Memory on Fire: The Re-membering of the Lithuanian Body (Politic)

by

Denise Elaine Thorpe

Date:

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David Morgan

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

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Abstract

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ABSTRACT

On the first day of November, ordinary commerce in Lithuania comes to a halt. Stores and offices are shuttered, while roads and cemeteries in cities and small villages come alive with the movement of families traversing the country to lay flowers and light candles at the graves of parents, grandparents, godparents, children, aunts, uncles, friends, and teachers. Vėlinės is not a boisterous occasion like the Day of the Dead in Mexico, but it is not morose either. The cemetery is transformed into a place of reunion and remembrance as the gathered community exchanges greetings and gossip while cleaning cemetery plots, arranging flowers, and lighting candles atop the graves. Little children wander between the legs of adults; elderly men and women find resting places on benches and stones; vendors hawk candles at the entrances; and people steadily stream in and out through the gates. When the sun sets the candles flicker to life to form a cemetery on fire.

These Lithuanian Vėlinės practices, though notable in their high level of participation, are not unique. To varying degrees All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day pilgrimage to cemeteries is common in many parts of what we now map as Europe. Yet these practices have a distinctive and powerful importance in Lithuania. The pervasiveness of death, suffering, loss, exile, and dislocation is a prominent aspect of the Lithuanian experience in the modern era. Significant as well is Lithuania’s geographic location in a region fraught with the dynamics of the modern projects of empire, colonialism, and nationalism in all its varying forms. A central concern of the dissertation is the significance of Vėlinės
cemeteries and Vėlinės practices for Lithuanians seeking to survive and find a way forward in the midst of the violence and upheaval of the past century, the attendant trauma, and the confusion and contestation over cultural memory that has followed.

Utilizing ethnographic method I explore Lithuanian Vėlinės practices from the perspective of practical theology and material culture. Within Catholic liturgical theology All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day practices herald a powerful claim of participation in the communion of saints, an invocation of future eschatological hope, and for some, a promise of communion with those who are dead. Yet doctrinal and liturgical theology alone do not explain what is happening in these cemeteries. Rather, these cemetery spaces are framed by and shimmer with shards of Christian traditions while also hosting complex realities of human experience. Over the years these practices have been adapted and modified to construct and express important aspects of family, cultural identity, national belonging, and memory.

The dissertation is essentially a thick description of Vėlinės and a theological inquiry into its power and significance. After the initial introduction the dissertation is divided into three parts, with three chapters in each part. Part I describes the people, places, and practices of Vėlinės through chapters on history, cemeteries, and practices. Part II addresses the structures of social order that intertwine with and affect Vėlinės practices in chapters on family, church, and state. Part III of the dissertation engages structures of spiritual struggle with chapters on trauma, memory, and hope.
For John
with Deep Gratitude
and Enormous Love
*Aš tave myliu*
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And you were right. We did need to go to Lithuania.
Introduction
Introduction

"Is it important to eat?" That was Klebonas Zigmantas's quick retort when asked why Lithuanians bring candles and flowers to cemeteries during Vėlinės, the season of All Saints' and All Souls' Days in early November. Klebonas Zigmantas's parishioner Žilvinas responds more philosophically: "Respect for the dead came through a mother. So it is as important as mom...dad...life." "You have special places in America...like the twin towers. Why do you go there? Why do you light candles and leave flowers?", asks Klebonas. Picking up his priest's theme, Žilvinas continues:

I recently watched a report about the September 11 remembrance event which took place in that tragic site. Hundreds of people stood there with tears in their eyes. We have followed our beloved dead with tears in our eyes for hundreds of years. Hundreds of years. In Soviet times we were not allowed to put crosses on the graves so we put regular monuments, but we still continued to pray. It is the same as loving homeland. Or wife. It is hard to say why you love your wife. But you do."

Indeed, most Lithuanians do. They "do" Vėlinės. When the cool autumn days grow short and October turns to November, the graves of the dead stir to life in Lithuania. Young and old move through cemetery gates armed with spades, shovels, flowers, and candles, ready to prepare small gardens atop their family graves, and to place glass-encased flames that will burn continuously for

1 A Klebonas is a priest who is also a Deacon with oversight responsibilities for multiple priests and parishes.
2 The celebration is technically two distinct days: Nov. 1--Visų Šventųjų Diena or All Saints' Day, and Nov. 2—Vėlinų Diena ("Spirit") or All Souls' Day. In practice, some people understand this distinction and find it important, and some do not. It is not uncommon for the entire celebration to be referenced as Vėlinės.
3 As I will explore later, the connection made here between 9/11 and Vėlinės cemeteries is significant, both for what it says about perceptions of me as a citizen of the United States and for what it says about the connection these two individuals make between church and state in Lithuania.
days, filling the evening darkness with fire. Freighted with tradition, the gravitational pull of Vėlinės is toward family: church for some; reunion at the graves for most; time around table as circumstance invites or allows.

The primary space for Vėlinės is the cemetery. Those who are unable or unwilling to travel to their own family graves are frequently drawn toward the unknown or the well-known dead: strolling to a prominent cemetery in the city to soak in the crowds and light; wandering down the road and around the corner to meander among the tidy, glowing graves of men, women, and children who lived in their village or town decades and even centuries earlier. Some Lithuanians resist Vėlinės practices out of disinterest, skepticism, or disdain. But the majority of Lithuanians "do" Vėlinės. This "doing" is so ordinary in Lithuania, so taken for granted, that people find themselves confounded when asked to talk about it, usually expressing puzzlement at an outsider's questions and curiosity. Yet for someone who is not from this region of the world, this is no ordinary time. It is, in fact, extraordinary.

Vėlinės is not a boisterous occasion like the Day of the Dead in Mexico. But it is not morose either. The cemetery is transformed into a place of reunion and remembrance as the gathered community exchanges greetings and gossip while attending to individual graves. These Lithuanian Vėlinės practices, though notable in their high level of participation, are not unique. To varying degrees All

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Saints’ and All Souls’ Day pilgrimage to cemeteries is common in many regions of what we now map as Europe. The practices in neighboring Poland bear particular similarity.⁵ Yet these practices carry a distinctive and powerful importance in Lithuania.⁶ Lithuanians frequently name Vėlinės as one of three truly obligatory holidays—the others being mother’s day and Kūčios, or Christmas Eve. Like Kūčios, Vėlinės is oriented toward constructed space for remembrance of the dead, and even for their care and welcome. But the practices of Kūčios occur primarily behind closed doors. They are largely domestic rituals of home, family, and sometimes church. The energy of Vėlinės is in the opposite direction. While relatives may gather in homes for coffee or a simple meal, the focus is on the cemetery.

From the perspective of Catholic liturgical theology, All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day practices herald a powerful claim of participation in the communion of saints, an invocation of future eschatological hope, and for some, a promise of communion with those who are dead. Though Catholic liturgical theology offers a very particular narrative for All Saints’ and All Souls’ days, doctrinal and liturgical theology alone do not explain what is happening in these cemeteries. Rather, these cemetery spaces are framed by and shimmer with shards of Christian traditions while also hosting complex realities of human experience. Over the years these practices have been adapted and modified to construct and

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⁶ As I will discuss further, Lithuania and Poland share a complicated history. I am not arguing here that All Souls’ Day practices are more important in Lithuania than they are in Poland, or in any other country for that matter. My intent is not to do a comparative study. Rather, I am simply making the point that variations of these practices occur in many different places. However, I will be elaborating on these practices only in their present form in Lithuania.
express important aspects of family, cultural identity, national belonging, and memory.

Lithuanians describe these memory practices in relation to a panoply of social, religious, and familial dynamics: the Christian adaptation of ancient Pagan practices; food provision marking class distinctions and obligations; maintenance of familial identity and memory; respect for ancestors; the establishment and maintenance of Lithuanian statehood; practices of resistance during the Soviet period; the work of grief and sustenance in times of despair; and status-seeking, post-Soviet performance of western consumer excess. If we neglect the Christian doctrine and history, we fail to grasp the significance of these cemetery spaces and the practices enacted there. At the same time, any witness to the richness of these practices is profoundly impoverished if we look to the narrative of Christian doctrinal history alone.

In this dissertation I explore these Vėlinės practices from the perspective of practical theology and material culture, which is to say that I try to have my senses tuned toward God as I enter these cemeteries. The main story I have to tell is this: cemeteries in Lithuania are messy places; God moves among the

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7 Throughout the dissertation I intend the term “identity”—both individual and cultural—in what I hope is a fairly straightforward definition: an individual’s sense of who he or she is. I do realize that question opens up a pandora’s box of theory and discussion, especially as to the relationship between individual and cultural identity. But for my purposes I intend it as one of many complex operations within these practices of Vėlinės. I am inclined to agree with the editors of *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* who draw upon the work of Raymond Williams to suggest: “Identities—if they are alive, if they are being lived—are unfinished and in process.” The authors go on to suggest that, “[c]ultural studies of the person, in particular, need to move more solidly to process. They must be predicated upon continuing cultural production: a development, or interlocking genesis, that is actually a co-development of identities, discourses, embodiments, and imagined worlds that inform each moment of joint production and are themselves transformed by that moment.” Dorothy Holland, et al., eds, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), vii. This sort of interlocking fluidity is of a piece with what I hope to convey in discussing space, practices, and matter in relation to Vėlinės.
mess. In fact, God moves in, through, between, beneath, and above the mess. And God is silent too: absent; ignored; resisted; denied. In claiming this, I do not mean to convey that cemeteries are messy the way my house and office are too often messy: in disarray; unkempt; neglected. Lithuanian cemeteries are remarkably tidy places. Lovely even. Not manicured, but tended with a care that is remarkable if one’s norm is the typical cemetery in the United States. These Vėlinės cemeteries are complex, multivalent, elusive, ordinary, and contradictory spaces.

The challenge in writing about Vėlinės cemeteries is the challenge of honoring that messiness. In a fundamental sense, the heart of the academic process is management and control. After wading into a topic that bombards every dimension of our senses and gushes data upon us like an open fire hose, we are somehow supposed to reign it all in and reduce the flow to a nice, orderly channel: examining it from every side; placing it on display; and drawing piercing and insightful conclusions. One scholar describes this practice in western scholarship as an attempt to “extract meaning from the sensory knots of culture.” I do not want to do that. In fact, I can’t do that.

I can’t do it for three important reasons. First, it’s not true. I have no tidy conclusion to draw from the hours I’ve spent wandering these Vėlinės.

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8 David Howes, ed, “Introduction”, Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader (New York: Berg, 2005), 9. Howes appreciates the image of the knot, which he draws from Michael Serres, because it is, “...a useful notion for enucleating both the complicated (imbricated or twisted) nature of everyday perception and the embodied ‘compacity’ of the senses.” Howes emphasizes however, that imagining the senses as knotted does not mean that senses are necessarily simultaneous or that there is no hierarchy to sensory perception. Rather, he suggests that there are patterns in sensory perception and that senses function according to sensory regimes that determine what we notice and privilege and what we do not. At the same time, those sensory regimes are constructed through sensory data so there is a proverbial chicken/egg quality to the construct.
cemeteries. I was deeply moved and overwhelmed the first time I entered these exotic spaces. They have become places for me now, less exotic and far more welcoming. In many senses familiar. Yet they surprise me still. Their enormous gravity, sharp edges, startling contradictions, and sublime beauty won’t fit in any package I can wrap and deliver. What fascinates me about these cemeteries is their “intersensoriality...the multi-directional interaction of the senses and sensory ideologies.”

This is not to set the senses as some pure, romantic ideal that differentiates from language because it invokes clear meaning. The senses, like language, are much wilder and more elusive than notions of clear meaning allow. Rather, this is a relational reality, an attempt “to understand how meaning and sense are one.” In contrast to a mind/body dualism, intersensoriality assumes mind and body are intrinsic to one another; they function relationally. Sense and affect are the most promising paths for entering the messiness of Vélinés cemeteries. What I hope to do in this dissertation is give witness to the complexity and wonder within these “sensory knots.”

The second reason I can not offer tidiness is that to enter these cemeteries is to touch great suffering. Enormous suffering. More suffering than I could possibly understand or absorb. This part of the world is the site of a deep wound: people caught up within and trampled over by the towering ideological

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Mary McClintock Fulkerson writes: “Theologies that matter arise out of dilemmas—out of situations that matter. The generative process of theological understanding is a process provoked, not confined to preconceived, fixed categories.” To convey these places of rupture and disjuncture McClintock Fulkerson suggests the metaphor of a wound: “…an inchoate sense that...
and material contestations of the twentieth century. The echoes of Rachel are deafening here; she weeps for her children and refuses to be consoled.\textsuperscript{12} As one man put it, “we are a little land caught between big powers”. Lithuania is the locus of enormous grief, pain, and loss in the modern era. That reality needs to remain fresh for awhile. For a long, long while. I do not wish to cover it up or to explain it.

In naming this suffering, I do not intend or imply a narrative of absolute victimization or pure innocence. That would be insulting to the truth of it, though Lithuanians’ own worry and accusations about becoming trapped in victimization are indeed a piece of the messiness. What I want to resist is participating in the construction of yet one more grand narrative in search of its own power, rolling over the complexities and truth of life here. There has been enough of that already. In many senses it continues still. I can not adequately honor all the messiness. But I also do not want to participate in further desecration or dismissal.

These cemeteries give witness to far more than suffering of course; inestimably more. There is levity and posturing, deep devotion, cynicism, warmth, suspicion, and potent, mystical wonder. Great courage and endurance, ordinary hope, despair, betrayal, love, and practicality pulse within and thread throughout these Vėlinės cemeteries. I can’t even begin to touch all that either.

That is the third reason I won’t be delivering a nice package sealed with a bow. I’m a pastor and a theologian; a practical theologian.\(^\text{13}\) I first entered these spaces because of my husband’s curiosity about his family history in Lithuania. I returned to these Vėlinės cemeteries with pastoral questions. In essence, looking for traces of God. What I discovered is that God is in the messiness. In seeking to understand this messiness I turn more to lived practice than I do to doctrine and teaching. That is to say, I attend to what people do in these cemeteries, and to why they do those things. Though there is rich and interesting scholarly discussion about the roots and development of Vėlinės practices in Lithuania, the focus of my study is not the derivation of the practices, but rather their function and performance within the period of living memory of the people with whom I did my research: Lithuanians between the age of twenty-one and ninety who are still living in Lithuania. In particular, I am interested in the function of these practices during the long period of turmoil between the

\(^{13}\) Though the field is shifting, much of practical theology has historically been focused on the life and practices of the ecclesial community. While I am interested in how these Vėlinės cemeteries are marked by the practices of the church, the church’s structuring of these practices is only one aspect of my inquiry. In that sense my exploration is more in line with the developing discipline of lived religion. However, as I elaborate further in this introduction, my questions are theological and carry with them certain assumptions about and dispositions toward God’s presence in the world. This is not the stance that is customary or assumed in the study of lived religion. For a review of the discipline of practical theology see, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Randy L. Maddox, “Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition”, *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 18(1991), 159-69; For an introduction to the study of lived religion see, David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
onset of World War II and today. I therefore explore historical material only as it 
directly impacts current practice.\textsuperscript{14}

Though I draw upon ethnographic method to do this work, this is not a 
formal ethnography. My larger frame of interest is theological.\textsuperscript{15} David Morgan 
describes belief as "a disposition to see, hear, feel, or intuit a felt-order to the 
world. As a form of intuition, believing finds in the world a tendency or need to

\textsuperscript{14} I have spent seven of the last ten Vėlinės holidays in Lithuania. Each year I try to visit 
cemeteries in different parts of the country and to spend at least part of the Vėlinės holiday with 
specific individuals or families. Over the course of the last nine years my cumulative time in 
Lithuania is somewhere between fourteen and eighteen months, though the longest continuous 
period I have spent there is three months. Prior to 2004 I made two ten-day trips to Lithuania. In 
2004-2005 I spent two three-month periods there. Since 2004 I have spent between four and ten 
weeks in Lithuania every year, with the exception of spring 2009 to summer 2010 when I could 
not travel because of family obligations. I intentionally use the terms interview and interviewee as 
I find the common ethnographic term "informant" distasteful under any circumstances, and 
particularly offensive in the post-Soviet context, given the Soviet dependence on accusatory 
practices. During my two year period of formal research I conducted approximately 70 
interviews with men and women ranging from age twenty-one to age eighty-six. I interviewed people from 
all five regions of Lithuania, from a variety of education and income levels, and in both rural and 
city settings. Because my Lithuanian language skills are not adequate for the level of nuance I 
sought in the questions I asked or for the flexibility of follow-up I desired, I brought translators with 
to all interviews where the interviewee was not an English speaker. Because my interest in 
Vėlinės emerged out of relationships and friendships that developed over time in Lithuania, many 
of the thoughts and ideas in this dissertation are drawn from a wider pool of experience than my 
two years of formal research. However, in keeping with the ethical guidelines under my IRB 
protocol, all direct quotes in the dissertation come from conversations during the research period. 
I have changed names and in some cases personal details in order to maintain anonymity. I 
developed a standard set of questions but each interview varied because I would ask additional 
questions and follow the conversation down the paths that seemed most interesting and helpful. 
Most often I used the snowball method to find my interviewees: one person would recommend 
another person, and so on. However, in order to make sure that I had adequate coverage in 
terms of age, location, education, and income level I did seek out several specific interviewees, 
sometimes through personal connections and sometimes through e-mail or telephone contact. 
\textsuperscript{15} In claiming that my larger frame of interest is theological I mean to convey not only that this is 
a dissertation in practical theology, but also that the larger questions that draw me to this and 
other topics are fundamentally theological questions: how and where we glimpse a transcendent 
God immanently present in our world, and especially in the specifics of a particular lived-world; 
how that immanence forms us, and how that transcendent God might call us to be immanently 
present in this world. And in this particular case, how those sorts of cares and concerns are or 
are not a part of these Vėlinės practices. My questions are not about the existence of God. I 
have no issue with those who wish to have that conversation, it simply is not the conversation I 
am engaging here. The questions I ask assume the existence of God and then lead me to seek 
for how and where that existence is manifest. In this case I am asking those questions in a place 
that is not my home, though it is a place I have come to love in the way one loves a spouse or a 
derar friend, which is to say it is a place that drives me crazy sometimes too.
exist in a certain way.” In these cemeteries, I am looking for traces and manifestations of such belief, particularly Christian belief.

As I will explain later in this introduction, I am aware of the history and dangers of an outsider entering into realms of life and meaning inhabited by another, and then claiming the ability to diagnose or analyze what is happening there. I am particularly mindful of historic efforts of missionaries to map meaning upon and thus gain power over another through the imposition of a Christian system of sin and salvation. Nicholas Mirzoeff describes this as the imperial look: the assumption of a right to look, and the attendant denial of that right to those who are looked upon. I hope I am not doing that. It is certainly not my

17 Intending this notion of belief as something far broader than ideational assent, I write here as a believer. In fact, all people are believers of some sort—“bearing a disposition to see, hear, feel or inuit a felt-order to the world.” In this (and other) senses the apostle Paul is right. We are all slaves to something, relying upon and entrusting ourselves to that which we deem worthy of trust. My particular form of belief is grounded in Christian traditions. It could be argued that the particular form of trust in what is called “belief” by Morgan is reliance upon the transcendent. But given the contentious history of that term I am not inclined to distinguish it that way. It is fair to say, though, that my form of trust is indeed wrapped into what the academy deems religion, which is also a contentious term. Morgan follows Jonathan Z. Smith in making a claim for the term religion as developed by scholars for their own use. See, David Morgan, The Embodied Eye, xiv. Morgan also follows that definition by calling for a more “circumscribed” definition of the sacred than the academy’s debates about transcendence elicit.
18 For one of several trenchant and sobering studies of this reality see, David Chidester, Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in South Africa (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996). For an insightful analysis of how the expansion of European space through colonial domination is interwoven with a fundamental distortion of the Christian social imaginary see, Willie James Jennings, The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
19 Nicholas Mirzoeff, The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 15-18. Mirzoeff explores countervisuality as assertion of contrary and disruptive power by those who are subject to the imperial look. For a nuanced exploration of different forms of “the gaze” in relation to religious practice see David Morgan, The Embodied Eye. According to typologies of the gaze suggested by Morgan, the imperial look is a “unilateral gaze”. In contrast, the gaze I hope to adopt in this work lies somewhere between Morgan’s reciprocal, devotional, and communal gazes. I believe there is a good argument to be made that any work such as this one is inherently liminal as well, being offered not from one vantage point. But there is witness to absence as well. Though I attempt to speak from a gaze within the lived experience being described, it is described by one who is welcomed into but is never fully a part
intention. At the same time, I am aware that all of our acts hold great surplus beyond the actor’s intention. In this work I take the posture of a witness. In a court of law witnesses testify to what they see and experience. It is not their role to offer judgement on the issue in controversy. That role is left to another. In Christian discourse a witness is one who offers testimony to an experience of the presence of God.\textsuperscript{20}

The very fact that I feel the need to offer this litany of caution and qualification bespeaks another reality of the academy that I should name: I am functioning well beyond my previous training in trying to do interdisciplinary work here. In the process I find myself fitting everywhere and nowhere. The questions I am asking emerge out of my lifetime formation in Christian faith traditions, and they are particularly honed by my vocational training in systematic theology. Grateful as I am for that training, I am not trying to do systematics here; in fact, in a significant sense I am pushing back against that training while also assuming the language and constructs I learned there. Again, these Vėlinės cemeteries are messy. Both the healing power and the danger that I witness of these Vėlinės experiences. It is clearly open to debate whether anyone is ever fully within any social/cultural experience. Nonetheless, it is definitely true that I am an interested and entangled outsider in relation to Lithuania.  

\textsuperscript{20} I enter these cemeteries as I enter all places: trusting that God has been present long before I arrived, and that God will continue to be present and at work after I leave. It is simply a privilege to witness what is happening in these spaces. More often than not I come away from conversations in Lithuania in awe of the human capacity for survival. I intend to give witness to the ways I glimpse the Spirit of God moving in the midst of that survival. On witness in relation to Christian theology and biblical studies see, Walter Brueggemann, \textit{Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy} (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1997); Brian K. Blount, \textit{Can I Get a Witness: Reading Revelation Through African American Culture} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005). On witness in relation to holocaust testimony see, Lawrence L. Langer, \textit{Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub, \textit{Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History} (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992). I deliberately leave the definition of witness vague here, as it too is messy. As I will explore in this dissertation, that messiness takes particular forms in relation to trauma, memory, and theology.
there are messy too. Though these Vėlinės cemeteries shine with shards of Christian practice and tradition, to try to stuff what is happening there into clean, neat systematic theological categories is to distort the material and affective substance of what I witness in these powerful spaces.

Equally, though I prize the standards, questions, and methods suggested by both religious studies and cultural anthropology, my questions are directed less by theoretical categories from within those disciplines than by pastoral concerns that I will outline later in this introduction. In the same vein, though the way I perceive the world has been radically altered and even transformed by my work in visual studies and cultural theory, I draw upon that work only as applied to the theological questions that engage me, not as an expert in its methods. In truth, as grateful as I am for my work in cultural studies, I am a bit bemused by its construal of belief and sometimes find it surprisingly reactionary,\(^{21}\) and even naive.

\(^{21}\)As one example of what I experience as naivete: I am appreciative of and have been greatly influenced by the work of Paul Gilroy, particularly his work with the traditions of the Black Atlantic and his understanding of race. I also appreciate his call to a form of cosmopolitanism. What I find vexing is the question of how and where these capacities, visions, and communities are to be formed, as my own sensibilities tell me they do not happen naturally. Interestingly, while in coursework I participated in a conference on Gilroy’s work and he was present at the conference. I had the opportunity to ask him that question and he said he did not have an easy answer. He also said that because of his orientation toward a particular vision of life he had been critiqued by friends and fellow cultural studies scholars for harboring a hidden religious agenda pointed toward a particular teleological or eschatological end. For Gilroy’s work see, Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Let me also be quick to note that the reactivity I describe is understandable to me given Christianity’s complicity with western global domination in the last six centuries. I am sympathetic with the critiques of Talal Asad and others who suggest that this imperial form of Christianity is so deeply woven into western epistemology that even attempts to discuss “other” religions and theories of secularization are in fact still stalking horses for Christian epistemology. Nonetheless, a frequent lack of nuance in cultural studies in discussions of Christianity and other religions does strike me as naive to the lived reality and ordinary practices of a huge portion of the world.
The significant insights offered by cultural studies lead to another important reality. I am sobered and persuaded by trenchant critiques of the performance of western Christianity as a driving force in European colonization, or as Willie Jennings describes its present form, “the deeper realities of Western Christian sensibilities, identities, and habits of mind which continue to channel patterns of colonialist dominance.” At the same time, I am left wondering where and how communities might be formed to reach toward the alternate visions so compellingly offered in much of cultural theory. What seems to be missing is an appreciation for how the interweaving of relationship with the transcendent and relationship with fellow human beings is a fundamental human reality for vast numbers of people in the world, whether that be for good or for ill. The dismissal of that force as delusion, naivete, lack of adequate awareness, or coercion alone strikes me as odd, even when the indictment against the nefarious force of western Christianity within the construction of asymmetries of power is both astute and accurate.23

Vėlinės In Relation to My Experience and Subject Position

When Klebonas Zigmantas and his parishioner Žilvinas responded to my question they assumed there was an analogy between my experience in the United States and Vėlinės, and they sought to connect their experience to mine in order to help me understand. Seeing the continuing puzzlement on my face as we talked about Vėlinės, Klebonas Zigmantas leaned over his kitchen table to

look me straight in the eye as he asked his analogous questions: “I have a question for you too. Why do you honor and respect such places in America as the memorial site of the Trade Center? Why do you light candles there?” “Nežinau” was my response: “I don’t know.” Everyone around the table burst into laughter.

