes as *cepelinai* and *šaltibarščiai* … and while she was teaching how to make them, she was also telling her when Lithuanian used to cook them and why … so my daughter learnt the cooking, the language and our traditions (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

After completing their school commitments most of the children were often asked to observe and help the elderly to complete and learn various tasks, in order to maintain the traditional culture. Young girls would imitate the elderly and under their instructions would learn to prepare old Lithuanian dishes and look after the house. In a mostly rural society, the tradition of cooking was an important component in the upbringing of a girl, who one day would be married and would be the mistress of her house. All the participants in the study confirmed that the pre-war rural style of cooking and eating habits have been maintained and handed down to the current young generation. Although Lithuanians, since independence in 1991, have been introduced to western cuisine and styles of cooking, most of the young generation still maintain their preference for the traditional diet, based on a large consumption of grains, dairy products and meat with mushroom and berries. Irena, a respondent living in Klaipeda, claimed:

> Once a week my children and grandchildren come to my place for dinner. They like to eat the old Lithuanian dishes that I prepared and they always want me to preserve for them pickles cucumbers and make berries jam. My daughter in law is working and she does not have time but I am retired … I have time and I like to cook for them (Irena, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

Most of the farming population still today is self-supporting. Rural Lithuanians produce most of the food of their former diet, using pre-war methods of preparation. They smoke their own meat, make their own cheese, butter and *grietinė* (sour cream) and bake their own bread. Typically, these traditions survived in the villages in their original environment. In the cities, even though the life style changed, Lithuanians continued to maintain traditional cooking and eating habits, purchasing most of the products from the local markets. Regina remembered her husband's eating habits with these words:

> My husband died two years ago, but he always wanted to eat real Lithuanian food … we tried sometimes when our grandchildren came to visit us something different … but he didn't like … he wanted always Lithuanian food (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Local food markets have retrained the old features. The farmers display their products in stalls or in the back of their car or mini-van that today has replaced the former cart and horse. Irena described the market in Klaipeda where she continued to go regularly at the time of the interview.

> Almost everyday I go to the local market on foot it is not far from where I live … I don't like to go to the supermarket … I am looking for Lithuanian food not for all the new food that I don't even know what it is and is expensive. … In Klaipeda we have a very nice market, just as it was in the past … I always buy daily baked bread, cheese, butter and the cream, fruit and vegetable only sometimes because I have my soda in the country and I grew them …just as I used to do when I was working and when I had my children … nothing is changed, now I have more time … and I am happy, I can do what I like (Irena, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

While all my participants claimed that they have preserved the old eating and drinking habits, they agreed that alcohol consumption has increased noticeably, mainly among the generation born after the 1950s. Veronika reported with feelings of bitterness:

> We like to drink for all sorts of reasons …Lithuanians like to drink … but before the Soviet occupation especially in the rural area the farmer did not drink too much only for special occasions … because they had to work hard and on the farm they had animals and crops to look after and alcohol was expensive particularly during the Independence. Farmers needed tools for the farm and food for the animals. … There were farmers that used to drink a lot … you could see this from their farm, that was dirty with rugs at the windows and broken fences and not many animals … they were usually heavy drinkers … but not as much as now…since the occupation *dektinė* (Lithuanian vodka) has become very cheap and is still cheap and everyone can afford it, before it was very expensive and people with a family could not afford to spend their money in drinks. The Soviet wanted us drunk so they could control us as they did in their country, since the time of the Czar (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In the memories of a people who had lived under Soviet rule for more than four decades, the pre-war rural Lithuanian society was a community with a warm sense of hospitality and charity. Most of the participants in the study drew attention to the differences between pre- and post-Soviet occupation society. Jadviga reported in her narrative, with feelings of sadness:

> Before the war people was more friendly … we used to help each other, and enjoyed parties and celebrations together … in the villages people was friendly we all knew each other … now in the cities and in the villages everything is changed, too many years of Soviet occupation have changed the mentality of some Lithuanians especially of our children … we have lost the trust in people and we became very suspicious … we only trust ourselves (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

The population in the villages traditionally was part of an extended family. Members of the community helped each other and shared their material goods with those in need. Food played an important role in the family and in religious celebrations. A table with an abundance of food and drink was considered a sign of hospitality and affluence. It was customary for all guests to sit at a common table that filled most of the best room of the house. The hosts would ensure that no guests would leave the table hungry or thirsty. Typically, these meals started with salads, cold meat and bread accompanied by *kompotas* (cold fruit tea) and small glasses of vodka, wine or *gira* (a carbonated soft drink made from grain), followed by a hot course, dessert and tea or coffee. Conversation and singing were shared among the guests in happiness. Arvydas described a party at his father's farm before the Soviet occupation.

