

**(Re-)Considering Authenticity:
A Critical Review of Soviet Lithuanian Historiography
of Gender and Sexuality**

by Rasa Navickaitė

In the last decade there has been some interesting historical research produced on Soviet Lithuania that seems to move away from the the binary resistance vs. collaboration model, which has been dictating the research agenda since the declaration of independence in 1990. These recently produced studies focus on untangling the complex and interdependent relationship that both elites and masses had with the Soviet regime and ideology. That is not to say, of course, that the topics of occupation, resistance, and collaboration have disappeared from the research agenda. On the contrary, as Violeta Davoliūtė notes, since Russia's military aggression in Georgia (2009) and Ukraine (2014), the Baltic states have been immersed in an increasingly divisive cultural war regarding national memory. In Lithuania this has resulted, for example, in a renewed interest in and often uncritical exaltation of the anti-Soviet postwar armed resistance.¹ The ongoing importance of a certain “clean” historical narrative of the Soviet period is also visible in a new purge of Soviet-era insignia from the public sphere.² Nevertheless, next to these developments, which clearly relate to nationalist political agendas, there has also been a rise in social history, cultural history, and the history of everyday life in Soviet Lithuania, which aims to present an original interpretation of Soviet history, including an analysis of the entanglement between the state and society. These works do not necessarily actively serve political agendas but, instead, aim to deal with intricate issues of subjectivity, emotions, ethical and aesthetic norms, and other “personal” matters.

While these more recent historical works do not follow the resistance vs. collaboration binary, they do often employ another binary that structures the interpretation of sources and informs their research findings; namely, the distinction between the “authentic”, meaning inner, personal, sincere experiences, feelings and thoughts of various social actors, and the “artificial” or imposed from the outside, Soviet state-produced, ideological norms and ideals that were forced upon individuals by the state. Various different versions of the “authentic vs. artificial” binary appear in works that deal with, e.g., the question of subcultural groups and their relationships with Communist ideology,³ the oppression of organized religion in

1 See Violeta Davoliūtė: The Baltic Model of Civic-Patriotic History, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* (published online September 3, 2021), pp. 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2021.1968145>.

2 The most recent attempt at such cleansing of the public space in Vilnius was the removal of the sculpture of the Writers' and chairman of the Lithuanian SSR Writer's Union, Petras Cvirka. See <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1546530/cvirkos-paminklo-nukelima-stebejojir-priesininkai-ir-palaikantieji-bus-svariau-bet-ne-taip-grazu> [last accessed: 12.10.2021]; see also Rasa Navickaitė: The ‘Apolitical’ Politics of Soviet Memory in Vilnius, in: *Baltic Worlds IX* (October 2016), no. 3, pp. 78-80.

3 See Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė, Ainė Ramonaitė: *Sąjūdžio ištakų paieška: nepaklusniųjų tinklaveikos galia* [In Search of the Roots of Sąjūdis: The Power of Disobedient Networking], Vilnius 2011.

an atheist state,⁴ and “boredom” in the Brezhnev era of stagnation,⁵ among others. In their different ways these works ask to what extent Soviet Lithuanian people have incorporated the official Soviet ideology in their everyday practices, in their cultural production and their inner narratives of themselves, and to what extent they have maintained, expressed or suppressed their personal views and their authentic selfhood, which might have differed from what was promoted by the state.⁶ In this review article I provide an overview of the Lithuanian historiography of gender and sexuality in the Soviet period, asking how the aforementioned binary has been employed so far in describing women’s (heterosexual) intimate and family trajectories and homosexual (mainly men’s) subjectivities in Soviet Lithuania. While the historical research in this field is still just taking its first steps, I hope that the article will provide some useful insights into the advantages and potential problems with this binary, as well as some guidelines for a critical reevaluation of the notion of “authenticity” from a feminist and queer perspective.

As Alexei Yurchak has convincingly argued, most of the knowledge retrospectively produced about the Soviet Union has been strongly influenced by post- and anti-socialist “political, moral, and cultural agendas”.⁷ In a Lithuanian context, the post-socialist anti-Soviet nationalist agenda dictates a hegemonic understanding that the failure to produce a negative moral judgment of the Soviet period means also a failure to acknowledge and condemn the fact of the occupation and illegal incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union, or the crimes of the regime; ergo it is “treason”. As a result, the hegemony of this nationalist discourse dictates the kind of historical writing and practices of memory which consistently aim to “other” the Soviet regime.⁸ In this context, even those works that consciously avoid or question the collaboration vs. resistance model binary still retain a certain dualism at the level of the Soviet individual, who is often portrayed as mentally trapped between “authentic” (and, presumably, more moral) personal feelings, thoughts, desires, opinions and dreams, and the (immoral) state-imposed, Soviet ideology-compliant expressions, utterances, actions, and life choices.⁹ The production of historical knowledge

4 See Nerija Putinaitė: *Nugenėta Pušis. Ateizmas Kaip Asmeninis Pasirinkimas Tarybų Lietuvoje* [Truncated Pine Tree. Atheism as a Personal Choice in Soviet Lithuania], Vilnius 2015.

5 See Tomas Vaiseta: *Nuobodulio Visuomenė. Kasdienybė Ir Ideologija Vėlyvuosiu Sovietmečiu (1964–1984)* [The Society of Boredom. Everyday Life and Ideology in Late Socialism (1964–1984)], Vilnius 2015.

6 Think of the persistence of religious beliefs and Church influence in Soviet Lithuanian society. Could we say that Christianity was authentic, while the Soviet ideology – was not, as Putinaitė argues in “Nugenėta pušis”? Or think of the fascination with Lithuanian folk customs – can we separate between the authentically reconstructed dances, costumes and traditions, and the ones that were “artificial”, created based on Soviet ideology, as Ramonaitė argues in “Sąjūdžio ištakų beieškant”? See Kavaliauskaitė, Ramonaitė, *Sąjūdžio ištakų beieškant* (see note 3); Putinaitė, *Nugenėta Pušis* (see note 4).

7 Alexei Yurchak: *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, New Jersey 2005, p. 6.

8 As Čepaitė notes, even the vocabulary of historical periodization has been affected by the post-socialist ideology. Namely, the Soviet period has been renamed as “sovietmetis”, “sovietų/sovietiniai laikai” using the Russian word to describe it, instead of the Lithuanian word “tarybinis”, which was used by the contemporaries to describe the Soviet regime. See Rasa Čepaitė: *Sovietmečio Atmintis – Tarp Atmetimo Ir Nostalgijos*, in: *Lituanistica* 4 (2007), no. 72, pp. 36-50.

9 It is important to note that some of the most interesting young researchers of the Soviet period in

about the Soviet period in Lithuania cannot escape the imperative to portray the Soviet regime as (to borrow Yurchak's expression) "a complex web of immoralities",¹⁰ or, to put it differently, as an immoral regime which was foreign to Lithuanians.