In one sense I was being facetious. I know that people go to the World Trade Center site to light candles because this was a location of profound tragedy: a place where almost three thousand people died; where children were robbed of parents and parents of children; life partners were separated by death; friends stepped off of subways expecting to commute home together and instead said their final farewells. As these two Lithuanian men’s familiarity with the events of 9/11 exemplify, many, many people were profoundly affected by what happened there, either by experiencing the horror through their own bodily presence or by absorbing the violence through its mediation across television, internet, magazines, newspapers, and the stories of those who survived. But I also know the World Trade Center is an intractably complicated site of memory. Though it is held up as an American tragedy, in fact more than 90 countries lost citizens there, a fact that is itself revealing of the nature of life in the United States. The events of 9/11 have now become tied up with notions of security and insecurity, of American exceptionalism, of grotesque characterizations of Muslims as fanatics, of justification for U.S. aggression and war in the larger world. It is a site of rupture: the puncturing of a mythic balloon of invulnerability—a bubble in which many in my generation and my racial and socioeconomic
experience in the United States have spent most of our lives. I know many people light candles there. But I can not answer the question of “why” it resonates in the particular ways it does in the United States. It is just too complicated. Perhaps that is the point the Klebonas was trying to make with me about Vėlinės. It is complicated. There is no single answer “why”.

What my time in Lithuania has helped me appreciate more deeply is Žilvinas’s invocation of “our beloved dead”. My own failure to adequately understand responses to the horrors at the World Trade Center is tied up, no doubt, with my own beloved dead. The twin towers fell in New York just two months after sudden death and loss pressed closely upon my own family in a way we had ever known before. Thus, I was in a deep, emotional fog when the towers fell, with all my energy consumed by simply getting through each day and seeking to protect my family. The larger social loss at the twin towers was distant compared to the immediacy of my own loss. Vėlinės cemeteries force me to recognize in new ways this very human reckoning between personal experience and the larger social realities around us. The immediacy of one’s own grief, loss, and trauma profoundly shapes one’s capacity or desire to explore, understand, or even consider devastating social trauma and loss in the larger society. As I will

24 I remember a friend commenting at the time, “nothing like this has ever happened in the world before.” In one sense that is true. All events and experiences are unique. Towers hundreds of stories high had never been felled with the use of airplanes as bombs. But in another sense it is not at all true, and is instead revealing of the relative isolation of the United States from the suffering in the larger world. Horrific and violent actions around the world and even within our own national life and history have taken and do take the lives of far larger groups of people. For a helpful exploration of memorials and memorialization in the United States see, Erika Doss, Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Doss, The Emotional Life of Contemporary Public Memorials: Towards a Theory of Temporary Memorials (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).
explore further in this dissertation, this difficult reckoning between personal, familial, and social loss is a deeply important dynamic in Lithuania today.

Few things are as visceral as grief. Loss is a bodily experience; profoundly so. An aching in the sinews; a punch to the gut; a wounded and eviscerated heart. As I spent time in Lithuanian cemeteries and listened to complex and overwhelming stories of family history, loss, grief, courage, and memory, it started to strike me as odd that so much of what we do in response to grief in white, Protestant traditions in the United States is airy and ethereal: gently shared stories; careful selection of Bible verses and anecdotes; favorite songs; quiet prayers and poems; perhaps a photo or two at the reception in the church hall. Much of it is lovely, but it is terribly enclosed: tears and stories at home; names and liturgy in the church; occasional written testimonies in the local paper, alumni magazine, or civic club newsletter. The only communal ritual on the earth to which we entrust our loved ones is generally performed on that one day of burial.

In contrast, something felt right to me about this mass movement of people I experienced during Vėlinės in Lithuania, this continuing bodily engagement with memory, grief, and hope. At first it seemed it was the candles that drew me: the small lights carpeting uneven slopes. But as I thought about it, the crowd lingered with me more—the hushed murmur. Not joyful, not sad, but knowing. And muffled. It was the milling about, the greetings: respectful; distant; yet interconnected. And the people standing at graves and simply staring, oblivious to the shuffling strangers and the neighbors at work on the burial plot
beside them. Something important was happening. Something powerful. Particularly powerful because it was not the wandering efforts of a few, but an embodied act of the community: a repeated, ritual act that no one needed to direct or explain. Cyclical; fully participatory; fully embodied.

One of the cemeteries we visited during our first Vėlinės was fairly large by Lithuanian standards, near the church, slightly concave, drab in one sense but on this day a place of reunion: reunion of the living and reunion with the dead. The other was small, but in many ways more compelling: at the heart of the town; a short, solemn march from the church; wooden chapel at the center. Slightly rolling mounds of earth bearing the weight of history and enshrouded in the fabric and complexity of the present. So maybe it was the weight that struck me after all, and the candles simply illumined that thickness. Families clustered around graves, praying in silence; old arthritic knees bent to stroke soil and shape flowers and candles. All knit together. So much history, so much mystery: hushed, strong, alive. Yet subdued. Something powerful was happening in those cemeteries. Something I wanted to understand.

By dint of my husband’s grandfather’s birth in the western part of Lithuania, in 1999 we accepted the gracious invitation of one of my husband’s students who grew up in the capital, Vilnius, and made our first visit to Lithuania. Our curiosity deepened, and in 2004 I resigned my position as a parish pastor and together we spent two three-month stints in Lithuania. My husband taught a couple of law seminars, met lawyers, and watched court proceedings. We became involved in an English speaking church and connected with the ex pat
community. I befriended a group of artists and learned how to paint. Most significant for our life in years to come, both my husband and I took Lithuanian lessons and through our teacher encountered the children and staff at two children’s homes about an hour-and-a-half from Vilnius. We fell in love with the children and came to deeply appreciate the staff who cared for them. We’ve been drawn back to them, and thus to Lithuania, ever since. Those relationships led us to consider adoption, and in 2009 we were blessed with two children born in Lithuania who are now a vital part of our family. So my own relationship with Lithuania is now intimate and messy too.

It was during that initial extended trip during the fall of 2004 that I first experienced Vėlinės. Dutifully following the advice of friends, we made our way to the west of the country and the family cemeteries. Three years before this trip, in the summer of 2001, my stepdaughter died suddenly in her sleep, shattering our tidy little world in inexpressible ways. As I wandered to a distant corner of the cemetery during that first Vėlinės, I noticed my husband standing stationary in the center, staring intently at a woman transfixed at the foot of a freshly dug grave. As I moved closer I realized that like my husband, this woman was living the torment of the death of a child. But rather than three years ago, her son’s death was sharp as the blade of a knife: just three weeks earlier. Without speaking or even knowing one another, these two parents were dwelling together in a tangible and powerful space of memory and grief.

When we got back to the car I asked my husband what he was thinking. “It would be nice,” he murmured quietly, “to have one day when everyone stops
and remembers. I remember Whitney every day—all the time—but I have to push through all the activity and expectations of the world to do that. It would be a relief to have one day when the rest of the world pauses to remember too.”

John’s longing for a space to remember is what first quickened my interest in and formed my questions about Vėlinės. I thought of the church-sanctuary-bounded All Saints’ Day celebrations at the parish I’d just left with a few candles, bells, and truly lovely music. It suddenly seemed ungrounded, disembodied, thin.

My second question developed slowly. As we met more people and learned new details of life in Lithuania, the reality of trauma and loss loomed large around us. We started asking people how many families they knew who had lost loved ones through war, exile, or terror during the three different occupations of Lithuania in the twentieth century. More often than not, the answer was, “I can’t think of anyone who didn’t lose a family member. Everyone I know lost someone.” As a pastor, I tried to imagine reckoning with multigenerational grief on that large a scale. Even harder to absorb was any concept of what happens to that enormity of grief in a society where the political system for long years discouraged trust, restricted speech, and repressed and persecuted the church and other religious groups. Just thinking about it made me dizzy. In truth, I did not know the half of it then. Nor did I even begin to understand the complexity or the pervasiveness of that grief and loss. I still don’t.

Over time, my pastoral vocation also became significant. Though this dissertation is not an ethnography, I have taken an ethnographic approach in
gathering the information I explore here. In 2009 I was fortunate to attend a conference on theology and ethnography as I was preparing to start my formal research.25 By this time my relationships in Lithuania had grown deeper and wider than they were on that first trip to the cemeteries. The discussion at the conference addressed the often disturbing lineage of cultural anthropology, from the days of early Christian missionary work, through construction of a notion of culture according to an imagined hierarchy of “civilization(s)”, through modern and postmodern critiques of white, Euro-American, western, male bias in this and many other disciplines.26 What struck me in the discussion that day was the fact that the anthropologists in the group were wary of theological use of ethnographic method out of a fear of proselytizing—a sense that the intent behind the interaction might be religious conversion or correction rather than investigation, exploration, and learning. The questions they raised were appropriate, but I realized the discomfort I was feeling over how to do this work, and more specifically how to do it well, was of a different sort.

Many of my relationships in Lithuania were by then increasingly intertwined with my vocation as a minister of word and sacrament, partly because of my intermittent service as pastor in an English speaking church there. But that was only one piece of the complexity. When people find out you are a pastor they often think you want to talk about God, and that you want to hear their

25 Emory University, Atlanta Georgia. March, 2009.
26 There are myriad sources available to explore the development of the discipline of cultural anthropology and its entwinement with missionary efforts, colonialism, and the establishment of a hierarchy that places white, male, Euro-American ways of life at the pinnacle of normative power. For the purposes of this dissertation, the most helpful overview is likely Kathryn Tanner’s work as it is oriented toward questions of theology: Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).
questions, stories, doubts and fears about God too. That is true in the United States; it is true in Lithuania as well. But in Lithuania the experience is often startling. It continues to re-form and challenge my notion of the pastoral vocation in deeply unsettling ways. I have undergone a form of healing through all this: a healing of my sense of the discipline of theology, and a healing of my vocation as pastor and theologian. But growth and healing is disorienting.

The particular joy I experience in being a pastor is the great privilege of accompanying others as they look and listen for God’s footsteps in their lives, including pondering what it means when we hear only silence, glimpse barren and unmarked landscape, and feel absence all around. In the midst of my ordinary life in Lithuania I am occasionally invited to be present in priestly or sacramental form at profoundly intimate moments in people’s lives: in prayer and consolation; in baptism; in confession; and most searing of all, in the aftermath of death. In one sense, none of that is new. It is what pastors do. Yet in a significant sense it is all new for me. The institutional, cultural, and doctrinal matrix I have long assumed in speaking, moving, and acting pastorally and theologically is absent from my communal relationships in Lithuania. Or at the very least fractured, scattered, and remade.

While the gifts of practice, tradition, faith, and learning woven around and within me since birth continue to guide me, those structures prove inadequate to the task of competently navigating this utterly new terrain. And so I receive the gift of incompetence, doing my best to find a path through each interaction while feeling sure that I do not understand even a tiny drop of the huge ocean in which
I am trying to swim. Methodologically, that is no different than most any person trying to do ethnographic work and do it well. Humility about what we are truly able to understand is critical for any endeavor, and it is particularly important when we are strangers receiving welcome. What struck me at the conference that day though, was that my work in Lithuania was deeply marked by my vocation as pastor, marked in ways different than those described and cautioned in most of the discussions about theology and ethnography.27

One thing I clearly was not trying to do in Lithuania was proselytize or seek out converts. Quite the opposite, actually. When Lithuanian friends asked me to assume a pastoral role, I did so with a sense of hesitation. Hesitant in part because my formation in sacramental ministry placed great value on thick relationship and specific communal structures, neither of which exist in continuity for me in Lithuania. But even more urgently, hesitant because my inclination is to encourage people to seek God within the relational universe where they are born and where they come to understand who they are vis-à-vis the larger world. In Lithuania I am a protestant in a predominantly Catholic country, and I am a female clergy person in a place where most people have never encountered a priest or pastor who is not male.28 My first instinct then, is always to outline what people might be losing or surrendering by turning to me rather than to a Lithuanian priest.

27 Mary Moschella Clark has written an excellent book about pastoral care and ethnography: Mary Moschella Clark, Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction (Berea, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008). Because I was not working with a particular church or organization my experiences differ from most of the situations described in the book, but it has been a very helpful resource nonetheless.
28 There are female pastors in some of the Protestant expressions of the church in Lithuania, but it is a relatively small group.
But there was another important reason for my hesitation. I arrived for our first extended stay in Lithuania pretty worn out, and feeling particular discomfort with how the practices of faith I lead and nurture in the United States seem to issue forth in communities that, while well intentioned, nonetheless take on a form of exclusion—an exclusion that does not feel consistent with the gospel. In an important sense, my primary reason for being in Lithuania was to have a chance to be away from the pastorate, to be quiet, and to learn. I wanted to explore a different part of the world as a means of getting away and getting perspective. Lithuania was attractive to me because I was questioning some of the grand, historical narratives of western Christianity, and this tiny piece of the world wedged between Western Europe and Russia is generally glossed over and neglected when grand, historical narratives are sketched in the United States.

I now recognize that my own hesitation likely contributed in large part to friends’ comfort in talking to me. Whether because of hurt and alienation, resistance to a sense of patriarchy, or history and family formation in the a-religious Soviet tradition that exists alongside and within the deep vein of Lithuanian Catholicism, most of the people who talk to me about God in Lithuania are drawn to questions of faith but are reticent about the numerically dominant Roman Catholic tradition. This puts me in a rather odd place as I find myself offering a from of apologetic for the deep traditions of Roman Catholicism, a spiritual tradition I can readily critique as a protestant feminist, but also a tradition I hold in deep regard for its world-embracing reach and variety, and for a deeply
rooted wisdom in spiritual practice and in matters of justice and liturgy. But obviously, I wasn’t Catholic. It was not a spiritual tradition out of which I could speak or in which I had received ordination. So I found myself discouraging people from abandoning Roman Catholic traditions and commitments even though they were not commitments I shared.

Given all that, a brooding sense of role confusion and panic started welling up in my throat during the discussion at the conference that day. As it turned out, the panic was also a gift. I left with new clarity, realizing that although I would try to use ethnographic method well and to learn from the discipline of cultural anthropology, at the end of the day I’m just not an anthropologist. I’m not an ethnographer either. I’m a pastor, and a theologian. In the messiness of life and relationships, the hands that pressed heavily upon me in prayer at my ordination continue to shape my questions and my responses more fundamentally than any aspiration toward an endlessly elusive objectivity and observation ever will.29

More than a rather hackneyed postmodern notion of subjectivity was at play in my confusion. What became clear to me was that if I encountered situations where people reached out to me as a pastor while I was trying to listen to them from the vantage point of participant observer or any of the other ethnographic models, there was really no contest where I’d land. Yet that particular worry was probably for nothing. In interviews with people I already knew there were some wise cracks about confessing to the priest, or occasional

29 I need to be clear that I deem such aspirations worthy practices, and developed particular appreciation of their import in my training and work as a lawyer. From my perspective, the effort to step back and think about things objectively is a bit like the effort to become more like Jesus: valuable to undertake; a huge danger when we delude ourselves into thinking we have attained the goal.
reticence to be frank about apathy and antipathy toward religion. But all that was pretty easy to diffuse and quickly subsided. As it turned out, what challenged me was not role confusion, it was the encounter with the Holy in settings where I was clearly present to listen and to learn, but not to shepherd, proclaim, preside, or even console. And those wonder-filled moments were everywhere.

Though twenty years have passed, Lithuania is still deeply marked by long years when speech was dangerous, trust a rare and precious commodity, and life’s most precious stories and details held close and reserved for few. As one woman kept repeating while she uttered her story in bits and pieces, “we don’t talk about ourselves very much; it is just not what we do.” Thus, in conversations with extended families or groups the murmurings would start quietly and then rise in insistence, indignation, and wonder: “I didn’t know that!” “I’ve never heard that before!” Memories long held at bay would spill over into tears.

Complex family dynamics, hidden stories, the catalytic effect of an outsider asking questions on the inside—it is all the stuff of ethnography; well trod and vigorously examined methodological turf. Where I struggled was in my response. At moments where I probably could have prodded and asked more questions, everything in my being would tell me that like Moses, I should take off my shoes, for it was holy ground. I was hardwired to simply sit and be still. Amid vexing and confusing details, I frequently neglected to clarify facts, instead listening for whether I heard stark desolation and anger, mournful confusion, deep wisdom, a grasping for God, or some utterly mysterious hope. I responded differently than I think academics are usually supposed to respond, because I
was starting with different questions.

That bothered me for a good, long while. But it’s not bothering me much anymore. Rather, it is reordering my sense of what theology is really all about. I hope my work will be of some use to anthropologists and scholars of religion, at least those who take seriously the practice of faith as a particular form of enacted and embodied belief rather than as a specific occurrence of a general reality. I also hope I am deferential to the standards for historical writing, the ethics and expectations of ethnography, and the responsible application of theory. But at the end of the day this work is less about objective analysis and more about pastoral discernment.

**Overview of Dissertation**

Religion takes form in and is formed by physical expression. We learn, trust, and believe through, “doing, seeing, and touching.” We make and are made by our material, religious worlds: “Experiencing the physical dimensions of religion does not simply reflect an existing reality. Experiencing the physical dimension of religion helps bring about religious values, norms, behaviors, and

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30 I am mindful of the contentious debates around the term “religion”. Here I am following David Morgan in acknowledging the critique of religion as imposing dubious cultural hierarchies and ideologies, yet choosing to use the term to describe an academic discipline that, like cultural anthropology (and any other discipline) must be ever vigilant in seeking to understand, acknowledge, and explore the cultural assumptions loaded into its own investigation. Morgan draws upon Robert Orsi to suggest that religion, “is not about meaning but about relationships, materialization, and ‘making the invisible visible.’” In his own work Morgan describes this as “the visual construction of the sacred”. David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, xiv-xvii. Quoting Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5-6, 73-74.


32 “Learn” and “trust” are the words I choose, not McDannell’s words. McDannell writes in terms of symbol systems. I choose not to utilize the language of symbol and signification as words and speech are often privileged in discourse on symbol. While acknowledging and appreciating the power of words, I am trying to emphasize place, space, embodied experience, and material culture.
attitudes.”33 To understand belief we must examine, “how people behave, feel, intuit, and imagine as ways of belief.”34

In this dissertation I approach Vėlinės through this more capacious notion of belief. Vėlinės is a space or an event more than a belief. At the same time, people are believing here. Intensely believing. The questions I bring to this study are formed by a specific interest in Christian belief, which I define in fairly commonplace Christian theological terms as trust in the God made known to us in the person of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The dissertation is a thick description of Vėlinės and a theological inquiry into its power and significance. It is divided into three parts, with three chapters in each part. Part I describes the people, places, and practices of Vėlinės: In chapter one I offer a brief history of Lithuania with particular emphasis on the last century. In the second chapter I consider the significance of the Vėlinės cemeteries as space and place, drawing upon an image from the work of Ebrahim Moosa to frame Vėlinės cemeteries as liminal dihliz-ian spaces with clear but porous boundaries. In the third and longest chapter I develop a thick description of Vėlinės practices themselves, with particular attention to the embodied and sensory nature of Vėlinės. Part II addresses the structures of social order that intertwine with and affect these practices: In chapter four I explore family and give attention to five aspects of family structure in Lithuania: stability and change; gender and family; boundaries and contestation; untold

33 Ibid.
34 David Morgan, Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief (New York: Routledge, 2010), 5. My preference is for the language of faith or trust, but because I am drawing upon Morgan’s work for definition I am adopting his language of “belief.”
stories; the dead and the power of incorporation. Chapter five reflects on the presence of the church, with particular consideration of the development of All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day practices in the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic clergy’s description of Vėlinės theology and practice, and church and clergy relationship with the state. Chapter six turns to state structure and draws upon the work of Etienne Balibar\(^35\) to examine the relationship between family, church, and state in relation to Vėlinės. Part III of the dissertation engages structures of spiritual struggle. Chapter seven considers the significance of Vėlinės cemeteries in a country marked by trauma, and draws upon the work of Shelly Rambo to argue for an understanding of Vėlinės cemeteries as “Saturday spaces” set between the suffering of Good Friday and the Resurrection hope of Sunday. These Saturday spaces speak truth in Lithuania: life seeps into death here, and death seeps into life.\(^36\) Chapter eight addresses memory and engages with Michael Rothberg’s model of multidirectional memory\(^37\) to explore the fraught discussion of memory in Lithuania and its relationship to both trauma and hope. Chapter nine turns directly to the question of hope, offering a more traditional theological interpretation of these practices, but then suggesting that the greatest power of Vėlinės cemeteries may flow through the dispersed, pervasive presence of these dihliz-ian spaces across Lithuania, and the nature of their distinct yet porous boundaries and multivalent practices.

\(^37\) Michael Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
Intermittently throughout the dissertation, and particularly in the last chapter, I raise parallels with and insights from cultural critics and theologians within the African American tradition. I turn to these traditions as conversation partners, not as direct analogies. The majority of Lithuanians were not enslaved. Nor was the bias against them structured according to a racialization based on skin tone. In fact, Lithuania today is a remarkably—even hauntingly—white place, though not exclusively so. Lithuanians love jazz, and Vilnius, Lithuania’s capital, hosts a fairly large embassy community. If I see a person of dark skin in Lithuania I usually expect them to be jazz performers, US Fulbright scholars visiting for the year, or foreign embassy representatives—most often U.S. Embassy employees and U.S. marine guards. Nonetheless, as I will explore in the chapters on cemeteries and on memory, dark skin does refract through images of western capitalism to function as an important signifier in Lithuania. Though the conversation I initiate in this dissertation with Black Atlantic theological and critical tradition is very limited, I seek to establish that

38 My point here is not to parse words. Those who were sent to Soviet Gulag camps or Nazi work camps and death camps were certainly imprisoned and provided slave labor for their captors. Slavery would be an appropriate description of their experience. However, I am using different language and designation because I do not intend to do a comparative study and wish instead to suggest a conversation while also maintaining a distinction between the Black Atlantic slave experience and the experience of colonialism and occupation in the Baltics. 39 The treatment of the Jewish population in Lithuania is in many ways a better place to draw an analogy in terms of racialized violence. My chapter on memory will touch briefly on that question. But there are also vast differences in the Black Atlantic slave experience and the Shoah. In addition, as I will discuss in the next chapter, there is a historic Muslim Tatar population in Lithuania, as well as a Roma community. More and more there are also immigrants from Asia, Africa, former USSR republics, and the middle East. Even so, the overall non-white population is very small and it is fair to say that it is a very white country. 40 When one of those guards visited the children’s home, the children lined up and asked permission to touch his skin. It is likely more typical than atypical for a Lithuanian to have little to no experience with a person of African descent.
there are promising possibilities for future thought and conversation between the Lithuanian experience and the experience of the Black Atlantic.

I see fruitful possibility for the conversation between theologians and cultural theorists of the Black Atlantic and Lithuanian experience for two reasons. First, these are theological and cultural traditions forged in the immediacy of death, and death is an undeniable presence in Lithuania. Not only in Vėlinės practices, but throughout life. By death I mean physical death; traumatic death. There are very few families in Lithuania who have not been deeply touched by traumatic death. Though most often rooted in the experiences of older Lithuanians, that reality echoes down the generations.