> At the end of the harvest in my father farm there was always a big celebration … a big party that lasted all night with a lot of people, food and drinks, we used to dance, joke and we really enjoyed that time we were always looking forward for that day, I was young and with other young boys we were looking for girls … I remembered my parents inviting our neighbours and lots of friends … I was enjoying this time of the year (Arvydas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

These comments were shared by all the respondents, who declared with feeling of sadness that during the period of occupation, such traditions were difficult to maintain to the same extent. The new Lithuanian Soviet society was built on a system of informers, and most of the people were concerned about gatherings on occasions, even within their own extended family members. The house and the family, traditionally the focus of the pre-war community life, started to lose its original value. According to Jadviga, people

were intimidated and afraid, especially in the cities where the ethnic Lithuanians lived closely with Russians and other minority groups.

> My husband and I we were worried about our neighbours … they were Russians … they still live next door … we were careful when we spoke with them even at home between us … because also the walls could have ears … it was really dangerous, we had party for birthdays mainly … we invited relatives and friends but not many and we used to talk about nothing important … we just were scared … then how could you have friends if you are scare also of your own family … therefore you became isolated (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

Dana, with feelings of sorrow, recorded:

> We were always very superficial … very silly during the parties, but we were scared … for our family, friends and yourself … I was alone with my children my husband died in 1956, I used to go to work but I did not mix with people there … and my neighbours they were Russians … in this building there are still now more Russians than Lithuanians (Dana, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

When former deportees started to return from Siberia in the early 1960s, the situation worsened. Veronika with sadness recollected the return home of her father from Siberia:

> My father was a musician he played the violin in an orchestra he was deported in 1941 and he came back in 1960. He was an old and sick man, and my brother and I we could not have him at home in Vilnius … they [the Soviets authorities] did not give him the permission to stay with us, he did not know where to go, then he went to live a small village, nobody wanted to help him they were all scared ... all his friends were dead or deported and my brother and I we used to go and visit him but with difficulties we were both working … some neighbours help him but the Soviet propaganda had ruined everything … some people were thinking that my father was a criminal (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 1*, Vilnius, 2004).

These mixed feelings towards the former deportees were of partial acceptance, rejoicing, diffidence and fear. Some Lithuanians had to meet face-to-face the persons whom they had denounced and condemned, often without formal accusation or trial.

Discussions with members of the family and friends about their life in the camps or in the settlements were an additional problem that the former deportees had to confront, once back in Lithuania. Former prisoners were asked, upon leaving their camps, to sign a document in which they agreed to remain silent about their experience. Being required to sign such a statement frightened the deportees, most of who accordingly refrained later from talking about their ordeal and communicating their experience with people.

When I met one of them and I asked questions about his life in the camp, he merely answered … "I went to Siberia and I came back". After this statement I was not able to engage him in any further conversation; the man simply turned his back and left. This behaviour signals how some deportees, even after more than forty years from their release, were still reluctant to talk with people about their past and their experiences. Indeed, memories of the past are difficult to surface or to be talked about.

Other former deportees found that their immediate family and friends, if not uninterested, did not want to know in any detail where they had been and what happened to them. People were too afraid, not just of the disguised presence of the secret informers, but of what they might learn about their friends and relatives. The sense of community and hospitality so typical of the Lithuanian culture was diluted if not lost in most cases, as the result of a campaign organised by the local Communist Lithuanian authorities who feared the effect that former deportees might have on that part of the local population who displayed anti-Soviet feelings.

In contrast, feelings of trust and a sense of community could be maintained to a certain extent in rural areas where most of the ethnic Lithuanians lived. Arvydas, who had lived most of his life in a village near Kaunas and at the time of the interview moved to Vilnius in a retirement village, nostalgically remembered his life in his native village.