It is important to note that this article does not ask whether Soviet citizens indeed felt the division between their inner states and the requirements of the socialist state; there may well have been individuals who felt deeply tortured by such a schizophrenic experience. The article asks, instead, what are the methodological consequences of such a conceptualization of the individual as an historical actor for the writing of the history of Soviet Lithuania. As the historian Joan W. Scott has convincingly argued, the notion of experience as a transparent vehicle of historical truths, especially the experience of those oppressed and marginalized within broader socio-political frameworks, often precludes a critical examination of the very terms on which the structures of oppression and marginalization are based.¹¹ The goals of this article are therefore theoretical and methodological – to analyze how various forms of binary distinction of "authentic vs. artificial" operate in the history of everyday life under socialism in Lithuania, and how they affect the interpretation of materials and research findings. In this article I employ the critical tools proposed by post-structuralist gender history and queer studies to question some of the assumptions about historical reality, experience and selfhood in the historiography of the Lithuanian SSR. Even if the binary perception of reality as divided into "authentic" and "artificial" was indeed a basic structuring element of the experience of the Soviet reality for the individuals who lived it, is there a way in which historical research could denaturalize and historicize such a dualistic perception?

This article does not necessarily want to propose to do away with the "authentic vs. artificial" binary altogether, but it does argue for the need to reexamine the notion of the "authentic", sincere, personal, inner, free-from-ideology selfhood, which has informed historical writing so far. The post-structuralist framework¹² proposes to see all subjectivities as arising from within the discursive, social, ideological and historical possibilities and does not conceive of their existing outside of them as some sort of authentic, inner, and pre-discursive selves.¹³ Following such an understanding of subjectivity I suggest that indi-

Lithuania relate to Yurchak's conceptualization of the Soviet reality in a critical way, in particular criticizing his "totalizing" view of the Soviet system. See Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė: Alexei'aus Yurchako politiško samprata ir vėlyvojo Sovietmečio paradoksai [Alexei Yurchak's Concept of the Political and the Paradoxes of Soviet Life during the Late Soviet Period], in: *Sociologija. Mintis ir Veiksmas* (2014), no. 02, pp. 236-251. Similarly criticizing Yurchak, Vaiseta proposes instead to see the Soviet system as a spider's web, following Michel de Certeau's metaphor, where the impact of ideology decreases further from the "center". See Tomas Vaiseta: Sovietinio veltėdžiavimo Fenomenas Kasdienybės Praktikoje Ir Jų Trajektorijų Požiūriu [The Phenomenon of Soviet Vagrancy from the Perspective of Daily Practices and Their Trajectories], in: *Lietuvos Istorijos Studijos* 29 (January 1, 2015), pp. 111-126.

10 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever* (see note 7), p. 8.

11 See Joan W. Scott: *The Evidence of Experience*, in: *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), no. 4, pp. 773-797.

12 See Michel Foucault: *The History of Sexuality*, London 1979; Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York 1990; idem: *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York 1993; Joan W. Scott: *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, in: *The American Historical Review* (1986), no. 5, pp. 1053-1073, here p. 1053; Scott, *The Evidence of Experience* (see note 11).

13 While this approach has its own limitations, it has been useful for the feminist and queer critical

viduals do not exist “outside” of discourse and ideology, and therefore the “inner” values, dreams, and ideals of an individual are always shaped by the pre-existing discursive-social-historical structures. Hence, logically one can argue that the historical actors, who perceived themselves as divided between the Soviet ideology and their own inner beliefs (or managed to reconcile the two), were in fact experiencing not a clash between “the outside” and “the inside”, but a clash (or an overlap) of two discursive frameworks. Let me take as an example the sophisticated research on the culture of humor in Soviet Lithuania by the anthropologist and historian Neringa Klumbytė. She argues that the readers of the state-published humor and satire magazine “Šluota” lived a certain reality where personal values and state interests often overlapped, creating a comfort zone of political intimacy in late socialism, a zone of sincere yet simultaneously ideological laughter.¹⁴ While Klumbytė develops a convincing argument about the overlap between the “personal” beliefs and morals and the state ideology, I would like to take her argument further by questioning the very existence of the “personal”, or, as she calls it, “sincere” – that is, a certain kind of reality which is seen as pre-ideological. I propose instead that the seemingly “personal” experiences of an individual are in fact also shaped by discursive structures and ideologies, e.g. Catholic, bourgeois, nationalist, patriarchal, etc. These discursive frameworks sometimes clashed with the Soviet ideology, sometimes they lived in harmony with it, and sometimes they were interrelated with or appropriated by the Soviet ideology (as in the case of nationalism, for example¹⁵), but, I argue, they cannot be seen as more “authentic” or “sincere” than the hegemonic Soviet discourses.

In this article I focus in particular on how the “authentic vs. artificial” binary appears in the historical works focused on the broadly defined topics of gender and sexuality in Soviet Lithuania. What work does the notion of “authenticity” do when it is employed in analyzing probably the most “private” aspects of everyday life in the Lithuania SSR – desire, love, intimate relations, family life, gender roles and relations, eroticism, and sexuality? What is lost and gained by historians who posit the existence of a certain authentic, organic, natural erotic impulse, desire, sexuality, gender, love, etc., and set it against the Soviet regime and its ideology, which allegedly suppressed the natural instincts of Soviet citizens? Following the post-structuralist line of thought I propose to see every sexual subjectivity, gender identity, and intimate experience which took place in Soviet Lithuania as simultaneously “authentic” and “Soviet” at the same time, as it was formed in relation to and was inseparable from the plurality of discourses and power struggles characterizing Soviet Lithuania. Moreover, I propose that the focus on gender and sexuality can help researchers to overcome the language of authenticity and the related perception of innocence and moral superiority of the allegedly pre-ideological self in the context of the Soviet regime, which such language entails. Engaging with historical questions of gender oppression and the marginalization

theoretical work as it has shown the contextuality, flexibility and mutability of the subject’s, desire and has helped to redefine agency. See Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler et.al.: *Feminist Contentions. A Philosophical Exchange*, London et.al. 1995; Lois McNay: *Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler: Theory*, in: *Culture & Society* 16 (April 1, 1999), no. 2, pp. 175-193.

14 See Neringa Klumbytė: *Political Intimacy: Power, Laughter, and Coexistence in Late Soviet Lithuania*, in: *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (November 1, 2011), no. 4, pp. 658-677.

15 See Yuri Slezkine: *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism*, in: *Slavic Review* 53 (1994), no. 2, pp. 414-452.

of sexual and gender minorities might bring to the attention of researchers, I believe, the continuities and similarities between the Soviet ideology and other discursive structures which have also shaped Lithuanian society, but not exclusively during the Soviet period, such as nationalism, Catholicism, traditional peasant culture, Western Enlightenment ideas, and others.