But it is not physical death alone. There is social death as well. In the book *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson offers a definition of power as domination with three particular facets, and then discusses slavery in relation to these facets: 1) The condition of slavery was nearly always a substitution for death, generally violent death. Because the alternative to slavery was death, no life that was considered absent or missing when enslaved. It was truly a social death; 2) With this social death came natal alienation: alienation from all rights or claims of birth; ceasing to participate in any legitimate order; a secular excommunication; severed from ancestors and descendents; a “genealogical isolate”; loss of native status; deracination; loss of attachment to any groups or localities other than those chosen by the master; 3) All of this is sustained by a

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41 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Boston: Harvard College, 1982).
complex nexus ensuring escalation of honor and psychological power for the master, and dishonor and disempowering psychological pressure on and within the slave. I wish to argue that Vėlinės practices perform both the power of, and a form of resistance to, similar but distinct forces of domination that impinge upon the lives of Lithuanians, located as they are between the machines of 20th and 21st century empire.

As I discuss in chapters on practices and trauma, pagarba (respect) is the most frequent term associated with Vėlinės. I hear that term in new ways when I listen with ears tuned to Patterson. Patterson’s framework is suggestive in spite of the fact that the experience of only a limited and ever-shrinking number of living Lithuanians was at the extreme poles of power and domination that Patterson outlines. There were those in Lithuania who resisted regimes of occupation and colonial domination, those who were subject to the most extreme discipline or “secular excommunication”42 by the reigning powers, those who collaborated and joined forces, and many, many, many people who lived everyday life in the messy middle. In the midst of this complexity, death-bound existence was a reality for most everyone.

One particular experience at the midpoint in my research bears description here, both because it was seminal for my understanding of Vėlinės cemeteries, and because it provoked the order and the argument of this dissertation. During a research trip in spring 2011, the majority of people I spoke with were over the

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42 Ibid.
age of seventy. The details of their lives were excruciating: wandering from house to house at age four, clinging to a mother who was begging for safe shelter as troops burned and pillaged the village around them; days spent with nothing to eat; surviving execution by falling into a pit under the crush of dead bodies, pretending to be dead, and escaping once the executioners left for the evening; rushing supplies to trains bound for Siberia and receiving dead bodies passed out of the railroad car as food was passed in; frozen feet, long hours in the forests, crusts of bread and thin gruel on cold Siberian tundra; parents and siblings murdered; an old woman’s haunting childhood memories of the moans and cries of Jewish citizens corralled in the center of town and bound for the forests to be shot; the desperate sense of helplessness that has haunted that woman ever since.

Many of the people I spoke with became agitated as they responded to my questions, explaining that these were times they had sought to forget and it was now upsetting to try to remember. One grandson told me that after I left for the evening the eighty-three year old grandmother spent over an hour pacing back and forth outside the house babbling in stream of consciousness thought. Unable to calm down; spewing forth fragmented portions of her life they had never before heard her describe before.

During that trip I ended most days staggering for my bed and utterly overwhelmed. At the same time, I wandered through these conversations in awe and amazement. Almost to a person, as these older Lithuanians shifted from
details of their history to description of their time in Vėlinės cemeteries a sense of peace and strength welled up around them, slowly prying open a glimpse into the sturdy fiber of their being. At that point their talk drew upon the past, but inevitably turned toward the future. Language shifted from personal to communal. The air was punctuated with long silences and wise, respectful wisdom. The contrast with their earlier effusions of pain and anxiety was striking.

During the same research trip I stumbled upon a conference on “Democracy, Culture, and Catholicism” at Vilnius University. I slipped in the back door just as Professor Irena Vaišvilaitė, a noted church historian, was describing the Lithuanian church’s tendency to focus on the past and on the re-establishment of tradition. She described an urgent need for the church to claim resurrection, and to turn toward the promises of the gospel and God’s invitation to co-creation and hope. While offering examples of parishes that were taking this risk, she also acknowledged the brokenness, the weight of history, and the disorienting reality of change that makes hope so hard here.

Professor Vaišvilaitė’s keynote lecture was followed by a presentation from a prominent trauma scholar. Professor Danutė Gailienė began her remarks by agreeing that hope and resurrection is needed, but also suggesting...

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44 Professor Irena Vaišvilaitė, “Catholicism: A Cultural Tradition or the Good News of Jesus Christ?”, May 18, 2011, Vilnius University, Vilnius Lithuania.

that when people have experienced trauma it is difficult for them to turn from the past toward the future if their trauma has not been acknowledged, and even then there is no guarantee of healing and wholeness. She then outlined efforts they are making to encourage doctors to ask patients if they experienced political repression, trauma, and loss during the serial occupations of the twentieth century, explaining that because a doctor is one of the few people with authority and stature who these people encounter in their lives, that recognition is very significant. “Our research shows that some of these people have never talked about the trauma they experienced, and many have never shared the stories with their children.”

Professor Gailienė then went on to explain that her research is focused on people who are officially registered as politically repressed. The lingering effects of trauma are usually quite clear. At the same time, having survived

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46 Ibid., paraphrase from my notes from the lecture.
47 The group includes former political prisoners of the Soviets as well as the Nazis, former deportees, survivors of the Shoah, and Afghan veterans. Afghan veterans occupy a particularly difficult place in Lithuanian society as many of them experienced extreme trauma in the war, but they were conscripted by and served under the Soviet system and do not function as national heroes within Lithuania. (Information gathered from Professor Gailienė’s lecture). Many interesting analogies could be made between this group and Vietnam veterans in the United States. By far the largest group in Professor Gailienė’s study (75%) were victims of repression in the second Soviet occupation as there are many fewer survivors from the first Soviet occupation and the Nazi occupation.
48 The research was conducted by survey and compared with a control group of elderly Lithuanians who had not been exposed to prolonged trauma. There was an 80% response rate among those registered as politically repressed. Among this group 86.7% reported impact on health from their experience, 83.4% reported impact on their professional life, 55% reported loss of family (this effect was also prominent in the control group), 48% flashbacks, 33% nightmares, 26% feeling tense all the time, 26% breathing difficulties, 24% feeling inferior, 23% uncontrolled crying. See also, Danutė Gailienė and Evaldas Kazlauskas, “Fifty Years on: The Long-Term Psychological Effects of Soviet Repression in Lithuania” in Danutė Gailienė, ed., The Psychology of Extreme Traumatisation: The Aftermath of Political Repression (Vilnius: Akreta, 2005), 67-107; Danutė Gailienė, Ką jie mums padarė: Lietuvos gyvenimas traumų psichologijos žvilgsniu (Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2008).
both sustained trauma and a return to society as someone marked as suspect, some of the individuals able to return to Soviet Lithuania after deportation or imprisonment came back with a sense of emotional freedom rooted in the knowledge that they had already faced the worst and a sense that nothing more horrible could be done to them. The lines for this group among the returnees were clean.\(^{49}\) Professor Gailienė also described some of the research her students are doing with second generation offspring of these survivors.\(^{50}\)

\(^{49}\) Professor Gailienė states that consistent with other studies (for example of survivors of the Shoah), 50% of the respondents report relatively normal, happy lives with no diagnosis of psychological disorders. In Professor Gailienė’s study they sought to establish not only the effects of trauma but also coping and survival capacities and resilience. In both the control group and the study group, support of family (63.6 control/60.5 study group) and belief in God (51.7 control/72.5 study) were important factors. Interestingly, the control group had a much higher divorce rate—three times that of the study group. “Meanwhile, the victims of repression report many more factors that have helped them to cope with the repression. In addition to a belief in God they identified other internal representations: hope and spiritual strength, political participation and political beliefs serve as key protective factors.” [italics in text]. Danutė Gailienė and Evaldas Kazlauskas, “Fifty Years on: The Long-Term Psychological Effects of Soviet Repression in Lithuania”, 99. Communication with other victims of repression and the ability to give meaning to their experiences were also significant factors. “The results of our study have revealed that for the victims of repression, spiritual values, beliefs, faith, and the ability to find meaning in suffering were vital factors in coping with trauma.” Gailienė and Kazlauskas, 100.

\(^{50}\) When I spoke with Professor Gailienė the research on second generation effects had not been published. However, in her presentation at the conference Professor Gailienė reported that 72% of survey respondents reported impact on their lives from the repression in their parents’ lives, 31% reported negative impact, 27% reported that their parents’ repression was a family secret, 21% reported that they did not know about their parents’ experiences of political repression. That research is now available in the form of a doctoral dissertation: Ieva Vaskeliienė, Politinių Represijų Lietuvoje Ilgalaikės Psychologinės Pasekmės Antrajai Kartai [Long-Term Psychological Effects of Political Repression in Lithuania to the Second Generation]. Available at LABA: Lietuvos adamedinių bibliotekų direktorių asociacija. http://vddb.laba.lt/fedora/get/l.T-el.ABa-0001.E.02~2012~D_20121227_090744-57295/DS.005.1.01.ETD [accessed April 1, 2013]. Portions of this research have also been published at Ieva Vaskeliienė, et al, “Komunicaciją Apie Patirtas Politines Represijas Šeimoje: Tarp Generacinis Aspektas” [Communication about Political Oppression: Second Generation Study], International Journal of Psychology: A Biopsychosocial Approach 9 (2011), 91. The research in Lithuania tracks international research on second generation holocaust survivors in expressing significant effects of the experience of parents but not showing significant variance from the larger sample population on important indices. This is particularly interesting in Lithuania given the point that Professor Gailienė and others make that there is a larger social experience of trauma that has yet to be studied—the experience of the messy middle.
including survivors and offspring of people in the Jewish community who experienced the horrors of the Shoah.\textsuperscript{51}

What is missing and much needed, Professor Gailienė suggests, is research on the experience of a larger group within the population: those who remained in Lithuania and found their way in the messy middle as they sought to make a life within Soviet reality. The lines for this group are blurrier than they are for victims of political persecution and their families. Professor Gailienė suspects that within this group there is a distinctive form of trauma that has gone largely unaddressed, a trauma that visits itself upon the second and third generation and has huge impact on the population as a whole.

As I listened to these two conference presentations it occurred to me that in their own ways, many of the people whose stories I was hearing were groping their way forward and trying to do precisely what Professors Vaišvilaitė and Gailienė described: they were drawing from their ordinary, ritual practices to acknowledge their palpable experience of trauma, while at the same time wrestling toward the future.\textsuperscript{52} They were doing this work in the cemeteries. It is holy work. It is perilous work as well. To glimpse the hope and the peril, it is essential to engage the messiness. We will begin that engagement in the cemeteries themselves.


\textsuperscript{52} Again and again the stories I heard led me back to the work of Michel deCerteau and his suggestion that people draw upon the ordinary practices of everyday life to “poach” power from the regnant authorities in order to enact agency, to construct meaning, and to enhance pleasure and power in their lives. Michel deCerteau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (Berkeley: University of California, 1988).
Chapter 1: History

Photos by Denise Thorpe and Karen Meyer
Chapter 1: History

It is not surprising that Klebonas Zigmantas sought to explain Vėlinės to me by connecting with a tragedy of national scope in my own country, or as Žilvinas described it, “a tragic site.” Lithuania is a culture marked by trauma. Death, suffering, loss, exile, and dislocation permeate the Lithuanian experience in the modern era. Wedged between aggressive aspirations toward empire from both east and west, the people in this region of the world experienced horrifying loss during the last two centuries as forces from both sides pressed to expand boundaries and increase control in the region. The “political deployment of the threat of death”¹ has been a presence here over many years.

Lithuanians over the age of seventy-five have adopted the necessary survival skills to navigate five different political regimes in their lifetimes: born into the first independent Republic of Lithuania; under occupation by the Soviet Union from June, 1940 to June 1941; under Nazi occupation from June 1941 until re-occupation by the Soviet Union in 1944; occupation by the Soviets until the establishment of the second Republic of Lithuania in 1990; citizens of the second Republic of Lithuania since 1990. The independent Lithuanian Republic into which older Lithuanians were born was itself a freshly imagined construct. Their grandparents’ and parents’ lives had been marked by change and upheaval too, with most in their parents’ generation born into lives of grinding poverty and servitude. Subject to Czarist occupation and repression during the nineteenth century, before the first period of independence Lithuania was largely a society of

¹ Abdul R. JanMohamed, The Death-Bound Subject (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 44.
nobility and peasants with only a very small merchant class. Serfdom ended in the region only in 1865.

As someone who lives in a relatively secure and stable part of the world, it is nearly impossible to fully comprehend the upheaval that dominated life in this region during the past century. The periods before, during, and after World War II were particularly brutal and chaotic. For a fourteen year period from the early rumblings of Soviet aggression in 1939 to the death of Stalin in 1953, violence, hunger, uncertainty, and fear reigned in Lithuania. In a recent book, historian Timothy Snyder describes Lithuania’s section of the world as the “bloodlands.” He suggests that when we in the European west and the United States think about the period before, during, between, and after the two world wars, we usually focus on the horror and death in Western Europe and the Pacific arena, and end our inquiry into Eurasia no further east than Auschwitz. In so doing we vastly misunderstand the operations of empire and colony in the 20th century, as the most staggering devastation and loss of life in that region—Jewish, Gentile, military, civilian—actually occurred to the east in the bloodlands, the area presently designated Poland, the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), Ukraine, Belarus, and the edge of western Russia.

Between 1933 and 1945, 14 million people were murdered in the bloodlands. Though almost half of the soldiers who died in battle in the Second World War died in this same region, the figure of 14 million does not include them. These 14 million were not killed in warfare, but by other means: shooting,

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starvation, torture, mass annihilation. Most of the Jews who were killed in the Shoah were not killed in Germany where the Jewish population was less than 1% when Hitler came to power. Rather, they were killed in the bloodlands. Marched to the outskirts of towns and shot over open pits, or transported from points west and south to be gassed or executed.

While some of the fourteen million killed were Russian POW’s held captive and starved by the Germans, most of them were not Germans or Russians at all, “most were women, children, and the aged; none were bearing weapons; many had been stripped of their possessions, including their clothes.”3 The vast majority of these people lived where they were killed, in the countries wedged between, occupied, and colonized by the two great powers of the region: the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Snyder writes:

The bloodlands were where most of Europe’s Jews lived, where Hitler and Stalin’s imperial plans overlapped, where the Wehrmacht and the Red Army fought, and where the Soviet NKVD and the German SS concentrated their forces. Most killing sites were in the bloodlands …Stalin’s crimes are often associated with Russia, and Hitler’s with Germany. But the deadliest part of the Soviet Union was its non-Russian periphery, and Nazis generally killed beyond Germany. The horror of the twentieth century is thought to be located in the camps. But the concentration camps are not where most of the victims of National Socialism and Stalinism died. These are the misunderstandings that prevent us from perceiving the horror of the twentieth century.4

Though Snyder is clear that it is unwise to conflate the regimes of Hitler and Stalin as identical in nature, he insists that we must attend to the details of what these two leaders and their programs of mass murder shared, and the ways their grand plans for domination fed off of and enabled one another: a hatred of the

3 Ibid., viii
4 Ibid., vii-xi.
Jews; contempt for any notion of independence in these bloodlands; a zeal to be rid of any person who might wield rival authority and power; and a willingness to murder and starve peasants and aristocracy alike—all in the service of visions of purity.

The continuing impact of this murderous press from east and west in relation to Vėlinės cemeteries is the focus of my dissertation. But the bloodlands did not arise in a vacuum. In the longer scope of history, the people of Lithuania have experienced days of power and dominion as well as years of subjection, occupation, and terror. Situated along the southeastern shore of the Baltic, the first written mention of Lithuania is in 1009. In the early part of the 13th century, the legendary hero of Lithuanian nationalism, Mindaugus, gathered fragmented Baltic tribes in resistance to the incursions from west and north by two crusading religious orders: the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Brothers of the Sword. The troops led by Mindaugus managed to hold back the crusaders, but in 1251 Mindaugus assented to an agreement with the Teutonic order and was baptized and crowned King of Lithuania. This brief attempt at Christianization of the territory did not succeed for long, as Mindaugus was murdered by his nephew in 1263 and over time the loosely knit peoples in the area were again besieged by Christian crusaders from the north and west along with the Golden Horde from the east.

Gediminas and Vytautus are the most heralded leaders of the Gediminid dynasty that followed, a ruling elite who marshalled the establishment,

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expansion, and strengthening of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Throughout the Gediminiid period this region continued as a focus of aggression by Christian crusaders. In fact, there was pressure on all sides as well as from within: the Knights from the south and north, the Muscovy and Rutheni/Kievan Rus’ from the east and southeast, and fractious northwestern Žemaitija (Samogitia), now a region in present day Lithuania. Žemaitija is the region in Lithuania frequently credited with holding off the incursion of the crusading knights. In the midst of these various struggles, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania managed to rise to dominance in the region. By the end of the 14th century it was one of the largest territories in present day Europe, holding land from what is now Lithuania through present day Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, and Russia. This expansion eventually led to the downfall of The Grand Duchy as the expansion weakened the larger system.

A culture of noblemen rose in power during the Gediminiid period. Gediminas is remembered as a leader who maneuvered through interesting bait-and-switch negotiations to hold the German crusaders at bay by offering and then reneging on promises of conversion. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was far from homogenous during this time of expansion as Gediminas encouraged merchants, artisans, knights, and farmers from other areas to move to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Thus the Grand Duchy included Slavs, Jews, Germans,

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Tatars, Kairites, and Poles, as well as descendents of the earlier Lietuvininkiai tribes. The merging and mixing of people during this period had several implications. The East Slavic Ruthenians brought with them a devotion to the liturgy of the Orthodox church. Gediminas encouraged Jewish and Muslim Tatar groups to scatter themselves throughout the Grand Duchy, and they too brought their religious commitments and traditions. The Tatars were noted for their strength in warfare and in the handling of horses. Out of gratitude for their service, they were granted large landholdings in central and southern Lithuania. Though their numbers are now quite small, Muslim roots in this area go deep, as do Jewish roots.\(^8\)

Vytautus ascended to power in Lithuania at a time when it became increasingly perilous to manage and protect such a large geographic area, particularly as internecine warfare was breaking out within the ruling family itself. In 1385 Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania accepted Poland’s offer to marry Jadwiga of Poland and ascended to the throne of what eventually became the Polish-Lithuanian union, a political pact that ordered life in the region of Poland and Lithuania until 1572. The struggles among the ruling family were resolved by vesting Jogaila’s cousin Vytautus with control over Lithuania. In 1386 Jogaila was baptized as Wladyslaw, and in 1387 he converted Lithuania to Catholicism. As it turned out then, Catholicism finally came to Lithuania through Poland rather than Germany. Though the Polish-Lithuanian Union was cast as between equals, Poland in fact dominated during those years.

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With Vytautus’s official ascent as Grand Duke in Lithuania in 1392, a central state began to develop and local noblemen increased in power. In spite of the claim of Christianization proffered by Jogaila, the Teutonic knights continued to assert that the territories in Lithuania required conversion, and they proceeded with their aggressive campaigns. In cooperation with the Polish territories of the Union, Lithuania again held the Teutonic knights at bay in 1410 with the legendary battle of Žalgiris (Grunwald). Strong-willed Žemaitija in the northwest of Lithuania did not convert to Christianity until the early fifteenth century and this significant victory over the Teutonic order. During this time the growing Jewish population lived in both rural areas and cities. The cities of Lithuania became particularly important centers of Jewish life and bastions of the tradition of Misnagdic/ Ashkenazic Judaism with its concentration on study of the Talmud. However, there were also some Hasidim living in the region and following that more mystical Jewish tradition.9

After the death of both Jogaila and Vytautus, the local nobility in Lithuania tried to sever the Polish-Lithuanian union, but growing fractiousness from an increasingly powerful Muscovy in the east and Livonia in the north brought pressure on the East Slavic Ruthenian border and forced Lithuania to instead seek closer alliance with Poland. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was established in 1569. This led to the further Polinization of the upper classes in Lithuania, with Polish becoming the dominant language of culture and politics. As Polish became the language of the nobility, the Lithuanian language was

maintained largely in rural settings. This dynamic with Poland is a continuing sore spot for some Lithuanians today.

The Protestant Reformation had an important impact on Lithuania. The first printed book in Lithuanian arrived from the western portion of Lithuania that was then under German influence, an area now called Kaliningrad but identified during different periods of time as East Prussia and as Lithuania Minor. The most significant presence of the Lutheran church was in the west of Lithuania, with the Reformed church establishing itself primarily in the north. Because of the link between printed word and learning, the effect of the Protestant presence in Lithuanian intellectual culture has been much larger than the relatively small number of Protestants might suggest.

From 1573 forward the Kings of Poland and the Grand Dukes of Lithuania were elected by the nobility. This hierarchy of nobility—kings in Poland and dukes in Lithuania—continues to echo in public discourse, as a sense of interdependence with Poland chafes against a lingering belief that the earlier alliances were unequal, and that through them Lithuania was allotted insufficient power. That feeling was only exacerbated as nationbuilding and the events of the modern era unfolded. In the last half of the 17th century and throughout most of the 18th century Lithuania was ravaged by a succession of invasions and wars. In the late 18th century the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned, and Russia controled the area that includes present day Lithuania. Following uprisings in 1831 and 1863, Russia implemented strict russification policies, closing cultural and educational institutions, banning the Lithuanian
press, and requiring that all printing be done in the Cyrillic alphabet. A network of secret Lithuanian educational systems, book publishing, and smuggling was organized in the western portion of the territory, enabling the transport of books that were published in East Prussia and then smuggled through Žemaitija to the rest of the region.

Late in the 19th century, Russia’s overbroad attempts to control its vast territories began to take their toll and a need for soldiers in the Russian army fostered increasingly harsh policies. During this time the Russian army moved through towns and conscripted young men for terms of 25 years or life. This is the period when my husband’s grandfather and many other young men fled Lithuania to avoid conscription. This period of intensified Russian military presence was accompanied by struggle and famine. Thousands of Lithuanians joined the great outward emigration occurring throughout Europe. Between 1868 and the onset of World War I in 1914, approximately 635,000 people emigrated—nearly 20% of the population of Lithuania. Large numbers of these emigrants found their way to the United States and other points west in the first wave of the Lithuanian diaspora. Because of the continuing outbreak of pogroms and anti-Semitism throughout the Russian Empire, many in this diaspora were Lithuanian Jews.

In the midst of these years of shifting boundaries and occupations, a push for Lithuanian nationalism emerged. The abolition of serfdom allowed access to education in universities of the Russian Empire for young people beyond the noble class, and thus some individuals rose from the peasant class to become
clergy and also to undertake cultural and political leadership roles. In spite of strict russification policies, Lithuanian language newspapers were in fact published during this time, initiating an underground publishing tradition that was later drawn upon and revived during the period of Soviet occupation in the twentieth century. Poetry and literature emerged out of this nationalism movement, romanticizing the era of the Gediminid Dynasty and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and stoking local imaginations to dream of a modern independent nation.\(^\text{10}\) Though the Lithuanian language was prevalent only in rural villages at this time, intellectuals and clergy nurtured the nationalism movement by focusing on Lithuanian language and folk traditions, hoping to gather the support of the peasantry to push for an independent state in opposition to the Polish, Russian, and German influences that were by this time deeply woven into the fabric of the region. This Lithuanian National Revival established the cultural scaffolding that was later reactivated in the push to establish Lithuania as a modern nation state after World War I.

Following the collapse of the Russian Empire, the October Revolution, and the incursion of German troops into Lithuania, the Germans were aware that a full and formal occupation would meet resistance. They thus allowed a conference to meet in September of 1917 to arrange local governing areas dependent on Germany. Instead, the conference elected a 20 member Council, and that Council adopted the Act of Independence of Lithuania on February 16, 1918. When the Germans signed the Armistice of Compiègne on November 10, 1918, Lithuania scrambled to form a government and to adopt a constitution.

As the Germans retreated, the Soviets moved in. This would be the pattern throughout the twentieth century, with Lithuania claiming self-sovereignty in the midst of forces from east and west wrestling over occupation and control of the territory. Following the end of the war, the focus of concern soon shifted to disputes with Poland and Russia, and before long both the Lithuanian-Soviet war and the Polish-Soviet war commenced. In the tussle between the advancing Soviet army and the retreating Germans, Germany turned the capital Vilnius over to Polish authorities. The Lithuanian government then left Vilnius and moved west to the city of Kaunas. This was the first of many contestations over control of the Vilnius area between Lithuania and Poland, with Russia and Germany frequently contributing to push things in one direction or another.

