OIKOS: lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos 2025, nr. 2 (40)
ISSN 1822-5152 (spausdintas), ISSN 2351-6461 (internetinis)
https://doi.org/10.7220/2351-6561.40.5

Laima Vincė SRUOGINIS
Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Lithuanian Cultural Memory in the Memoirs of Daiva Markelis and Antanas Sileika[1]

Summary. The memoirs *The Barefoot Bingo Caller* by Antanas Sileika (born 1953) and *White Field, Black Sheep* by Daiva Markelis (born 1957) chronicle each memoirist's search for their North American identity while negotiating a Lithuanian diaspora cultural memory inheritance constructed through rituals of memory, society, and culture. These memoirs narrate coming of age experiences set against family historical trauma memories from World War II and Soviet and Nazi occupations of Lithuania. The memoirs are set in the largest Lithuanian diaspora sites, Chicago and Toronto, and document how collective traumas are shaped into cultural memory with the goal of passing on memory.

Keywords: memory, postmemory, Lithuania, cultural memory, historical trauma, Antanas Sileika, Daiva Markelis, Lithuanian American diaspora.

Introduction

World War II and the Soviet occupation of Lithuania (1944–1991) brought Daiva Markelis's and Antanas Sileika's parents to North America in the early 1950s. Within this landscape of Lithuanian collective trauma, Lithuanian diaspora community rituals kept memories of the homeland alive and created a medium to pass those values down to subsequent generations who were born and raised in North America after the Soviet Russian occupation of Lithuania. The diaspora community was essentially a community of survivors of war. Many coped with their own traumas with few resources to heal survivors' guilt and displacement. At the same time, this generation was tasked to rebuild a life on a new continent in a foreign culture and in a foreign language.

1 This paper received funding from the Research Council of Lithuania (agreement number S-PD-24-13).

Set in the two most populous postwar North American Lithuanian diasporas, Chicago and Toronto, the memoirs, *White Field, Black Sheep: A Lithuanian-American Life* by Markelis (born 1957) and *The Barefoot Bingo Caller* by Sileika (born 1953), reflect cultural memory experiences constructed out of the collective historical trauma experience of their parents and grandparents and the post-World War II Lithuanian diaspora community made up of displaced persons (DPs). During the period depicted in the two memoirs (the 1970s through the 1990s) this community was mostly made up of war refugees escaping the second Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1944 and their descendants. In these memoirs, both Markelis and Sileika describe the North American Lithuanian diaspora before the arrival of new Lithuanian immigrants from independent Lithuania in the 1990s and 2000s. The collective trauma experience of that diaspora was shaped into cultural memory with the goal of passing on memory, heritage, culture to future generations while maintaining a cohesive society based on rituals and traditions formed by collective cultural memory.

These two memoirs chronicle each writer's struggle to establish their own North American identity while negotiating a collective cultural memory inheritance constructed from romanticized remembrances of their parents' and grandparents' generation's prewar independent Lithuania coupled with trauma memories that were either passed on directly or indirectly through family stories and/or silences. These personal narratives of growing up in North American Lithuanian diaspora communities function as postmemory narratives because both writers' coming of age experiences are intertwined with allusions to their parents' and grandparents' collective trauma memories of the Soviet (1940–1941 and 1944–1991) and Nazi (1941–1944) occupations of Lithuania, living through the Allied bombings of Germany escaping Soviet occupied Lithuania seeking safety in the Allied territories of the West, living for five years in crowded postwar conditions in Displaced Persons camps, and finally, immigration to North America and the struggles of learning English and establishing a new life.

The DPs, and the second and third generations born to them abroad, feared Lithuanian language and culture would be lost under the Soviet Russian occupation of Lithuania (1944–1991). For this reason, maintaining Lithuanian language and cultural memory was prioritized in the diaspora. The activities of the diaspora provided a sense of belonging to something greater than mainstream American culture. Through strict societal codes, Lithuanian values were passed down through three and four generations in the United States and Canada. The Lithuanian DPs were a homogenous collective societal group that shared a collective memory of a flourishing independent interwar Lithuania, a collective trauma memory of fleeing the Soviet occupation through war-torn Europe, and a collective memory of living together in DP camps in Germany, unsure of their future, hoping to return home soon, but then slowly realizing that they had no choice but to emigrate either to the United States, Canada, Australia, or South America.

In the 21st century, after the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence, dual culturalism enabled a transnational culture to flourish with movement and cultural exchange back and forth between Lithuania and the United States and Canada.

Materials and Methods

Jan Assman's cultural memory concept was developed from the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's concept of collective memory and builds upon Halbwachs's work. Halbwachs claims that collective memory functions simultaneously in the past and the present within specific social groups. He argues: "<...> social beliefs, whatever their origin, have a double character. They are collective traditions or recollections, but also ideas or conventions that result from a knowledge of the present."[2] Assman distinguishes cultural memory from "communicative" or "everyday memory".[3] Assmann claims that cultural memory has a "fixed point" which does not change with the passing of time.[4]

According to Assman, cultural memory contains three interrelated concepts: memory (the contemporized past), culture, and the group (society).[5] Often there is considerable overlap between these three categories as each function to uphold the other. At the core of culture and society, expressed through clubs, schools, commemorative events, there is always memory. Therefore, if one could imagine three interlocking circles, the middle circle would represent memory, and culture and society would overlap over the other circles.