In what comes next, I overview historical works focused on desire, love, intimate relationships, family, gender roles and relations, eroticism, and sexuality in the Lithuanian SSR, by focusing on the ways in which these works use or avoid using the notion of “authenticity” in the context of Soviet modernity. I start from the research on heteronormative sexuality, namely the academic studies regarding romantic love and desire, gender roles, family life, and questions of sexual morality. Most of the works analyzed here deal with women’s history, focusing largely on women’s experiences and the construction of femininity. In the second part of this article I explore the scarce academic work on LGBTQ+ sexualities in Soviet Lithuania, in particular the research on gay and lesbian subjectivities and the grass-roots historical attempts at writing a queer history in Lithuania. I ask how the historical analysis of gender and sexuality can help us rethink the issue of the “authenticity” of the historical subject in the context of Soviet Lithuania.

Family, (Hetero)Sexuality, and Morality in Soviet Lithuania

Since the 1990s there has been a proliferation of excellent scholarship on the questions of gender, sexuality and family in the Soviet Union inspired by revisionist and post-revisionist theoretical trends.¹⁶ These works have shed light on the gender order, family policy, and the moral and ideological norms guiding sexuality, which were part and parcel of the project of building Soviet modernity. In Lithuania these topics have been touched upon only by a handful of historians working on everyday life in the Soviet period. Most of these works come from a perspective informed by feminist theory and focus on women’s experiences with an emphasis on the overall oppressive character of the Soviet system for women. Probably the most prolific historian of family and gender in Lithuania is Dalia Leinarte (previously Marcinkevičienė), who has written on Lithuanian women’s history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and importantly for this article, on women’s everyday lives and intimate trajectories in the context of the Soviet family ideology.¹⁷ Together with the anthropologist

16 To mention just a few examples: Nanette Funk, Magda Mueller: *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, New York 1993; Wendy Z. Goldman: *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936*, Cambridge 1993; Mary Buckley (ed.): *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, Cambridge 1997; Eric Naiman: *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, Princeton 1997; Deborah A. Field: *Irreconcilable Differences: Divorce and Conceptions of Private Life in the Khrushchev Era*, in: *The Russian Review* 57 (1998), no. 4, pp. 599-613; Frances Lee Bernstein: *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses*, DeKalb 2007.

17 See Dalia Marcinkevičienė (Leinarte): *Romantinė Meilė Kaip (Sovietinė) Socialinė Politika [Romantic Love as a (Soviet) Social Policy]*, in: *Colloquia* 21 (2009), pp. 96-113; Dalia Leinarte: *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945–1970*, Amsterdam et.al. 2010.

and historian Rima Praspaliauskienė, she has also written on prostitution in Soviet Lithuania.¹⁸ Recently a collective research project at Vilnius University on the dynamics of sexual norms and behavior in the modernizing Lithuanian society has generated more research into the topic of sexuality, which goes beyond the focus on women exclusively.¹⁹ Little so far has been published from this project, but one article by Tomas Vaiseta has shed light on the hitherto unresearched topic of erotic images in Soviet cultural magazines and the public reaction to them.²⁰ I will focus here on Leinarte's work, as it provides a salient example of the distinction between the imposed "artificial" Soviet ideology and presumably "authentic" inner feelings, and juxtapose it with other approaches.

In her article "Romantinė meilė kaip (sovietinė) socialinė politika (Romantic Love as a (Soviet) Social Policy)" (2009) Leinarte contrasts the romantic ideal of love, which she associates with the interwar Lithuanian cultural context, and the Soviet pragmatic understanding of love, imposed on society as a part of Communist ideology and state policy.²¹ The Soviet ideology of love, in her view, did not leave much space for sexual attraction and desire in the ideologically approved, exemplary picture of a long-lasting relationship and, ultimately, marriage. Beginning in the Stalinist period and up until at least the 1970s, Communist propaganda praised the kind of love which could be harnessed for the greater social good: an ideal starting point for the creation of family and procreation, and a source of spiritual sustenance for both partners in their creative work for the Soviet Union. Relationships were seen not as a private matter, but ideally as a building block of the Soviet society.²² Communist propaganda criticized the bourgeois ideal of romantic love as based on irrational emotions and passions – an unsuitable basis for the creation of a Soviet family. Official media, literature and cinema painted the picture of passionate romantic love as an obstacle to be overcome in search of a "true" Soviet love, which was selfless, noble, long-lasting, and somewhat puritan. This led, notes Leinarte, to a neglect of sexuality, repression of artistic representations of romantic desire, non-existence of sexual education, the lack of knowledge of the basic physiological facts about sexuality and reproduction, and ultimately, an exclusively negative view of sexual desire in both the Stalinist and Khrushchev eras.²³

If the Soviet ideology indeed contrasted "true" Soviet love with the un-Communist fleeting sexual and romantic feelings, Leinarte's work aims to turn this binary on its head. She instead argues that it was Soviet "true" love that was ideological, superficial, and indeed inauthentic. In contrast the idea of romantic love, especially as it evolved in the interwar

18 See Dalia Marcinkevičienė, Rima Praspaliauskiene: Prostitution in Post-War Lithuania, in: *Women's History Review* 12 (2003), no. 4, pp. 651-666, here p. 651.

19 See Project Seksualinių normų ir elgsenos kaita modernėjančioje Lietuvos visuomenėje [The Dynamics of Sexual Norms and Behavior in the Modernizing Lithuanian Society] (SMOD-17-6); Tamara Bairašauskaitė (ed.): Nacionalinės mokslo programos 'Modernybė Lietuvoje' 2017–2019 tarpinė ataskaita [The Interim Report of the National Science Program 'Modernity in Lithuania' 2017–2019], Vilnius 2020, <https://www.lmt.lt/lt/doclib/wjhgxcqcfjqpxprdme33x5wmsj5kpn> [last accessed: 12.10.2021].

20 See Tomas Vaiseta: "Miegančių Šunų Žadinimas": Ar Sovietų Lietuvoje Vyko Tylioji Seksualizacija? ["Waking the Sleeping Dogs": Was There a Quiet Sexualisation of Culture in Soviet Lithuania?], in: *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 95 (2019), pp. 229-253.

21 See Marcinkevičienė, *Romantinė Meilė Kaip* (see note 17).

22 *Ibidem*, pp. 110 f.