By the end of August, 1919, Lithuania successfully resisted the Soviets and later that year they also defeated the West Russian Volunteer Army in the north. The Lithuanian government adopted a third constitution on July 12, 1920. Although Lithuania held elections for the Seimas (parliament) in 1922 and 1923, during the bulk of the period of the first Republic of Lithuania the government was controlled by strong-arm leader Antanas Smetona and his party, the Lithuanian National Union. This period of independence was a time of increased prosperity in the region as many rural peasants moved from the countryside into cities in search of an improved life. This period of increased prosperity came to an end when the serial occupations of Lithuania during the twentieth century commenced in 1939.
In August, 1939, Stalin and Hitler entered into the now notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact granting Stalin control over the Baltics.\textsuperscript{11} In October, 1939, the Soviets insisted that Lithuania sign a Pact of Defence and Mutual Assistance allowing the Soviet military to garrison 20,000 troops within the Lithuanian territory.\textsuperscript{12} As an incentive to sign, Stalin agreed to allow the Lithuanians to maintain independence and to take control of the city of Vilnius which the Soviets then occupied after defeating the Polish government that had been in control during most of the period of the first Republic of Lithuania. This shift led to a period of displacement and confusion for the majority Polish and Jewish populations of Vilnius.

Less than a year later, the Soviets issued and Lithuania accepted the Soviet ultimatum of June 15, 1940. Stalin then initiated his formal occupation of Lithuania in June 1940\textsuperscript{13} and established a local figurehead government administrated by a group of Lithuanians who cooperated with his plans. Mass deportations were quickly undertaken, focusing on wealthy landowners and commercial leaders, the intelligentsia, religious, military, and cultural leaders, and

\textsuperscript{11} For detailed exploration of this period see, Šarunas Liekis, \textit{1939: The Year that Changed Everything in Lithuania’s History} (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

\textsuperscript{12} This period of time involves a complicated sequence of events. Under pressure from the Soviets, the government formally invited the Soviets to sequester troops in Lithuania and later to enter the country. Lithuanians contend this “invitation” was extended by force and Lithuania had little choice in the matter. Thomas Lane, \textit{Lithuania: Stepping Westward} (New York: Routledge, 2001). Some local leaders did encourage cooperation, though as time went along and the Soviet presence became more repressive the enthusiasm waned. Alexander V. Prusin, Alexander V. Prusin, \textit{The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 137-139; Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, \textit{Jews in the Former Grand Ducy of Lithuania Since 1772}, 31-33.

\textsuperscript{13} Thomas Lane \textit{Lithuania: Stepping Westward}, 37-40; Alexander V. Prusin, \textit{The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands}, 135-140.
any person deemed a threat to Soviet rule.\textsuperscript{14} Though the exact number of deportations and arrests is a topic of continuing study and debate, it appears that at least 23,000 people were included in this first deportation. Significantly, Soviets deported entire families in an attempt to eliminate social and cultural history and influence.\textsuperscript{15} Over the course of the turbulent period before, during, and after World War II, more than 300,000 Lithuanians were deported, imprisoned or murdered by the Soviets.

\textsuperscript{14} The statistics on deportations, imprisonment and death during the Soviet period are ever-shifting and incredibly complex, both because there is not full agreement on who should be included in those numbers and because many records from the former USSR have become available only recently and are still being researched and explored. Material from an International Commission established for the purpose of fact finding is included in this and following footnotes. Even the commission, however, is a matter of contention, as is the exploration of the Nazi Shoah alongside Soviet deportations, imprisonment, and murder. For further discussion of contentious discourse on memory in Lithuania see Chapter eight, Memory. For commission reports see, Tarptautinė komisija nacių ir sovietinio ocupacinių režimų nusikaltimams Lietuvoje įvertinti [The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Regimes in Lithuania], http://www.komisija.lt/en/ [accessed March 27, 2013]. For discussion of deportations in June, 1941 see, Arvydas Anušauskas, “Deportations of 14-18 June, 1941”, The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Regimes in Lithuania, 4. http://www.komisija.lt/Files/www.komisija.lt/File/Tyrimu_baze/I%20Soviet%20okupac%20Nusikalt%20aneksav/Tremimai/ENG/1941_BIRZELIO_TREMIMAI-EN.pdf [accessed March 24, 2013]: “Documents indicate that preparations for mass annihilation of the Lithuanian nation under the communist ideology started in 1939. Under the calculation of national security lieutenant Zaidenvurm 320 thousand members of national parties and organisations had to be registered in Lithuania as suspects. Therefore, together with their family members, some 50% of the Lithuanian nation was meant to be deported to Siberia.” For discussion and background on use of the term “genocide” in relation to Soviet actions in Lithuania see, Arvydas Anušauskas, “Deportations of the Population in 1944-1953”, The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Regimes in Lithuania, 1-2. http://www.komisija.lt/Files/www.komisija.lt/File/Tyrimu_baze/I%20Sovietine%20okupacija%20I%20etapas/Nusikaltimai/Tremimai/ENG/A.%20Anusauskas.%20Galutinis%20variant.pdf [accessed March 24, 2013]

“After the revision of the concept into the ‘Bolshevik and Russian genocide’, the number of victims stands at 350 to 400 thousand killed or deported persons and ‘the victims of the Nazi occupation’, including killed Jewish people, and Lithuanians imprisoned in concentration camps, relocated for forced labour and killed. Meanwhile, J. Rimašauskas maintains that “Soviet and Nazi genocide until 1955 claimed about 800,000 lives of those who where murdered, deported, killed in guerrilla fights and expatriated by any means from the country (refugees to Germany and repatriates to Poland).” http://www.komisija.lt/en/ [accessed March 27, 2013]
Soviet soldiers were frequently led from house to house by local Lithuanian collaborators. Troops were deployed throughout the country. Disciplinary tactics were harsh. Looting, rape, and murder by the occupying forces mushroomed throughout the country. Thousands of people were forced into hiding, living anonymously in villages to avoid inevitable deportation.¹⁶

Hitler’s repudiation of the Molotov-Ribbentorp pact in June, 1941 and the resulting Nazi invasion of Lithuania brought new forms of terror. Jewish Lithuanians were murdered during loosely organized killing sprees throughout Lithuania before and during the first days of Nazi occupation. By the middle of August, approximately 16,000 Jewish citizens were dead. In mid August 1941, Nazi Einsatzcommandos assisted by Lithuanian citizens carried out detentions and mass executions of Jewish citizens, Roma, and other targeted groups. By November 1941, another 130,000 to 140,000 Lithuanian Jews had been murdered. The remaining 40,000 Jewish Lithuanians were held in ghettos and work camps until 1943, with selective executions periodically carried out.

¹⁶ Alexander V. Prusin, The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 140-148; Thomas Lane, Lithuania: Stepping Westward, 49-53
¹⁷ Lithuanian Jews are often identified—and often self-identify—as Litvaks. For reasons of clarity I am choosing not to use that term here as it has come to mean many different things: Jews who lived in Lithuania throughout history; Jews presently living in Lithuania; Jews who emigrated from Lithuania; the descendents of Jews born in Lithuania. I will refer to Jewish people living in Lithuania following the establishment of the first Republic as Jewish citizens or Jewish Lithuanians. In doing this I acknowledge that this designation is also problematic as it may not correctly reflect the self-description of the Jewish community who may prefer the term Litvak. There was an effort by Jews within Lithuania to establish Jewish autonomy during the first Republic of Lithuania and there was also significant fluidity between Lithuanian and Polish control of the Vilnius region. Though the effort to establish Jewish autonomy was an effort that failed, it does express the fact that many Jewish Lithuanians experienced their primary cultural identity as Jewish and as distinct from—or within—Lithuanian citizenship. At the same time, Jewish Lithuanians were deeply involved in Lithuanian life in the first Republic with varying degrees of receptivity by both government and populace. For a thorough discussion of the complexities of this period see, Šarunas Liekis, A State Within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania, 1918-1925; Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772, 16-31.
throughout the period. Then they too were deported or murdered. By war’s end only 9,000 of the more than 220,000 Jewish inhabitants of Lithuania survived.\textsuperscript{18}

A group of nationalist Lithuanian emigrants to Germany helped to plan and coordinate this initial bloodshed, and some Lithuanians clearly assisted in the murder of their Jewish Lithuanian neighbors. Many others did not participate directly but stood by and watched as it unfolded. At the same time, among Gentile Lithuanians who were themselves living in terror and chaos, some put themselves and their families at great risk to hide, protect, and save their Jewish neighbors.\textsuperscript{19} Among the Jews who somehow did manage to escape after the German invasion, some survived the utterly impossible conditions by joining Soviet partisans in a guerilla war against the Nazis, and thus participated in violence that injured not only Nazi soldiers but also Lithuanian citizens. Others

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\textsuperscript{18} International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, “Conclusions”, in C. Dieckmann and S. Sužiedelis, The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941 / Lietuvos žydu persekiojimas ir masinės žudynės 1941 metų vasarą ir rudenį (Margi raštai: Vilnius, 2006); For a discussion of the forces behind this gluttony of violence, the details of organization and involvement, and the years following, see also, Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772. For further background and details on the Shoah in Lithuania see also, Alfonzas Eidantas, Jews, Lithuanians, and the Holocaust, trans. Laima Junevičienė and Aldona Matulytė (Vilnius: Versus aureus press, 2003). For further background on the Jewish community in Lithuania and the impact of the holocaust see, Alyvdas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, and Darius Staliūnas, eds., The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004).
\textsuperscript{19} According to Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, approximately 3,000 Jews survived in hiding in Lithuania. This number is approximately 9-1.4 per cent of the pre-1941 Jewish population of 220,000; over seven hundred Lithuanians have been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations for their efforts to protect Jewish neighbors; the true number may be as high as one thousand. See, Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772, Drawing upon, Dov Levin, Trumpa žydu istorija Lietuvoje (Izraelio ambasada, Tarptautinis ézydñu civilizacijos centras: Vilnius, 2000). For a compilation of articles and letters relating to efforts to protect Jewish people living in Lithuania see, Dalia Kuodytė and Rimantas Stankevičius, Whoever Saves One Life... The Efforts to Save Jews in Lithuania between 1941 and 1944 (Vilnius, Versus aureus press, 2002);
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moved east and west in an attempt to establish a new life. Some joined the Soviet army.\textsuperscript{20}

Though Jewish victims were the primary target of the Nazi occupation, they were not the only victims of the violence. The Roma population was also a focus, as were mentally disabled individuals. In addition, 170,000 Russian POWs died under terribly inhumane conditions in Nazi war camps or were tortured to death or murdered. Many non-Jewish Lithuanians initially welcomed the Nazis as liberators, but over time it became clear that the Nazis would not allow Lithuania to exercise the independent governance they hoped for. The repressive measures by the Nazis increased and the militias that had been arranged in the hopes of regaining independence disbanded. Lithuanian resistance during this period generally took a more passive form, and the Nazis were never successful in marshalling a Nazi SS unit from within the citizenry.

Though the number of non-Jewish Lithuanians murdered by the Nazis was small in comparison to Jewish deaths and Russian POW deaths, there was violence against the larger population as well. Entire Lithuanian villages were burned as punishment for resistance activities. Refusal to cooperate with requests for labour and military support or to pay required duties and taxes was punished severely.\textsuperscript{21} Mixed into this confusion were lingering tensions with

\textsuperscript{20} Sarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, \textit{Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772}.
\textsuperscript{21} The International commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, Christoph Dieckmann, et. al. eds., \textit{Totalitarinių Režimų Nusikaltimai Lietuvoje / The Crimes of the Totalitarian Regimes in Lithuania} (Tarptautinė komisija nacų ir sovietinio okupacinių režimų nusikaltimams Lietuvoje įvertinti: Vilnius, 2005).
Poland and partisan fighters seeking to regain Polish control of the southeastern region of Lithuania and particularly the capital, Vilnius.\textsuperscript{22}

The post-war tactics of the Soviets under Stalin were also merciless. Fear ran rampant. Once the Soviets pushed out the Nazis and re-occupied Lithuania at the end of World War II, repression and secrecy increased for the majority of surviving Lithuanians. The population was subjected to terror in varying forms. Partisan warfare escalated. Young men and women took to the forests: some to fight for independence; some to escape exile or persecution; others to share in common thuggery among their neighbors. Many who took to the forest believed that it was just a matter of time until western forces would arrive to liberate them, but this never happened.\textsuperscript{23}

There were several different genres of partisan throughout the periods before, during and after the war: Lithuanian; Polish; Soviet. There is now painful and volatile contestation of the history during this confusing and violent era of serial occupations. The same individuals who are considered heroes by some are remembered as murderous villains by others, depending on the form of their participation and collaboration with occupying forces.

Given the previous century’s long years of occupation by Russia during the Czarist period and the forced exile and murder of thousands during the first Soviet occupation, distrust of the Soviets ran deep among many Lithuanians.

\textsuperscript{22} Šarunas Liekis, “Soviet Resistance and Jewish Partisans in Lithuania” in Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, Jews in the Former Grand Ducy of Lithuania Since 1772, 331-356; The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania

\textsuperscript{23} For a glimpse of the experience of one partisan fighter see, Juozas Daumantas, The Forest Brothers: The Account of an Anti-Soviet Lithuanian Freedom Fighter, 1944-48 (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009).
This distrust increased over time. When the Soviets received acceptance and validation from the Allied forces through the agreement at Yalta, Lithuania felt abandoned by the west. This was shocking to the Lithuanians who for many years held out hope that the western powers would return to liberate them, particularly because so many Lithuanians had emigrated west during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

When the Soviets reoccupied Lithuania after the war thousands more people were shipped off to Siberia to live in harsh conditions or to labor in gulag camps. Nationalization of land and buildings continued. Families were displaced. Witnesses describe the bodies of partisan soldiers, shot in the woods and then laid out in the public square for display with two purposes in mind: first, to increase the culture of fear and terror; second, to identify the families of partisans. Any person who dared to weep or to flinch—let alone tend to a body—might be sent to Siberia or shot.

In the midst of these changes every person made choices: to resist; to quietly cooperate; to join in the new from of government, and even to lead. Some participated reluctantly; others became true believers. Speech was dangerous. Words loosely spoken at home might be repeated by a child at school and lead to a knock on the door in the night. Confusion reigned as the Soviets undertook a massive project to redirect resources and to build an alternate societal structure. As part of this larger project, Russian speaking residents from other parts of the USSR were relocated to Lithuania to provide labor and leadership in governmental institutions and industries. The number of Russians who were
relocated to Lithuania was fewer than the number sent to the Baltic countries of Estonia and Latvia. For that reason, the minority Russian population in Lithuania today is smaller than in those neighboring countries.

After the death of Stalin some of the fear subsided. Many of the exiles who managed to survive Siberia were allowed to return to Lithuania, though some were required to stay in Siberia or to move to other regions of the USSR. As noted by Professor Gailienė in her lecture, an interesting result was that some who returned from deportation or imprisonment felt a freedom of spirit that those who were left behind did not. As an example, most Lithuanians born during the Soviet period describe their church involvement as quiet and hidden—leaving the city and slipping off to the grandparents’ village to baptize children, take first communion, or receive confirmation. Aurelija’s father was born in Siberia. She describes her own baptism much differently:

I have lots of pictures of my baptism...there were lots of people. It was a big celebration. You could see that it was a big festivity. It was not in town, it was in the village. When my brother was born my father made benches for the party—like a wedding. Everyone came. Later the neighbors borrowed all those benches for their events. My father didn’t belong to the communist party, and their family was sent to Siberia...so they didn’t care. He was already claimed. You have your birth certificate that you were born in Siberia and it is clear to everyone that you are not trustworthy. That's why you can not be the director of the company. You can not do anything worse to the person than has already been done.

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24 Danutė Gailienė reports that in a study of the traumatic effects of political repression one of the surprising statistics was that those who had been deported often reported a higher level of happiness and sense of freedom than the control group who are not classified as victims of political repression. They also had more stable marriages and tended to be more religious. Professor Danutė Gailienė, “Traumatized Society, Democracy, and Catholic Religious Belief”, May 18, 2011, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania. See also, Danutė Gailienė, Ka jie mums padarė: Lietuvos gyvenimas traumų psychologijos žvilgsniu (Vilnius: Tyto Alba, 2008); Danutė Gailienė, ed., The Psychology of Extreme Traumatisation: The Aftermath of Political Repression (Akreta: Vilnius, 2005).
That was it. We were open to going to the church, whatever. It was not a big tragedy. You do not fear.\textsuperscript{25}

Not all who were allowed to return flourished as Aurelija’s family did though. Some lived in constant fear of being sent again into exile, haunted by the trauma even as they were forced to find their place in a homeland that was fundamentally changed. There were limitations set on these returning exiles. Usually they were not allowed to settle in the region of Lithuania from which they were taken, and were instead required to make their way in a portion of the country unknown to them. And as Aurelija describes of her father, restrictions were also placed on the jobs returning deportees were allowed to hold, and the schools to which their children could gain entrance. Similar limits were placed on individuals whose family members were identified with the partisan wars even if the family was not deported.

“The Lost Generation” is a label people in Lithuania sometimes apply to categorize the generation who grew up and started adult life during Soviet times but after the death of Stalin in 1953 and “the thaw” that followed. Schooled in Soviet thought, they came of age in Soviet Lithuania, lived through independence, and then sought to find their place amidst new economic and political structures following independence.\textsuperscript{26} For some that went well. For others it did not. Though they did not grow up within the chaos, confusion, and fear that gripped their parents, their lives were formed amidst the silent echoes

\textsuperscript{25}Aurelija, age 37, female.
and powerful reverberations of that fear. Knowing the possible repercussions of stories loosely shared, families often said little about what had happened, offering only the information and stories necessary for survival and protection. But children felt the weight of the history and trauma.

The Soviets developed an elaborate system for forming and indoctrinating youth while also suppressing and discouraging alternate avenues of formation through church or community groups. Some among the lost generation were devoted to Soviet ideology, criticizing their parents if they failed to share their enthusiastic support for the communist cause. Others went along to get along, while quietly receiving and maintaining an alternate narrative at home. Many grew up with elements of both: recognizing Soviet acculturation as the path to power and success, yet maintaining a sense of Lithuanian identity and history. Whereas for the parents’ generation the most palpable experience was fear, for many in this generation a sense of ordinariness, practicality, and absurdity pervaded their outlook on the world.  

What remained true was that death was never far away. Whether spoken or unspoken, most every family carried stories of loss; frequently violent, frightening loss. Life was lived, and is still lived, in spaces where death was so pervasive that in some communities no one remained to tell the story. The material world around them spoke that truth where words did not: hidden family letters from brothers and sisters who ran to the forests to fight; empty

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synagogues; the residue of Hebrew alphabet on buildings; a menorah repurposed to serve as a candelabra on a Catholic table; secret partisan hideouts dug beneath kitchen benches; Jewish headstones built into a playground wall in a local schoolyard. No one knows where all the partisans are buried in the woods, but legend has it that when the wild strawberries bloom in the forest they tell the story of death, because those that bear the most abundant fruit are planted on shallow graves.

The fall of the Soviet Union happened quickly. As the first of the Soviet states to declare independence, Lithuania was at the epicenter of the final dissolution. Wonderment, hope, fear: these were heady and terrifying days. Awareness of the true cost of change dawned more slowly: the January 13, 1991 deaths of 13 people at the Vilnius television tower when the Soviet army rolled into town to try to reign Lithuania back into compliance; murder of customs guards at the border; the chaos inherent in establishing a new economic and political system; disproportionate allocation of property enabled by speedy privatization; fear and disorientation among native Russian speakers who were first sent to Lithuania by the Soviets, made a home in the Baltics, and were now faced with learning a new language and choosing long term alliance and citizenship; economic hardship as huge fluctuations in the markets played havoc with savings and pricing; lofty hopes for identification with the west; pain and discouragement as those hopes met the realities of larger markets and world recession; the monumental challenge of emerging from a society based on secrecy, and the attendant disorientation in determining who and how to trust.
Even the pervasiveness of death, suffering, and loss during the years of occupation and the ennui of the Lost Generation do not fully express the magnitude of the trauma. Equally important is the confusion, the silencing, and the fear. This reign of fear lessened after the death of Stalin, but the power of the trauma remained as the Soviet system of surveillance and control perpetuated forms of silencing that invaded even the most intimate arenas of life. Describing Soviet society, Paul Connerton writes:

> For half a century, until the fall of Communism, many families had been deprived of even the minimal comfort of telling their stories, instead keeping their bereavements to themselves, some hiding their pain even from their children, for fear of the damage that might be released by an unwary revelation. ...For decades people lived in an acoustics of paranoia and a society of whisperers.28

One of the most vexing aspects of the silencing was the social complexity and confusion it shrouded. Cecilija tells the story of her grandmother and the two grandfathers. Her grandmother’s first husband was sent off to Siberia and for long years he never returned. Understanding that he was dead, Cecilija’s grandmother remarried. The first husband finally did return to Lithuania, and reappeared long years afterward. In their later years, Cecilija remembers the grandmother and both husbands gathering at the graves during Vėlinės, having found a way to reconnect and appreciate one another in the midst of that complexity.

Kajus grew up in southwestern Lithuania in a region that at various times was a site of contestation between the Germans, the Russians, Poland, and local

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partisans. He describes the murder of his mother’s family: “We are not sure if it was the Germans, the Russians, or the Partisans. No one knows. This heroic talk of the partisans…I am skeptical. It was one group coming through and killing, and then another.”

Saulė is in her early eighties and she has a lot to say, barely taking a breath once her stories begin. Growing up in an area just north of Vilnius she too witnessed an ever evolving range of territorial disputes and aggressions. Her mother spoke Polish and was proud of her work as a young woman at the manor house of the large landowners in the area. Saulė is skeptical of this earlier time of nobility and peasants, and she clearly believes that important notions of equity and commitment to equality have been lost in the shift from the USSR to an independent Lithuania. As a child, Saulė remembers playing with the young Jewish boy who lived next door and later ended up under the pier in a local lake with a stone tied around his neck. She appreciates the education she received in the Soviet system and is proud of her time as director of the local school. She is adamant though, that although she was a member of the communist party she proudly marched through the front door of the local church to attend her father’s funeral, insisting no one in the Soviet bureaucracy looked down on her or gave her trouble for going to church at that critical family time. As we wander through the cemetery after a long day of conversation she leads me past the graves of peasants who died in rebellion, members of the Czar’s army, German officers, Polish partisans, Russian soldiers, Lithuanian partisans. Suddenly she turns and
looks me in the eye, “Who is good and who is bad here?  Can you tell me...really?”

Even now, more than twenty years after Lithuania declared independence, family stories are ragged and full of holes: uncertainty over why someone disappeared; vague recollection of how many children there were in the family; sketchy notions of where grandfather was born or when and how he died; confusion about how one child managed to escape deportation and exile when the rest of the family was sent away; disagreement over who actually killed the cousin who served as a Soviet police officer and whether the perpetrator was ever charged; debate about what happened to the cousin’s sister after he died. And there is also shame. Lithuania is just beginning to unfold the complexity of its own history in the past two centuries. 29  Shifting borders with Poland, a significant German presence in the western part of the country, and this rapid succession of repressive political occupations before, during, and after the two World Wars led to great confusion. During the chaos and fear of the war years and the years of Soviet occupation and partisan warfare after the war, families might respond to several knocks on the door in a single night, each from a different partisan or occupation coalition seeking food or shelter. Throughout these years of fear and confusion some sought simple survival, some took risks to help their neighbors, others seized opportunities for exploitation and profit, and some joined in a blood lust that unleashed long-simmering distrust and hatred.

29 For an exploration of the rise and development of anti-Semitism in Lithuania as well as interesting insights into the role of shame see, Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaerań Freeze, eds, Jews in the Former Grand Ducy of Lithuania Since 1772.
The reality of significant Lithuanian collaboration when the Nazis arrived in 1941 is a particularly raw and difficult topic in Lithuania today. One woman from the Jewish community in Vilnius describes the situation in clear terms: “They were liberators for most Lithuanians; they were murderers for us.” Some acts of resistance to the Soviets were woven into cooperation with and participation in Nazi atrocities. The memory of these times is complex and tinged with details that make the trust of the Nazis by many Lithuanians a bit more comprehensible to an outsider. Comprehensible, that is, until the details turn to justification of the barbarities, which is a piece of the narrative that does emerge over time in some conversations.

Again and again people recount how the Russian soldiers were rough, unkempt, and cruel, whereas the German soldiers were clean, respectful, and even kind—unless you were Jewish, Roma, aligned with the Soviets, homosexual, or disabled. Only since independence is that confusing chapter of history beginning to receive significant public attention. And the conversation is not an easy one, as it requires acknowledgement of the participation of the

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31 Believing that a German invasion of occupied Lithuania would lead not only to the expulsion of the Soviets but also to self-governance for Lithuania, some members of the Lithuanian Activist Front—composed of Lithuanian citizens claiming to be patriots—secretly worked with the Nazis even before they arrived in Lithuania, seeking to pave the way for the Nazis to push the Soviet occupiers out of the country. However, evidence suggests that even before they arrived in Lithuania, the Nazis recruited members of this group to assist in murdering Jewish neighbors.

