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Memory of Soviet Repressions in the Kazakhstan Lithuanian Diaspora: Interpretations, Practices, Contexts

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In this article, the focus is on the memory of repressions in the Kazakhstan Lithuanian diaspora, a large part of which consists of the descendants of Lithuanians who were subject to repression. Based on data from a survey of semi-structured interviews,1 the interpretations, evaluations, and practices for the memorialisation and commemoration of the memory of the repressions among the representatives of the diaspora are analysed. The connections of this memory with Kazakhstan's dominant collective memory discourses and the Lithuanian narrative of the memory of repressions are discussed. The analysis reveals how discourses of the memory of the repressions in the country impact the memory of the descendant of the migrants.

Keywords: forced migration, memory of Soviet repressions, memory of migrant generations.

[1] The article is based on data collected by a group of researchers (Loreta Vilkienė, Jolanta Kuznecovienė, Vytis Čiubrinskas, Irena Šutinienė) as part of *Forced migrations from the Lithuanian diaspora in the East and their identity: The cases of Zavolzhsk and Kazakhstan* (LMT LIP-20-12), a project funded by the Research Council of Lithuania. This material is analysed in other aspects of memory studies in other publications by the author.

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Introduction

Lithuanians foster the memory of the victims of the Stalinist repressions not only in Lithuania, but also in numerous places of exile and imprisonment throughout the territory of the former USSR (Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and so on).[2] Descendants of Lithuanians who were subject to repression and for one reason or another never returned to their homeland still live in some of these places. Some of them still hold onto their Lithuanian identity and have founded diaspora organisations. Such a diaspora also exists in Kazakhstan, which was the centre of the Gulag system and a place of exile since the 1931-1932 famine and the expulsion of part of the local population. The Kazakhstan Lithuanian diaspora is not currently a large one – there were roughly 5,000 Lithuanians living there in 2009,[3] and the number has since decreased. The majority of the Lithuanians live in the northern and central parts of the country (with 1,700 in the Karaganda Region and 667 in the North Kazakhstan Region in 2014).[4]

Former political prisoners and exiles and their descendants still make up a large part of Kazakhstan's society – in 2021, former victims of repression and their descendants accounted for 40 per cent of Kazakhstan's population[5] – so the memory of repressions was and still is relevant here The appearance of Lithuanians in Kazakhstan is also related to Stalin's repressions, and in terms of the number of Lithuanian exiles and political prisoners during the Soviet era, Kazakhstan was second after the Russian Federation.[6] It is estimated that a total of about 81,000 Lithuanians were imprisoned or lived in exile in the Kazakh SSR at various times, or every fifth repressed person from Lithuania.[7] Therefore, the memory of prisoners and exiles in Kazakhstan occupies an important place in the general context of the memory of Lithuanian repressions.

The memory of forced migrants and their descendants is studied at the intersection of two interdisciplinary research fields: migration and memory. Many studies have found that the memory of diasporas is by nature exceptionally specific and contextual, and this is determined by the processes that take place in the transmission of memory between

[2] For more, see: Algis Vyšniūnas, *Lietuviai ypatinguose Kazachstano lageriuose:1948–1955 m. [Lithuanians in Kazakhstan's MVD Special Camps: 1948-1955]*, Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2022, pp. 360–382.

[3] Этносы Казахстана, Internete in : https://assembly.kz/ethnos/kk/litovtsy/

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *І Сарыарқа – пен келісім мекені. Сарыарка – колыбель единства и согласия [The Kazakhstan Uplands are a place of peace. The Kazakhstan Uplands are a cradle of unity and harmony]*, Karaganda, 2021, p.64.

[6] Algis Vyšniūnas, *Lietuviai Karlage I: 1990 metų ekspedicija į Kazachstaną [Lithuanians in Karlag I: 1990 Expedition to Kazakhstan]*, Vilnius: Lietuvos politinių kalinių ir tremtinių bendrija, 2016, p. 25.

[7] Kazakhstan, Internete in: http://global.truelithuania.com/lt/kazakhstan-636

generations, across national borders, and in specific socio-political contexts.[8] The problem of intergenerational transmission of the memory of the traumas experienced by forced migrants has been identified as being both relevant and inadequately researched.[9] It is noticeable that psychological research on the intergenerational transmission of trauma effects is predominant in this field. Although there has been an increase in such research recently, little is still known about the long-term consequences of forced migration experiences on diasporas.[10] Research on the intergenerational transmission of memory shows that, contrary to the expectations of the assimilation of descendants, later migrant generations still associate themselves with the memory of their parents' country, but in a different way than the first generation.[11] For the next generations of descendants, the country of their parents or grandparents usually does not "remain" important, but rather – "becomes" important,[12] and knowledge about the past is not transmitted directly, but reconstructed from fragments that they receive from their families and their surroundings.[13] The transmission of memory is even more complicated in the case of forced migrations, where young members of the forced migrant diasporas are usually faced with fragmented knowledge, conflicting discourses, and contradictory stories about identity, the past, and their parents' country of origin, and are also influenced by their country of residence as well as global contexts.[14] Their memory is characterised by fragmentation and contradiction, and is formed under the influence of various and often competing generational, ideological and moral points of reference.[15] How this memory is formed and what factors affect it in specific historical and socio-political contexts can usually only be identified by empirical research.