> I liked to live in my village, I knew everybody … we had parties … we invited friends and relatives … we were real Lithuanians patriots … in my village there were only two Russian families … they lived on a farm that belonged to some people that was deported … we never talk with them … we fear more the *stribai*, they weren't Lithuanians patriots they were spies … but we knew them … in a small village with twenty families or so we all knew each other … they were different they acted in a different way … we had to be careful … I never invited them at my place (Arvydas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Religious Practices and Traditions under Soviet Rule

> It is impossible to have the people religious as they were before the war … my generation is still very religious … most of our children are not … our grandchildren they can make their own choice … they are free now (Pranas, *Interview transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

Occupation and deportation also impacted on the Lithuanian Catholic Church. During the years of Soviet occupation, the policy and measures adopted by the Soviet authorities

towards religion were aimed to isolate the church and the clergy from public life. Churches became state property and most of the clergy lost their source of income and accommodation. Arvydas sadly remembered the parish priest of his village.

> Our parish priest was a nice man. He was an old man and he had a small piece of land with a cow … he liked farming because his father was a farmer and he spent all his life on a farm … but they [the Soviets] took everything away from him … on his small piece of land he grew vegetables and from the cow he had the milk … he did not have much … afterwards the people in the village had to look after him (Arvydas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Pranas claimed that the survival of the clergy left in the country depended increasingly on contributions by the parishioners. He remembered the time when the parish priest of his village was invited to his parents' house for a meal:

> My mother was a very religious woman and we lived walking distance from the church. We always invited our parish priest in secret at our place for dinner or lunch. He was an old man and by himself, he did not have any relatives (Pranas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

Typically, this practice was possible in villages where Soviet control was not as constant as in the cities and towns and where the rural population had more food commodities at their disposal. The Soviets controlled mainly the cities where the educated Lithuanians were living and working for the New Order. In the villages the rural population represented less of a threat.

The recollections of Genovaitė, who lived in Vilnius, gave away also how the Soviets dealt with the churches in urban areas.

> In Vilnius, a church in the city was used as a theatre, it was a nice small chapel near the university and even now is still used as a theatre … there were churches that have been used for storing food or spare parts for the machines or tanks … it was terrible, they really destroyed all our churches … the oldest church of Vilnius was used as an archive separated on two floors (Genovaitė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

The following recount during an interview describes the feelings of Pranas about the deconsecrated Catholic church of his village.

> In my village there was a big old church, it was just beautiful … it was first damaged when the German retreats because the Russian arrived and they fight it was in part burnt down … after this it was then converted in a potato deposit … it was such a pity, we all felt bad but we could not do anything…in my village there was no priest, no church … but now after so many years the church has been repaired and it is now beautiful as it was ... in my village my generation

they go all to church. ... On Sunday it is full and we have more than a priest (Pranas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

Another measure of repression adopted by the Soviets was the ban on the teaching of religion in public schools, along with the elimination of the crucifix and religious crafts. Gediminas, who at that time was attending the gymnasium (high school) in a town not far from his father's farm, had vivid memories of what happened in his classroom.

> I was going to school, but we could not have anymore the parish priest coming and teach us religion … one day I remember it was Monday … I went to school and the crucifix was gone it was above the teacher desk and it was not there anymore … the teacher did not say anything … also a picture of the Virgin Mary was gone … it was very unusual but nobody said anything. … We could not ask … we were scared … but we knew that something bad was happening (Gediminas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Jadviga maintained that as a result of such measures the Church went underground and the religious Lithuanian population, both in the villages and cities, continued religious practices in secrecy.

> We used to go to the forest and the priest celebrated the Mass, we prayed together and we spent some time with the priest. It was dangerous but it was not so bad in the villages, we were true Lithuanians … people from the cities used to come and joint us … we continued to do everything but in secrecy (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In the cities a program of intensive surveillance was introduced to prevent public servants, teachers and people working for the Soviet administration, from attending religious services or associating with the clergy as mentioned previously in Chapter 4. Veronika, an 85-year-old female, who was a high school teacher in Vilnius, remembered:

> I was a high school teacher … I was teaching home-economics, I could not attend any religious service or go to my local parish, I was worried that I would lose my job … because they [the Soviets authorities] checked on all of us … if I was a simple worker was not problem or if I was an old retired woman … but because I was a teacher … It was a good job … I could travel everywhere in Lithuania and in the Soviet Union … when I could I used to go to the church in some villages but I still was scared to be discovered … then I decided to avoid to go…but I was still praying at home … I believe in God (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In a joint interview Jonas and his wife Irena, who both worked as public servants, stated:

> My wife and I … we both had a very good job … I was working for the Department of Construction and my wife for the Department of Transport … we

did not wanted to loose our jobs…we had two children and we wanted them to study … for me it was not a problem to avoid to go to church but for my wife that she was religious she was not happy … she always prayed at home and she used to recite the rosary all the time with her mother … she was living with us (Jonas and Irena, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

The abolition and re-naming of religious feast days, explained previously explained in Chapter 4 became part of the strategy adopted in the battle against traditional religious practices. Genovaitė explained:

For Christmas you had to go to work otherwise you could lose your job or be sent somewhere else … some people refused to go to work on Christmas Day … but it was too dangerous. I had two children and my husband had a good job … we used to prepare the Christmas tree for the children and then go to work (Genovaitė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Notwistanding such measures of repression, the threat posed by the clergy's position and influence over the Lithuanian religious population and its strong identification with the Nationalist Movement induced the Soviet authorities sometimes to remove them from their parishes, to imprison and send them to Siberia. Irena remembered her parish priest with feelings of sadness:

He was a very good man, he worked hard and we all liked him … he used to do a lot for the children and going to visit sick people and elderly … he used to come to our place often he was a good man … and he was sent away (Irena, Klaipeda, *Interview Transcript 2*, 2004).

During the deportation of 1941, a total of forty-three priests were imprisoned. Only nine of these reached Siberia; fifteen had been killed and eighteen had been able to escape (Savasis, 1966, p. 22-24). In the autumn 1945 when the Soviet Army returned more clergy, were deported accused of helping or hiding the partisans. In Lithuania in the period between the two twentieth century world wars, all the religious denominations had a constitutionally guaranteed monopoly over registration of marriages, births and deaths. The Soviets systematically removed the clergy from performing such religious events, placing them instead under the direct control of the State (Savasis, 1966, pp. 76-81). The Soviet authorities claimed that their goal was to:

Put into practice the real freedom of conscience … let the believers believe, but the non-believers should not forced be forced to study religion, marry in church, be baptized and pay for the support of the church (Vardys, 1978, p. 46).

The introduction of secular ceremonies was aimed to eliminate the role of the church and the authority of both religion and traditional family structures. Sanctions were also introduced against those who ignored the State's injunctions.

For instance, christening the newborn according to the Roman Catholic rite was difficult as the official celebration of religious practices was banned. A system of clinics with free medical assistance was available to all Soviet citizens living in the occupied country and to the local population. However, in the villages typically the delivery of babies was at home and christening was possible in secrecy. In the city where the presence of the priest was banned from the hospital, a Christening became difficult when the newborn was in danger of dying. Jadviga made a comparison between the Christening of her two children during the period of the German and Soviet occupations and maintained that the priests were always administering the sacrament where and when it was possible.

> My two children were both baptized … one was born in 1942 and there was the German occupation and it was not a problem, the second one was born three years later when the Soviets occupied Lithuania, my mother that was not working and was looking after the children … she took him to a village where my aunt was living and there he was baptized … it was dangerous but my mother was able to do it she was the godmother and my uncle the godfather it was just a normal day, nobody knew it … she organized everything (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*,Vilnius, 2004).

On the same vein Veronika recalled:
> In the cities there were not many churches left open for worship, so the Soviets could easily monitored people who was going and what they were doing or what it was happening … you could not just go to the church and ask for your baby to be baptized … the priests would be punish as well … in the village was easier … the Soviets were not there all the time, but you had to be careful for the spies … I was a teacher I could not possibly have my children baptized where we were living … so we went in a village not too far from here but nobody knew that I was a teacher … they did not know us (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In spite of the adverse circumstances, all the participants in the study maintained that their children had been baptized according to the Roman Catholic rite. Typically the ceremony took place within two weeks of birth; however, for some this length of period could not be maintained as circumstances and events prevented it. The godparents were traditionally the grandparents or in their absence close members of the family who could be trusted to maintain the necessary secrecy.

During the period of Soviet occupation, although most of children continued to be baptized with names of Christian Saints, together with old Lithuanian pagan names, most of the families started to celebrate birthdays in place of Names' Day as had been customary in the old time. Jadviga claimed:

> Names' Day was celebrated before the war … after the war it was only for people who was baptized with important names as Jonas (John), Ona (Ann), and for the elderly … some young people although they have these names they prefer to celebrate their birthday … as my children and grandchildren (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

The participants also maintained that often grandchildren who bear the same names as their grandparents join in the celebration. This is what Jonas reported about one of his grandsons:

> My grandson is twelve years old. His name is Jonas [John] … the same as mine. He likes to have Name's day celebration with me…so we can have together a party with family and friends … we put around our head a wreath made with leaves of oak as it was done in the old time … I believe it is good for the young generation to know our old traditions (Jonas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

First Communion and Confirmation were not always easy to organize, given the repressive measures adopted by the Soviet authorities and continuing controls, especially in the cities. However, Veronika affirmed the most of the children at some stage of their life were confirmed and received their First Communion.