32 “Lančiūnų partizanai”, Rytų frontas: 1941-1945, „Užėję vokiečių kariai su partizanais Lančiūnų dvaro bokšte išskelė dvi vėliavas – mūsų tautinę ir vokiečių. Vokiečių kariai, kur tik apsistojo, su apylinkės gyventojais elgėsi mandagiai, jie pasirodė labai tvarkingi ir be reikalo nenaikino ūkio turto“["German soldiers together with Lithuanian partisans raised two flags on the tower of Laciunava mansion - Lithuanian national and German. German soldiers wherever they stayed they were very polite with the local people, they seemed very neat and did not destroy farm property with no reason"]. http://rytufrontas.net/lančiunavos-partizanai/ [accessed March 24, 2013].
church and of nationalist heroes in creating an atmosphere of antisemitism that unleashed utter barbarity.\(^{33}\)

The current discussion of the Nazi occupation in Lithuania occurs in two different registers. In public the discussion is strident, though there are signs of movement. Government officials participate in services of memorial to mark the Shoah in Lithuania and the Lithuanian parliament recently passed a resolution to pay some compensation for property seized from Jewish citizens.\(^{34}\) Among many, the Shoah in Lithuania is explained as a tragic result of fear and uncertainty during this chaotic time, when every person was terrified and felt there was nothing they could do to stop the unending horror.

A popular narrative that distorts important facts is the contention that the Jewish citizenry provided the leadership for the bolshevik movement in Lithuania, and that they enabled the Soviet invasion.\(^{35}\) While it is true that the percentage of Jewish people involved in labor movements in Lithuania was greater than their representation in the overall population, Jewish citizens held a wide variety of political views. They were represented in the government of the first Republic of Lithuania, and the Jewish community remembers the time of the first Republic as

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\(^{33}\) See, Saulius Sužiedėlis, “Listen, the Jews are Ruling Us Now’: Antisemitism and National Conflict during the First Soviet Occupation of Lithuania, 1940-1941” and Darius Staliūnas, “Lithuanian Antisemitism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries”, in Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, Jews in the Former Grand Ducy of Lithuania Since 1772, Vol 25 in Polin Studies in Polish Jewry, 305-330 and 135-150. For an accessible overview of the context and history of the Shoah in Lithuania as well as the painful situation today, along with comparison with the situation in the Netherlands, see, Robert van Voren, Undigested Past: The Holocaust in Lithuania (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).


relatively secure, though still marked by antisemitism.\textsuperscript{36} When the Soviets arrived they took harsh action across a broad sweep of the population, including against Jewish Lithuanians who were large landowners or influential in commerce. Their goal was to eliminate political and military leaders, teachers, the intelligentsia, the clergy, and the wealthy. Another frequent but misleading comment suggests that the percentage of Jews in the world who were murdered in the Shoah is smaller than the percentage of Lithuanians murdered through Soviet atrocities, and that therefore the Jewish claims for recognition of the horror of the Lithuanian Shoah as extraordinary are misplaced. This comment is particular telling as it does not count Jewish deaths as “Lithuanian”.\textsuperscript{37} More extreme nationalist factions even characterize the Shoah as a gross exaggeration, claiming that the numbers are constantly shifting and are manufactured for effect.\textsuperscript{38}

As I will explore further in later chapters, private conversations with individuals are much more nuanced and laced with sadness. The narrative is


\textsuperscript{37} It is telling that Jewish deaths are not considered “Lithuanian” when the tally of deaths is assembled as this is a clear expression of the problematic construction of life and “belonging” that fostered the form of antisemitism that was nurtured, exploited, and enacted through the Nazi genocide of Jewish and Roma populations. In noting this it is also important to acknowledge that for a complex set of reasons the Jewish population of Lithuania did for many years self-identify as Jewish rather than Lithuanian. But the point is nonetheless important. For Jewish self identification see, Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, \textit{Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772}, 3-56; Infolex, “Žydų delegacijos reikalavimai parlamentarams atrodo nerealūs”, September 24, 2003.


fairly consistent: indeed, Lithuanians did participate in shooting Jews; some of those Lithuanians still live in the country but many escaped west through Germany to settle in the United States, South Africa, and South America; any person who was known to have shot and looted Jewish neighbors was shunned within the community and considered a pariah after the end of the war; some of those individuals were tried by the Soviets and sent to work camps but many were not; all lost social status. The realities are considerably less clean and neat than this common narrative would indicate. As recent hostile reaction to a documentary film’s naming of individuals who helped with the Nazi murder of Jews in Jurbarkas, a town in the south of Lithuania, makes abundantly clear, families of those who participated in the murder of Jews remain in Lithuania, and some hold positions of power and prestige.⁴⁹

As an outsider, it is confusing and even disturbing to hear these stories and explanations. Even the responses of thoughtful and open-minded people sometimes seem to diminish the horrific realities of the Shoah. In the United States the significance of the Shoah is now deeply integrated into public education in most states and memorialized in museums, books, and days of remembrance. Though tolerance education is part of the school curriculum in Lithuania, public discussion of these issues is at a very different point than it is in the west, and it is set in a radically different context.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ For an analysis of tolerance education in Lithuania see, Christine Beresniova, “When intolerance means more than prejudice: Challenges to Lithuanian education reforms for social tolerance”, in Iveta Silova, ed., Post-Socialism is not Dead: (Re)Reading the Global in Comparative Education, Vol 14 in International Perspectives on Education and Society (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., 2010), 247-269.
Over time, my conversations in Lithuania revealed three important truths. First, my shock is conditioned by the narrative of western history I learned in U.S. public education and by my formation as a Christian protestant pastor. In school I learned that the United States entered World War II not only as a response to the aggression at Pearl Harbor, but also out of a responsibility to stop Hitler's genocide of the Jewish people.\(^{41}\) As a protestant pastor I learned the story of the murder of the Jewish people as part of a longer story of the people of Israel as God's chosen people\(^{42}\) who have been subject to exclusion and oppression over many centuries, including horrible oppression by Christians who also, ironically, claim to trust and follow a crucified Jewish man who was the son of God.

Second, open discussion of the Shoah in Western Europe and the United States did not really begin until almost twenty years after World War II. Given the fact that Lithuania was under Soviet control at that time, there was no possibility for public discussion of the complex suffering of World War II. While the Soviets did convict and punish some Lithuanians who participated in the massacre of the Jews, it was largely a symbolic effort. This was one piece of the larger public propaganda that positioned the Soviet ideology as superior to the ideology of “western fascists,” with no acknowledgement of the complexity and chaos within which it all ensued or the death-dealing ways of the Soviet superstructure. The Soviet regime was no true friend to the Jewish people. As one young Jewish

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\(^{41}\) I realize there are many debates about how this all unfolded. Here I am simply recounting what I learned in public school in the United States in the 1970’s.

\(^{42}\) Again, the meaning of God’s chosen-ness is a matter of great debate. Here I am simply recounting my own formation in order to contrast it with educational formation in Lithuania. Just as there is variety in the educational formation in the United States, so there is variety in Lithuania. But I believe the point I am making here still holds.
woman summarizes it, “neither was good for us. The Nazis killed us physically; the Soviets murdered us spiritually.”

Given these historical realities, it is not surprising that many of the more difficult discussions are emerging only now, as Lithuania is into its third decade after independence. As Professor Gailienė suggests, what was true for Germany may be true for Lithuania as well: reckoning with and responding to the complex and painful truth of those chaotic and terrifying times will be the work of a new generation, born after the war and able to examine difficult realities outside the immediacy of lived trauma. Yet, as I will explore in later chapters, the trauma casts shadows and uncertainty on these later generations as well. Because open conversation, acknowledgement, and grief were not possible during the Soviet years, that process is just beginning.

Finally, it is also critical to remember that the same narrative of western history that conditioned my shock over discussions of the Shoah in Lithuania also failed to focus upon or privilege the incredible suffering and death among other people in the bloodlands who were subjected to the horrors and degradations of Stalin. The Lithuanian belief that the suffering and loss inflicted upon this part of the world by Stalin is largely neglected in the larger western narrative is grounded in reality, even if the implications of that reality for the way the story is told in Lithuania are often disturbing. In pointing this out I do not imply that the two horrors were identical. They were not. The point I am making is that Lithuanians sense that there is much greater awareness in the west about the

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barbarity and horror of the Shoah than there is about the death, destruction, and suffering wrought by Stalin and the forces of the USSR.44

There are many possible reasons for this striking omission from the standard western narrative of history. We in the west tend to tell the story of World War II in a way that makes our own country’s participation appear heroic. Therefore we neglect to carefully explore the truth that some of the same people who committed atrocities against the people in the bloodlands were also our partners in World War II. People in Lithuania do know this. And my experience is that once they deem it safe, they talk about it. When Klebonas Zigmantas and parishioner Žilvinas spoke candidly on this topic they echoed the words of many others I spoke with:

If we look historically, the painful fate of the after-war youth was determined in 1943 in Yalta where Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt agreed that the Baltic states were to belong to Russians. In 1945 in the Potsdam conference this was confirmed again. Our generation grew up listening to our parents’ disappointment and disbelief in America. Even more, in our village you could hear people condemning America. They were saying that America lied to them and that they would be free if America had done anything. And people spoke that their sisters and brothers would not have gone to the resistance [the partisan forces in the forests] if they knew. Don’t be angry, but I really have to say something against your homeland. It wasn’t nice what America did.

It is my sense that Lithuanians are right that most people in the United States are far more familiar with the loss and death on the western front in World War II than they are with the much larger loss and fatality on the eastern front.45

Even more, we often neglect the implications of our chosen role as a power

44 There is considerable conflict about the use of the term “genocide” and where it is correctly or incorrectly applied. That is an important discussion, but it is not a discussion I intend to enter here.
45 In fact, it is fairly atypical for most people I meet to even know where Lithuania or the Baltics are located on the world map.
broker of global reality, and within that our decision to cede to Stalin power over
the Baltics and other portions of Eurasia at the end of the war.

Instead of contending with the complexity inherent in these realities,
during the period following World War II our society quickly wove a narrative that
set the United States and western Europe as the antithesis of the Soviet political
system. We then used that narrative frame to glorify a particular form of
democracy and capitalism while at the same time critiquing the Soviet system as
a communist “opposite”. Rarely did we wrestle with the reality that the form of
government in the Soviet Republic was actually totalitarianism justified through
Marxist ideology. We divided the world according to competing ideological
narratives, yet neglected to critically examine our role in global power and
instead accorded the power of empire only to the “other.” In drawing those stark
contrasts we failed to acknowledge and examine the actual and continuing toll of
loss and suffering in this region, or the lived experience of those who were trying
to survive as the area was buffeted between eastern and western powers. A
more careful and truthful accounting of this history invites consideration of less
heroic realities undergirding social forces in World War II and driving the
economic systems that followed, particular modern colonial power and a longing
for global domination. As the chapter on memory will explicate more fully, that
reality increasingly is and must be a piece of any discussion of genocide and
trauma.

Intellectuals in the post-Soviet states offer yet one more explanation for
the western academy’s lack of attention to the Soviet system as a colonizing,
totalitarian regime. Some suggest that the atrocities of Stalin receive less attention than the horrors wrought by Hitler because carefully attending to those details would contradict a commitment to Marxist ideology in the academy, and would thus muddy the waters of a post-colonial discussion that seeks to draw colony and metropole along strict binaries of north and south, east and west, light skin and dark skin.⁴⁶ There is truth in this as well. As one new to the study of this region and groping for understanding, it is disorienting and even stunning—or more truthfully grating—to hear the stories of loss and trauma in Lithuania and then to turn and discover how the Soviet experience is discussed in much of the “post Socialist” academic literature. Often a brief introductory sentence gestures toward the horrors people experienced in a form of: “Yes there was terror…BUT.”⁴⁷ The Lithuanian narration of the story is generally quite different, “Yes, there was some economic security…BUT.”


⁴⁷ This is a tricky area as most academic writing is appropriately resisting a continuing cold war ideology of bad/dangerous “them” and good/virtuous “us”—and ideology that took new form in the time period after the dissolution of the Soviet Union as “Good us…we are bringing freedom/democracy/capitalism” to these formerly captive people. Given the reality of that regnant ideology of the west as rescuer, the tone of much of the academic “post-socialist” literature is understandable, particularly as it focuses upon eroding false binaries. In most all of this literature I see an attempt to honor and salvage a sense of the daily life of individuals as coherent and lived according to a particular ethical and moral frame. This too is appropriate. What I feel is lacking is the acknowledgement of the fear and terror that was in fact the originary source of the the imposition of Soviet rule and that continues throughout all the years of the USSR. As I explore in this dissertation, the echoes of that fear still reverberate through family and institution and are even taking new form as those who willingly participated in the Soviet system feel silenced and shamed, unable to truthfully tell their own stories of hope and fear. I intentionally choose not to use “postsocialist” as I feel it is in accurate given that there are many forms/degrees of socialist governance continuing today in Europe and elsewhere. However, for examples of insightful and important writing on these themes (with the caveat explained above), see, C.M. Hann, ed., Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia (New York: Routledge, 2002); C.M. Hann, ed., Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice (New York: Routledge, 1993); Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).
At the same time, it is also dangerous to pluck this region’s twentieth century history from the larger narrative of nobles and Czars, feudalism, peasantry, and economic exploitation that preceded it.\textsuperscript{48} Postsocialist writing provides a great service in reminding us of the danger of forgetting the past and the severe economic disparity that drove the Bolshevik revolution, even if the Bolshevik ideology eventually served as warrant for what was in fact a totalitarian regime in the USSR. The economic and class disparities that the Soviets claimed to address—albeit through force, fear, and violence—were all too real. This literature also does us a favor by dispelling the myth of democracy and neoliberal economics imported from the west as a great panacea for all.

The period of massive wealth disparity between a few in the noble class and the majority peasants is not the focus of this dissertation as it is beyond the living memory of most Lithuanians today. But that reality was an important driver in the loosening of the bonds of control in the region that led to the push for the first republic of Lithuania. The Bolshevik message resonated in this region; it resonates still. Though few would openly wish to return to either the terror or the absurdity of Soviet times, many are aware of and comment on the current worrisome economic realities for a small country drawn into large-scale, global, neoliberal capitalism: “This is not really independence. It is shifting

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See also, Alexei Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). As I address in a later chapter, Yurchak’s book is an example of the significant difference between perspectives of those who experienced the USSR as part of the center in Russia and those who, like Lithuania, experienced the USSR from the boundaries and as an occupation force.
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\textsuperscript{48} I rearranged this dissertation several times because of this dilemma as I waffled between concern about adequate background and concern about length and focus. I do offer a few further details about the earlier history of Lithuania in later chapters. At the same time, to truly do justice to the intricacies of this topic a much lengthier history of the region would be required.
dependence—dependence on the Soviet Union is now dependence on western markets over which we have no control.”

These partial, scattered scripts are all marred by scarring and disruption. Yet they are a piece with the larger trauma, fear, and confusion—a by-product of the painful, chaotic realities the twentieth-century visited upon this part of the world. Some in Lithuania present the condition of their country in harsh terms, suggesting that Lithuania is mired in a “victim mode” and that Lithuanians need to take more personal responsibility for moving their own lives and the life of their country toward a productive future. Others parse the present nexus of fear, hope, frustration, and despair through the lens of nationalism, offering Lithuania as an example of a newly created country seeking an absolute and pure narrative for reasons of identity; a narrative that insists upon a Baltic identity in purist ethnic terms and considers absolute heroism and goodness to be the only true and correct narration of history, no matter that details of history might suggest otherwise. Still others believe that Lithuania is living through a necessary period of dependence during this time of transition: a turn to the west for guidance and mentoring after years of rule by a strong, if often cruel, dominant father-figure in the east. Others still—generally only cautiously and quietly—suggest that while the country should continue to reject any totalitarian form of government, it needs to return to many of the socialist principles of equality that were sacrificed in the break from the USSR.

Along with flowers and candles, ordinary Lithuanians carry all of these commitments and confusions of memory with them on their yearly pilgrimage to

49 Gintaras, male, age 52.
the cemetery at Vėlinės. “Carry” is an important term here. For Vėlinės is above all embodied act. As distinctive space marked by both memory and history, Vėlinės cemeteries invite reckoning with the elusive truths of trauma, survival, identity, and hope. That reckoning takes place in the body and in specific embodied and emplaced experiences. Therefore, we will next turn to consideration of place as we explore Vėlinės. In the chapter following we will explore the bodily practices themselves.
Chapter 2: Cemeteries
Introduction

Cemeteries are scattered throughout the landscape in Lithuania. On the evening of November 1, a drive through the countryside reveals small pockets of light emerging deep in forests and glowing from the center of dormant fields: sites of burial unnoticed during most of the year, but during this season marked with candles as places of memory. During early autumn evenings, thick blankets of darkness and solitude unfold over cemeteries tucked into churchyards and gathered at the edges of towns. In late October these shadowed evening spaces begin to glow with magnetic force. Crowds, cars, flowers, and candles appear within and around the cemetery gates. As the sun sets, people move toward the brimming light.

These cemeteries alight with fire arise amongst a landscape marked by the complex layers of Lithuania’s history: castles on hills and along rivers celebrate the days of the power of the Grand Duchy in the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} centuries; dormant manor houses and ornate baroque churches testify to the era of the dukes and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; winding, cobblestone streets, faded Hebrew on cracked plaster walls, and an occasional commemorative plaque evoke faint material traces of the vibrant history, profound influence, and utter tragedy of Judaism in Lithuania; abandoned collective farms, crumbling Soviet apartment blocks, empty churches, mosques, and synagogues linger as unsightly scars from years of Soviet occupation. More
recently, modern glass office buildings tower above medieval city centers while blue European Union billboards dot rural roads, both indications of Lithuania’s turn to the west and accession to the EU. Lithuania’s cemeteries are scattered amidst this varying landscape, their light illumining it all.

My exploration of Lithuanian cemeteries is driven by the question of how these spaces form and perform¹ this varied history, and how they give witness to the conflict, suffering, confusion, faith, and hope lived here. Specifically, I seek to understand what these cemeteries tell us during the time of Visų Šventųjų diena (All Saints’ Day) and Vėlinių dieną (All Souls’ Day, which is actually the first day of an eight day octave) in the calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. In practice, some people in Lithuania understand the distinction between Visų Šventųjų diena and Vėlinių dieną and find it important; others do not. As one

¹ “Performance” and “perform” are terms I use throughout this dissertation. They are also complex and contested terms. See, Marvin Carlson, “What is Performance?,” in The Performance Studies Reader, Henry Bial, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004). In my use of performance I rely upon Erving Goffman’s definition as, “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continual presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers.” Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 22. Goffman is particularly helpful as he seeks to examine how, in effect, all life is a stage, and to consider performance within ordinary, everyday life. My focus on Vėlinės is also a focus on the ordinary and everyday rather than the extraordinary or the artistic performative. However, in relation to the complexity of Vėlinės performance, a helpful elaboration on the concept of Vėlinės can be found in Carlson’s piece where he draws attention to an encyclopedia article by Richard Bauman suggesting that, “all performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, through which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of the action.” In an important sense, my writing about Vėlinės renders Vėlinės a performance per se under this definition, as even when I participated in Vėlinės rituals—which I did—I was aware that I was observing those performances for the purpose of writing this dissertation and was comparing that particular performance with other performances I had witnessed. But Bauman’s insight (through Carlson) extends beyond performance vis-à-vis me as a participant observer. In listening to people talk about Vėlinės it is clear that powerful performative processes, likely both conscious and unconscious, are at work for most everyone. There is clearly a sense of what Vėlinės “ought” to be, and there is also a dynamic of observation—whether the observation emanates from family, neighbor, clergy, or the Soviet or Lithuanian state. See, Richard Bauman, in Erik Barnouw, ed., International Encyclopedia of Communications (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Referenced in, Marvin Carlson, “What is Performance”, 71.
young man put it, "I think they are so tied that you can use the time of it the way you want." For many, the common term for this time of year is Vėlinės, which is how I will reference the season here.

Within Vėlinės cemeteries Lithuanians navigate massive social and political transition while also reckoning with a century of intense trauma and loss. Vėlinės cemeteries testify to this trauma. But they also do more. They form and perform family, reinforce and challenge the state, participate in political and social contestation, display economic status, offer opportunity for reconciliation, witness to faith, doubt, and confusion, provide sanctuary, and emplace sustaining hope.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In Part I, I describe the material reality of the cemeteries themselves and some of the history they reveal. In Part II, I consider Vėlinės cemeteries as space and place as a lens to explore the significance and complexity of what happens within the cemeteries. I frame that discussion by drawing upon the image of the dihliz, offered by Muslim ethicist Ebrahim Moosa as a threshold space that allows for the negotiation of complex relationships of identity and power. As dihliz-ian spaces, I first explore Vėlinės cemeteries as home and as boundary. I then consider Vėlinės cemeteries in relation to embodied practice. Through this discussion I seek to establish that Vėlinės cemeteries serve as a point of orientation and grounding as well as a site of resistance within larger forces of political and social fracturing.

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2 Throughout the dissertation I describe cemeteries during the season of All Saint and All Souls Days as Vėlinės cemeteries.
Part I: Material Reality of Vėlinės Cemeteries

After explaining the intricacy of the eight hour bus journey to her family’s graves in the north, Gabija—a former secretary of the local communist party—asks if she can tell a joke: “Lithuanian men need to marry three different women in their lifetimes,” she explains with a smile, “a Jewish woman to teach them how to live a good life, a Russian woman to teach them how to love, and a Lithuanian woman to take care of their graves.” Cemeteries are sacred space in Lithuania. Both public and private, the cemetery is an extension of the domestic space of family; social space where roles and relationships are negotiated and displayed. Yet the cemetery is also public, deeply inscribed by both church and state. As a predominately Roman Catholic country, most cemeteries in Lithuania are Christian spaces, yet also semi-Christian, non-Christian, even secular in the forms critiqued by Talal Asad.4

The size and scope of cemeteries in Lithuania vary dramatically: small family plots in field or forest; grand expanses on rolling hills; enclosures in the midst of villages, towns, and cities; churchyards dotted with clusters of graves;  

3 Space can be sacralized in any number of ways, including liturgical ritual and consecration, recognition of particular material features that are reverenced by a community, placement of specific objects within a space, bodily practices such as pilgrimage, events or actions that vest space with ad hoc or temporary sacrality, designation as sacred by some form of authority or communal agreement and participation. In some senses all of these forms of sacralization are present in Lithuanian cemeteries, and likely other forms as well. What is clear is that these cemeteries are set apart for a particular purpose which is reverenced and respected by most of society.
4 The term “secular” is a focus of lively academic discussion. I use the term intentionally here as that very discourse will be important to my larger argument—particularly in relation to these practices as they participate in nation-building, political resistance, and post-colonial response and construction. In his exploration of the secular, Asad has his eye toward the secular as a formation of life that dehistoricizes politics and culture and thereby masks itself as objective reason while performing a powerful assertion of white European American dominance, epistemology, and control. See, Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
fresh and sparsely populated open fields on the edge of town supplementing older, more central cemeteries now filled to capacity. Nearly all the older cemeteries have walls and gates, some beautiful with elaborate stone structures [Figure 1] and others marked by modest metal fences [Figure 2]. The boundaries of the cemetery are important in Lithuania. In earlier days traditions governed whether coffins were passed over the wall or carried through the gate. Those who committed suicide could not be buried inside the wall and were instead interred beyond. The cemetery gate was considered a portal or threshold for the soul, requiring attention to ensure that it was opened and closed at proper times.

In many cemeteries the space is cramped and grave markers crowd in upon one another. The markers vary in form, material, and size: old wooden crosses deteriorating under the erosion of the elements [Figure 3]; stone sculptures of saints or of Christ [Figure 4]; etchings of biblical scenes [Figure 5]; traditional Lithuanian crosses forged with metal [Figure 6]; occasional images carved in stone to reflect the joys and passions of the dead—musical notes, paintbrushes, even the wheel from a motorcycle [Figure 7]. Photographs of the deceased imprinted onto a stone and placed like jewels on the grave marker are increasingly popular, as are stones in the shape of an open book with names and dates inscribed on the pages.
Figure 1: Cemetery Gate. Photo by Denise Thorpe.
Figure 3: Wooden Cross. Photo by Karen Meyer.

Figure 4: Jesus with Cross. Photo by Karen Meyer
Figure 5: Biblical Etching on Gravestone. Photo by Karen Meyer.