In their memoirs, Sileika and Markelis write about the social, cultural, and educational institutions of the North American Lithuanian diaspora, constructed first in the displaced persons camps in Europe, and then later in the postwar and Cold War years transplanted to North America.

DP Culture and Community

In his welcoming remarks at the international conference of collective trauma, *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past,* hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, former Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, himself a DP, reflected on historical trauma:

> When speaking of the pains of the twentieth century, which have traumatized us and Europe as a whole in a very dramatic way, I also draw on my personal experience. It contains traces of the two most brutal, totalitarian regimes of the time and the occupation of the country, which lasted for five decades. Pointless and transcending the boundaries of healthy perception annihilation of the population, deportations, political and religious oppression, restrictions on human rights and freedom, forced emigration from the homeland, of which I was a part. After spending several years in a refugee camp in Germany, later with millions of emigrants like myself, I found myself in the United States. In both Germany and the United States, I have seen up close the consequences of the repression

2 Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, transl. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1941, 1952], 188.

3 Assmann, Jan and Czaplicka, John, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", *New German Critique* 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring–Summer) (1995), 126, https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.

4 *Ibid*., 129.

5 *Ibid*., 129.

> and persecution of the Holocaust, they have affected generations and they are still felt to this day. During the difficult Soviet era, when I started visiting Lithuania, I re-experienced what the consequences of oppression are and what all the restrictions and censorship of democracy and humanity mean for society.[6]

Dovilė Budrytė discusses the function of diasporas:

> In addition, diasporas can serve (and have served) as powerful carriers of transnational memory. As argued by Langenbacher (2010), collective memory is crucially important to diasporic identities. It helps to establish a link between various diaspora communities and the homeland. Diasporas have the power to strengthen (and even to construct) the leading historical narratives in their state of origin (their "homeland"). Not only do they lend support (including financial resources) to certain historical narratives about collective traumas, but they also lead campaigns to increase awareness about such traumas on the international level.[7]

Once established in their respective diaspora communities, the DPs created a multilayered cultural memory group that consisted of all three levels of Assman's cultural memory experience. They passed on their cultural memory to their descendants through Lithuanian Saturday schools, cultural organizations, sports, communal song and dance festivals, and the activities of the Catholic and Protestant churches. These organizations maintained a distinct delineation between "we are this" and "we are not that." For example, during the Cold War years, Lithuanian Jews, Litvaks, were excluded from the ethnic Christian Lithuanian DP cultural memory group. Over the past twenty years, with the establishment of a new sensitive understandings of the Holocaust in Lithuania, Litvak culture has been reintegrated into the Lithuanian cultural memory group.

The DPs passed down collective cultural memory narratives of trauma while working towards post-traumatic growth. While the DPs faced challenges of building a new life in the diaspora without the tools to initiate healing from trauma, Lithuanian diaspora community rituals, such as commemorating prewar Lithuanian Independence Day on February 16th, mourning those lost in the Siberian deportations of June 14–22, 1941, Lithuanian language émigré literature and the press, and the educative work of cultural, and social institutions served the function of ritual collective healing and expressions of cultural memory.

Mid-twentieth century sociologist, Milton M. Gordon argues that, with the exception of the intellectual class which forms its own subculture regardless of ethnic backgrounds, race, and religion[8], immigrants ought not to be pressured to adapt to American life but should be encouraged to retain the psychological and emotional comfort of their home country:

6 Adamkus, Valdas H. E., "Welcoming Remarks", in *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past: International Conference Overview, March 5–6, 2020*, eds. Gabija Dalenkaitė, Samanta Galinaitytė and Evaldas Ignatavičius. Vilnius: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020, 8–9.

7 Budrytė, Dovilė, "Transnational Memory as Traveling Trauma: Lithuanian Traumatic Memory after World War II", in *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past*, 78–79.

8 Gordon, Milton, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 254–255.

> The forms and devices of the immigrant community face two ways. On the one hand, providing the indispensable comfortable milieu, they continue the newcomer's orientation to the culture of the old country and the old locality, to its familiar ways of doing things, to its current history and its current gossip. On the other hand, they gradually incorporate elements of the American culture, interpret that culture to the newcomer in ways which he can understand, and sift its elements and bring them to his attention in a degree and at a pace which muffles and makes bearable the shock of cultural collision. The immigrant's burial and insurance societies, his indigenous church, his "foreign language" press, his favorite cafes and coffee houses, his old-style theatrical entertainments, his network of social cliques and "nationality" organizations, his ceremonies and folk dances, are never created or recreated simply as replicas of old country elements; they always progressively reflect the influence of American conditions and American events, serving as a sturdy bridge between the old and the new. In a word, the immigrant subsociety mediates between the native culture of the immigrant and the American culture <...>.[9]

In America and Canada, ethnic communities thrive with their own restaurants, houses of worship, clubs, and meeting places. This is true of the Lithuanian diaspora as well. However, Gordon's expectations of American born immigrant assimilation differ from the expectations that were established within the North American Lithuanian diaspora. He writes that acculturation takes place within one generation:

> The American-born children of immigrants, the second generation, with exceptions based on the existence of a few rigidly enclosed enclaves, should be realistically viewed as a generation irreversibly on its way to virtually complete acculturation (although not necessarily structural assimilation) to native American cultural values at selected class levels. Exposed to the overwhelming acculturative powers of the public school and the mass communications media, the immigrants' children will proffer their unhesitating allegiance to those aspects of the American cultural system which are visible to them in their particular portion of the socio-economic structure.[10]

This process of acculturation was natural to American-born children of emigrants from Lithuania who immigrated during 1868–1939. Within a generation they made the linguist shift from Lithuanian to English. Nonetheless, they maintained Lithuanian Churches and other ethnic community establishments for several generations.