> My younger daughter had her first communion and confirmation when she was eighteen…we went to a church in Žemaitjia … my son that was older instead had his first communion and confirmation when he was twelve … at that time it was easier *…* we just went in a village were we knew the parish priest (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Genovaitė added:

> All my children had their Holy Communion and Confirmation with other children in a village … in the city where we were living was not possible … but I was able to have them confirmed (Genovaitė, *Interview Transcript* 2, Vilnius, 2004).

Although the celebration of weddings was forbidden, and even to be merely present at a celebration as a guest could invite serious consequences, most urban Lithuanians who chose to be married with a religious rite went to a village. Jadviga described the wedding of her sister with the following words:

My sister she was twenty two years old and she wanted to be married in a church she arranged everything with my mother who she knew the priest in a village far from Vilnius and they went there it was a normal Sunday … nobody knew anything … it was too dangerous (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

This did not affect the participants in the study. They all but one claimed that they married in a Catholic Church according to the Roman Catholic rite. They married during the period of Lithuanian Independence or during the German occupation and they celebrated their wedding according to the pre-war rural Lithuanian traditions. Dana, an 89-year-old female, showing the photos of her wedding during the Lithuanian Independence, explained:

My father had a very big farm … we were very wealthy … I had three brothers and two sisters … I married an army officer … we had a very beautiful weddings with many people … I was a student at the University of Kaunas at that time … I had a white wedding dress and my mother pinned on my dress some *rūta* (rue) my parents waited for us with the traditional glass of wine and bread and salt and wish us good luck and prosperity … we danced and sang and really I had a very good time there were also officers friends of my husband (Dana, *Interview Transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

Veronika, who married during the German occupation, when she was only twenty year old, claimed:

My father had a big farm but too many children and so he sold the farm and we went to Vilnius to live … he sent all of us at school and my brothers attended the university … I became a midwife and I married during the German occupation. I had a marriage in the church with my family and friends and then the reception at our place … I was dress with the traditional white wedding dress and everything was done as it was for my mother wedding (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In contrast, Kestutys although having been baptized stated:

I never believed in God, since I was a young man … I never went to church and pray … I had a civil marriage according to the Soviet rules … it was not a problem because both my wife and me we were not believers … we had a party with few friends and that was all (*Kestutys, Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Family members, relatives and all the community, particularly in rural areas, participated in the celebration of funerals as a sign of respect for the deceased and their family. During the Soviet occupation, priests defended their traditional religious rights and in secrecy continued their ministry. Gediminas recollected the funeral of his father in his village.

Before my father died a priest gave him confession and administered his last sacrament … my mother wanted for him a proper funeral … we were living in a village … he stayed at home from three days … he had a crucifix in his hand and we light up candles around him … and people came and paid their respects … in the village nobody said or did anything … I don't know if they [local Soviet authorities] knew … but nothing happened (Gediminas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In contrast Dana, who was living in the city, sadly remembered the two different occasions of the death of her parents.

Both my parents died during the Soviet occupation, we lived in Vilnius they both died in hospital. They were just buried in the cemetery not far from where we lived … It was sad because my mother was a very religious woman and she wanted to have a priest … but it was just not possible … but I prayed for them at home … it was terrible … now it is different people has the traditional funerals with the priests and friends … but not at that time (Dana, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Arvydas concluded that although life in the villages was not easy, religious practices and traditions could be better maintained because of the ethnic Lithuanian population, the presence of the partisans and the lack of interest from the Soviets in controlling rural people and labourers.