Figure 6: Lithuanian Iron Crosses. Photos by Karen Meyer.
Three figures appear with great frequency on grave markers: Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn—a famous icon of Mary without the baby Jesus located in a chapel above the city gate in old town Vilnius;[Figure 8];5  Rūpintojėlis, a sculpted image with a rich history in Lithuania that has now become known as “the worrying Christ”.[figure 9]6; Images of Mary [Figure 10].

Figure 8: Grave Monument with *Mater Misericordiae*. Photo by Karen Meyer.

Figure 9: Rūpintojėlis. Photos by Karen Meyer
The scale of some family monuments communicates a clear message of wealth and social prominence; flat, barren, unmarked graves evoke the muffling effects of poverty.

There is an immediate sense of uniformity and order when first entering through the cemetery gates, but if you slow down and wind through the many paths, the individual detail is striking. Most graves have a small three to eight inch raised border wall on top of the cemetery plot. On some graves the raised border is in the shape of a coffin. On other graves it is angular; either square or rectangle. The space within the border wall is treated as a garden and covered with a bed of decorative stone, by grass interspersed with plantings, or with dirt carefully combed and then planted with flowers or diminutive shrubs.
Sometimes small sculptures or mementos are positioned among the plantings. Though all cemeteries harbor the occasional scruffy grave, most graves are tended and well kept.

These cemeteries tell important stories about the nature of community in Lithuania. Since Lithuania’s re-establishment as a nation-state in the late twentieth century, the regnant historical narrative proclaims a clear and direct lineage of Baltic identity as foundational to the young nation, while also prizing a history of tolerance and welcome in the 14th and 15th century. The details of history are not quite so clear. Shifting dynamics of power and affiliation, occasional alliances with neighboring countries, and struggle between the different regions now together designated "Lithuania" suggest a different story.⁷

Cemeteries point to the hybridity that is often shrouded behind a grand narrative of clear and sharp national boundaries and language.

In some towns there are several cemeteries separated by religious affiliation, with Catholics on one side of the road, Protestants on the other side, and Jewish, Muslim Tatar, Old Believer, Kairite, or Orthodox graves still further away. In larger cities and in newer cemeteries there is far more entanglement. One grave marker might hold a stone depiction of a strong jawed Lithuanian Balt with surname ending in the ubiquitous "as", while the headstone beside may be inscribed with the Cyrillic alphabet memorializing a woman who moved to Lithuania during the Czarist period or the Soviet occupation, and the grave across may bear a strong Polish name with some variant of "cz". These names and headstones express a significant truth about Lithuania: religious and ethnic identity has been in flux over the years. During some periods of history purity of language, religious affiliation, and ethnic lineage loomed large here. At other times, neighbor lived beside neighbor, different religious groups maintained distinctive practices that varied importance among their members, and lines of purity and ethnicity were subsumed beneath other concerns. Vėlinės illumines the intricate webs these relationships have woven throughout Lithuanian history. Patterns of darkness and light highlight the complexity of this small, spunky Republic forged in a crucible of contestation between powers both east and west.

Every year, Vėlinės cemeteries bring the full span of ages together in the presence of death. Vėlinės is not the only time of the year when families visit cemeteries. Mother’s Day is considered an obligatory cemetery day by many, as
is Father’s Day by some, along with anniversaries of death, and birthdays. But Vėlinės is distinct in the level of participation. It is a huge crowd event. Police direct traffic at cemetery entrances in larger towns and cities. People scurry and jostle and bustle.

Among the crowds are tiny babies and small children. Death is integrated into life from the earliest of days. Just as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter are part of the pattern of life for most Christian children in the United States, children who grow up in Lithuania assume Vėlinės as part of the cycle of their year. Even young university students I spoke with who are fairly casual about their participation in Vėlinės at this stage of life assert quite strongly that they plan to bring their children to the cemeteries when they become parents and maintain the tradition: “I am busy with university studies, but this is something important. It is a tradition that I remember. I loved it as a child. I want my children to have that experience too. My grandparents are all alive. I do not have anyone to visit who I really knew. But when that changes I will go for sure.”

This connection between joyful childhood excitement and time in a cemetery is striking. Some do enjoy memories of their grandparents’ stories of bumps in the night as they were preparing to go to bed on Vėlinės, along with the accompanying explanation that the spirits are out on walks and they need the warmth and light of candles at the cemetery to welcome them along with candles in the windows to guide the souls on their way. But no one I spoke with described Vėlinės cemeteries as scary places. Peaceful places—yes. Places of

8 Irena, female, age 25.
obligation, respect, reunion, mourning, sorrow, remembrance—Definitely. Places of crowds and impatient waiting as a child—Occasionally. But fear? No. Cemeteries and other death and memorial practices are integrated into the family life cycle.9

Part II: Vėlinės Cemeteries as Space and Place

Dihliz–ian Space

In his work in Muslim ethics, Islamic scholar Ebrahim Moosa suggests a helpful image for understanding Lithuanian cemeteries during Vėlinės: the dihlīz. An “Arabized” Persian term for “that space between the door and the house,”10 the dihlīz is the courtyard before one fully enters the public street, a liminal space that defines “inside” and “outside” while also enabling an engagement with conflicting identities and power relationships.11 “Unlike a border that serves as a territorial demarcation between sovereign territories and criminalizes improper crossing without authorization, the dihlīz is not a criminalizing space but a welcoming space.”12 Moosa draws on this trope to aid in his examination of the work of Abū Hāmmid al-Ghazālī. He uses a spatial metaphor to explore textual tradition. Following Moosa’s insights about the significance of boundary and liminality in hermeneutics, Vėlinės cemeteries function as actual physical dihlīz–ian spaces.

9 See, Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin, ”We are All in Exile Here’: Perceptions of Death, the Soul, and the Afterlife in Rural Lithuania”, in Milda Allšauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder, Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society: Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 66-67.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 48-49.
According to Moosa, the *dihliz* is a structuring space, “it ensures that one enters by the door in a disciplined manner while maintaining the decorum appropriate to the integrity of the occupants of the house and the people in the street. It is neither entirely private nor totally public, but something in between.”\(^{13}\) Crucial to the notion of the *dihliz* is the power to frame other spaces: “without the *dihliz* one cannot speak about an embodied 'door' and a 'house,' nor can one speak of an 'outside' and an 'inside.' Even though it is located in between spaces, the *dihliz* frames all other spaces.”\(^ {14}\) The Lithuanian cemetery is just such an “in between” space: not private; not entirely public; rendering a frame for other spaces.

Although the invocation of an Islamic term like *dihliz* in a primarily Roman Catholic country may seem odd, in reality it is quite apt. As I touched upon in the last chapter, Lithuania claims a small but longstanding Muslim population dating to the late 14\textsuperscript{th} century.\(^ {15}\) The Muslim population in Lithuania is now more diverse, as Muslims from other parts of the former Soviet Union are beginning to emigrate to the Baltics in search of opportunity, joining Tatar Muslims and Muslims who were relocated to Lithuania during Soviet times. More importantly,

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{14}\) *Ibid.*  
Lithuania lies at the boundary of areas that have been defined as “occident” and “orient” in western modernity’s construction of the world.  

As the chapter on history attests, this region was the relentless focus of some of the earliest Christian crusades. These boundary-lands have been a site of great contestation throughout the last five or six centuries, and a particular focal point of suffering during the wars and occupations of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The European continent does not come to mind for most people when considering colonialism and alterity, but this region of Europe is in many ways an “other” vis-a-vis both east and west. Though now formally a member of the EU, Eastern Europe is frequently addressed as almost Europe, or perhaps vying to be Europe, on matters of economic and social policy. In some

16 For an exploration of the complex and contested use of these terms see Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1979); Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York: Vintage, 1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Violeta Kelertas, ed., Baltic Postcolonialism (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2006). I choose these terms while also acknowledging that the use of “east” and “west” risks further essentializing of what is in fact an incredibly complex and fluid reality—particularly when the historical horizon is set not in the modern era but further back in the days when the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a powerful force in the area and was contending with Christian crusaders from the south and west and the forces of Muscovy and other regions to the east. Some of this complexity is addressed in later chapters. However, given that my focus is on the modern era in Lithuania, Lithuania’s location in the territory between western Europe and Russia is of primary importance in understanding how life has been shaped in this region in the last two centuries. In this I am agreeing with historian Timothy Snyder and his argument that we in the west fail to fully understand the significance of that location if we do not step back and do some comparative historical work with an eye to the plans for domination led by Hitler in Nazi Germany and Stalin in the U.S.S.R. See, Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands. In addition to the repercussions for Lithuania’s present relationship with Western Europe and Russia, in chapter five I will argue that I will the significance of this location in relation to colonial domination has antecedents in Lithuania’s earlier history, particularly given the Catholic church’s focus on Lithuania as a site of conversion.  


18 Kenneth Dyson and Angelos Sepos, eds, Which Europe: The Politics of Differential Integration (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Two interesting examples highlight this fact. First since the Schengen Agreement went into effect citizens of Lithuania and other eastern European countries may work legally anywhere in the EU. This is causing increasing distress in some parts
circumstances this region functions as partner to Western Europe, yet in other discourses the region provides a foil within a dominant western imaginary. Long subject to colonizing aspirations from both west and east, the Baltic countries share in the struggles of other regions of the world seeking identity, autonomy, economic security, and power amidst forces of empire whose aspirations have shaped and scarred the terrain around and within them.\textsuperscript{19}

Cemeteries during \textit{Vėlinės} brim with this experience of contestation, struggle, suffering, loss, and hope. While the majority population in many European countries identifies with the western colonizing forces of the last several centuries,\textsuperscript{20} Lithuania’s recent history is more akin to that of the colonized. \textsuperscript{21}Therefore, the power dynamics underlying Moosa’s construal of the dihliz bear upon Lithuanian cemeteries:

\begin{quote}
the intermediate space or the threshold space…one with intersecting boundaries and heterogenous notions of practice and time\textsuperscript{22} …a liminal
\end{quote}

of western Europe as the economic recession takes its toll, with the now fairly predictable result of a call for reduction of benefits, restriction of opportunities, and even withdrawal or modification of the agreement. The introduction of the Euro is another interesting example. Though the Lithuanian lita is pegged to the Euro and Lithuania sought to become part of the EU economy soon after joining the EU, they were deemed to have failed to meet budget and deficit requirements set by the western EU countries and have thus far not adopted the Euro. (That might not be a bad thing for them right now, except that their currency \textit{IS} pegged to the Euro). The particular irony in this stance is that several of the large western EU economies do not themselves meet the Euro requirements that are required for the entrance of countries in the east.\textsuperscript{19} Whether empire and colony are appropriate terms for the Lithuanian experience is a matter of debate. See, Ann L. Stoler, at al. \textit{Imperial Formations} (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 77-139. Nonetheless, the dynamics of colonialism are very much a (perhaps under-explored) part of the experience of eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{20}

As noted above, Lithuania was once a significant power in this region and reconstructed memory of that era functions as a utopian ideal upon which the modern republic has been built. European colonization began in the 15th century, much earlier than I discuss here. Because my work with these practices is focused primarily in relation to the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} century experience, I am addressing Lithuania’s experience of occupation and colonization during that time period.\textsuperscript{21} See, Kelertas, \textit{Baltic Postcolonialism}; Kristine Suna-Koro, “Once More on (the Lightness of) Postcolonial Naming: Which Europe and Whose Eurocentrism,” \textit{Journal of Post-Colonial Theory and Theology} 1, (2010), 1.\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 27.
space between the inside and the outside\textsuperscript{23}…an interspace, negotiating and struggling with the hegemonic and colonial knowledge traditions as well as the subalternized.\textsuperscript{24}

As dihliz-ian spaces, Lithuanian cemeteries host a complex configuration of bodily memory and hope, together suturing Lithuanian bodies, hearts, and minds fractured by the modern experience of geo-political conquest and occupation.

I will explore Vėlinės cemeteries as an important dihliz-ian space where Lithuanians negotiate political, social, and familial relationships within a space that is marked, but not controled, by the church. To do this, I will first consider Vėlinės cemeteries as they function as home space and as boundary. I will then examine this cemetery space and place in relation to embodied practice. Through this exploration I seek to establish that Vėlinės cemeteries serve as a point of orientation and grounding as well as a site of resistance within larger forces of political and social fracturing.

**Vėlinės Cemeteries as Home Place:**

Cemeteries are home places.

In our family it is normal just to meet our dead relatives on this day. We prefer this day not for church, but for graves. I know that God loves us all, and God loves not only us who live here now, but also dead people. …For me and for [my husband] it is really a special day; a time when we go into a cemetery with another friend from another world. I see that my husband is talking to his father there—he and his brother both. Maybe it is a little bit different in other families. But for me, it is not a sad day. It is my family; alive or dead. It is just that the cemetery is the place where we are meeting each other.\textsuperscript{25}

These home places are tended with the care and attention expected of any home. Nurture, affection, reflection, security, reconciliation, love, and gratitude

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 34.
\textsuperscript{25} Tarvilė, female, age 32
are all words that emerge in descriptions of this home. In this sense, it is often an idealized vision of home—a home focused on reunion.

In understanding the complex dynamics of home in Vélinès cemeteries it may be helpful to think of these cemeteries as both spaces and places. Space is not an inert object upon which we inscribe meaning, nor is it an empty void. Rather, space is “produced” by interactions and practices, and at the same time contributes to the formation of those practices and interactions. Space is also fluid and dynamic, ever changing and being changed. But Vélinès cemeteries are not only spaces, they are places as well. Geographer Tim Cresswell suggests that the simplest definition of place is “a meaningful location.”

Humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan describes place as humanized space. A place is experienced, and home is the touchstone example of place. Tuan suggests that place evokes security whereas space beckons with freedom. He asserts that desires for both space and place jostle within all of us as we crave


27 See, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 89. They describe space (and all matter) as functioning as *assemblage*. Driven by desire—which drives flow—matter is constantly in flux and change. They use the terms territorialize, deterritorialize, and reterritorialize to describe these fluid dynamics. They also offer a helpful image of space as a rhizome: “A rhizome has no beginning or end. It is always in the middle, between things, *intermezzo*...a logic of the AND... The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed.” *Ibid*, 25. For a particularly helpful explanation of the *assemblage*, See, Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

28 Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 7. Place is both, “…an act of defining what exists (ontology) and a particular way of seeing and knowing the world (epistemology and metaphysics). Place is created through relationship between self and environment; the ways we receive, respond to, and understand the world determine what becomes “place.”, 15.

the reassurance of place while also feeling the lure of space that lies beyond.\textsuperscript{30}

Thus, for Tuan place is deeply intertwined with notions of security, identity, community, and nationalism, and with all the complexity, possibility, and danger those terms imply. Place is also bound up with meaning, and meaning is shaped by an insider’s view. An inherent “othering” accompanies the formation of this kind of place: a boundary between who understands and belongs and who does not. Place is “home” for some, but not for all.

During Vėlinės Lithuanians craft place within their cemeteries. But the historic dynamic of security and freedom in Lithuanian cemeteries varies significantly from the security/freedom dichotomy suggested by Tuan.\textsuperscript{31} As place, the dihliz-ian spaces of Vėlinės cemeteries render “home” on many different levels: an enactment of rootedness over time; the site of family memory and history; a formative site for relationships with neighbors and friends; a marker of Lithuanian identity in contrast to occupiers’ inscription of alternate identities; a spiritual home of hope; a longing for home beyond this world. Most often, this alternate awareness is nurtured through bodily practices that form place, rather than through words.

As Lithuanians describe life during the Soviet period it becomes clear that for many, the home functioned as the locus of a sense of history and identity that ran contrary to what children were learning at school. This sense of history and identity was sometimes explicitly articulated with words and explanations:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{30} Yi Fu Tuan, \textit{Place and Space: The Perspective of Experience} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{31} Home is also crucial for the work of Gaston Bachelard, a philosopher who pursued many of the same themes and questions as humanistic geographers. \textit{See}, Gaston Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space} (Beacon Press: Boston, 1994).
\end{flushright}
Yes, I would learn in school all those things about how life was so wonderful and the USSR had created the ideal society. But I would go home and tell my mother and she would say, “oh no, do not believe that. It is utter nonsense.” She would not say much. She would just make sure I knew it wasn’t true, that it wasn’t who I really was.\textsuperscript{32}

Yet loose words could be dangerous. Soviet society was structured and disciplined\textsuperscript{33} through a system of informants. Incentives to accuse and to inform were built into the access and promotion structures of most all institutions.\textsuperscript{34}

Therefore it was never clear who could be trusted and who could not, even within close networks of friends.

This dynamic formed the behavior of families as well as individuals. In many families there were no explanations of history or practice. You simply learned by watching and by doing, and developed an innate sense of what could be shared outside the family and what could not:

Oh, I think maybe one time my father talked to me about my uncle who had been sent to Siberia. I asked a question about something we saw or something we were doing and he decided I was old enough to hear. He said it once and that is all that was said. All that needed to be said. And I knew it was important. Sometimes I think there is just too much talk now. Then, we knew to listen. And if it needed to be said it would be said. But most things did not need to be said.\textsuperscript{35}

Storytelling was a risky practice during the years of war and occupation, and a painful one as well.

\textsuperscript{32} Šarunė, age 43.


\textsuperscript{34} Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately do not limit accusatory practices as state induced coercion. They define accusatory practices as, “...spontaneous communications from individual citizens to the state (or to another authority such as the church) containing accusations of wrongdoing by other citizens or officials and implicitly or explicitly calling for punishment. …The term ‘informer’ generally implies a regular, often paid, relationship to the police.” Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, eds., \textit{Accusatory Practices}. Because of the focus of my study, the most interesting stories I heard about incentives to inform involved individuals’ attempts to enter seminary during the Soviet period and the conversations with and requests by the KGB during that process. But most all professions were subject to these dynamics to varying degrees.

\textsuperscript{35} Taurė, female, age 44.
These Vėlinės home places are frequently described as gendered spaces. Močiutė (grandma) looms large in Vėlinės stories of identity and awareness. If a child had a močiutė, it is highly likely that she was the one who ushered that child into the world of Vėlinės. It is also likely that the practices of Vėlinės revolve around her still:

The way I understood who I was I would learn within my family—who I was as a Lithuanian—and that things I heard from the government were not true...the way I understood that was through watching. Watching what we did at home...on Christmas when we pulled down the shades and celebrated. Seeing what we made time to do and to enjoy. Going with močiutė to the cemetery and listening to her greet her parents and friends in the graves: “Hello mama, hello Papa.” When I was little I thought, “Oh...silly old grandma.” But then I started to understand. These are my people. This is who we are. And I loved to go with her. I just loved it. Now as I am older and my parents have died, I understand. I really understand.36

Under different historical circumstances, bell hooks also describes the significance of home space for the birth of alternate understanding of self and identity.37 As she recounts her childhood and the realities of race in the United States, she describes the journey to her grandmother’s home—a gendered space of comfort and strength:

When I was a young girl the journey across town to my grandmother’s house was one of the most intriguing experiences. ...It was a movement away from the segregated blackness of our community into a poor white neighborhood. I remember the fear, being scared to walk to Baba’s (our grandmother’s house) because we would have to pass that terrifying whiteness—those white faces on the porches staring us down with hate...

Oh! That feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming when we finally reached the edges of her yard, when we could see the soot black face of our grandfather...Such a contrast, that feeling of arrival, of homecoming,

36 Taurė, female, age 44.
37 bell hooks, Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 41-49.
this sweetness and the bitterness of that journey, that constant reminder of white power and control.

I speak of this journey as leading to my grandmother’s house, even though our grandfather lived there too. In our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learned to have faith. The folks who made this life possible, who were our primary guides and teachers, were black women.  

Emilie Townes shares a similar description of gendered practices of home as place and the powerful effect of home place as her childhood opened to awareness of the narratives of race in the United States:

I grew up in North Carolina and my parents were teachers here. It was the evening and my mother was braiding my hair into rows. She flipped on the television and there was Jessie Helms on WRAL. He was saying awful things—just awful things—about negroes. I sat and listened. I had never heard things like that before, and I was shocked. I turned to my mother and asked, “Who are they talking about?” She said, “They are talking about us baby, they are talking about us.” That’s all she said. She just kept braiding my hair. That is when I first realized that I had to be careful what I trusted. That I couldn’t believe everything I heard. Or take it in. That people out there said things that just weren’t true.

In both the Lithuanian and the U.S. contexts, the reasons for these gendered constructions and the power of domestic space are many. I will explore this more fully the chapter on Family. For now, what is important to note is the force of these places in nurturing resistance and an alternate sense of identity and freedom.

Home is still a site of alternate formation in Lithuania, but the dynamics have shifted. Now the socially acceptable stance is that of Lithuanian patriotism.

38 Ibid., 41.
Lithuanian culture is glorified. After long rears of repression and denial, the freedom to fly the Lithuanian flag and to emphasize Lithuanian language and practice is celebrated. During the Soviet period Russian was the language of the state. Therefore Russian culture and literature influenced the education and cultural formation of most all Lithuanians over the age of twenty-five.\footnote{Russian was taught in the school from the first grade forward. Several interviewees called it “the first language”, but most schools were taught in Lithuanian. This differed from the period of intense russification during Czarist times, when Lithuanian was forbidden in schools and forbidden in print. During that time communities would hire individuals to go from home to home to teach Lithuanian to children and Lithuanian books were smuggled into Lithuania from the area that was once called “East Prussia” and “Lithuania Minor.” It is now a part of Russia and called Kaliningrad.} Russian is now stigmatized in many settings.\footnote{Following independence Lithuanian became the official language but knowledge of Lithuanian was not required for citizenship. This was a more liberal policy than in the other Baltic states. Those states also had a larger population of Russian speakers who had been moved to the Baltic states during the Soviet period.} In particular, Lithuanian citizens who moved to Lithuania from Russia during the Czarist and Soviet eras feel that stigmatization, and practices of home function for them as alternate identity formation.

But this alternate home identity is not confined to families with Russian roots. Even when Lithuanian is the first language, home provides the freedom to acknowledge the hybridity of Lithuanian culture and of the formation of individuals during the Soviet era. Home is a place where it is okay to laugh at Russian humor on television or deploy Russian aphorisms. Home is thus a place that resists purist constructions of Lithuanian culture under the current resurgent Lithuanian nationalism:

\begin{quote}
Probably many people will not admit this to you unless they know you well and trust you, especially if you are talking to more educated people rather than ordinary workers. But the truth is many Lithuanians like Russian culture, Russian humor, Russian strength. Today, for example, they will
\end{quote}
tell you they don’t like Russian culture. But at home they will watch Russian television but do not want to admit this. Earlier it was the more powerful culture. There was an agreement to adjust. Out in public they may make fun of Russians, but then they will go home and tell Russian jokes. That is what we grew up with. It is familiar to us. I am from Russian culture. It feels very natural. I was completely captured in Russian songs, humor...People express surprise at our last election--that people with ties to Russia and dirty business there received many votes. But we Lithuanians tend to admire strength and bravado. We became used to hierarchy under the Soviet system and we are uneasy with much about democracy. We can not admit that in public of course, but you see it in families as they interact at home.42

Dangers of Home

Romantic notions of place as home and of home as the site of grounding and formation have been criticized as essentialist and exclusionary.43 Measuring lived experience through an ideal type is fraught with problems; difference is denied, or at the least elided. In truth, home is not always a warm and cozy place. For some it is a place of unending toil, or a site of violence, abandonment, disruption, and fear. For others it is a place of stultifying emotional deadlock, or burdening anxiety. There is no one pure, true, and good home that is universal for all.44 It is appropriate then, to be wary of notions of place as home, and to

43 Cresswell, 25ff.; Some of the most potent critiques of home-based notions of place come from feminist geographers who value the focus on relationship, body, home, and experience in humanistic geography, but are also critical of the rosy picture of home embedded in this approach: Katherine McKittrick, Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Linda McDowell, Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 71-95. Pamela Moss, Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place, and Knowledges (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).
attend to the ways this construct might invite a romantic sentimentalism that lends itself not only to gender stereotyping, but also to xenophobic and homogenizing forces of ethnic strife and ardent nationalism.