The DPs, however, constructed a diaspora based on carefully constructed cultural memory and shared collective trauma. Through a cultural memory inheritance, their intent was to arrest the acculturative process of Americanization and assimilation of the second-generation North American born generations. The children and grandchildren of DPs were expected to function within American culture economically and politically, but to maintain their loyalty to the Lithuanian diaspora community and to always prioritize its political and social goals, which were achieving Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union and then to return and help rebuild an independent Lithuania. Through Lithuanian language Saturday Schools, folk dance ensembles, choirs, scouts, and a variety of Lithuanians sports and cultural clubs, throughout the decades after World War II, the DPs

9 *Ibid*., 244.

10 *Ibid*., 254–255.

continued to foster the hope of returning to Lithuania, instilling that hope in their children, interrupting the typical immigrant's natural process of cultural assimilation.[11] This sentiment is evidenced in publications from the Cold War era, but can also be found in personal correspondence. For example, in a letter dated January 27, 1955, Olga Albertina Ingelevičienė, wife of the photographer, Antanas Ingelevičius, who had fled to the West with their younger son in 1944, while her husband and older son remained behind in Lithuania, expresses to her brother-in-law in New York her continued belief that they were only temporarily separated from home and family eleven years after fleeing Lithuania:

> After all, we all still must await the day when we will all be able to return to the Homeland. The day when we will finally know what happened to those we left behind and what lies behind that dark curtain. Then I will finally see my Mama again. I will see how the son I left behind has made his life in that country of "boundless opportunity" [the U.S.S.R.]. In a word, we've seen so much, but we must keep on living so that we may witness the finale of our tragic century.[12]

Olga Albertina Ingelevičienė passed away in Los Angeles, never having the opportunity to return home to Lithuania.

Expressions of Cultural Memory in the Lithuanian North American Diaspora

Through expressions of cultural memory, the postwar Lithuanian diaspora sought to recreate their Lithuanian culture lost due to occupation. Lithuanian folk-dance ensembles were created to connect younger generations to the previous generation's collective memory, instill cultural memory, and create a positive group experience. The folk dancing groups were a vital cultural memory aspect of every Lithuanian diaspora community in North America and served multiple purposes within the diaspora communities. According to Assmann: "Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation."[13]

Sileika's first book, *Buying on Time*, is a work of autobiographical fiction that relies on humor to tell the story of a newly arrived immigrant family in a 1950s Toronto suburb. In his memoir, *The Barefoot Bingo Caller*, written decades later, Sileika describes his evolution from a hippy kid drawn to hanging out on Yonge Street in Toronto to folk dancer. Sileika's mother seeks to "civilize" her son, by bringing him into the Lithuanian cultural memory group:

> Our parents, twenty-five years in-country but still immigrants at heart. To them, even sunglasses were seditious. Who knew what pupils were dilated behind the darkened glass?[14]

11 For more on cultural assimilation, see the work of John W. Berry: Berry, John W., "Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (6, November) (2005), 697–712.

12 Letter from Olga Ingelevičienė in Los Angeles to her brother-in-law Vladas Ingelevičius in New York, 27 January, 1955. Courtesy of the personal archive of Monika Sabalis (2022).

13 Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", 132.

14 Sileika, Antanas, *The Barefoot Bingo Caller*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2017, 28.

Sileika's parents force him to join the Toronto Lithuanian folkdance ensemble. Sileika dutifully learns the polka and waltz steps and begins to enjoy the shared cultural memory experience and company of the dance group. When his father sees him practicing the waltz step alone in the living room, he comments: "Look, Mother, <...> somebody finally taught the boy the meaning of fun."[15] To the diaspora, the dance group is "educative" and "provides rules of conduct." The "humanizing functions" are delineated as spending time in close contact with other young adults who belong to the same cultural memory group, like his dance partner Irene. The relationship with Irene, however, is described through irony.

In a scene where Irene, dressed in her traditional Lithuanian national costume—an embroidered wool skirt and embroidered apron, embroidered blouse, and traditional fitted vest—fishes for a compliment from her dance partner, Antanas, she receives an unexpected response.

> "I asked you how I looked," Irene said.
> "And I told you."
> "But you didn't even really look."
> "What's to see between the headpiece and weirdly patterned clothes all over your body? You look like a happy peasant."
> "That's just my costume."[16]

Irene implicitly understands the significance of her costume. When Lithuanian refugees fled Lithuania after the second Soviet Russian occupation in 1944, many Lithuanian women packed their Lithuanian national costume into the limited amount of luggage they brought with them. In the displaced persons camps, Lithuanian women dressed in the national costume on special occasions. Wearing the Lithuanian national costume was a great point of pride. Nijolė Bražėnaitė, the widow of Juozas Lukša, the leader of the anti-Soviet armed resistance, quoted in the essay, "Mano Brangus Juozuk" describes how she was married to Lukša wearing the Lithuanian national costume.[17] The tradition of owning and wearing a Lithuanian national costume was an important component of the Lithuanian diaspora cultural memory heritage.