23 *Ibidem*, pp. 105 f.

period in independent Lithuania among the educated city elites, was the expression of an authentic feeling, a true inner desire. Leinarte claims that the concept of romantic love as a “harmony of the souls of a man and a woman, symbiosis of two hearts, psychological and emotional concord between a husband and a wife”²⁴ has become a feature of Lithuanian culture during the interwar period. The idea that romantic love could serve as a legitimate basis of marriage was one of the results of the gradual modernization of the country in the 20th century. As Leinarte shows, in the 1930s and 1940s romantic love started appearing as an image in Lithuanian literature and private correspondence. Basing her analysis on the private letters exchanged among urban and educated Lithuanian men and women (an elite minority in a largely agricultural country), Leinarte argues that “marriage based on emotional and sexual intimacy was perhaps the distinctive feature of the modern interwar Lithuanian family”.²⁵ Leinarte suggests seeing the development of the idea of romantic love as an accomplishment, not only as a feature of the modernization and Westernization of the country, but also as a moral achievement in separating love from pragmatic concerns. This progress was however halted, in Leinarte’s view, by Soviet propaganda, which saw romantic love as an expression of “philistine and bourgeois morality”²⁶ which held individuals back from submitting fully to the Soviet project. It is striking that the analysis of the norms of love from the interwar period in Leinarte’s article is based on the analysis of private letters, while the analysis of the Soviet period largely relies mainly on pedagogical articles published in the official press. The “ideology” of love as promoted by the Soviet state is counterposed by Leinarte to the putative “personal” feelings of individuals living in the interwar period she idealizes the latter and paints the former in exclusively negative colors, as something inherently alienating and morally wrong.

Leinarte’s book “Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality. Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945–1970” (2010) is based on ten selected life-narratives by women who lived throughout the Soviet period, as collected by the author herself. In this work Leinarte continues elaborating on the distinction between the artificial Soviet ideology of love and authentic romantic love as developed in pre-Soviet Lithuania and employs it in her interpretation of the life narratives of two of her respondents – Leokadija Diržinskaitė-Piliušenko, a high Communist party member, and Marija Popova, also an active Party member. Diržinskaitė and Popova had similar life trajectories in the sense that they both entered into their first, short-lived marriages based on what they themselves described as romantic attraction. They described their first husbands respectively as “the most handsome man in the party group”²⁷ and “very appealing – so tall, with dark curly hair”.²⁸ Their second, long-lasting marriages were, on the contrary, with men whom they described as supportive and respectful partners, or “friends for life”²⁹ and not necessarily objects of desire. Leinarte interprets these life narratives as reflecting a “battle between ideology and love” in which the Communist ideology “has triumphed”.³⁰ While she depicts the first relationships of these two women

24 Ibidem, p. 102.

25 Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering* (see note 17), p. 45.

26 Ibidem, p. 43.

27 Diržinskaitė, quoted in Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering* (see note 17), p. 95.

28 Popova, quoted in *ibidem*, p. 134.

29 Popova, quoted in *ibidem*, p. 48.

30 Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering* (see note 17), p. 49.

as originating from inner and authentic feelings of romantic love and sexual desire, their second marriages were, according to Leinarte, a result of the “internalization of propagandistic stereotypes”³¹ of the Soviet understanding of marriage.³² In this way, romantic love of the pre-Soviet, interwar Lithuanian variety, as conceptualized by Leinarte, is presumed to be the expression of an authentic inner self, a matter belonging to the personal realm, while the Soviet ideology of love stays external to the subject can be only “internalized”, which then allegedly eradicates the possibility of an authentic experience.

The assumption that only those (gendered and sexual) feelings, beliefs and actions that contradict Soviet propaganda are “authentic” creates a problem for a feminist analysis of gender roles and relations in Soviet Lithuania. This approach, for example, reduces the socialist ideal of women’s emancipation to something artificial, imposed, and merely ideological, not related to Lithuanian women’s authentic subjectivities or desires. And indeed, Leinarte argues that the Soviet gender-equality propaganda messages “were aggressive in encouraging women to conform to the role model of the educated, socially active and emancipated woman”.³³ When analyzing the life narratives included in “Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality”, Leinarte interprets women’s experiences of self-reported empowerment through work and Party activism, as well as their dissatisfaction with romantic experiences, to be an outcome of indoctrination into the Soviet ideology. Only the experiences of romantic and irrational love are seen by Leinarte as authentic and free from ideology. This reflects the predominant post-socialist Baltic feminist sentiment of seeing the Soviet model of gender equality as artificial, forced, and the end of state socialism as an opportunity for women and men to regain their more authentic gendered selves.³⁴

The “authentic vs. artificial” binary, I argue, presents two obstacles for historical research informed by critical feminist theory. Firstly, it does not allow the development of an analysis that would account for both positive and negative aspects of the socialist gender-equality paradigm for women, or for the internal contradictions of Soviet ideology and its approach to sexual emancipation. As scholars such as Susan Zimmermann, Magdalena Grabowska, Kristen Ghodsee, Krassimira Daskalova,³⁵ and Rima Praspaliauskienė³⁶ have demonstrated in different Eastern European state-socialist contexts, socialist regimes provided various

31 Ibidem.

32 See also Aili Aarelaid-Tart’s review of Leinarte’s book, in which she asks if any “harmonious marriage of two Party members has to be condemned as a Soviet phenomenon”, or if, according to Leinarte, it could still be redeemed as “a form of romantic cohabitation”. Aili Aarelaid-Tart: Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945–1970, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 42 (December 2011), no. 4, pp. 564-567.

33 Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering* (see note 17), p. 3.

34 See Daina Stukuls Eglitis: *Imagining the Nation: History, Modernity, and Revolution in Latvia*, Pennsylvania 2002, pp. 202 f.

35 See Susan Zimmermann: *Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism*, in: *Aspasia* 4 (Spring 2010), no. 1, pp. 1-24; Magdalena Grabowska: *Bits of Freedom: Demystifying Women’s Activism under State Socialism in Poland and Georgia*, in: *Feminist Studies* 43 (2017), no. 1, pp. 141-168; Miroslava Nikolova, Kristen Ghodsee: *Socialist Wallpaper: The Culture of Everyday Life and the Committee of the Bulgarian Women’s Movement, 1968–1990*, in: *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 22 (September 1, 2015), no. 3, pp. 319-340; Krassimira Daskalova: *How Should We Name the ‘Women-Friendly’ Actions of State Socialism?*, in: *Aspasia* 1 (March 1, 2007), no. 1, pp. 214-219.