The issues addressed in this article contribute to research on the transmission of the memory of oppressive experiences across migrant generations in specific historical and socio-political contexts. It examines how the memory of the Soviet repressions experienced by the first generation is (re)created and what meaning it takes on in the Kazakh-

8 Thomas Lacroix, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, „Refugee and Diaspora Memories: The Politics of Remembering and Forgetting", in: *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 2013, No. 34 (6), p. 686; *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary approaches to memory studies*, edited by Julia Creet, Andreas Kitzmann, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

9 Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova, „Shadows of the past: violent conflict and its repercussions for second-generation Bosnians in the diaspora", in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2021, No. 2, p. 2.

10 Alice Bloch, "Reflections and Directions for Research in Refugee Studies", in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2020, No. 43 (3), pp. 436–459; Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

11 Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Marina Richter and Michael Nollert, "Transnational networks and transcultural belonging: a study of the Spanish second generation in Switzerland", *Global Networks*, No. 14 (4), 2014, pp. 458–476.

12 Peggy Levitt, "Roots and Routes: Understanding the Lives of the Second Generation Transnationally", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* No. 35 (7), 2009, p. 1227.

13 Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

14 Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova, *ibid.*, p. 14.

15 Peggy Levitt, *op. cit.*, p. 1238.

stan Lithuanian diaspora, a large part of which consists of second- and third-generation forced migrants, as well as how it is influenced by Kazakhstan's dominant discourses of memory and the Lithuanian national narrative of the memory of the Soviet repressions.

Few studies have been conducted on the memory of the descendants of forced migrants. A review of research conducted in several countries on forced migrant diasporas identified factors favourable to the continuity of their memory and identity, such as conditions for economic adaptation, communication between migrants, and social and political recognition in the country of immigration.[16] The impact of ties with the ethnic homeland and collective forms of memory in the diaspora on the memory of second-generation forced migrants has also been examined.[17] Research has also been carried out that reveals the influence of the political contexts and discourses of the countries of origin[18] as well as global discourses[19] on the memory created by descendants of forced migrants. The influence of the experiences and memory of the military conflict on the memory and identity of the second-generation Bosnian diaspora in Switzerland is revealed in a study by Dilyara Müller-Suleimanova.[20] Research conducted in Kazakhstan analyses some aspects of the use of memory in the formation of ethnic identity among the German and Polish diasporas of Kazakhstan.[21]

In memory studies of people from Lithuania who were forcibly deported to the territories of the then USSR, the focus has been on the recollections of Gulag prisoners and exiles who returned to and live in Lithuania.[22] Meanwhile, there has been relatively little research that examines the recollections and memory of the Lithuanian exiles and their descendants who stayed in the East. A study conducted by Vytis Čiubrinskas analyses the identity of Lithuanians deported to Trans-Volga region in the 19th century and memory

16 Peter Loizos, "Ottoman half-lives: Long-term perspectives on particular forced migrations", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1999, No. 12 (3), pp. 237–263.

17 Julia Devlin, "In Search of the Missing Narrative: Children of Polish Deportees in Great Britain", *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, 2020, No. 4 (2), pp. 22–34.

18 Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova, op. cit., pp. 1–17; Dominika Blachnicka-Ciacek, "Occupied from Within: Embodied Memories of Occupation, Resistance and Survival Among the Palestinian Diaspora", *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2020, No. 34, pp. 1915–1931.

19 Andreas, Kitzmann "Frames of Memory: WWII German Expellees in Canada", in: *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, comp. Creet J., Kitzmann, A. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, pp. 93–119.

20 Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova, *op. cit*., pp. 1–17.

21 Rita Sanders, *Staying at Home: Identities, Memories and Social Networks of Kazakhstani Germans*, Berghahn Books, Inc., 2016; Poujol Catherine, "Poles in Kazakhstan: Between integration and the imagined motherland", *Central Asian People*, 2004, No. 1, pp. 91–100.

22 See, for example, the articles by Dalia Leinartė, Violeta Davoliūtė, Tomas Balkelis and Dovilė Budrytė in: *Maps of Memory: Trauma, Identity and Exile in Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States*, comp. Violeta Davoliūtė, Balkelis Tomas, Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2012.

as its resource.[23] Gintarė Venzlauskaitė also examines the features of collective memory and experiences among forced migrant diasporas in the East and West in her dissertation. Along with other aspects, she discusses the specifics of the collective memory of Lithuanian forced migrants living in the territory of the Russian Federation, taking into account the memory of diasporas in the West and the Lithuanian narrative, and reveals the great diversity of individual stories, experiences and memories of migrants and their descendants.[24]

The transmission of memory between generations of forced migrants is disrupted not only by migration, but also by its traumatic nature.[25] A trauma or disaster disrupts the connections between various collective and individual memory structures, leading to "multiple ruptures and radical breaks" that "inflect intra-, inter- and trans-generational inheritance."[26] The memory of traumas is characterised by interruptions, inconsistency and fragmentation, especially when the traumas are not overcome and are integrated into the identity.[27] Unexpressed – to use Aleida Assmann's term – in a form of "victimhood" narratives and unacknowledged traumas can be passed down through generations. Assmann considers the formation of a collective narrative of the victims and the recognition that they were wronged at both the social and political level to be one of the most important factors in transmitting the memory of the victims of repression and overcoming trauma. According to her, for such an articulation and recognition of this memory, it is not enough to simply express it in private – it requires collective forms of memory that can only be created in organised groups. In the absence of such symbolic forms of memory, "the psychological wounds of trauma may be unconsciously transmitted to other generations."[28] These collective discourses of memory explain and make sense of people's traumatic experiences in historical, national and ethical contexts.[29] The nature of the