Dressing second and third generation Lithuanian American and Canadian young adults living in Canada and the United States to look like "happy peasants" can be interpreted as formative and normative according to Assmann:

> The binding character of the knowledge preserved in cultural memory has two aspects: the *formative* one in its educative, civilizing, and humanizing functions, and the *normative* one in its functions of providing rules of conduct.[18]

Sileika observes that Irene is wearing cultural camouflage. Although he admits Irene is pretty, he finds her national costume incongruent with her Canadian persona. In another

15 *Ibid*., 28.

16 *Ibid*., 27–28.

17 Laima Vincė, sud., „Mano brangus Juozuk", *Apie anuos nepamirštamus laikus: Juozo Lukšos-Daumanto ir Nijolės Bražėnaitės susirašinėjimas*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos instituto leidykla, 2021.

18 Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", 131.

scene in the memoir, Sileika reflects on his mother's appearance as opposed to his father's. His mother has learned to adapt to Canadian culture on the exterior, while his father has not adapted neither on the exterior or interior.

> She was dressed in a green pant suit, pretty fancy for a Saturday with no company. To look at her, you'd almost think she was a real Canadian. (Unlike my father, who might as well have had the letter "I" for "Immigrant" stamped on his forehead.) She *looked* modern, she even listened to Herb Alpert, but she still *thought* like all the other immigrant mothers down at the parish hall. After twenty-five years in the country, she had learned about camouflage.[19]

On the surface, the generations appear to have switched places. The DP mother "camouflages" herself as a Canadian, so that she may work and be a part of her Canadian community while maintaining her immigrant mindset, and the DP daughter "camouflages" herself as a Lithuanian while taking a drag on a cigarette and retaining a Canadian mentality.

Sileika reflects on how he misses out on the counterculture of the sixties and seventies that marked his generation in North America but accepts as compensation having some unruly fun with the other "ethnics" on Dominion Day:

> As for us, we were still on the boat. Even when we got off the boat, the island was filled with other people like us. Happy ethnics, celebrating their heritage while building a better future together. Other people went to Woodstock. Some had been to Monterey. I was on Centre Island.[20]

Although born in Canada, Sileika imagines himself as an immigrant on the boat to Ellis Island: "I wouldn't have been surprised if our ferry traveled down the St. Lawrence and out to the Atlantic and landed at Ellis Island."[21] This sardonic observation betrays Sileika's postmemory experience of imagining himself into his parents' life as immigrants arriving at Ellis Island although Sileika himself was born in Canada.

The sarcastic remarks Sileika makes describing his experience with the folk dancing troupe seem to highlight the push-pull relationship Sileika experiences with the Lithuanian Canadian diaspora throughout his life and which is described in his second memoir, *The Death of Tony*, and in an interview published in *Vilnius Review:*

> I've given up fleeing, I can't resist the impulse any longer. Also, especially now later in life when I am involved in literary projects in Lithuania. Although in Toronto I do cherish my childhood friends more and more in my older age. But when what draws me to Lithuania are the stories. I am always trolling for stories, for memoirs, for old books that might turn into information that I can use in a new novel. I'm doing that even now. I've been doing this for the last fifteen or twenty years.[22]

19 Sileika, *The Barefoot Bingo Caller*, 25–26.

20 *Ibid*., 34.

21 *Ibid*., 33.

22 Laima Vincė, "The Death of Tony: A Conversation with Antanas Sileika", *Vilnius Review*, 20 December 2023, https://vilniusreview.com/interviews/the-death-of-tony-a-conversation-with-antanas-sileika/.

Throughout his adult life, Sileika attempts to break away from the North American Lithuanian diaspora community but always returns. Finally, he admits, he no longer felt the need to break away from community.

Symbols of Memory, Culture, and Society

Markelis admits that she was influenced by Sileika's *Buying on Time*.[23] She found Sileika's story remarkably similar to her own. Sileika and Markelis were born within a few years of each other in the early 1950s, only a few years after their parents immigrated to Canada and the United States. Although they grew up in different countries—the United States and Canada—under different systems of governance, educational systems, and with different local histories—their coming-of-age experiences chronicled in their memoirs are remarkably similar—both were exposed to the same Lithuanian diaspora cultural memory community through education, culture, and society.

In her memoir, *White Field, Black Sheep*, Markelis describes the many ways she feels displaced while growing up in the city where she was born. Markelis's memoir opens with an experience of negotiating "cultural collisions" in the neighborhood where she grew up:

> The markers of my childhood: the varnish factory looming like a giant domino against the sooty sky, the rat-infested coal yard north of the Burlington tracks, the air of huge red Magikist lips jutting out and above the Eisenhower Expressway. Coming back from summer trips to Indiana, my sister and I would spot them and know we were home. They were a woman's lips, curving gracefully at the edges. Set against the gray industrial landscape of northern Cicero, Illinois, they seemed to me heartbreakingly beautiful.[24]

Rather than Lithuanian fir trees or the Baltic Sea or the baroque architecture of Vilnius or the Art Deco style of prewar Kaunas forming her daughter's consciousness as images of home, these symbols of cultural memory are replaced with a set of disembodied tawdry provocative woman's lips looming over a dirty skyline set against a depressing industrial landscape. With these early visual perceptions of home lodged in her memory, Markelis finds herself in the borderlands between cultures. The symbol of the larger-than-life sexualized woman's lips, which Markelis as a child finds "heartbreakingly beautiful," are vulgar to her Lithuanian mother.