36 The article by Rima Praspaliauskienė on the Lithuanian SSR Soviet Women’s Councils is probably

means for the agency and empowerment of women, while at the same time they also failed to deconstruct patriarchal social frameworks and sexist cultures. Rendering the Soviet ideal of women's emancipation as merely "artificial" would mean interpreting any account of empowerment, emancipation, or even familial happiness under socialism as inauthentic. Secondly, this binary, as employed by Leinarte, does not allow one to engage critically with other, "non-Soviet" ideologies and discourses regulating gendered and sexual order. In particular, it does not allow a critique of the notion of "romantic love", nor of the broader patriarchal and conservative ideas on gender and sexuality.³⁷ Most importantly, Leinarte does not criticize the nationalist and Catholic moral frameworks, or the traditional peasant culture, or Western bourgeois norms, which continued to shape the gendered roles and relations, domestic lives, and approaches to sexuality in Soviet Lithuania, and which were further carried into post-socialism.³⁸

As the sociologist Aušra Maslauskaitė suggests, we cannot assume a clear line separating the Soviet ideology of love from a "romantic" notion of love, but rather have to understand the two as closely related and sharing many features. She argues for seeing continuity in the discourse of family, as based on romantic love, sexual relationship, marital bond, and asymmetrical gender relations, throughout the twentieth century and including the Soviet period in Lithuania.³⁹ While the idea of a "normal family" was indeed developed in the context of Lithuanian interwar nationalism as a prescriptive middle-class ideal, it was only slightly modified during the Soviet period to fit within the Communist family model and its emphasis on women's emancipation. This idea, and the accompanying gender asymmetry,⁴⁰ was never radically challenged in Soviet Lithuania due to the particular "ethnic communism" and its conservative, right-wing ideological tendencies characteristic of the Baltic states, argues Maslauskaitė.⁴¹ Therefore, while the gender and sexual order was changing and modernizing in socialism (more women joining the workforce and achieving education, increasing number of divorces and single-parent families, growth of state-provided childcare) the ideologically conservative tendencies in Soviet Lithuania meant that the interwar

the only such publication in the Lithuanian context which considers both the possibilities and the limitations of agency for female Communist activists, who, she argues, achieved a certain degree of emancipation working from within the Soviet ideology. See Rima Praspaliauskienė: *Women's Activism in Lithuania: 1945–1985*, in: Edith Saurer, Margareth Lanzinger et.al. (eds.): *Women's Movements. Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Köln 2006, pp. 307-316.

37 The sociologist Eva Illouz, for example, gives a sociological account of the structural gendered disadvantages that women encounter in the modern capitalist world of heterosexual dating and romance, where the notion of "free love" is still embedded within sexist cultures. See Eva Illouz: *Why Love Hurts. A Sociological Explanation*, New York 2013.

38 For the impact on traditionalist narratives on the post-socialist Latvian women's activism and gender studies, see Eglītis, *Imagining the Nation* (see note 34).

39 See Aušra Maslauskaitė: *Lietuvos Šeima Ir Modernybės Projektas: Prieštaro Bei Teorizavimo Galimybės* [Lithuanian Family and the Project of Modernity: Debates and Theoretical Potentials], in: *Filosofija. Sociologija* 21 (2010), no. 4, pp. 310-319.

40 Asymmetry here refers to the gender order in which women typically carry the burden of childcare and household chores while men are expected to be active in the public sphere, as well as the double sexual standard.

41 See Maslauskaitė, *Lietuvos Šeima* (see note 39), p. 316.

“normal family” model and entrenched gendered oppression were in fact smoothly carried into Soviet, and then also post-Soviet society.

Post-socialist feminist writers, among them Leinarte, have elaborated the critique of the “doubleburden” of Soviet women, who were expected to both participate in building Communism and take over the majority of responsibilities at home.⁴² She further elaborated this critique in her newest research monograph “Family and the State in Soviet Lithuania”, which documents in exhaustive detail the continuous oppression of women in Soviet Lithuania in both domestic and labor spheres.⁴³ While such critique has been mainly directed at the Soviet regime, we cannot possibly disconnect it from either the critique of the Soviet variant of the bourgeois family model and its supporting ideology of romantic love, or from the traditionalist and Catholic church-promoted views on gender roles and sexuality. To put it differently, the criticism of gender injustice, sexism, control of sexual desire under socialism etc. cannot only be the criticism of the Soviet ideology, but also the criticism of other ideologies which existed in this period and were officially incompatible with the Soviet ideology.

I argue that a critical engagement with the issue of gender inequality in the Lithuanian SSR should question the notion of “authenticity” of the “personal” space, imagined as a place outside of ideology, a morally superior and somehow innocent space. In fact, we should see this imaginary location as also influenced and shaped by other, not-officially-Soviet ideological norms, moral standards and discursive rules, among them traditionalism, religious beliefs, patriarchal ideas, liberal and “Western” ideas on masculinity and femininity, as well as Communist ideals of gender equality. Promising further spheres of research would include the research on the sexualized women’s images in the public sphere,⁴⁴ sexual harassment under socialism,⁴⁵ gendered experiences in Communist political activism,⁴⁶ and already explored in the Lithuanian context, or, as has been researched in other Soviet contexts, violence against women,⁴⁷ and the construction of the norms of masculinity.⁴⁸ Research into the gendered “personal” aspects of Soviet life has the potential to shed light on the continuities and similarities between the Soviet period and the pre-Soviet and post-Soviet societies, as well as historical specificities and the negative and positive aspects of state socialism for gender equality and women’s emancipation, without othering the Soviet experience as “inauthentic”.

42 See Funk, Mueller, *Gender Politics* (see note 16); Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering* (see note 17).

43 See Dalia Leinarte: *Family and the State in Soviet Lithuania: Gender, Law and Society*, London 2021.

44 See Vaiseta, *Miegančių Šunų Žadinimas* (see note 20).

45 See Ugnė Marija Andrijauskaitė, *Kai Žodžio ‘Ne’ Negana: Nepageidaujamas Romantinis Dėmesys Lietuvoje Sovietmčiu* [When ‘No’ Is Not Enough: Unsolicited Romantic Attention in Soviet Lithuania], in: *Istorija* 114 (2019), no. 2, pp. 63-71.

46 See Praspaliauskienė, *Women’s Activism in Lithuania: 1945–1985* (see note 36).

47 See Marianna Muravyeva: *Bytovukha: Family Violence in Soviet Russia*, in: *Aspasia* 8 (March 1, 2014), no. 1, pp. 90-124.

48 See Marko Dumančić: *Men Out of Focus: The Soviet Masculinity Crisis in the Long Sixties*, Toronto et.al. 2021.

Queer Soviet Sexuality: Repressed, Silenced and Rediscovered

In the last two decades there has been a substantial growth of interest in the topic of queer sexuality in the historiography of the Soviet Union, which can be associated with the rise of the post-revisionist approach.⁴⁹ Drawing on the theoretical insights of queer studies, this historical research has demonstrated that the medicalization and criminalization of homosexuality were an inseparable part of socialist modernity. Through close work with archival materials, scholars have challenged the assumption of complete “silence” about same-sex desire in the Soviet Union and aimed to historicize the contemporary homophobia in Russia.⁵⁰ Complementing archival research with oral history, researchers have provided insights into the biopolitical control and regulation of sexuality and the effect it had on the subject formation of queer individuals throughout the Soviet period.⁵¹ The historiography of the East-Central European state-socialist contexts, where homosexuality had mostly been decriminalized in the 1960s, has shown a variety of tools of modern disciplining of same-sex sexuality and eroticism, especially through medical discourses and censorship.⁵² The growing historiography of non-heteronormative sexuality in state socialism unfortunately remains very much limited to Soviet Russia and the Central European countries⁵³ and comparatively little research has been done so far on the Western borderlands of the Soviet Union, including Lithuania.