As I will explore throughout my discussion of Vėlinės, current dynamics in Lithuania lend support to this critique. Yet such a critique also carries a freight of assumptions about the locus and definition of freedom, tolerance, and identity. In exploring life in Lithuania today it is important to be cautious of definitions formed largely within a western, neo-liberal tradition that was built—ironically—on slave labor, and on exploitation of a Native American population for whom the contested land was place and home long before colonization. This irony did not escape notice in Soviet society, nor is it forgotten now.45 Soviet ideology actively portrayed the west as the site of crass economic exploitation, racial hierarchy, and neglect of responsibility to the general good.46

This characterization of the west as a racialized site of exploitation continues today as Lithuania enters western market economies. Although there are very few people of African descent in Lithuania, I encounter phrases like “I worked like a n--ger” and “black work” in both formal interviews and casual conversations. The phrase “black work” and my reception of the phrase are

45 See the chapter on Memory for further discussion of this topic. As preliminary background: Soviet ideology actively portrayed the west as the site of crass economic exploitation, racial hierarchy, and neglect of responsibility to the general good. A popular children’s book of the period told the story of Koko who came from the jungles of Africa and was treated badly in the United States but was welcomed with open arms to the brotherhood of the Soviet Union.
particularly interesting. For the first couple of years I thought “black work” meant unreported payment under the table, or outside the authorized system and within the “black market”. Only recently have I come to understand that “black work” is a description of difficult, manual labor.

My confusion is a telling example of the inculcation of cold war constructs through educational pedagogy in both east and west. In the U.S. educational system I was taught to understand that the real economy in the Soviet Union was the economy that was “off the books” or in “the black market”. Therefore my ear was trained to hear “black work” within that paradigm. This second economy was (and is) an ordinary part of life in this region.\(^{47}\) However, the fact that I immediately ascribed that meaning to the phrase “black work” indicates the narrowness of my own cultural formation. Specifically, it displays my blindness to the fact that “black” resonates in a different way in relation to the discussion of work in my own western capitalist context. It was only through a comical and rather ironic discussion with a friend that I discovered that the use of the term “black work” by her and other friends was actually drawing upon a Soviet characterization of the western hierarchy of labor and exploitation in my own culture. In their view of western capitalist economies, black skin signifies manual labor.\(^{48}\)

Lithuania and the entire region Snyder labels the bloodlands have a profoundly different history than the United States. Serfdom was abolished only

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\(^{48}\) For a glimpse of the sobering accuracy of this perception see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
in the late nineteenth century and this shift occurred in the context of differentiation from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth amidst Czarist russification efforts. Therefore, our western, neo-liberal assumptions run great risk of distortion when applied whole-cloth here. It is clear that Lithuanians struggle with deeply conflicted feelings about western economic and political models: grateful for newfound freedom of expression and for expanded educational and work opportunities for them and for their children, yet wary of the corrosive effects of western consumerism and its tendency to increase wealth disparity and to nurture consumption and profit as an end unto itself.

Therefore, notions of place as home and of space as the territory beyond home refract differently in Lithuania than they do in the west, carrying within them contrary elements of constriction, reassurance, and freedom.

Perhaps understanding these cemeteries as home in Tuan’s sense is actually helpful then, yet as home with dihlijz-ian boundaries and dynamics. A threshold into liminal space is a helpful imaginary, as during the period of Soviet occupation the ordered spaces of Vėlinės cemeteries allowed individuals and families to create “welcoming space” that did not criminalize or punish family and

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49 For an insightful exploration of the resonance between the African American experience of slavery and the experience of the serf and peasant class in Russia through the lens of literature, see, Dale E. Peterson, Up From Bondage (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

50 See, David Harvey, A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Harvey, The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism (New York; Oxford University Press, 2011). Both rural and urban Lithuanians speak quite shrewdly and insightfully about the changes they see in their society as involvement with western markets increase. The most frequent worry I hear is the reorientation of society toward profit as a value unto itself and the ways that shift reshapes society as a whole. Since the economic crises Lithuanians particularly express an understanding that they have moved from dependence toward the east to dependence on the west and the consequences they feel given their relative lack of power within that larger dynamic. Harvey’s description of those dynamics fit will with many of the descriptions I heard in my interviews.
friends for the complex choices each person was making as he or she navigated a path through shifting and often oppressive social realities.

The fascinating thing about Vėlinės cemeteries during the Soviet period is that they hosted occupier and occupied, partisan and party official, matriarch and prodigal, true believer and skeptic. Even more, they allowed for the inevitable blurring of these categories and roles. During the years of serial occupation, Vėlinės cemeteries and their “liminal space[s] between the inside and the outside” offered decorum and integrity in the midst of confusing and dehumanizing disruption, violence, and transition in the larger society. And today, these cemeteries are one of the few public spaces that attest to the complex historic plurality of this region, as the gravestones with Russian and Polish names testify.

Silvija is in her late forties. She grew up in a rural region in southern Lithuania and was raised in the Catholic Church. She describes Vėlinės gatherings as particularly important because they are a time and place when people set other things aside.

It never really mattered who was in power or who was in Lithuania—Soviets or Independence. It didn’t matter if one brother was a communist, and the other one wasn’t. It’s about coming together. They would never argue. Nobody would ever argue in the cemetery. It’s all about being together. It’s about the values of the family. It’s about those precious things about life.

When asked for more detail she speaks carefully:

For instance, one of my uncles was an official in the Communist party in Vilnius—quite a well-respected and powerful official. There were many family occasions that he could not attend. Anything that obviously involved church or religion he could not participate. But he could come to the cemetery on Vėlinės. Everything else was set aside. I remember
seeing him standing by a grave marker with a cross and wondering what
this really was for him. But what mattered was that we could all be there
together, and that was a wonderful thing.

This designation of Vėlinės cemeteries as a place apart was a performance of
expectations formed at home. Močiutė’s presence is significant here. Silvija
describes Vėlinės as revolving around her grandparents: “like the hub of a
wheel. It revolves around the oldest people, usually a močiutė. A grandchild will
go pick her up and the family’s entire day will be planned around her.”

As with many Lithuanians, Silvija’s močiutė was central to her religious
formation. She explains this reality with a chuckle:

You wouldn’t go to the church. My parents were teachers. It would be
recommended not to go to the church. To keep it quiet. Both my parents
are believers—they were believers all the time. For other people not to
know, they would go to another town. For baptism we were living in the
village, so I was baptized in [nearby city]. First communion we were living
in [nearby city], so I had first communion in my grandparents’ village.

In many Catholic families močiutė was the family member most deeply devoted
to the church, and during Soviet times she became the primary source of
religious instruction and formation for her grandchildren. Močiutė then also set
the tone for and directed the practices that inscribed and maintained family
memory. She was a carrier of faith and in many families she orchestrated the
inscription of these dihliz –ian Vėlinės spaces as sacred. Her practices and
presence ordered the space in the cemetery and set the terms for how one
“enters by the door in a disciplined manner while maintaining the decorum
appropriate to the integrity of the occupants of the house and the people in the
street”. These are the practices that marked “outside” and “inside.”

Moosa, 48-49.
power did not discriminate according to station. It was determinative for
Communist party uncle, teacher parents, collective-farm-worker aunt, and young
Silvija alike. Yet *močiutė*’s power was not impervious to the flows of
relationship. 52

Ignas, age 54, describes Vėlinės experiences similar to Silvija’s, though he
believes (but does not know for sure), that the driving forces in his family were
less political than familial. He remembers Vėlinės as a time when feuding
factions in the family would set other things aside to gather by the graves and
then to sit at table afterward:

For some reason my uncle—my mother’s brother—did not like my father.
In fact he would have nothing to do with him. Not even talk to him. Yet I
remember going to the graves as a child and they would both be there.
Not friendly, but courteous. And after that they would sit together at a
table when we gathered in the house of family. That made an impression
on me, that for some reason on Vėlinės they could be together on that
day.

*Klebonas* 53 Tomas, a priest in his early fifties, notices similar family
dynamics in his parishes today, family dynamics he attributes to an opportunity
afforded by the Vėlinės cemetery itself:

I don’t think Vėlinės is the reason for people to come together and solve
their conflicts. To resolve the conflict there has to be conscious will of the
person. There does not seem to be that will in Vėlinės. Divorced
husbands and wives go to different graves of their own families; they do
not go together. Brothers and sisters who do not get along try to avoid
each other at graves. Vėlinės can work as an impulse to resolve conflict,
but only if people are looking to do that and seek that. Sometimes if there
is conflict between sister and brother and they go to the grave of their
parents it can be an impulse inside to do that reconciliation with my
brother and sister who is standing with me at the same grave. But they
must have the intention to look for reconciliation. And of course
sometimes they are looking for reconciliation but they are both too

52 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus.*
53 Father.
proud—who will be the first? And when they are together at the grave of their parents they can shake their hands, they can embrace each other and say “okay, forget what was in the past.” Being there may spur them to think about reconciliation.

Yet movement toward reconciliation happens not only among the living, it is also woven into the visits with friends and relatives who have died. Not everyone understands their time in the cemetery as a time of visitation with the dead. Some describe it exclusively as an act of remembrance. But for those for whom the cemeteries are a place of reunion with both the dead and the living, the description of their thoughts and conversations generally includes apology, regret, love, and reconciliation. Klebonas Tomas describes his personal experience of Vėlinės in just such terms:

I was there today. Just an hour ago I returned. I visited my native cemetery today with my brother…I talk to my dad and mom. I said, “I am so sorry that I really was not always good for you. I did not always understand you and did not always obey you. Sometimes I really insulted you. I was so stupid at that time and I am sorry. I pray for them….let eternal light shine on you. Light…also symbol of light and symbol of God. We can live in the light. In the darkness no light is possible.

Ignas also speaks of regret and overwhelming love when he talks about his visits with his father:

I feel now that I was sometimes simply mean to my father. So lacking in understanding. My parents' life was so hard...so difficult and full of suffering--though they did not see it that way. They just talked about it like it was ordinary. And it was ordinary then. It was just the way life was. My father talked about eating grass as a young man because there was no food. And then he would laugh. He would be talking about the village he lived in and say, "oh yes, that family was shot." Or, "yes, the youngest son was hanged." As if, "Oh...by the way..." He did not describe it as unusual or shocking. But my father was also a very gentle man, and incredibly honest. ...He was an alcoholic, and as I am older I see that he was probably drinking as a way to cope with this harsh world where he would not or could not do the things that other people did to get by. I think it was a place to hide. But when I was a boy and a young man it made me
so mad. I would be so angry with him. And not kind. Or understanding. By the time he died, those angry feelings had passed. I felt nothing but love. And I would give anything to have him back now. Just the way he was. No changes. I really miss him. And I really love him. I tell him all those things. That is what I talk about when I go to his grave at Vėlinės. I tell him I am sorry. And that I love him.

In a profound sense then, the cemetery is a portal to what matters. The welcome of this dihliz–ian space frames the meaning of other spaces, both opening and foreclosing possibilities for relationship and change.

**Vėlinės Cemeteries as Boundary and Threshold**

Death leaves marks. In periods of social upheaval and confusion fundamental realities in society are up for grabs, yet death remains a certainty. In fact, death is often an acute and dominant reality. So it has been in Lithuania over much of the last century. Cemeteries and cemetery practices trace multivalent stories of inclusion and exclusion: familial, political, religious, and existential. In this sense, cemeteries are places of constraint. Boundaries are crucial to notions of place, boundaries that determine who is In Place/Out of Place. Power dynamics play out spatially. Vėlinės cemeteries mark these constructs of in place/out of place, while simultaneously blurring those same boundaries in fascinating forms.

Proper burial of the dead is a high priority in Lithuania. During the disintegration of the USSR in the late years of the 1980’s and the early years of the 1990’s, Lithuania was unique among former Soviet countries in its fervent national push to return the remains of Lithuanians who had been exiled to Siberia

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and had died there, and to bury those remains in Lithuanian soil. Presence in the cemetery matters. It matters for the here and now, and it matters for the journey beyond as well. Taurė talks about the repatriation of the remains of her uncle who had been deported to Siberia:

Yes it matters. It was a very important and emotional time. Important for my family. It matters very much to have him back here with us. ...We had a mass with prayers when his body was returned after independence, and we buried him here. We wanted him to be with us and we wanted to be there with him. To walk with him; to send him on his journey…I don’t know how you say it...with the touch of the church.55

Absence matters too. It is not by mere fiat that huge numbers of Jewish Lithuanians murdered by the Nazis and local Lithuanian collaborators in 1941 were buried in mass, unmarked graves on the outskirts of towns and in rural fields.56 Nor is it coincidental that many of the graves in the older Jewish cemeteries were desecrated during the Soviet period, when the land was appropriated for state projects, and gravestones were used in the walls of new buildings, as pavers in steps, and even in schoolyard fences.57 Current efforts to highlight and reclaim memory also testify to the significance of presence and absence in the cemetery. In a desire to reestablish Jewish material memory in its proper place, a group living in Lithuania and beyond recently created an organization to photograph and clean Jewish cemeteries throughout Lithuania.58

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55 Taurė, female, age 44.
56 Though Jewish citizens were the majority in these mass graves, others died there too: members of the Roma community, the disabled, intelligentsia, and other leaders considered particularly dangerous.
In a sign that maintenance and acknowledgement of these difficult memories is expanding beyond the Jewish community alone, the advisory board for the group includes leaders from the Lithuanian independence movement, Lithuanian emigrants and family, as well as prominent members of the Jewish community in Lithuania. All of this brings painful and important realities closer to the center of Lithuanian life. At the same time, the heckling and hacking this group has experienced on their internet site gives witness to the continuing contestation of memory around Jewish history, and the claims of some Lithuanians that Jewish history is out of place within proper Lithuanian memory.

**Vėlinės Boundaries, Minority Religions, and Dihliz-ian Space:**

Interestingly, members of minority religions in Lithuania offer little indication of resentment when they speak of Vėlinės practices. Rather, most people describe the beauty of cemeteries during Vėlinės and the opportunity to pause for reflection. Increasingly, candles and flowers are appearing on Protestant, Orthodox, and even some Muslim and Jewish graves. A Muslim leader puts it this way:

For me it is an ordinary day. I do not do anything special. But I think it is good that there is this national holiday of the Catholic Church and that many Lithuanians participate. We understand. Catholics are the largest group in this country. Most Lithuanians are Catholic. I think it is always good to stop and to reflect...to think about the truth that all of us will one day die, and what that means. We have our own days for such remembrances. It is beautiful to go to the cemeteries, and sometimes I do that. Some of our members do participate in Vėlinės practices, especially

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as people intermarry and extended families include Catholics or
Protestants as well as Muslims.\textsuperscript{60}

Orthodox believers are the second largest religious group in Lithuania and
comprise approximately 4\% of the population. Intermarriage between Catholic
and Orthodox families is fairly common. Many of these families describe
participation in cemetery practices on Vėlinės in addition to their own Orthodox
feast days for the dead:

When the children were growing up we would always go on Vėlinės to the
Polish-Lithuanian cemetery. My husband’s family was Polish-Lithuanian
and that distinction was important to them. I enjoyed visiting the graves,
decorating them, remembering the people. And it is just such a beautiful
day. So peaceful. We are divorced now, but I still do sometimes go to his
family’s graves. And I always go to a cemetery somewhere. Sometimes
to remember a friend…sometimes simply leaving a candle or flowers on a
grave that needs a candle. I go on our days of memory too. I especially
love to go on Easter. I think it is a very beautiful practice we have—
leaving eggs. Sometimes food and salt. It is so important to remember
that death is true for all of us. And to remember life too.\textsuperscript{61}

All Souls’ Day is not a church celebration for Protestants, and when All
Saints’ Day is celebrated it is usually a service in the church sanctuary with the
reading of the names of those who have died.\textsuperscript{62} In fact, differentiation from
Catholic practice at the time of death as well as differentiation from Catholic

\textsuperscript{60} Svajunas, late 30’s. Svajunas is a Tatar Lithuanian, a member of the Muslim group that has
lived in Lithuania for centuries. Egdūnas Račius, a professor of Arabic and Muslim studies in
Lithuania, indicates that over the course of their 600 years in Lithuania the Tatar community has
adopted a path of acquiescence to the power of the Catholic church and maintenance of the
status quo and that post-independence Tatar Lithuanians are largely assimilated to the larger
culture. By contrast, he suggests that newer converts to Islam in Lithuania tend to be deeply
critical of the Catholic church while at the same time they wish to see the government enforce
traditional moral values in areas such as family and sexuality—an effort in which the Catholic
Church has been a significant force. There is also a small but growing immigrant Muslim
community that tends to be fairly closed and isolated and therefore does not join forces with the
other two Muslim groups on social and political matters. See, Egdūnas Račius, \textit{Muslims in
Catholic Lithuania}.

\textsuperscript{61} Olga, female 55 years.

\textsuperscript{62} “Vėlinės: gyvųjų ir mirusiuų šventė,” alpha lt, Nov. 1, 2010,
http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/10418576/Veliones..gyvuji.ir.mirusiuju.svente=2010-11-01_08-14/ .
practices of remembrance was a distinguishing characteristic of the early
Protestant movement in Europe.63 Protestants in Lithuania have their own
tradition of cemetery celebrations during the summer. These are a form of
homecoming, when extended family is encouraged to return on a summer
Sunday for an outdoor service in the cemetery, celebration of the eucharist, and
blessing of gravestones. During Soviet times these gatherings were a quiet form
of resistance for some Protestant Lithuanians, just as Vėlinės practices were for
others.

Protestants do express more wariness of Vėlinės practices than members
of other minority religions in Lithuania, though that wariness may be decreasing.
For some protestant Lithuanians Vėlinės practice, and particularly the practice of
praying for the dead, feels deeply contrary to protestant theology and more akin
to pagan practices. But as intermarriage increases and as the protestant
churches continue to reestablishes themselves following independence and to
find their own place in relation to the dominant Catholic Church, those stances
are softening.

When I first spoke with Zita six years ago she likened some of the Vėlinės
practices to witchcraft.64 But when I spoke to her four years later she had been
watching families in the church intermarrry and raise children, and had become a
mother herself. Her perspective had shifted:

It is a beautiful event. There is no question. And when it is not connected
with negative things—with confusion about being Christian and being
Lithuanian as the same thing—then I am thinking it might be good. How

64 Zita, female, 35 years, conversation in 2006.
can it be bad for people to pause and to reflect on death? And on resurrection. On God’s promises. On the truth that for all of us our days are numbered and our lives matter. Now that we have [children] we like to take them out in the evening during Vėlinės to walk through the cemeteries. It is a really peaceful place with the candles and the people gathered quietly. It affects them. In a good way, I think.65

Given the history of the last one hundred years in Lithuania, the response from the Jewish community is particularly poignant. Basia is in her later fifties. She grew up in a Jewish family that was able to escape in 1941 at the onset of World War II and her family was one of the few who returned to Lithuania after the war and then maintained Jewish practices during the Soviet occupation and the establishment of the USSR. The distinction between practicing Jews with historic roots in Lithuania and newer “Soviet Jews” is sharp for her. When asked about Vėlinės, she fondly recalls a memory from Soviet times: a cemetery with ordered rows of graves according to religious tradition. She loved the sea of candles that anchored the large Catholic section and the contrast with the dark and dormant graves of Jews, Protestants, Orthodox, and Muslims layered above it.

I think it is a good thing to remember. And I like it when people have religious practices that they actually keep—when the practices are important. I always feel glad that people are stopping to remember their dead and to think about death. We have our own times to do that. I respect people who maintain their religious practices.

Kelila, a younger Jewish woman in her late 20’s who emigrated to Lithuania from Israel, describes her reaction in more ambivalent terms:

I have many friends who go to cemeteries on Vėlinės, and sometimes I go with them. I have even gone to the Jewish cemetery sometimes to clean up or to leave a candle. It is good to remember. More and more I see

65 Ibid., conversation in 2012.
movement in the Jewish cemeteries during that time...people do go...and there are a few more candles. But it is like with everything, there is not much light or attention from outside the small Jewish community here. But some of it does spill over. That is okay. It is all okay. I have very good friendships with people who are not Jewish—many, many of my friends are not Jewish. And I have participated in lots of discussions in schools and communities talking about Judaism and meeting people who have never met a Jew, even though so many Jews lived here for so many years. And those usually go well. But then there is something like the article in the paper about putting a monument by the river in the place where there was a huge Jewish cemetery that was destroyed by the Soviets and the gravestones removed, and I read the comments people write in response to that article. Hateful, awful things. From people who have probably never met a Jew. It makes me realize that there is still a darkness here. A deep dislike. And that does not feel good.

New grave markers erected throughout Lithuania in the last ten to fifteen years tell another important story about the complexity of in place/out of place in relation to Vėlinės. Many partisan soldiers, often called Forest Brothers, died in the woods, towns, and fields of Lithuania during the first decade of post-war Soviet occupation. No one really knows exactly how many people died or where they were buried, as families were often unable to recover the remains or even learn the circumstances of their loved ones’ deaths. With increasing frequency, family members and friends are placing tall wooden crosses in rural fields, at the edge of forests, and beside roads throughout Lithuania to mark the deaths of these Lithuanian partisans. Occasionally the markers include a specific name or names, but more often they are the product of joint effort by a group of people who lost relatives to the partisan movement in that particular area. Knowing only that their loved ones died somewhere in the vicinity, they place the cross as a memorial for those lost from that particular village or region. In some

66 Women participated in the Partisan movement as well, but they are mentioned infrequently unless there was a female partisan in the immediate family. The story of Žilvinas’s family in chapter four gives some insight into the experience of partisans who were women.
communities school children tend these partisan memorials, and they become a pilgrimage site for locals as well as for family members of deceased partisans. During Vėlinės, the lonesome fields, forests, and roads are dotted with light as candles are set at the foot of these crosses.

In most regions of Lithuania there is also a field on the outskirts of town or a park marked by granite memorials inscribed in Hebrew. These are the sites of mass graves for Jewish Lithuanians who were marched or carted from central gathering places and shot over open pits. In addition, some towns and cities contain monuments in parks and near government buildings marking sites that were once Jewish cemeteries. In Panevėžys, (Ponevezh in Yiddish), the local Jewish community is largely comprised of Jews who moved to Kaunas during the Soviet era as very few Jews born in Lithuania survived the massacre of 1941 and most of those who did manage to escape never returned. In Panevėžys, the Jewish community worked with the city government to remove pieces of Jewish tombstones built into the wall of a local theatre. Those tombstones were sculpted into a memorial that stands in a small city square.

Žagarė (Zháger) is another interesting story. A family’s efforts to trace history led to a link between descendents of Jewish Lithuanians who were murdered in Žagarė and current residents. Those relationships led to the establishment of an NGO to encourage community development as well as friendships and trust. Deepening genealogical research enabled several families to trace their family history and helped the community understand more fully the horror that occurred there. The last Jewish resident of Žagarė, Aizikas
Mendelsonas, died in the fall of 2011. In the summer of 2012 several descendents of Jewish citizens of Žagarë gathered with local Lithuanians to dedicate a plague in the town center. Built to appear as a tablet with three parts, the words on the monument are written in Lithuanian, Yiddish, and English:

For hundreds of years Žagarë (in Yiddish—Zhager) had been home to a vibrant Jewish community. Zhager’s marketplace had many shops and was a center of commerce for merchants from here and from a range of other towns. Many of their shops surrounded this square. Zhager was also famous for its many Hebrew scholars, the “Learned of Zhager”. German military occupiers and their Lithuanian collaborators brought the region’s Jewish men, women, and children to this square on October 2, 1941. Shooting and killing of the whole Jewish community of Zhager began here and continued in the forests nearby. About 3,000 Jewish citizens were killed.

These are not necessarily typical stories of Jewish memorial markers in Lithuania. Many of the Jewish memorials have been funded through the work and donations of descendents of Lithuanian Jewish citizens who managed to flee Lithuania before the Shoah but left their beloved dead behind. Sometimes municipalities are involved with this effort to acknowledge and memorialize history, but not always. Not everyone in Lithuania is prepared to reckon with this piece of history.

During Vėlinės 2011, I visited Šiauliai (Shavl), a city in the northwestern region of Lithuania. At the beginning of the 20th century more than half the population of Šiauliai was Jewish. When we arrived that night, the large, newer cemetery at the far end of the city was afire with candles, as were smaller cemeteries nearer the center. I was trying to explore the nature of Jewish memory during this trip, so I went looking for Jewish graves both in Šiauliai and

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in surrounding villages. It is not easy to find the former site of the Jewish
cemetery in Šiauliai under any conditions as it is located behind deteriorating
public buildings and down a gravel road that looks something like an alley. It is
even harder to find it at night. After we circled the neighborhood several times
and finally happened upon the small gravel street, we were greeted by near total
darkness. After a bit of groping in the dark we located a large stone affixed with a
plague marking this small wedge of land as the former Jewish cemetery. There
were no candles in that open space. The only light illuminating the memorial came
from the headlights of my car.