> My mother, however, found them vulgar, symbolic of all the things wrong with this new country: plastic flowers, Hostess cupcakes, Barbie dolls. What she found offensive about the Magikist sign was not only the deliberate and ugly bigness of the lips, but also the provocative misspelling of the word. "It should be *magic kissed*, shouldn't it?" she'd say every time we passed the sign. She disliked the loony orthography of American advertising, hated finding the *s* in *ease* arrogantly displaced by a *z*, as in the over-the-counter sleeping pill, Sleep Eaze. (In our native Lithuanian there's no mechanism for such an E-Z resettlement of morphemes.)[25]

23 Laima Vincė, *Vanished Lands: Memory and Postmemory in North American Lithuanian Diaspora Literature*. Oxford: Peter Lang International Publishers, 2023, 493.

24 Markelis, Daiva, *White Field, Black Sheep: A Lithuanian-American Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, 1.

25 *Ibid*., 1.

The image that her daughter associates with home the mother associates with gaudy, cheap, superficial American culture. For the mother, those lips grimace rather than smile. While the constant reminder of those cheap gaudy lips hovering on the skyline becomes a symbol of home to the daughter, for the mother they are a reminder of the home and culture she has lost. However, within the context of cultural memory, the gaudy American lips also challenge the mother to pass her own culture on to her daughter:

> <...> A trip through the Wisconsin countryside would bring back memories of the forests of Lithuania with their birches and pines. My mother would speak of the holiness of trees, their sacred status in Lithuanian culture. "The souls of the dead migrate to surrounding oaks and maples," she would explain as matter-of-factly as if she were telling us where birds go in the winter.[26]

Markelis cannot reconcile her perception of the vulgar lips as beautiful with the cultural references her parents and her Lithuanian American community instill in her. She is asked to honor a country she has never seen, to uphold the cultural standards of a homeland she has never experienced, and to literally not *see* the one that she was born into. Critic James Morrison calls this state of mind a "double consciousness" arguing that Markelis's memoir is a narrative of displacement. Morrison points out that there is always a double vision at work in the memoir.[27] The daughter's American and urban gaze also contains within it the DP mother's gaze of a pastoral landscape from a lost country Markelis has never seen. The disparate images co-exist in Markelis's mind, as though one were superimposed onto the other. As the narrative develops, Markelis describes the deep depression that she falls into as a teenager, young adult, and later as a married woman. She self-medicates with alcohol. Markelis connects the cognitive dissonance of her childhood in the border lands between a Lithuanian cultural memory and American culture as the root to her depression and alcoholism. She experiences post-traumatic growth through the process of writing her memoir, stops drinking, comes to terms with her depression. Markelis reflects on her personal growth through writing her memoir:

> We are a small country, and we perceive ourselves as victims and so we must represent our country by putting on the best possible show. Writing this memoir forced me to face myself and be honest with myself. I feel that as I wrote I cleared myself of my old traumas. The writing made me healthier.[28]

White Field, Black Sheep is a Lithuanian American woman's coming of age story, but also a story about breaking away from the cultural memory group and establishing her own identity separate from the group.

The *Vilnius Declaration on Dealing with Consequences of Collective Trauma* describes the consequences of collective cultural trauma:

26 *Ibid*., 143.

27 Morrison, James, "Review: White Field, Black Sheep", *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 41 (3) (2012).

28 Laima Vincė, "Interview with Daiva Markelis (born 1958): Oak Park, Illinois, July 10, 2021", in *Vanished Lands*, 482.

> Societies who continue to struggle to deal with the past traumatic experiences may suffer a wide range of trans-generational consequences, such as the increased prevalence of mental health problems, violence in families, communities and other settings, and other problems related to the destructive societal dynamics, including a critical lack of authentic faith, trust, and self-esteem.[29]

Markelis writes authentically about violence, mental health problems, depression, and alcoholism in the Lithuanian diaspora in Chicago. She breaks a strong cultural taboo by not showing the Lithuanian diaspora's best face to the outside world. Although, she addresses the loss of family members to Siberian deportation she also writes about how her parents had to put their own personal interests and talents aside to provide economically for their family in America.

Sileika uses humor to create almost absurdist scenes where the cultural memory inheritance of the Lithuanian diaspora community clashes with the mentalities of their North American born and educated children. However, as a mature writer, he returns to Lithuania's historical trauma as the source for nearly all his works of fiction.

Nobel prize winning Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich talks about people's stories of trauma as the source of inspiration for her book, *The Unwomanly Face of War*:

> I thought that these stories of these people could become more than just an existential rubbish, that you set out on paper it becomes literature. They had to be told in a constructive manner. To make everyday life into reality. To show the life of people, how people value each other, why superstitions rule us so much. In the name of this, we can give our lives and the lives of others.[30]

Ultimately, cultural memory passes on the stories of lived lives. Literature transforms those life stories into narratives that enable us to empathize with lives we may not have lived but can only imagine.