In the Lithuanian academic community of historians, the topic of non-hetero-normative sexuality remains taboo,⁵⁴ and the scarce knowledge on the subject is provided only by a handful of works in sociology and cultural studies. Most of these works focus on the formation of post-socialist LGBT identities, with usually a short historical recourse into the late Soviet period,⁵⁵ and only two master’s theses have focused mainly on the subjectivities

- 49 See Sheila Fitzpatrick: *The Soviet Union in the Twenty-First Century*, in: *Journal of European Studies* 37 (March 1, 2007), no. 1, pp. 51-71.
- 50 See Dan Healey: *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent*, Chicago 2001; Dan Healey: *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*, New York 2018; Rustam Alexander: *Homosexuality in the USSR (1956–82)*, PhD dissertation, The University of Melbourne 2018.
- 51 See Francesca Stella: *Lesbian Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia: Post/Socialism and Gendered Sexualities*, New York 2014; Arthur Clech: *Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic: Tema or the Shared Forms of Late Soviet Homosexual Subjectivities*, in: *Slavic Review* 77 (ed 2018), no. 1, pp. 6-29.
- 52 See Josie McLellan: *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, Cambridge et.al. 2011; Judit Takács: *Disciplining Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in State Socialist Hungary in the 1970s*, in: *European Review of History* 22 (2015), no. 1, pp. 161-175; Kateřina Lišková: *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989*, Cambridge 2018.
- 53 The majority of research is done however in Western universities.
- 54 See Ugnė Marija Andrijauskaitė: *Laikinosios sostinės paslaptys: ‘Kaip Teklė norėjo vesti Stasę’ [Secrets of the Temporary Capital: ‘How Teklė Wanted to Marry Stasę’]*, in: *Kauno istorijos metraštis* 14 (2014), pp. 165-174. The ongoing presence of this taboo is manifest also in, for example, the research object choice of the recent project. The dynamics of sexual norms and behavior in the modernizing Lithuanian society at Vilnius University, which intentionally excludes any research into “non-normative” sexualities, meaning any consideration of LGBTQ+ people.
- 55 See Artūras Tereškinas: *Lithuanian Gays and Lesbians’ Coming out in the Public/Private Divide:*

of gay and lesbian people in the Lithuanian SSR.⁵⁶ While academic historians in Lithuania without exception profess their moral disapproval of Soviet policy and ideology, their writings, as I have argued here, have remained suspiciously silent about “non-normative” gendered and sexual subjectivities, femininities and masculinities, trans and homosexual identities, thus creating the picture of the Soviet period as being empty of queerness.⁵⁷ Despite that, the contemporary Lithuanian LGBTQ+ activists are increasingly turning to the (Soviet) past in search of “our” history.⁵⁸ I believe that in this context, the discussion of the usefulness of the notion of “authenticity” in Soviet Lithuanian historiography is important in both theoretical and political senses. Due to the scarcity of works on the topic of LGBTQ+ people in Soviet Lithuania, I here provide only some insights on the theoretical dilemmas that arise in the existing work (two master’s theses) and discuss how the post-structuralist notion of the subject might be useful in future research.

A master’s thesis in sociology by Skirmantė Česienė, based on five interviews with four gay men and one lesbian woman, portrays homosexuals as sexual dissidents in the Soviet context.⁵⁹ Česienė depicts the Soviet persecution and pathologizing of people with same-sex desires and the trauma that this caused as often resulting in “split personality”.⁶⁰ Česienė describes state repression, such as harassment by the KGB and psychiatric treatment, and informal oppression resulting from the compulsory heterosexuality of Soviet society, which forced people to create families with people of the opposite sex and/or led to bullying at work. The loss of career prospects and social prestige were the main areas where, Česienė argues, the price of poorly hidden homosexuality was paid. Česienė sees the Soviet regime and ideology as responsible for the psychological problems, self-hatred and internalized homophobia of her respondents and homosexuals in general. People with same-sex desires were psychologically damaged, she argues, by the Soviet discourses of homosexuality as perversion. Empathizing with her respondents, Česienė describes the treatment of homosexuality in Soviet Lithuania as a “nightmare” and “inhuman”.⁶¹ Her master’s thesis shows

Sexual Citizenship, Secrecy and Heteronormative Public, in: *Sociologija. Mintis Ir Veiksmas* 19 (2007), no. 1, pp. 74-87; Arnas Zdanevičius (ed.): *Heteronormos Hegemonija. Homoseksualių Žmonių Socialinė Atskirtis Ir Diskriminacijos Patirtys* [The Hegemony of Heteronormativity. Experiences of Social Exclusion and Discrimination], Kaunas 2007; Juratė Juškaitė: *Transgender People in Lithuania or an Ethnography of Illegal Community*, master’s thesis, Budapest, Central European University 2017.

56 See Augustas Čičelis: *Reading Between the Lines: Spatial Communities of Men with Same-Sex Attractions in Late 20th Century Lithuania*, master’s thesis, Budapest, Central European University, 2011; Skirmantė Česienė: *Homoseksualūs Žmonės Viešose Ir Privačiose Erdvėse: Socialistinis Ir Posocialistinis Lietuvos Kontekstas* [Homosexual People in Public and Private Spaces: Socialist and Post-Socialist Lithuanian Context], master’s thesis, Kaunas, Vytautas Magnus University 2006.

57 An exception here is the recent book on psychiatry in Soviet Lithuania by Vaiseta, which, among other things, deals also in passing with the question of homosexuality. See Tomas Vaiseta: *Vasarnamis. Vilniaus Psichiatrinės Ligoninės Socialinė Istorija 1944–1990* [Summer House. A Social History of the Vilnius Psychiatric Hospital 1944–1990], Vilnius 2019.

58 Viktorija Kolbešnikova: *Kaip Išgirsti Tylą: Lietuvos Queer Archyvas* [How to Hear the Silence: Lithuanian Queer Archive], *Manoteises.Lt* (blog), February 26, 2021, <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/kaip-igirsti-tyla-lietuvos-queer-archyvas/> [last accessed: 12.10.2021].

59 See Česienė, *Homoseksualūs Žmonės* (see note 56).

60 *Ibidem*, p. 48.