[23] Vytis Čiubrinskas, "Transnacionalizmas ir migracija: lietuvių migrantų ir jų ainių patirtys, strategijos ir identitetai Teksase, Užvolgyje ir Čikagoje" *[Transnationalism and Migration: The Experiences, Strategies and Identities of Lithuanian Migrants and Their Relatives in Texas, Zavolzhsk and Chicago]*, in: *Migracija: sampratos ir patirtys [Migration: Concepts and Experiences]*, comp. Matulytė M., Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis dailes muziejus, Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2022, pp. 20–59.

[24] Gintarė Venzlauskaitė, "From Post-War West to Post-soviet East: Manifestations of Displacement, Collective Memory, and Lithuanian Diasporic Experience Revisited", 2020, Internete: https://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/event/gintare-venzlauskaite-university-glasgow%C2%A0-post-war-west-post-soviet-east-manifestations [accessed: 28-Jun-2023].

[25] Julia Creet, "Introduction. The Migration of Memory and Memories of Migration", in: *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, ed. Creet, J., Kitzmann, A., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, pp. 3–26; Devlin, J., pp. 22–35.

[26] Mariane Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", *Poetics Today*, 2008, No. 29 (1), p. 111.

[27] Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2016.

[28] Aleida Assmann, *ibid*., pp. 57–58.

[29] Aleida Assmann, „Europe's divided memory", in: *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, edited by Uileam Blacker, Alexandr Etkind, Julie Fedor, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 35.

narrative that expresses these experiences is also important for overcoming trauma and restoring a positive identity for the victims. Aleida Assmann differentiates between *active victimhood* and *passive victimhood*. *Active victimhood* can turn the trauma into a heroic sacrifice, making it easier to overcome and integrate into a positive identity. Meanwhile, passive victimhood is characterised by powerlessness, in which case overcoming trauma and restoring a positive identity is more difficult.[30]

Since the classical studies of Maurice Halbwachs, there has been no question in memory studies that collective memory formats, especially official hegemonic narratives, affect both individual memory and various formats of collective memory, as well as how this memory is formed, expressed and transmitted. According to Aleida Assmann, in order for individual memory to be transmitted across generations, it must be expressed in inter-subjective representations. In this externalisation, memory inevitably changes, and at the level of communicative memory, it is already affected by collective representations, connections, obligations, and loyalty to the family, the nation, the state. When transferred to the public level, it is standardised and combined with the memory of others, and at the political level, it is coordinated with the norms of the official narrative.[31] This effect is not direct, as individuals and groups do not instantaneously adopt the dominant narratives, but rather – select the elements that have meaning to them and combine them in their own way.[32] In the case of diaspora memory, these connections are, as mentioned, even more complex due to the variety of narratives (the narratives of the country of residence and the country of origin, global narratives, etc.) that affect it.

Based on the assumptions discussed, this article examines the memory of repressions in the diaspora of the descendants of Lithuanian forced migrants as being related both to the political and sociocultural contexts and prevailing narratives of the country of residence, as well as to the narratives of the country of origin, and also as being influenced by the traumatic experiences of the first generation and the characteristics of the (non) transmission of this memory in the Soviet era.

The article analyses 27 interviews collected by the project implementation group during an expedition in Karaganda (Kazakhstan) in November 2021. The sample consists of descendants of people from Lithuania who were born into Lithuanian (or half-Lithuanian) families. A total of 16 women and 12 men were interviewed using semi-structured biographical interviews, including 13 second-generation representatives, 13 third-generation representatives, and one fourth-generation representative. Of these subjects, 16 of them were descendants of people who were subjected to repression, while the others

30 Aleida Assmann, *Shadows*, p. 59.

31 Aleida Assmann , *Shadows*, p. 49.

32 Gabriele Rosenthal, "The social construction of individual and collective memory", in: *Theorizing Social Memories: Concepts, Temporality, Functions*, ed. Sebald, G., Wagle, J., London, Routledge, 2016, pp. 32–55.

were descendants of labour migrants. In the study, the first generation of migrants is considered to be the genealogical (family, kinship) generation that came to live in Kazakhstan; the second generation is their children, and the third generation is their grandchildren.[33]

Contexts of the Formation of the Memory of Repressions in the Kazakhstan Lithuanian Diaspora: (Non-) Transmission During the Soviet Era and Features of the Country's Memory Policy

The memory of repressions in the Kazakhstan Lithuanian diaspora is characterised by the fact that during the Soviet era, its transmission was essentially interrupted at the second generation, so the current memory of the diaspora was restored after the Soviet era. Its restoration took place simultaneously with the formation of the official memory of repressions in the re-established state of Kazakhstan. Immediately after the Soviet era, the restoration of relations with Lithuania and interaction with the Lithuanian narrative began.