Cultural Collisions

In *The Barefoot Bingo Caller*, Sileika describes a pep talk given by his Lithuanian folk ensemble's director, Mrs. Aldona, meant to instill pride and a sense of dignity in the second-generation Canadian-born Lithuanian youth before an important Lithuanian folkdance performance. This pep talk offers an opportunity for first-generation Mrs. Aldona to instill the values of Lithuanian cultural memory into the Canadian-born second-generation teenagers:

> "Listen up," she said after she had formed us into a half circle. "We're going onstage after the Ukrainians." Mrs. Aldona paused after the word "Ukrainians" to let its meaning sink in. She paced a bit with her hands behind her back. "The Ukrainians are a tough act to follow. Maybe the toughest. With all that fancy boot slapping and Cossack foot kicking, the crowds love them and, on the surface, it's easy to see why."[31]

29 *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past*, 132.

30 Alexievich, Svetlana, "Why do I Write?", in *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past*, 34.

31 Sileika, *The Barefoot Bingo Caller*, 29.

She emphasizes the cultural differences between Ukrainians and Lithuanians, making it clear who belongs to the Lithuanian diaspora memory group and who does not.

> "But all they have is spectacle. You understand? The Ukrainians are no better than Las Vegas. Our dances are quiet, sure, but we have dignity and serenity. People sense that. They respect that. But you have to know how to *project* dignity. Irene, if I ever see you smoking in costume again, you'll get a one-month suspension and a call to your parents. Now go out there and project dignity and serenity or I'll have you practicing all summer long."[32]

In her speech, Mrs. Aldona reduces the centuries long traditions of Ukrainian folk dance to "Las Vegas," implying that the Ukrainian folk dances are cheap and gaudy and without substance. She upholds Lithuanian traditions as worthier, more reflective.

The dance performance pep-talk places a heavy burden on the second-generation Canadian-born teenage dancers. They are expected to pull off staging the dignity of having survived the trauma of war and having escaped and carried on with Lithuanian culture without having themselves experienced those historical trauma events. They are instructed to emulate an aura of serene innocent victimhood and create a moving performance for a Canadian audience outside of the diaspora cultural memory group. However, as Canadian born members of that society, the young dancers are keenly aware of how the Canadians will perceive them as "happy ethnics" (and not the way in which Mrs. Aldona wished). This "cultural collision" becomes painfully apparent at the end of the chapter when Sileika ditches a polka dance contest just as he and his partner Irene are about to win when he spots an American girl in the audience, who he had been flirting with a few weeks back on Yonge Street. He deserts his cultural memory group by literally running out of the polka dance, leaving Irene behind. For the young Sileika,there is no contest between a contemporary American girl and a girl living according to a constructed Lithuanian identity.

Later, boarding the ferry back to the mainland, Irene, tells him had they won the polka dance contest she would have had sex with him as a reward. Antanas is still not interested. He cannot see Irene as anything more than a "happy peasant," as someone play-acting a role assigned to her by the diaspora community.

Cultural Memory and the Significance of the Mother Tongue

The preservation of the Lithuanian language, the narrative of war, displacement, immigration is a constant presence in Lithuanian cultural memory. Mark Wyman notes that "just as the DP camps threw the rich and poor together, former landowners and former tenants, the DP camp schools brought different social classes together in a democratic conglomeration that would have pleased Horace Mann and other nineteenth-century American public school advocates."[33] Once established in the United States and Canada in the early 1950s, the Lithuanian DPs began organizing Lithuanian Saturday schools. They

32 *Ibid*., 29.

33 Wyman, Mark, *D.P.s: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1998 [1989], 100–101.

drew from their organizational experience learned in the DP camps. These schools were an important institution that instilled Lithuanian language, history, culture, and cultural memory into children and young adults. The formative texts of the North American Lithuanian diaspora, Saturday School primers, émigré newspapers and journals, the patriotic literary texts of the first generation, attempted to socialize younger generations born in the diaspora to the cultural values established by the Lithuanian-born generation.

Markelis recalls in her memoir a scene when the clash between her home language and school language is verbalized publicly:

> At home, my parents talked to my sister and me in Lithuanian. They watched for the intrusion of English words into our speech the way high school biology students look under a microscope for germs.[34]

Markelis's parents exclusively speak Lithuanian with her and her sister, even in public American spaces. This leads to recrimination from passers-by who maintain the opinion that immigrants should learn to speak English. The family does in fact speak English, but they are choosing to maintain the home language as an expression of the Lithuanian diaspora cultural memory construct:

> Having borne the collective guilt of leaving their homeland in the hands of the enemy, my parents' generation was not about to shoulder the responsibility of the death of the oldest living language (as we were told again and again).[35]

Markelis's parents continue to insist that the family speak only Lithuanian at home even as their daughters mature and become more socially active in American society.

> And then there was the chance, infinitesimal as it was, that the Russians would leave Lithuania, evicted by the superior forces of the United States, whose leaders, realizing their blind acceptance of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact had been a mistake of the most horrible kind, would go to any length to rectify their error. And then we could go back— we could all go back. Of course we did not go back.[36]

Markelis describes her embarrassment over her father's heavily accented and faulty English when he meets her American friends:

> I mentioned an Ann Landers column about taking pride in speaking one's native language. My father, who read and admired Ann Landers, was nonetheless adamant: Vee cow-moonick-ate in English.
>
> The irony, of course, was that my father's vocal, overly enunciated English marked him as a foreigner in a way that a quiet, natural Lithuanian would not have. He plowed ahead, oblivious to articles, ignoring the dangers lurking in prepositional phrases. When my American friends would visit, my father would greet them with "How you do?" *How you do, Lisa? Tom, how you do?* After one too many *How you dos,* I couldn't take it anymore. I began to yell: "It's not *How you do?* It's *How do you do? How do you do? How do you do?*"[37]

34 Markelis, *White Field, Black Sheep*, 16.

35 *Ibid*., 17.