61 *Ibidem*, pp. 48 f.

how, by forcing people to hide their sexual orientation, the Soviet regime led to split the lives and personalities of those whose sexual desire did not fit the heterosexual norm.

Adopting her respondents' discourse, Česienė sees the Soviet system as guilty for the "belated" coming out and self-understanding of homosexuals, who "discovered themselves" only in the post-socialist era, when information about LGBT people started flowing to Eastern Europe more freely.⁶² Homosexual identity in Česienė's understanding is not dependent on socio-political circumstances; rather, it is the expression of an authentic inner desire which various discursive regimes can only suppress or acknowledge. However, just as in the case of the ideology of heterosexual romantic love, as discussed above, could we not assume that the possibility of someone having a same-sex affair or living in a same-sex relationship still depended on their ability to make sense of this feeling in one or another way? Then, instead of talking about the "self-discovery" of homosexuals in post-socialist Lithuania, should we not talk about the positive reevaluation of one's desires and a "reinvention" of oneself, rather than a "revelation" of the true and authentic self? To follow Scott's critique of the concept of "experience" in historical work, instead of seeing homosexuality as a pre-discursive reality, an inner truth about individuals, we could instead analyze how, when, and why certain interpretations of same-sex attraction are replaced by other interpretations.⁶³ This approach would also mean that homosexual love in Soviet Lithuania, as much as it was indeed felt and expressed, also had to have certain discursive frameworks which made it intelligible. The task for historical research would be to find these discursive sources.

These complex issues, as they arise from Česienė's work, are further discussed by Augustas Čičelis, in his master's thesis in gender studies, based on fifteen oral history interviews with gay men between 40 and 60 years old.⁶⁴ His work shows how during the Soviet period gay men transformed certain locations of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius into spaces of clandestine communication and encounters. Following the post-revisionist trend in Soviet studies, Čičelis' thesis aims to show not merely the oppressive side of Soviet modernity on non-heteronormative sexualities, but also, in a Foucauldian manner, the productive side of criminological and pathologizing discourses. In a context where the information that homosexual people could receive about their sexual orientation was extremely scarce and exclusively negative, Čičelis argues that even the law prohibiting sexual relations between men, or the pathologizing medical and pedagogical texts on homosexuality, could have served as sources of self-definition.⁶⁵ Following post-structuralist theoretical insights, Čičelis' work does not differentiate between Soviet discourses and "authentic" desires, ideas, or experiences of his respondents, but instead treats (homosexual) subjectivity as arising from within the Soviet discourses and inseparable from them.

Čičelis' work further shows the difficulty of conceptualizing the homosexual "experience" in the Soviet context. Emphasizing the lack of any positive sources of information and self-identification in Soviet Lithuanian society and culture, the lack of a discursive

62 Ibidem, p. 53.

63 See Scott, *The Evidence of Experience* (see note 11).

64 Notably, the thesis was written not in Lithuania, but at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. See Čičelis, *Reading Between the Lines* (see note 56).

65 Ibidem, p. 12.

framework, which would normalize their sexuality, Čičelis' respondents stress that sexual attraction to people of the same sex for them was largely a bodily, corporeal, emotional experience, hard to define discursively, to express in words.⁶⁶ While the medicalizing and criminalizing texts in Soviet Lithuania indeed produced the notion of a homosexual (or rather – a “pederast”⁶⁷), they did so in an exclusively negative manner, thus providing LGBT people with a shared stigma, rather than a positive identity.⁶⁸ Discursively, aside from medical and criminological texts, homosexuality was present in Soviet jokes and curses. It featured as a topic in gossip, bullying, and harassment, but was no topic of conversation for “educated” discussions. This led to self-loathing on the part of many of Čičelis' respondents, who acknowledged to him having felt like “scum” in this environment. Čičelis however chooses to interpret Soviet discourses in a value-neutral way, as productive, in the Foucauldian sense, of homosexual subjectivities, without the separation between inner, “authentic” feelings and imposed, “artificial” discourses. His approach leaves him, however, with a dilemma of how to interpret the testimonies of his respondents, who drew a strict boundary between their own “inner feelings” and the imposed homophobic discourses, and attested to living not only “double” but also “triple, quadruple and quintuple” lives.⁶⁹

I would argue that the notion of multiple lives and multiple “selves”, as elaborated by one of Čičelis' respondents above, is instructive for a more sophisticated historical understanding of the Soviet experience. Instead of postulating the existence of a binary reality divided into the “artificial” Soviet ideology and the “authentic” pre-ideological personal realm, the queer example allows us to theorize the clash of multiple ideologies, which operated across the public-private binary. The (very limited) research into queer subjectivities under socialism, as described above, shows that the repression of non-normative genders and sexualities was based not only on the Soviet ideological norms, but also on traditionalist and Catholic moral frameworks that continued operating in socialist society, and, most likely, also on the modern Western psychiatric understandings of sexual deviance. At the same time, queer subjectivities were not only repressed, but also constructed and made intelligible (even if only in the most elemental way) only through those same discursive frameworks which made them abject, loathsome, abnormal. These same discursive frameworks that defined the heteronormative sexual norm potentially continued into the post-Soviet era, similar to the idea of the “normal family” and the accompanying gender asymmetry as described by Maslauskaitė, and even presumably as a part of this idea. Allowing for the multilayered picture of Soviet reality could contribute also to seeing the history of sexuality in twentieth-century Lithuania as a history of continuous modernization (without seeing it necessarily as a positive development), instead of divided into neat historiographical brackets of pre- and post-socialism.

The independent grass-roots LGBTQ+ initiatives at archiving and historicizing deviant sexualities are indeed already going in this direction. They aim to overcome the illusion

66 Ibidem, p. 20.

67 Vaišeta, Vasarnamis (see note 57).

68 As Čičelis' respondents remark, there was no name, no slang term to refer to gay men in a positive or neutral way up until 1990, when the word “gėjus”, a Lithuanian translation of the English “gay”, started being used. See Čičelis, *Reading Between the Lines* (see note 56), p. 57.