The interruption of the transmission of the memory of repressions during the Soviet era is related to circumstances such as geographical dispersion (unlike the Germans, Chechens, Poles and Tatars who were deported to Kazakhstan in communities, Lithuanians lived alone), the danger of the memory of repressions in the environment of Kazakhstan, the traumatic nature of this memory, the Sovietization of the second generation and part of the third, and the ideological gap between generations. According to informants, only the first generation still talked about these experiences in small circles of trusted people, but this memory was hidden from the children. In Kazakhstan, this memory was particularly dangerous due to the fact that the perpetrators of the repressions who followed ex-political prisoners and exiles often lived right alongside them. Plus, the majority of Lithuanians were political prisoners who had been convicted for participating in the anti-Soviet resistance and whose families were under close surveillance. So during the Soviet era, not only were collective memory narratives and practices not formed there (unlike, as the recollections testify, in some Siberian exile communities or in Trans-Volga region[34]), but the memory of the first generation was basically not transmitted even in the families of the repressed.

The prevailing ideological contexts in Kazakhstan, which influenced the Sovietization of the second generation, was also not favourable for transmission of the memory of the repressions. Historian Nancy Adler observes that although the USSR's attitude towards the victims of repression changed over various periods, two narratives competed throughout

[33] Although not all of the informants were descendants of people who were subject to repression, it should be noted that in part, labour migration to Kazakhstan can also be considered forced, as this is how some of the interviewed informants described it, emphasising that their parents or grandparents were forced to go to Kazakhstan to work by difficult, often traumatic circumstances – they were fleeing from something or were simply sent to Kazakhstan from the orphanage.

[34] Vytis Čiubrinska., *op. cit*., pp. 20–59.

the Soviet era – one emphasising the experiences of the victims, and the other supporting a totalitarian state, with efforts to undermine the memory and recognition of the victims. Under the latter narrative, despite the "thaw" of the Khrushchev era, the repressions were not clearly condemned, and political prisoners were not clearly exonerated or separated from criminal offenders.[35] In Soviet Kazakhstan, according to the testimony of informants, the latter narrative prevailed – many second-generation informants remember that former political prisoners were not substantially exonerated, were considered criminals and "enemies of the people", and were discriminated against. Moreover, the crimes of Stalinism were not clearly spoken.

In Kazakhstan, which was home to many people who had experienced repression, the restoration of the silenced memory of repressions during the Soviet era began quite early, back during the years of perestroika. In the official memory policy, overcoming the traumatic Soviet past took place through various symbolic forms of memory culture – renaming public spaces, building monuments and memorials to the victims of repression or famine and other victims, exonerating the victims of the 1931–1933 famine and the 1937–1952 deportations and ethnic cleansing, declaring the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression (which was renamed the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression and Famine in 2010), and so on. [36]

Kazakhstan's policy of remembrance of the crimes of communism can be described as unique – different from the ethno-national and liberal political paradigms of this memory prevailing in the post-communist space. The latter emphasises the implementation of the values and ideologies of liberal democracy, which in remembrance policy means unconditional condemnation of the communist past and effective ideological decolonisation.[37] These values of transitional justice are also implemented in the ethno-national paradigm, where the memory of repressions is an important part of the national narratives of "fighting and suffering" that present nations as victims of Soviet occupation.[38] Kazakhstan's strategy for the memory of communist repressions is treated as a "third way" between these paradigms, noting that in the global memory of repressions, the country acts as an intermediary providing various actors in this field with space and resources for initiatives concerning global policies for the memory of the victims of communism, from the repatriation of the remains of prisoners of war and other victims (which began as far back as in 1987 with the agreement with Japan) to the establishment of memorials and museums,

[35] Nancy Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System*, New Brunswick, NY: Transaction Publishers, 2001, p. 8.

[36] *Сарыарқа – пен келісім мекені. Сарыарка – колыбель единства и согласия [The Kazakhstan Uplands are a place of peace. The Kazakhstan Uplands are a cradle of unity and harmony]*, Karaganda, 2021, pp. 64–65.

[37] Maria Mälksoo, "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe", *European Journal of International Relations*, 2009, No. 15 (4), pp. 653–680.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 656.

commemorations, scientific research, commemorative projects, and so on.[39] Yet in the memory of the repressions of the Soviet era, the responsibility, culprits and victims are rarely named, even though this is very important in the global and European discourse of memory of wars and repressions. Meanwhile, to avoid conflict in Kazakhstan, everyone is treated as victims of some abstract communist totalitarianism or Stalinism.[40] This avoidance of conflicts is also related to the "internationalisation" of the memory of the repressions in Kazakhstan, which corresponds to the official political paradigm of "ethnic and religious harmony" as well. Unlike in the narratives of most European and post-Soviet countries, the ethnicity of both the victims and those responsible is avoided here.[41] The memory of repressions in the country's official narrative of the memory of the Soviet era is important, but not the most important – the latter also includes and equally values the memory of all those who played an active role (that is often considered heroic) throughout this period: the victims of Stalin's terror, participants in the "Great Patriotic War",[42] and heroes of the post-war reconstruction and Soviet-era modernisation projects.[43]

Thus, Kazakhstan's repression remembrance policy is focused on conflict avoidance and is little used in the implementation of transitional justice, but it is an important symbolic capital that strengthens the country's prestige and influence internationally. The fact that this memory is officially recognised and commemorated in the country, and that it is dominated by the narrative of the victims, enables the victims and their descendants to overcome the traumas, and also allows, at least in part, the memory narratives of the "historic homelands" of ethnic groups to be transplanted into diasporas, and the memory of the victims of repression of these groups to be memorialised and commemorated.