36 *Ibid*., 17.

37 *Ibid*., 44.

Markelis's frustration at her father's overconfidence in his flawed English speaks to her inability to reconcile Lithuanian cultural memory with American culture, not feeling fully comfortable in either linguistic space.

The mastery of both Lithuanian and English in the second and third generations proved useful during the movement for Lithuania's independence in the eighties and nineties. Descendants of the DPs possessed cultural literacy in both Lithuanian and North American culture and applied that fluency to the independence movement. Sileika writes about returning to Lithuania in the late eighties and early nineties as a journalist to report to Canadian newspapers on the independence movement in Lithuania:

> It was January 1989 and Lithuania was trying to break away from the Soviet Union. Canada and America didn't like it because separatists were going to undermine Gorbachev. Five church basement ethnics from Toronto were going to do our best to bring the Canadian government along. Hundreds more were doing their bit across North America.[38]

Sileika writes about the emotional cost of his return to Lithuania, his DP parents' homeland. Already a retired professor, Sileika reflects on how he has spent his life neglecting his Canadian identity, his birthright, so that he may honor the inheritance of his parents' cultural memory through researching and writing about Lithuania. He muses over the alternate timeline hijacked from him.

> The Canadian part of my life lay neglected. I had never been to Newfoundland or anywhere truly north. I once had fantasies of drinking my way through the Okanagan Valley or of searching out whatever commercial fishermen remained on the Great Lakes in order to ship out with them. These were oversights I might never remedy, fantasies I would never realize. Much as I would have liked to write about the place where I lived, I kept writing instead about the place my parents came from.[39]

The transfer of collective memory between generations makes Sileika's Canadian identity seem like a mere shadow compared with the drama of his DP parents' life. Sileika's son, Dainius, however, returns to his grandparents' homeland to live and raise a family, fulfilling his DP grandparents' dream of returning to Lithuania.

Constructing Lithuanian Identity in the Diaspora through Education

For the most part, Lithuanian diaspora cultural memory is constructed from a romanticized remembrance of interwar Lithuania as an idyllic agrarian society consisting mostly of ethnic Christian Lithuanians, excluding the populous local Jewish *shtetls*, and the minority population of ethnic Russians, Germans, Poles, and others. Markelis describes the sense of an invisible culture that exists only as cultural memory:

38 Sileika, *The Barefoot Bingo Caller*, 186.

39 *Ibid*., 212–213.

> At Lithuanian Saturday School I learned a geography imbued with longing—Lithuania was a country of lush pine forests and golden dunes, a paradise on earth, forever embedded in amber. More important, I learned about the arbitrariness of borders, that a country can exist for one person and not another—a lesson reinforced at home, where there were always maps, and a globe that my sister and I loved to twirl when my father wasn't around.[40]

Markelis describes memorizing Lithuanian émigré poems and performing them at cultural events to please her parents. However, she admits that the experience of memorizing and reciting Lithuanian poetry denied her American born identity:

> I remember my parents and grandparents really encouraging and making a big thing out of Lithuanian poetry recitations. I love Lithuanian poetry. I love this part of Lithuanian culture the most. But, I think that stymied for me the way that I was supposed to go. I was supposed to have this deep love for Lithuania. For years, I didn't even think of myself as being American. "No, I'm Lithuanian," I'd tell everyone. Somehow, I'd gotten stuck in this little enclave in Illinois.[41]

A bittersweet relationship with the Lithuanian language exists in both writers' memoirs. As adults, both appreciate having access to another culture through language, and to be able to access the stories that are such a wellspring for their writing. However, on the other hand, they both express that there is a price to pay for the preservation of Lithuanian—alienation from the culture into which they were born and educated.

Sileika claims that the memoir, *The Death of Tony*, is about "leaving the Lithuanian community every few years and I end up coming back all the time".[42] Sileika explains:

> Because I get sick and tired of it, that's why. When I was young, I got tired of the Lithuanian folk-dance group, the Lithuanian scouts, the *Ateitininkai*, and I fled to Paris where I fell in with the Paris Lithuanians. When I returned to Toronto, I got an unlisted number because I was sick of Lithuanians. But then when my children were born and started to go to Lithuanian Saturday School that brought us back into the community. Then I got tired of Lithuanians again and suddenly Lithuania was seeking its independence, and I dove into that very deeply. Then I got tired of Lithuanians once again and I started to write books, and all of those books had to do with Lithuania. Those books brought me back to Lithuania yet again.[43]

Perhaps it may seem somewhat unfair, and possibly unhealthy, to blame personal heartbreak on the parental and societal pressure of adhering to the cultural memory rules of the North American Lithuanian Diaspora community; however, both Markelis and Sileika, well understood the emotional complexities of breaking with community. Markelis lays the blame for her shattered relationships on her Lithuanian American inheritance.