Until 1953 the Soviets were scared to come to the village, because they knew that the partisans were there, hidden in the forests, and they knew that the farmers were helping them … so they did not came very often … but it was also difficult for us living in the villages because if you gave food or help to the Russian soldiers, the partisans retaliated against you and your family … if you helped the partisans you were sent to Siberia or shot … it was a difficult situation because the Russians, from the farms they took everything, especially food but at least we were relatively free to go to the church, when Stalin died it was better but it was still not easy to be free to practice religion (Arvydas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In 1953, with Stalin's death a new strategy in the war against religion began as the Soviets realised that the ban on religion and religious practices would only be beneficial for the church. Thus a new strategy was adopted by the Soviets, who focused on the young Lithuanian generation, as detailed in Chapter 3.

Kūčios (Christmas Eve meal), was maintained during the period of occupation. It was strictly a family-only celebration and circumstances prevented parents from discussing the religious meaning of the ritual with the youngest members of the family. Regina stated:

I was lucky I did not have any children and for few years I could still celebrate Kūčios at home with my family and my husband … but then after I had children and they started to go to school, we choose not to talk about religious meaning of the Kūčios … it was to dangerous … the children could speak to the teacher and say what we were doing … the Soviets would retaliate and they could also take away from you your children (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Genovaitė described one of these dinners with her family:

For *Kūči*os, we always prepared the traditional Lithuanian meal. I was working but living with my parents and my mother took care of it. … My mother used to cook the all meal…we were six in my family we had *kučiukai* [small biscuits] with poppy seeds milk … and she prepared the fish the herrings with mushroom, potatoes, vegetable … we have always celebrated *Kūčios* (Genovaitė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Kaledos (Christmas Day), as previously explained at the beginning of this chapter, was declared a working day. Parents prepared the Christmas tree for their children and a good meal was usually prepared by the grandmother and shared at the end of the day. Veronika, mother of two, remembered:

My husband and I we used to prepare the Christmas Three for our children but that was all after we had to go to work only at night when we came back from work we could have a meal together my parents that were living with us prepared everything … but we could not go to the church (Veronika, Interview Transcript 2, Vilnius, 2004).

The *Užgavenės* (Shrove Tuesday) festival, celebrated on the eve of Ash Wednesday to mark the period of Lent, was maintained during the Soviet occupation. However, it soon largely lost its religious meaning. Pranas explained with bitterness that the festival became a party instrument to make a mockery of Independent Lithuanian institutions and people.

They [the Soviets] made fun of our past, our history our rules. It was not anymore an enjoyable carnival, it was vulgar … we still made the traditional pancakes at home, but it was more a family celebration. None of us wanted to participate in a community festival (Pranas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Kaunas, 2004).

The traditional celebrations of the Holy Week, *Verbo Sekmadieni* (Palm Sunday), *Svarioju Ketvirtadieni* (Holy Thursday), *Dydysis Penktadieni* (Good Friday) and *Didysis Seštadieni* (Holy Saturday) could not be maintained as religious community events, but were as an individual commitment or at the level of individual families. As Jadviga explained:

I lived in Vilnius I never went to church during this week and for Easter … it was just a normal working week…but with my mother I used to recite the rosary and fast on Good Friday … it was easier to pray at home nobody could control you (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Jadviga further added that *Velykos* (Easter Sunday) was a working day and one's presence at work was carefully monitored by the officials.

Even if I wanted to go to church somewhere else there was not the opportunity if you were working all day … for the elderly people it was easier they did not have to go to work and they had more time. My mother used to go at the house of some friends and pray … but it was dangerous because they could be heard from next door (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

The traditional festivals of *Sekminės* (Pentecost), *Joninės* (Feast of Saint John of Baptist), *Zolinė* (Feast of Assumption), all relating to farming and husbandry, were not celebrated during the period of the Soviet occupation. Since 1991, the year which marked the withdrawn of the Soviets from Lithuania, these religious festivals have been resumed in most urban and rural areas. Irena, living in Klaipeda, confirmed:

Since 1992 every year on the night before June 24, here in Klaipeda, we had a big celebration on a hill not far from my house … there are people in national costumes that dance around the bonfire light up for Jonine … I go every year and it is beautiful…it reminds me of when I was young, when we used to celebrate this day in the village not far from the farm of my father … we used to dance and meet young men … we really enjoyed that time. … For many years [during the occupation] we were not allowed to do anything, … all our traditions were suppressed … but now we do it again … and many young people want to know their traditions (Irena, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

Veronika in her narrative recalled:

Last year, my daughter drove me to the Cathedral in Vilnius for the celebration of *Sekminės*. The Church was full. There were many priests and the service was beautiful, everybody was singing as it was in the past. Then there was a long procession from the Cathedral through the main street of Vilnius that takes you to the gate of the Virgin Mary … and afterwards the priests blessed all of us….It was raining but there were a lot of people, young, old and children. … For many years we could not do it, as we did not have the permission. Now the church has started again to work as it was before the war and people like it … also young people start to go back to church and religion (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Typically, on the eve of *Vėlinės* (All Souls' Day) Lithuanians would visit the graves of the deceased members of their family and relatives and would decorate them with flowers and candles as a sign of respect and an occasion to reinforce the existing bond

between the living members of the family and the community and the deceased. Religious services were held in the church during the whole of the day, culminating in a night procession lead by a priest to the cemetery and the graves of national heroes who were also honoured; although many cemeteries and graves had been destroyed or damaged during the Soviet occupation in the attempt to eliminate the influence of religion on the Lithuanian ethnic population. Jonas and Irena maintained that Lithuanians continued to pay their respects to their deceased.

> In Klaipeda the Soviets demolished the oldest cemetery in the centre of the city with bulldozers to create a park. They did this because the cemetery was in the centre and they did not want people going there and worshipping. … They [the Soviets] built a new cemetery outside the city. It is now a big one … I go there once a week to visit my parents and few friends … I just take a bus … it is about an hour distant from the city (Jonas and Irena, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

The above extracts in this section, taken from interviews in 2004, convey the hardship of the Lithuanians in maintaining their religious beliefs and pre-war traditions in a period in which secularization and elimination of the national identity was the goal of the New Order.

A Controlled System of Education

> Most of our children have a good education … but most of them have lost religious values (Jadviga, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the re-organization of the education system completed the Sovietisation of Lithuania. As part of their education, children had to spend some time working on a farm and on a factory during the week, and to attend an extensive program of lectures, youth groups and camps activities, organised to eliminate parental and religious influence on the children. Although this Soviet educational system gave most of the children the opportunity to achieve a good education, it eliminated their parents' control over the content of the programmes and the methods of instruction. Pranas, whose daughter obtained a degree in English literature at the University of Vilnius, described her daughter's education with feelings of sadness:

> My daughter was a very clever student and she had the opportunity to go to Vilnius to study at the university … she became an English teacher … but she lost completely her faith … when she was at home and she was a child we taught her some religion in secrecy because it was very dangerous but then we became

scare to talk with her … she was heavily involved with the youth camps and all the activities organized by the communists and she became an atheist … and my son as well … he is like her … my wife and me we are very religious, we are believers … we don't go every Sunday to the church but we believe in God as my mother and all my family did … but my children are different, they do not want to know about religion (Pranas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Veronika in the same vein added with feelings of bitterness:

My daughter is married with five children, she had a very good job … she had an education … but she is atheist … she married a Russian man; she did not married in the church as I did and all my family did as well. … She was baptized because I arranged it … she is my only daughter and I am very sorry for her … but I cannot change her. … Most of our children had a good education but most of them have lost religious values (Veronika, *Interview Transcript 2*, Klaipeda, 2004).

Lithuanian Language: Its Re-emergence

We are Lithuanians, we have our language, culture and traditions … we continued to speak our language as it was the only way to resist the sovietisation of Lithuania, and to show them that we were not Russians … nothing could stop us (Regina, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

During the years of occupation the Lithuanian language lacked official status. It was formally regained in 1988, when it was declared the official language of Lithuania, as it had been during the period of Independence (1918-1940). However, both in urban and rural areas Lithuanians had maintained the use of their language on a daily base. It is a common claim among the participants that the Lithuanian language was better preserved in the villages among the ethnic Lithuanian population. People were not exposed daily to the use of the Russian language as were the Lithuanians living in the cities where there was a high concentration of Russian population. In the cities the pressure to speak Russian as the daily language of communication was high. Regina, who had been living and working in Vilnius, claimed:

In the village it was easier to speak Lithuanian language because there were mainly farmers and labourers … but in the city the situation was different, people had to go to work in the offices and in place where the people in charge were Russian … then you had to speak the Russian language … especially in government jobs … you could not speak Lithuanian. I continued to speak Lithuanian only at home with my children and my relatives. … In Vilnius in the building where I was living there were mainly Russian families … after fifty years they could not even say good morning in Lithuanian (Regina, *Interview transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Veronika described her life at work with words of resentment:

> I was working in a factories and I was in an office … I remember one day came a man to talk with us about the production … we were about five hundred Lithuanians, he was one … but he spoke only Russian … and we had to listen … and some of us did not even understand what he was saying … everything was in Russian (Veronika, *Interview transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

In schools and at all levels of education, text books, language classes and course content focused on Soviet Russian culture and values, taught in the Russian language by Russian teachers who had been brought into the Lithuanian education system to fill the places of those who had been deported or removed. Indeed, from the start of schooling the Russian language and literature studies occupied larger periods of the school week, diminishing the time available to Lithuanian language classes. At school it was forbidden to speak Lithuanian, even during recess time. As the emphasis in the schools was heavily on Soviet Russian culture, Lithuanian children had to learn their own language and culture through other sources.

During the Czarist period of occupation in the nineteenth century, as stated in Chapter 3 Lithuanian school teachers and ethnic Lithuanians in the village had organised an underground educational program for children of all ages (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 263). During the years of Soviet occupation, it was again the responsibility of the Lithuanian people, informally, to maintain their language and to teach Lithuanian culture to the young generation. This objective was achieved through the family. Lithuanian families taught folk poems, songs and stories in the attempt to maintain their culture among the younger generation. Folk songs and poems from before the period of occupation were used to reclaim the national spirit and to provide a foundation upon which to develop and maintain national identity.

Most of the Lithuanian-born teachers, however, did continue unofficially to promote and reinforce aspects of the Lithuanian culture at school whenever the opportunity allowed. As Vytas, who had been educated during the period of Soviet occupation recalled:

> I remember my teacher who managed to give us some knowledge of our culture, alongside all the Soviet propaganda. We were even taught poems and songs which were not supposed to be sung in public … it was dangerous but somehow she did it (Vytas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Vilnius, 2004).

Dana with proud feelings reported:

> We were able to maintain our old traditions, language and religion more in the villages because there were the real Lithuanians … in the city we were more mixed …we had more Russians but all the Lithuanian families wanted to fight for the national identity and preservation of their culture (Dana, *Interview Transcript 2,* Vilnius, 2004).

For the ethnic Lithuanian population, the family has been always the most important vehicle or instrument for preserving the material and spiritual values that are part of the core of the pre-war rural Lithuanian culture; and once again, according to Dana, the Lithuanian family was able to fulfil its role.

Concluding Summary

Notwithstanding the political, cultural and economic changes which took place in Lithuania over the forty-six years of Soviet occupation and subsequent Sovietisation of the country, the Lithuanian population was able to challenge the imposed Soviet system in an attempt to preserve the key core markers of their pre-WWII Lithuanian culture.

Although during the years of occupation the Lithuanian language officially lost its status to the Russian language, it was still maintained on an individual and family level, surviving the pressure of the New Order. Particularly in rural areas it was preserved unbroken and used daily as the population was distinctively of ethnic Lithuanian origin. In urban areas and towns it was retained, albeit only at an individual and family level as the pressure of the work place and the high presence of different ethnic groups resulted in the daily forced adoption of the Russian language.

Religious beliefs and practices as a form of protest against the atheistic doctrine survived among the present-day Lithuanians who participated in the study, whose values and beliefs were shaped by pre-war Roman Catholic traditions. However, their religious practices were more on an individual level, than as a community as it was before the occupation.

Family traditions continued to be maintained in rural areas - the natural environment for these ethnic Lithuanians. In urban areas, traditions were also maintained, albeit in

diluted forms due to the presence of different ethnic groups and the influence of the industrialization which did not affect directly the rural areas.

The Sovietisation of education did not influence the generation of participants as they have been brought up in the pre-war education system. However, it shaped the up-bringing of their children who, although in some cases were able to obtain a better education than their parents; it seems had been detached from religious values.

From the analysis of the data of my interviews the traditional pre-WWII Lithuanian sense of hospitality and community seem clearly to have been affected by the Soviet occupation. The society was built on a system of informers who intimidated and created feelings of fears among the ethnic Lithuanians, who in turn withdrew into themselves and did not interact with each other, to such an extent that it created isolation even from their immediate families.

Two separate columns profiling in summary form the cultural characteristics of the rural and urban subgroups of the present-day Lithuanian sample are in columns 5 and 6 of the multi-column table in Appendix 3.

Three non-identifying but directly grounded composite narratives with the purpose of conveying a sense of the people who made up the Lithuanian sample are in Appendix 10: 10.8, 10.9 and 10.10.