69 Ibidem, p. 19.

of “non-existence” created both by the Soviet official ideological erasure and by the post-socialist traditionalism, which strongly shaped research agendas in state universities. One such initiative at reclaiming queer agency in Soviet times is the Facebook page “Žmonės, kurių nebuvo” (People Who Did Not Exist), which collects the stories of individuals who lived in Soviet times and various cultural representations of same-sex desire. Journalistic research has also enriched the history of LGBTQ+ Lithuanians, by documenting the clandestine meeting strategies of Soviet gay men⁷⁰ and stories of prominent homosexual individuals, such as the photographer Virgilijus Šonta.⁷¹ Some stories of non-heteronormative artists, such as Veronika Šleivyte, have already attracted the attention of art historians who provide a glance at her work and private life.⁷² Recently in Lithuania also a new initiative at archiving queer history has been launched by the association “In Corpore” which, similarly to the above-mentioned Facebook page, aims to “listen to silence” about Soviet queerness.⁷³ These and other grass-roots initiatives will hopefully contribute to a less black-and-white historical understanding of the Soviet period.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that the language of “authenticity” has been employed by historians and other researchers of Soviet Lithuania not so much to reference the supposed freedom from ideological constraints of historical actors, but often to express a value judgment inherent in a certain positionality of the post-socialist researcher. Namely, authenticity has been assigned to nationalist sentiments, to Catholic beliefs, or, as in the cases analyzed in detail here, to romantic love or homosexual identity. This has encumbered researchers in a number of ways: first, it has stopped them from seeing any positive and/or productive aspects of the Soviet ideology and policy for individuals; second, it has prevented them from analyzing the negative aspects of other, non-Soviet discourses, moralities, and ideologies, which remain present in socialist society; and third, it has obscured the continuities of the systems of gendered and sexualized oppression before, during and after the Soviet period. This article therefore argues against the usage of the notion of “authenticity”, understood as a pre-discursive, pre-ideological, inner, personal, sincere realm, and opposed to the allegedly “artificial”, meaning Soviet, state-imposed, Communist, ideological, etc. realm.

70 See Mindaugas Jackevičius: Homoseksualai Sovietmečiu Prieglobstį Rasdavo Vyrų Pliažuose Ir Slaptose Kavinėse [In the Soviet Times, Homosexuals Found Shelter at Men’s Beaches and Secret Cafes], Delfi.Lt, May 11, 2013, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/homoseksualai-sovietmečiu-prieglobsti-rasdavo-vyru-pliazuose-ir-slaptose-kavinese.d?id=61351401> [last accessed: 12.10.2021].

71 See Mindaugas Klusas: Homoseksualumą Ilgai Neigęs Fotografas Šonta Su Savimi Susitaikė Tik Prieš Kraupią Baigtį [After Long Denial, the Photographer Šonta Accepted His Homosexuality Just before the Cruel End], Delfi.Lt, December 6, 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1290350/homoseksualuma-ilgai-neiges-fotografas-sona-su-savimi-susitaikė-tik-pries-kraupia-baigti> [last accessed: 12.10.2021].

72 See Agnė Narušytė: Veronikos Šleivyte’s Fotofikcija: Apie Meną, Moteris Ir Meilę [Photo-Fiction of Veronika Šleivyte: On Art, Women, and Love], Vilnius 2021.

73 See Kolbešnikova, Kaip Išgirsti Tylą (see note 58).

Instead, following insights from post-structuralist gender history and queer studies, I have suggested seeing intimate experiences and gendered identities as having the possibility of being simultaneously “Soviet” and “authentic”.

Drawing on the existing research on gender and sexuality I suggest that the biggest challenge for future queer historical research on Soviet Lithuania will be to avoid interpreting LGBTQ+ experience as a form of personal dissidence to the Soviet regime and ideology, as a sphere of “authentic”, “sincere”, inner, etc. desire and selfhood. Instead, I argue, historians should aim to read the experiences of oppression on the basis of gendered and sexual identity in the Lithuanian SSR within the broader geographical and historical context of the marginalization of LGBTQ+ people and the gender struggle both before, during, and after socialism. The very silence of Lithuanian historiography, not to mention the political and legal realities of post-socialism, speaks to the fact that it was not merely “Soviet ideology” which repressed LGBTQ+ people, but also other discursive frameworks, such as nationalist traditionalism, Western scientific norms, and Catholic morality. Similarly, further research into gender oppression and inequality under socialism should complicate the now predominant view in Lithuanian historiography that the Soviet ideology of women’s emancipation through labor was merely “foreign” and artificially imposed on women, not related to their authentic inner selves and, eventually, did not contribute to the goal of gender equality, as it is now reconceptualized in the post-socialist neoliberal context. Employing post-structuralist insights to the analysis of women’s and men’s gender experiences, desires, and subjectivities in Soviet Lithuania could, I believe, contribute to a serious reconsideration of the notion of “authentic” and ahistorical gender and sexuality. Understanding subjectivity as necessarily embedded within discursive frameworks could contribute to a history of everyday life under socialism, which avoids the “othering” of the Soviet system, as much as it could foster the kind of emancipatory politics in post-socialism, which do not need a recourse to a pre-existing “natural” self to justify the goals of equality and justice.

Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Artikel ist eine kritische Betrachtung der aktuellen historischen Forschung zur Geschichte des Alltagslebens im sowjetischen Litauen und richtet ein besonderes Augenmerk auf die Arbeiten, die sich mit den Themen Geschlechtlichkeit und Sexualität befassen. In ihm wird erörtert, dass die sowjetische Historiografie dazu neigt, eine binäre Unterscheidung zu reproduzieren – zwischen „authentisch“, also den inneren persönlichen Erfahrungen, Gefühlen und Gedanken verschiedener Akteure einerseits und den „künstlichen“ oder ideologischen Normen und Idealen andererseits, die der sowjetische Staat dem Einzelnen von außen aufzwang. Der Artikel kritisiert die Unterscheidung zwischen „authentischen“ und „künstlichen“ Aspekten persönlicher Erfahrungen, da sie ein Image einer geteilten sowjetischen Persönlichkeit schafft und im Endeffekt die sowjetische Zeit als nicht wirklich litauisch und das sowjetische Regime für die Litauer als fremdartig abstempelt. Er analysiert die neuesten Arbeiten zur Geschichte der Frauen und LGBTQ+-Sexualität im sowjetischen Litauen und hat vor allem im Fokus, wie der Begriff „Glaubwürdigkeit“ im Hinblick auf Geschlechtlichkeit und Sexualität artikuliert wird. Der Artikel warnt vor der Romantisierung einer bestimmten Vorstellung von Liebe, Begehren und Intimität sowie

geschlechtlicher Identität und Ausdruckskraft als „Außenseiter“-Ideologie, die deshalb dem repressiven Sowjet-Regime überlegen ist. Er zeigt auf, wie eine historische Analyse von Geschlecht und Sexualität im sowjetischen Litauen dazu beitragen könnte, die Vorstellung der authentischen persönlichen Erfahrung zu überdenken. Auf der Basis post-strukturalistischer theoretischer Erkenntnisse schlägt der Artikel vor, jede sexuelle Subjektivität, geschlechtliche Identität und intime Erfahrung im sowjetischen Litauen als gleichzeitig „authentisch“ und „sowjetisch“ zu betrachten, so wie sie sich aus der Vielzahl der Diskurse und Machtkämpfe ergab, die das sowjetische Litauen prägten und von dem sie sich nicht trennen lässt.