40 Markelis, *White Field, Black Sheep*, 35.

41 Laima Vincė, "Interview with Daiva Markelis (born 1958)", 478.

42 Laima Vincė, "The Death of Tony".

43 *Ibid.*

> Yes. I think that the way it affected me was that I buried a part of me that I wish I hadn't. For example, I had this American boyfriend who I really loved. Both of my parents came to the decision that I should let him go and wait for a Lithuanian. I didn't think back then—as I would right now—how strange that was and what a dangerous notion to live as people had lived a hundred years ago. <...> I ended up breaking up with this person. I married a Lithuanian who was totally wrong for me. My father finally guessed that this was not a good match and that he only made my drinking worse. But my mom said, "He's a Lithuanian and he has a job. These two things should make my daughter happy."[44]

It takes courage for Markelis to confide that her self-isolation within the Chicago Lithuanian American diaspora caused her heartbreak. The emphasis within the Lithuanian diaspora communities was on post-traumatic growth and celebrating culture. For Markelis, these two worlds become incompatible when it comes to her heart.

Conclusions

The three main components of cultural memory—memory, culture, society—instill societal cohesion among Lithuanian-émigré culture second and third generation descendants. Both writers describe similar cultural memory experiences—a romanticized nineteenth and twentieth-century Lithuanian history, omission of the German occupation (and the collaboration of Lithuanian perpetrators) and omission of Lithuania's Jews from the cultural memory narrative. Emphasis is placed on Lithuanian cultural trauma events, such as Soviet atrocities and occupation. Both memoirists write about acculturation into the group, or society, through the cultural memory rituals of Lithuanian diaspora organizations, such as the folk-dance ensembles, Saturday School, scouts, etc. Both memoirists use humor, an ironic tone, and at times a voice ripe with sarcasm to highlight cognitive dissonance between collective Lithuanian cultural memory and/or postmemory and the culture of mainstream American or Canadian society.

Literature

Adamkus, Valdas H. E., "Welcoming Remarks", in *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past: International Conference Overview, March 5–6, 2020*, eds. Gabija Dalenkaitė, Samanta Galinaitytė and Evaldas Ignatavičius. Vilnius: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020, 8–9.

Alexievich, Svetlana, "Why do I Write?", in *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past: International Conference Overview, March 5–6, 2020*, eds. Gabija Dalenkaitė, Samanta Galinaitytė and Evaldas Ignatavičius. Vilnius: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020.

Assmann, Jan and Czaplicka, John, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", *New German Critique* 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring–Summer) (1995), 125–133, https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.

Berry, John W., "Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (6, November) (2005), 697–712.

44 Laima Vincė, *Vanished Lands*, 478.

Budrytė, Dovilė, "Transnational Memory as Traveling Trauma: Lithuanian Traumatic Memory after World War II", in *Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past: International Conference Overview, March 5–6, 2020*, eds. Gabija Dalenkaitė, Samanta Galinaitytė and Evaldas Ignatavičius. Vilnius: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020, 76–94.

Gordon, Milton, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, transl. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1941, 1952].

Laima Vincė, "The Death of Tony: A Conversation with Antanas Sileika", *Vilnius Review*, 20 December 2023, https://vilniusreview.com/interviews/the-death-of-tony-a-conversation-with-antanas-sileika/.

Laima Vincė, "Interview with Daiva Markelis (born 1958): Oak Park, Illinois, July 10, 2021", in *Vanished Lands: Memory and Postmemory in North American Lithuanian Diaspora Literature*. Oxford: Peter Lang International Publishers, 2023.

Laima Vincė, „Mano brangus Juozuk", *Apie anuos nepamirštamus laikus: Juozo Lukšos-Daumanto ir Nijolės Bražėnaitės susirašinėjimas*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos instituto leidykla, 2022.

Laima Vincė, *Vanished Lands: Memory and Postmemory in North American Lithuanian Diaspora Literature*. Oxford: Peter Lang International Publishers, 2023.

Markelis, Daiva, *White Field, Black Sheep: A Lithuanian-American Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Morrison, James, "Review: White Field, Black Sheep", *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 41 (3) (2012), 337–340.

Sileika, Antanas, *The Barefoot Bingo Caller*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2017.

Wyman, Mark, *D.P.s: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1998 [1989].

Laima Vincė SRUOGINIS
Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas

LIETUVIŲ KULTŪRINĖ ATMINTIS DAIVOS MARKELIS IR ANTANO ŠILEIKOS MEMUARUOSE

Santrauka. Antano Šileikos (gim. 1953 m.) memuarų knygoje „The Barefoot Bingo Caller" („Basakojis bingo pranešėjas") ir Daivos Markelis (gim. 1957 m.) memuaruose „White Field, Black Sheep" („Baltas laukas, juoda avis") pasakojama apie šių knygų autorių tapatybės paieškas Šiaurės Amerikoje: brendimo patirtis, susijusias su šeimos istoriniais trauminiais įvykiais per Antrąjį pasaulinį karą, sovietų ir nacių okupacijas Lietuvoje, ir karo pabėgėlių stovyklose praleistus metus. Veiksmas vyksta didžiausiuose lietuvių diasporos miestuose – Čikagoje ir Toronte, dokumentuojama, kaip kolektyvinės traumos formuojasi į kultūrinę atmintį, siekiant perduoti prisiminimus, ir kaip tai paveikia memuarų personažų asmeninius gyvenimus.

Raktažodžiai: atmintis, poatmintis, kultūrinė atmintis, istorinė trauma, Antanas Šileika, Daiva Markelis, Šiaurės Amerikos lietuvių diaspora.