The Significance of the Memory of Repressions in the Kazakhstan Lithuanian Diaspora's Collective Memorialisation and Commemorative Practices

Not all Lithuanian descendants participate in the practices of memorialisation and commemoration the victims of repression, but in this diaspora, these practices are an important

[39] Nelly Bekus, "Symbolic Capital of the Memory of Communism. The Quest for International Recognition in Kazakhstan", *Theory and Society*, 2021, No. 50, pp. 628–629.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 634.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 638.

[42] The narrative of the "Great Patriotic War" has great power in the country. It is a heroic narrative that strives to express "pride in the past, a pragmatic appreciation of the present, and a positive outlook on the future." The heroes are not just those who fought in the war, but also the "heroes of the rear" – all the people who worked and suffered deprivation at that time. In order to avoid conflict, it is often kept silent that a considerable part of the "heroes of the rear" consisted of exiles and people in prison camps. Альбина Жанбосинова, „Историческая память о Великой отечественной войне в пространстве Казахстана" *[Historical memory of the Great Patriotic War in the space of Kazakhstan]*, *Исторический курьер*, Internete: https://cyberleninka.ru/journal/n/istoricheskiy-kurier, 2022 [2023-08-26]).

[43] Nelly Bekus, *op. cit*., p. 639.

collective form of the expression of Lithuanian identity and participation of the Lithuanian community in the life of the country. The activity of memorialising and commemorating Lithuanian repressed people in Kazakhstan began at the end of the Soviet era, in 1989, when the first group of Lithuanian political prisoners who had been incarcerated in Kazakhstan came to visit with their relatives.[44] The expedition moved the remains of their relatives to Lithuania and erected the first memorial at the Spassk prison camp cemetery.[45] This is when the Lithuanians who lived in Kazakhstan began to restore their ties with Lithuania and co-operate in memorialisation of the victims. Since 1990, these activities have been continued mainly through the efforts of Lithuanian state institutions and other organisations (the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, the Council for the Protection of Cultural Values, the Lemtis Association, the Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees, etc.), in cooperation with the Lithuanians of Kazakhstan. The Lituanica community that was founded in Karaganda in 2002 became the mediator and implementer (and in some cases – the initiator) of Lithuanian memorialisation initiatives.[46] In this way, the Lithuanians of Kazakhstan joined the policy of the state of Kazakhstan as a mediator between countries, implementing initiatives to memorialise the victims of repressions. In 2004, through the efforts of Lithuanian institutions and the community, monuments to Lithuanian victims of repressions were erected in Zhezkazgan, Balkhash and Kengir, and other memorialisation projects were implemented in Zhezkazgan (2019), Rudny (2020) and Spassk (2022).[47] The Lithuanians of Karaganda also carry out projects to memorialise victims of Soviet repression from other countries. According to the chairman of the Karaganda Lithuanian community, the Lithuanian community of Karaganda has erected memorials for victims from 20 foreign countries. These activities allow the small Lithuanian community to play a significant role in Kazakhstan's political life. The chairman of the community tells the story of these activities as follows (at the end of the quote, one can also see the tendency to avoid conflicts typical of Kazakhstan's remembrance policy):

> And after that, there was more and more talk that this is not just a mass grave, but also a sign of respect for those who are buried there, and the Poles called, then France, Italy, Finland, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia... So we went and built memorials for all of them. Our community alone has built 20 memorials for other countries. ... It was supported first and foremost by the president himself... But it's a very fine line, so as not to annoy the locals. (M50 G3).[48]

[44] Algis Vyšniūnas, *Lietuviai ypatinguose...*, p. 371.

[45] Feliksas Žemulis, „Kazachstano stepės glaudė lietuvių tremtinius" *[The steppes of Kazakhstan sheltered Lithuanian exiles]*, *Lietuvos žinios*, 2009-10-9.

[46] *Lituanica, the Lithuanian Community of Karaganda, was established in 2002 and brings together the largest group of Lithuanians in Kazakhstan – about 250 people. Lituanica is also the largest Lithuanian community operating in places of Lithuanian exile.*

[47] Algis Vyšniūnas, *Lietuviai ypatinguose...*, pp. 360–374.

[48] The abbreviation (letters and numbers) at the end of quoted interview excerpts indicate the sex, age and generation of the informant.

The Lithuanian community also participates in other areas of repression memory cooperation between Kazakhstan and Lithuania – for example, it helped to organise and implement the activities of three "Mission Siberia" expeditions. "Likimus siejanti gija" ("The Thread That Binds Fates") was an expedition of journalists and people who had been political prisoners in Kazakhstan to the former prison camps that was organised together with the Embassy of Kazakhstan in 2009. After the expedition, an exhibition was put on display and a catalogue was published, which was presented by Kazakhstan representatives at the United Nations headquarters and elsewhere.[49]

The majority of the active participants in the memorialisation and commemorative practices (most of whom are representatives of the third generation) are descendants of people who were subject to repression, but there are also descendants of labour migrants, for whom this memory is important because of the links with their Lithuanian identity and because of the opportunity to participate in the country's political life. Representatives of the diaspora name the participation of the community at the national level in the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan as an important aspect:

> Even with regard to those memorials, which are, of course, important both for education and for the memory of those who live here and in Lithuania. But … we care about more than just cultural heritage. We care about both ancestral memory and policy; this is obvious because the Assembly is written in the Constitution. (M50 G3)

Some informants, especially descendants of people who were subject to repression, say that they feel a strong personal moral obligation and motivation to participate in the activities of memorialising and commemorating the repressions, and that it is important for their personal, family and Lithuanian identity. According to the granddaughter of two people who were subject to repression, memorialisation activities in the community will be complete when every Lithuanian who died here has been recognised and commemorated: "When young people come here with Mission Siberia, and when we look for those crosses... I think we can finish looking when we can say – that's it, there are no more Lithuanians here, neither unknown, nor buried – none, we have identified them all." (F35 G3).

The Lithuanian community also participates in Kazhakstani commemorations of repression, first and foremost on May 31, the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression and Famine. On that day, representatives of the community take part in commemorations and discussions, visit the memorials at Spassk and ALZhIR. Lithuanians are also involved in proposing repression memory initiatives. One active third-generation Lithuanian organises youth programmes in the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. The Lithuanian community also contributes to the initiation and implementation of other projects in the country – for example, it submitted proposals for the Assembly's "Karlag: Memory for the Sake of the Future" project and actively participated in it. According to the

[49] For more, see: *Likimus siejanti gija [The Thread That Binds Fates]*, comp. Algis Vyšniūnas, Vilnius: Atipija, 2009.

chairman of the community, these activities resulted in him becoming a member of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.

Some Lithuanian commemorative practices are fostered in the Karaganda community as well. For example, to commemorate All Souls' Day (on 2 November), community members go to the Spassk Memorial, where they light candles and place flowers at the monuments to Lithuanian political prisoners and exiles.

Therefore, the Lithuanian diaspora successfully utilises the opportunities provided by Kazakhstan's remembrance policy in memorialising and commemorating the victims of repression. As a result of these activities, the small Lithuanian ethnic group participates and is visible in the public life of the country and thus underscores the Lithuanian identity in the country.

Features of the Restored Memory of Repressions in Generations of Descendants

It has already been mentioned that the "recovery" of the memory of repressions, both at the collective and individual level, only began at the end of the Soviet era. A part of the Lithuanian descendants learned about the repressions through cultural forms of collective memory – monuments, memorials, museums, commemoration rituals, texts and other media that mainly express the narratives of Kazakhstan, but sometimes of Lithuania as well. Meanwhile, the descendants of people who were subject to repression primarily restored this memory by reconstructing the memory of their own family's repressive experiences. Most descendants of labour migrants know the memory of repressions transmitted through forms of memory culture. In this group, it is mostly actualised and interpreted within the framework of the narratives prevailing in Kazakhstan. For some of them, this memory is not relevant in the context of either the Lithuanian or the "internationalised" narrative of Kazakhstan. However, there are also cases among descendants of labour migrants when this memory is actively nurtured and associated with Lithuanian identity.

It was not easy for the descendants to restore the memory of repressions. The obstacles to restoring the memory of the repressions experienced by the first generation include the interruption of its transmission in informal intergenerational communication during the Soviet era, its traumatic nature, the poor knowledge of Lithuanian history among young people, and the broken ties with the older generation both emotionally and often physically, when the older generation lived elsewhere or died when the informants were still children.

The narratives of recovered memory in the families of descendants about the repression experienced by their ancestors are usually short and fragmentary – they are stories that have already been retold and are partially imagined, and they contain many ambi-

guities and gaps that the descendants try to fill with the help of guesswork and imagination. In some families, children or grandchildren know quite a few details retold by their elders, but understanding, interpreting and integrating them into a more coherent story is hindered by their poor knowledge of Lithuanian history. When recreating the histories of their parents and grandparents from stories or archival documents, informants often confuse the chronology of events, the regimes that carried out the repressions, the fighting sides during and after the war, and so on. In part of the stories, the biographies of the ancestors are presented in the chronology of Soviet history. The most detailed stories of the experiences of the first generation are told by those Lithuanian descendants in Kazakhstan who know the contexts and history of Lithuania, have connections with Lithuania, and have personally interacted with their parents and grandparents.

For the descendants of people who were subject to repression, this memory is actualised by the need to restore a positive identity (family, personal, ethnic) and an emotional relationship with the ancestors, and it also contains features characteristic of the memory of a traumatic experience. For these descendants, "recovering" the family memory means learning about the coercion, trying to overcome the trauma associated with it, and coming to terms with the painful past. Both generations of descendants talk about their ancestors as victims, but they interpret these experiences somewhat differently. In the memory of the second generation, the passive victimhood discussed by Aleida Assmann prevails, where the descendants emphasise and sympathise with their parents' suffering and identify with their traumatic experience. The emotional identification with the traumas of the parents' generation is evidenced by the compassion, the tendency to highlight the wrongs and sufferings experienced by the parents, and the emotions expressed in telling the stories:

> After all, it... *[long pause]* that was the kind of period it was. Complex and important. And it was practically deleted. As if none of it even happened. ... There's this film, and you know, I just started watching it and I can't *[pause]*. Because they took them there with dogs, with everything. It was not funny *[emphasis on "not funny"]*. (F64 G2).

We mentioned that based on the images of *passive victimhood*, it is harder to restore a positive identity for them and their descendants, so in second generation narratives, the positive qualities of the parents – craftsmanship, strength, perseverance, etc. – are highlighted alongside the suffering. The experiences of repression in both generations are partially interpreted in the context of the heroic narrative of Lithuania, but for the second generation, which remembers the Soviet-era attitude towards the repressed as criminals, it is often more important to recognise not the heroism of the parents, but their suffering, and to "exonerate" them in society:

> I don't consider them enemies by any means, they are patriots. ... No one holds it against us, and now our acquaintances look at it [favourably]... even Russians, you'd think... Kazakhs, it's not like "oh, look at you, look at your parents" – on the contrary, everyone understands ... well done. (F69 G2).

> Sometimes they deliberately refrain from adding heroic accents, emphasising suffering and compassion: "Well, I guess I'm proud, but he went through so much, you just feel sorry for those people. ... They suffered so much – so many people, so many died. Not guilty of anything, nothing at all." (F63 G2).

In the stories of the third generation, the emotional distance from the experiences of the grandparents is more pronounced, and some of the stories are schematic and superficial, but there are also detailed stories based on a knowledge of Lithuanian history. Overcoming trauma is no longer relevant for this generation, and in their stories, the victims are usually presented as heroic people who overcame hardships – *active victimhood*. In portraying them as heroes, the third-generation descendants often use the Lithuanian narrative of "fighting and suffering", which, above all, is used to emphasise heroic moral and personal qualities (patriotism, sacrifice, strength, etc.), avoiding the accents of the Lithuanian narrative that may be contradictory to the discourses of Kazakhstan (the resistance, Soviet occupation, repression, etc.).

In the following excerpt from the story of a third-generation informant, she talks about the hardships experienced by her grandparents, emphasising their ability to overcome them. The informant highlights her grandmother's strong patriotic motivation in becoming a resistance fighter and her grandfather's persistent protest against using the Russian language in exile, as well as their ability to create a happy life despite their suffering:

> And my grandmother, when she got to Karlag... She was a partisan and ended up in Dolinka for it. And of course, when a person opposes the government... yes, my grandmother was very young ... well, and people didn't just go and join the partisans. You have to have internal motivation for that. You have to know what you want. ... When I think about my grandfather's life – the revolution, 1917, in 1939, tanks actually came to Lithuania – hello, you're in the Soviet Union, 1941 – the war. Deportation to Kazakhstan. It's just such a life in general... And he managed to create his own happiness in a life like that. ... And that internal protest of his – at least not to speak the language of the country that sentenced him. (F35 G3)

This generation is particularly proud of the heroic characteristics of their ancestors and identify with them. The tendency to portray ancestors as heroes is more universal and has also been found in family memory studies in other contexts: already in the memory of the third generation, ancestors are often portrayed as being heroic, and are role models and "moral heroes" for the descendants in these stories.[50] Similar trends have been identified in the memory of the younger generation of German descendants in Kazakhstan, which does not delve into the sufferings and feelings of their ancestors, but emphasises

[50] Radmila Švarickova-Slabakova, "Moral Heroes or Suffering Persons? Ancestors in Family Intergenerational Stories and the Intersection of Family and National Memories", *Journal of Family History*, 2019, Vol. 44 (4), pp. 431–448; Robyn Fivush, Natalie Merrill, "An ecological systems approach to family narratives", *Memory Studies*, 2016, No. 9 (3), pp. 305–314; Raili Nugin, "Rejecting, re-shaping, rearranging: Ways of negotiating the past in family narratives", *Memory Studies*, 2021, No. 14 (2), pp. 197–213.

German industriousness as the quality that helped them overcome hardships.[51]

The Influence of Kazakhstan's Official Discourses of Memory on Interpretations of Repressions Memory in the Lithuanian Diaspora

In addition to the aforementioned avoidance of aspects that contradict the national discourses, there are more signs of the influence of Kazakhstan's prevailing discourses of memory in both the collective and individual interpretations and practices of the memory of the repressions in the Lithuanian diaspora. This influence is clearly visible in the frequently emphasised attitudes of the informants to avoid conflicts. It is also reflected in the community's memorialisation activities and collective commemorative practices, where the "victimhood" narrative is expressed exclusively, without raising questions of guilt and responsibility. These leitmotivs are also repeated in individual interpretations:

> We are paying tribute to the people who ended up here, let's say, against their will. It needs to be talked about. ... The people who live here, the members of our community, must not take this as hatred for a certain past – they must accept it as the history of what was. Just not through hatred. (M50 G3).

There is also talk about the efforts in the Lithuanian community to avoid possible conflicts between the descendants of people who were repressed and descendants of people who may have collaborated with the regime:

> Some people came by themselves, they say ... we're not going anywhere. Others who suffered and were in the camps, these are their descendants. And here in the community they cannot be distinguished. In this regard, we have a policy that we Lithuanians have to help each other and remember the past, but not be angry with each other, because it was not us who decided, but some incompetent politicians or politicians who allowed it to happen. (M50 G3).

Without raising or considering questions of responsibility, abstract objects are named as the "culprits" – "Stalinism", "politicians", often noting that current generations are not responsible for the crimes of past generations:

> ...I understand that a lot of people experienced repression, and I understand that there was a lot of injustice in the past. ... But we cannot judge or blame one person or another now, first and foremost because it was the other people [of the past]. And, for example, the current generation is not to blame for this. (M30 G3).

The influence of Kazakhstan's discourses is also clearly visible in the interpretations of the Lithuanian heroic national narrative of "fighting and suffering", in which the memory of repressions is very important. As already mentioned, in the interpretations of family memory, this narrative is usually based on the portrayal of ancestors as heroes, but its application avoids aspects that contradict the official discourses of memory in Kazakh-

[51] Rita Sanders, pp. 25–26.

stan. Also bypassed is the desire often characteristic of national narratives to emphasise injustice, which implies the distinction between passive victims and brutal criminals,[52] as well as themes and aspects that contradict the narrative of the "Great Patriotic War". Public interpretations are particularly coordinated with the contexts of the country's remembrance policy. For example, the biography of a Lithuanian resistance fighter as told by his granddaughter and presented in a representative publication (possibly edited by the publishers) emphasises the role of the Red Army as a "liberator", does not mention the grandfather's participation in the anti-Soviet resistance, and glosses over the reason for his arrest, imprisonment and so on.[53]

Another leitmotiv characteristic of Kazakhstan's remembrance policy that can be seen in the informants' interpretations is refraining from mentioning the ethnicity of the victims. The Lithuanian narrative of the victims is combined with Kazakhstan's ideological narrative of "ethnic and religious harmony", arguing against playing up the suffering of Lithuanians in relation to other nationalities and emphasising the commonality of suffering:

> Yes, memory must nevertheless be in our heart. Whatever our nationality, we have to somehow respect history, that's what I think. Because these were our ancestors. After all, they died there ... I don't distinguish by nationality. (F59 G2).

The future-oriented attitude of not dwelling on the past that is characteristic of the ideology of the country's civic identity is also visible:

> You have to remember, but you don't have to fixate on that suffering ... well, so to speak, there has to be something positive ... every culture has these incredible things. ... and therefore... somehow we are more united, and... that's the way it is (F62 G2).

Conclusions

In a large part of the diaspora, the restored family memory of the Stalinist repressions and knowledge of the Lithuanian repression narrative is fragmentary, often contradictory, and supplemented by imagination. Few tell comprehensive and coherent stories. Some features of the diaspora's memory of repressions are connected to the interruption of its transmission, its traumatic nature, and the need to restore a positive (personal, family, ethnic) identity and the connection between family generations. Differences in the memories of different generations are also related to these factors. In the memory of the second generation on the experiences of the first generation, images of passive victimhood prevail and its emotional significance is stronger, while in the stories of the third generation, the grandparents are heroic active victims whom they identify with. The Lithuanian

[52] Anna C. Bull, Hans L. Hansen, "On Agonistic Memory", in: *Memory Studies* 2016. 9 (4), p. 392

[53] *Сарыарқа*, pp. 101–105.

heroic narrative of "fighting and suffering" is more often used in the stories of the second generation to "exonerate" the ancestors, while in the stories of the third generation, it is used to portray them as heroes.

Although Kazakhstan's official memory policy has its shortcomings in terms of establishing justice, the fact that this memory is officially recognised and commemorated in the country, that it is dominated by the narrative of the victims, and that it is given considerable importance in the country's political life, enables the expression and recognition of the memory of the victims and their descendants and the overcoming of traumas, and also allows, at least in part, the memory narratives of the "historic homelands" of ethnic groups to be transplanted into diasporas. At the level of collective practices, the Lithuanian diaspora is successfully using the opportunities provided by Kazakhstan's remembrance policy in order to achieve greater recognition of their ethnic group. Participation in the country's memorialisation and commemoration activities allows the small Lithuanian ethnic group to participate in the country's public life and thus emphasise their Lithuanian identity in the context of the country.

The results of the study show that in the authoritarian state of Kazakhstan, the restored memory of the repression experienced by the first generation of migrants is greatly influenced by the dominant discourses of this memory and the country's other ideological contexts. This influence is seen both in family memory and individual interpretations, as well as in the collective interpretations and practices of the community. The Lithuanian memory narrative of repressions is transferred to diaspora practices and interpretations by modifying and adapting it to Kazakhstan's prevailing memory narrative. Therefore, its impact on the memory expressed in the diaspora, especially on its public forms, is much smaller.

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Irena Šutinienė

Sovietinių represijų atmintis Kazachstano lietuvių diasporoje: interpretacijos, praktikos, kontekstai

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojama represijų atmintis Kazachstano lietuvių diasporoje, kurios didelę dalį sudaro represuotų lietuvių palikuonys. Remiantis pusiau struktūruotų interviu metodu atliktos apklausos duomenimis[54], analizuojamos diasporos atstovų represijų atminties interpretacijos, vertinimai, įamžinimo ir minėjimo praktikos. Aptariamos šios atminties sąsajos su dominuojančiais kolektyviniais Kazachstano atminties diskursais ir lietuviškuoju represijų atminties pasakojimu. Analizė atskleidžia gyvenamosios šalies represijų atminties diskursų įtaką migrantų ainių atminčiai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: prievartinė migracija, sovietinių represijų atmintis, migrantų kartų atmintis.

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