I left feeling indignant, saddened by the contrast between dark and light on
that night of memory, and quizzical about why the church and the state did not
encourage individuals to extend these pervasive memory practices to include all
Lithuanians. On my next trip those questions became more complicated when I
interviewed Klebonas Zigmantas and his parishioner Žilvinas, the director of the
school in a small town further west in Lithuania. This particular school prides
itself on its work to maintain Lithuanian customs and memory. Žilvinas proudly
explained that throughout the year the children from the school take field trips to
tidy the graves in the area, and that on Vėlinės they bring candles and flowers
not only to the cemetery up the road from the school, but also to partisan
memorials scattered in the countryside, to the graves of the leaders of a 19th
century peasant rebellion buried just outside of town, to graves of plague victims,
and even to the graves of Soviet soldiers: "You may think we shouldn’t be doing
anything there but they are people laid to rest. So we light candles there as
well."

I then ask about the Jewish community that was once a vibrant part of this town and is now completely gone. Both the priest and the director immediately point out the back window of the rectory toward a wooden building: “Right there is their Šulė. And there is a Jewish cemetery as well. Šulė is not a synagogue. Every village had a Šulė...like a home to gather for prayer. In synagogue they used to have Holy Scripture readings and it was regarded as a holy place...a temple.” “What is in that building now?”, I ask. “There used to be a Cultural Home and now it’s empty.” “And the Jewish cemetery?”, I inquire. “It is beside the main road about 400m from here. We fixed it with the kids: fenced it with a chain and rebuilt the fallen monument. Now this cemetery is looked after by our school. We clean away the dead leaves, tidy it. There are dead people there too.” I move the focus to Vėlinės: “Do you visit that cemetery on Vėlinės?” “No,” he responds, “Jewish people were here in 1989 and they told us not to apply our Catholic traditions to Jewish culture. We don’t know their Canons and we try not to step over.” The Klebonas then interjects. “I know that Jewish go to cemeteries in October and pray there.”

Cemeteries mark who is inside and who is outside in Lithuania, but those lines also blur and become porous. Space is territorialized, deterritorialized, and reterritorialized. The Vėlinės cemetery is a threshold, dihliz-ian, liminal space. It matters whose graves are marked and whose graves are not, where and how graves are located and tended, who is present and who is missing. Over the years the movement, ritual, and demarcation in these cemeteries tells a story of

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68 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. 
power, submission, maintenance, resistance, social striving, envy, and hope. These Vėlinės cemeteries “frame all other spaces”\textsuperscript{69} as they negotiate between public and private realities in the midst of fluidity and change.

**Embodied Practice and Vėlinės Cemeteries as Dihliz-ian Space:**

Political and social power is not the only force shaping the contours of space. Many of us live in physical environments over which we have little or no control, and our choices and actions are clearly performed amid social and cultural rules that shape what we do. At the same time, individual actors do have agency. We change and adapt in response to individuals and to groups.\textsuperscript{70}

Vėlinės practices inscribe cemetery space. Vėlinės is above all an embodied practice: strolling through cemeteries; bending to smooth the earth; placing flowers; lighting candles. Focusing on embodiment in relation to Vėlinės cemeteries goes a long way toward demystifying and even rendering as ordinary what happens there. If we are attentive to the reality that all action engages the body, even speech (vocal chords, mouth, lungs), writing (hands, brain, eyes), and thought (brain, nervous system), we can understand Vėlinės as just one of many spatial practices that inscribe, form, and inform the lives of those who participate.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{69}Moosa, Ghazālī, 48-49.

\textsuperscript{70}“At a given moment in time, place provides a geographically specific set of structures. But even with layer upon layer of structuring conditions no-one can safely predict what you or I are going to do. …The places we have to negotiate are the result of the practices of those who were here before us but this place in the future will be different. It is not a once and for all achieved state. …The point is that human agency is not so easily structured and structures themselves are made through the repetition of practices by agents. …In general practices are never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming—in process.” Creswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., referencing the work of Nigel Thrift, "On the Determination of Social Action in Time and Space" in *Environmental and Planning D: Society and Space* 1:1, 23-57; Paul Connerton, *The
It is not possible to interact with the world without a body. Therefore, it is misleading to think about body and world as completely separate. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out, the body is the condition of possibility—the unreflected experience of the real: "the flesh of the world and our flesh touch each other to make possible our being-in-place." When explored through the body, the Vėlinės cemetery is more an event than a secure thing.

During the Soviet period memory, knowledge maintenance, social construction, and identity were embodied and performed within cemeteries by both occupier and occupied alike, each in distinctive and intermingling forms. Under the grip of Stalin in the early years, Vėlinės practices were discouraged and even punished. Yet the practices remained. As with many life-cycle ceremonies, the Soviet leadership later sought to take command of these rituals, and eventually to incorporate them as their own. Though there was no national holiday during this season, Soviet state ceremonies were held in cemeteries during the first days of November for an occasion called “The Day of the Dead.” The ceremonies were planned by local cultural workers and included a march of torches, music blasted through loudspeakers, and local school children reciting poetry. These cemetery rituals were one among many state activities intended

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73 Creswell, Place: A Short Introduction, 39.

to direct memory away from a religious cosmos oriented toward eternity, and toward a materialist cosmos emanating from the authority of the Soviet state.

The Soviet rituals discouraged religious association and focused instead on the remembrance of all dead, but particularly those who died in service to the Soviet cause.

Simultaneously, cemeteries functioned as sites of political resistance.

Occasionally open resistance, but more often internal and silent resistance.75

Through the form, planning, and timing of Vėlinės practices within Vėlinės


75 Valdemaras Klumbys, “Lietuvos Kultūrinas Elitas Sovietmečiu: Tarp Pasipriešinimo Ir Prisitaikymo,” *Lietuvos etnologija*, Vol. 8 (2008), 161. In this article Klumbys explores the question of how Lithuanian elites participated with and even benefited from the mechanisms of Soviet power while also understanding themselves and being understood by others as participating in a silent resistance to the Soviet regime. He argues that part of this adaptation is explained by a concern for survival and the realities of life under a repressive regime. This concern for survival was a concern not only for individual survival but also for the survival of an identity as a separate Lithuanian nation—an identity that Lithuanian intellectuals had nurtured and developed earlier in the century as they organized a movement for independence before and after World War I. But Klumbys also argues that this distinction between the internal and the external—between thought and action—played upon older intellectual practices in this region which made a distinction between inner actions which were considered true and authentic, and outer actions which were suspect as they were formed and shaped in response to a hostile regime. What makes his argument particularly complicated and interesting is that he maintains that intellectuals felt a need to maintain involvement with the Soviet state and the public sphere in order to subtly continue and nurture a sense of national identity through Soviet investment in the continuation of Lithuanian cultural practices. This Soviet investment was part of their claim to be maintaining traditions and cultural practices of local people as part of a brotherhood of peoples gathered under the USSR as Fatherland. He suggests that intellectuals maintained these dual spheres by nurturing two different, and in a sense conflicting, public mythologies: one through open participation in official Soviet rhetoric and rituals, and the other drawing upon the official rhetoric and ritual but orienting action and conversation toward a conversation and performance among the elite, and through that performance signaling an alternate reality. In some sense, his argument parallels similar theories about how the less powerful in a society poach upon the practices and power of the elite. But in this case, the intellectual elite are operating within a larger power dynamic between occupier and occupied and in important senses participating in both domains. For parallel paradigms See, Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1984); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). For two differing perspectives on Soviet efforts to nurture and maintain local cultural practices See, Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
cemeteries, the church and the state inscribed competing narratives of identity, cosmology, and hope upon participants’ bodies. Some Lithuanians fondly remember the torches, music, poetry, and pageantry of this period and long for the return of a more ordered, communal expression. For these Lithuanians the church’s practice of prayer on Visų Šventųjų diena and Vėlinių dieną was reshaped into a practice of silence and memory, oriented not toward a Christian eschatological horizon but toward human kinship based in materialist philosophy delivered through Soviet ideology. The traditional recitation of prayers became instead a time for a moment of silence out of respect for the dead. Most importantly, it was a time of recognition of the dead within the public space: “There was an order there, and a dignity. It was a big deal; an important time. I miss that public attention—when it was more about the whole community. It is focused on families now…more about individuals.”

Other Lithuanians offer vague descriptions of the state-sponsored ceremonies, but remember the events primarily as an opportunity to poach from the regnant powers and to craft a distinctive place of remembrance and even resistance. For these Lithuanians the cemetery space was boundaried and patrolled by the state, and the freedom to move within that space was limited by the Communist Party apparatus. But the power and significance of place was constructed by relationship with the people buried there, and by the movements of individuals who showed up at the formal ceremonies, but then ventured to

76 Lisabetta, female, age 55.
graves and prayed as they wished, quietly tracing lines of memory contrary to the state performance that surrounded them.  

Yes, we participated in the torch parades and sang the songs. All the children did. But what mattered was what came after, when we wandered through the cemetery and found our parents waiting for us at the graves of our loved ones. They could control what we did on that day and force us to participate, but they could not control why it mattered to us, or what we thought.

In 1940 during the first Soviet occupation, and later in 1955 in the period of “the thaw” after the death of Stalin, in 1956 in response to the Hungarian Spring uprising, and again in 1957, these internal expressions of resistant Vėlinės memory broke out in external, loosely organized forms of protest when students in Kaunas and Vilnius seized upon Vėlinės traditions as an expression of Lithuanian identity and freedom. Juozas, an elderly Lithuanian scholar, describes finding himself in the midst of one of these early protests in Vilnius:

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77 These descriptions fit within the framework offered by Klumbys above, though they were not limited to the ritual participation or rhetoric of the intellectual elite. They are also a nice example of Michel de Certeau’s strategies and tactics. De Certeau famously deals with space and place, but he utilizes those two terms differently. He inverts them. Because he focuses on the everyday and the ordinary in the context of power asymmetries, his work is particularly helpful in thinking about Lithuanian modes of reception of and participation in Vėlinės, and especially the relationship between individual choices and action and the institutional forces of state, church, and family. For deCerteau, place is the vast empty area upon which practices are performed, and these practices create space. He suggests that those on the weaker end of asymmetries of power construct or perform everyday life by “poaching” on the existing structures, structures that are enforced and policed by the more powerful. “Practice is thus a tactical art that plays with the structures of place that are provided. The mobile world of practice teases apart place in its orthodox form.” DeCerteau is attentive to concrete, localized, material life: walking, reading, working, graffiti, games, tricks. In deCerteau’s construct, strategies hold power and domination in place. Tactics disrupt this power, without necessarily overturning it. See, Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life; Valdemaras Klumbys, “Lietuvos Kultūrinos Elitas Sovietmečiu: Tarp Pasipriešinimo Ir Prisitaikymo,” Lietuvos etnologija
78 Miglė, Age 63
I was simply there. Not for any particular reason. It was not carefully planned, but a group of us decided to go to the cemetery to light candles and to remember—as we always used to do. And we felt a freedom...a boldness...we began to sing Lithuanian songs and then soldiers came to stop us. I remember running down the streets and feeling very frightened. I cut my head. It was all a response to the moment more than anything else.\textsuperscript{80}

For still others, the timing of the state ceremony in the cemetery at the very hour of the evening mass in the church spoke an important truth of their lives: a choice between Soviet ideology and Christian faith, with no room for shared allegiance:

There was a funny thing...the Soviet procession would always start at the same time as the mass. My cousin Marija had a very artistic reading of the poetry. She sometimes comes to visit; she is an actress. Our uncle was a priest. Marija started reading her poetry there. Uncle said, “Will you stop one day disturbing the peace in the cemetery with your poetry! Let them rest peacefully.” So that describes the attitude of the priest toward these events in the cemetery. But there was no clash or conflict because the priests also understood it was not voluntary. The same organizers of the events used to come see the priests in the evening. The priest would be in the church holding mass at the same time as the cemetery ceremonies. They [the Soviet organizers] would do that on purpose, plan it to be at the same time. There were people in the church for the mass, especially the older people. Younger people were told, “you must go to this event [in the cemetery], or else you will lose your job.” All people who had certain responsibilities--culture, education, etc--had to go to cemeteries. Younger people with simpler work, agricultural workers from the collective farm, they would go to mass too.\textsuperscript{81}

Without question, multiple people and institutions seek to mark Vėlinės cemeteries as their own: church, family, and state in particular. Yet in Vėlinės cemeteries, assertion of ownership and strategies of control are never fully successful. Ownership and control are both acknowledged and disrupted. Each

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{80} Juozas, male, age 76.
\item\textsuperscript{81} Klebonas Zigmantas and Žilvinas.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of these institutions possesses power, while at the same time that power is far from absolute.  With the location of many cemeteries in churchyards marked by the church’s rituals of death and burial, the church does delimit cemeteries as her own during Vėlinės, thereby structuring particular performances of memory, hope, and authority. Yet as one church historian commented, “Vėlinės overflowed the banks of the church. The church does not control it. Many people participate; people of different faiths; people of no faith.”

The state works to define and determine these cemeteries as well. Once the Soviets changed their initial course in Lithuania and sought to incorporate memory rituals rather than forbid them, they quite literally took occupation of the cemetery and devoted resources to redirect the performance. The dynamic in the cemetery then shifted, as the state deployed strategies and the church, along with individual Lithuanians, became tactical. This jostling between strategy and

82 This is also a good example of Henri LeFebvre’s description of social space. Focusing on “social space” as a “social product,” and drawing on Marx’s notion of “concrete abstraction,” Lefebvre suggests that constructed space is a means of production, but also “a tool of thought and of action…a means of control, and hence of domination, of power.” Lefebvre offers a Marxist critique of the function of space, suggesting that under the influence of capitalism space is constructed to form us in the ways of consumption and at the same time to mask this formation, thus rendering space as a given rather than as the social construction that it in fact is. Yet this social space is a wily thing: political and societal forces may seek mastery, control, and domination in social space, but they never fully achieve it: “We are confronted not by one social space but by many – indeed, by an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as ‘social space’…Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia.” Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 87-90. See also, Stanek Lukasz, Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory (Minneapolis: Univ. Minn. Press, 2011), 62-79. Lukasz offers an informative discussion of Lefebvre’s use of “concrete abstraction” as a rethinking of the philosophies of Marx and Hegel.
83 Jurgita, Age 55, female.
84 In deCerteau’s construct, strategies hold power and domination in place: “I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated.” Space becomes place when one of these subjects with will and power determines that the space, “...can
tactic continues today. Current Vėlinės practices include a solemn mass in
prestigious Antakalnis Cemetery at the foot of the graves of the thirteen political
martyrs of the January 11, 1991 stand off between citizens and Soviet tanks at
the Vilnius television tower. The outdoor mass involves not only the Catholic
Archbishop, but also prominent governmental officials, drawing in Lithuanians
from afar through a televised spectacle broadcast across the country.⁸⁵

The family also functions as strategist. The weight of family obligation is
worn lightly by some, but it can be a burden as well. Younger Lithuanians talk
about Vėlinės with ambivalence, describing respect for the duty of family,
skepticism about the particulars of the ritual, critique of the confinement of
memory to one particular day, impatience with traffic, crowds, and pageantry. All
this intermingles with a longing to maintain Vėlinės practices for their children.
Older Lithuanians worry that the practices will not continue into future
generations. Many question the exuberance, excess, and efficacy of the practice
as it has re-emerged since independence. Yet the vast majority of Lithuanians
continue to participate, each poaching from these practices to construct a space
and a place that bears significance for their own lives and commitments.

be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority...can be
⁸⁵ “...these transverse tactics do not obey the law of the place,...they are not any more
localizable than the technocratic (and scriptural) strategies that seek to create places in
conformity with abstract models. But what distinguishes them at the same time concerns the
types of operations and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose
these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and
divert these spaces.” Ibid., 29-30.
Vėlinės Cemeteries Since the Re-establishment of the Lithuanian Republic

Vėlinės cemeteries are indeed inscribed with new patterns since Lithuania's re-establishment of statehood and the increased mobility that followed. Most everyone mentions the burgeoning of candles and flowers in Velinės cemeteries in recent years. For some this is cause for celebration as they perceive a new sense of abundance and a deepened devotion to longstanding traditions. This enthusiasm is accompanied by hope in a new form of economic promise and possibility tied to western markets and increased access to consumer goods.  

For others, it is a spectacle, one more indication of Lithuania losing its bearings as it adopts the consumptive habits of western globalization and accepts the accompanying increase in income disparity among the Lithuanian population. Many are ambivalent, cherishing ties to roots and traditions, but fearing that the expansion of Vėlinės practices is but one expression of a larger societal obsession with an imagined past of purity and goodness, or an effort to avoid the hard and complex realities of the present and the future.

Massive emigration of young Lithuanians to western EU countries is a huge concern in Lithuania right now. New, virtual relational connections are increasingly significant in Vėlinės cemeteries as they are marked by changes wrought through this pattern of emigration. Websites and newspaper ads in


Ireland offer grave-tending services to Lithuanian immigrants, proffering virtual, paid participation in Vėlinės remembrance rituals for emigrants unable to travel back to Lithuania in person. These consumer transactions express connections to land, history, and practices, and participate in a “net of social relations” that contributes to the spatial content of Vėlinės cemeteries.88

Though opinions about western global consumerism’s increasing influence in Lithuania elude uniform categorization by age, perspectives are generally shaped by whether the turn to western markets is experienced as a source of hope and opportunity, or of loss and insecurity. As I will explore further in later chapters, parents and grandparents are often conflicted on this question as they struggle with a desire to keep their children nearby while also harboring a hope that accession to the EU—the force now drawing their children toward jobs in the west—will one day produce opportunities for their children and grandchildren beyond the horizons of their own experience and imagination. That mixture of hope and loss is particularly poignant during Vėlinės. With increasing frequency parents and grandparents find themselves wandering to the cemeteries without their children, raising the question of whether any family will be living in Lithuania and able to visit and decorate their own graves after they die.

88 While there has been a strong trend in the academy to decry the effects of globalization and consumption on place and on humanity generally, feminist geographer Doreen Massey suggests an alternate, relational perspective on space and place in the era of globalization. While expressing deep concern about issues of justice and the differential effects of the globalizing processes, Massey articulates a “global” or “progressive” notion of place, and suggests that there are hopeful possibilities for considering the meaning and function of place in our current world. Massey focuses on connection through bodies, objects, and flows. She resists definitions of place that emphasize boundaries, stasis, fixed meaning, static identity, and exclusion:88 “Social relations always have a spatial form and spatial content. They exist, necessarily, both in space…and across space. And it is the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations which is social space.” Massey, Space, Place and Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 168.
When emigrants leave for Ireland, the UK, Spain, and beyond, they carry with them memories of these dihilz-ian Vėlinės cemeteries, leading them to turn to the internet or to newspaper ads for help in virtually marking their family cemetery spaces in Lithuania as their home places. During Vėlinės some of them also place candles in the windows of their flats, on kitchen tables, or on bedroom shelves, longing to reach across the countries that lie between them to touch the Vėlinės cemeteries they remember as children, and thus to walk among their beloved dead.\(^{89}\)

Robert Orsi suggests we explore the sacred in places “where circulation of power short circuits.”\(^{90}\) Such short circuits were frequent in Vėlinės cemeteries when Soviet rule dominated. In some senses they still are today. But there has been significant change between the Soviet era and now. The church has again moved, this time from periphery back to center. As we will explore in later chapters, since Lithuania’s re-assertion of independence, church and state function in radically different ways than they did throughout most of the twentieth century. Today church and state often join arms in Lithuania, both symbolically and in very material realities. Some Lithuanians view this interwoven power in a positive light. But many Lithuanians are skeptical and even dismissive.

\(^{89}\) Lucy Lippard hones in on nature and on the “sense” of place in tactile form: place as emerging from the senses: “The land, and even the spirit of place, can be experienced kinetically, or kinesthetically, as well as visually. If one has been raised in a place, its textures and sensations, its smells and sounds, are recalled as they felt to a child’s, adolescent’s, adult’s body. Even if one’s history there is short, a place can be felt as an extension of the body, especially the walking body, passing through and becoming part of the landscape.” Lucy R. Lippard, \textit{The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicultural Society} (The New Press: New York, 1997), 14.

While Lithuanians generally feel gratitude that Lithuania is an independent country and speak with a sense of reverence about those who died in the struggle for independence, the current politicization of Vėlinės in a union between church and state is treated with suspicion. Reflecting on the Vėlinės service in Antakalnis cemetery near the graves of the thirteen Bernardas, a young artist in his twenties, eloquently expressed thoughts I heard from many:

It is good to remember the people who died for the freedom of our country, but there are other days to do that. I think it would be okay to have this televised mass if they were remembering not just the famous people who died, but also the ordinary man or woman—the one who nobody remembers on this day. That is what Vėlinės should be.

The ordinariness of Vėlinės is perhaps its greatest power. In the next chapter we will explore the ordinary practices that inscribe dihliz-ian Vėlinės cemeteries.
Chapter 3: Practices
Chapter 3: Practices

The cemetery rests on a gentle rise at the heart of town. The old stone and plaster church in the center square is an easy walk from the graves up the hill. The twin church towers rise from behind a thick, whitewashed gate adorned with devotional windows for shrines to Mary, Jesus, and the saints. Majestic wooden and metal crosses anchor the church yard. Built in 1856, the somber stone and plaster of the church’s exterior strike a contrast to the ethereal color within. As the heavy doors swing open, long garlands drape majestically from the peaked ceiling to the side walls, drawing all eyes upward. The sanctuary is well tended, simple, and colorful, with bright gilded pillars, a light and airy front altar, tall candles, liturgical banners, blonde wooden pews, plaster stations of the cross, small side altars, and large windows. Spit-polished and creaky, this is a deeply-lived and well-tended place, rich with the care of many hands over long years. Dramatic black cracks gape wide at the point where walls reach to ceiling, revealing the sad burden of age and scarcity. The foundation is sinking and there is no money available to make it secure.

The congregation gathers outside the church before funerals and waits for the body to arrive from the family living rooms or small memorial buildings that host the preceding days of condolence and farewell. Once the coffin arrives, the crowd forms a pathway of two parallel lines with flowers in hand and heads bowed. As the priest accompanies the body through this assembled human portal, the liturgy begins. Once the body of the deceased enters the church with the priest, the congregation follows behind. At the center of the sanctuary, the
coffin is lifted onto a raised pyre surrounded by candles. In earlier years candles were costly, and the number of candles around the coffin indicated the devotion of the deceased and the prestige he or she carried in the church community. But candles are now readily available to encircle the coffin, mounted above the congregation as a looming reminder of the inevitability of death and the hope of resurrection. As the priest continues the liturgy, worshippers surround the coffin and find their place. The funeral mass is underway.

Because the cemetery is nearby, processions from church to cemetery generally proceed on foot if the burial is in town. The cross leads the way as banners, flags, and a stream of solemn mourners follow the priest out the gates of the church, across the town square, past the school, and up the small rise to the cemetery. The cemetery space itself is picturesque, surrounded by low stone walls culminating in an arched gate crowned with icon windows embedded in the upper sash. The worn, dirt paths among the graves leave barely five inches for those who wish to walk the cemetery. Space is tight here. Some graves are set off by chains or bordered with low decorative hedges. Most are framed by shallow, coffin-shaped, concrete boundaries, creating a space for small gardens atop the grave. A diminutive wooden, tin-roofed chapel anchors the center of the cemetery. Trees shade the edges.

My husband’s grandfather was baptized in this parish in 1882. He later escaped conscription in the Czarist army through emigration to the United States. During our first visit it was high summer. We didn’t know where to begin to look for family history in the maze of paths and headstones. In warmer months it is
common to hear the clink of a spade or shovel as someone, somewhere, is almost always tending a grave. So after a few questions, directions, a stop at a nearby house, more directions, and travel to the edge of town, we found ourselves face-to-face with a distant cousin who hopped in the car to travel back to the cemetery and give us a tour of the family graves, all set near the outer edge not far from the wall.

A few years later we arrived on a Sunday afternoon as the town gathered in the churchyard for a funeral. Down the road, the cemetery again hummed with families tidying graves and planting flowers. The brown dirt of a fresh grave slashed the earth near the far wall, waiting patiently for the completion of the funeral mass, the arrival of the procession, and the culmination of the liturgy at the graveside. Amidst the buzzing of bees, the cemetery settled into a lazy peace.

Although this little cemetery is seldom empty, none of those early visits prepared us for Vėlinės. Driving the 150 kilometers west from Vilnius that day, the stream of headlights on highways and rural roads was near constant, tracing patterns in every conceivable direction.¹ The weather was not the rainy, cold, and grey typically associated with Vėlinės. Instead, the air was cool and crisp with just a touch of wind and hazy sunshine. We first arrived in the nearby county seat in early afternoon. As the largest city in the immediate area we knew that several distant relatives were buried here, in the cemetery located near the large

brick church. We had to park several blocks away. Cars were everywhere and a
 crush of people moved in and out of the cemetery gate, sweeping past vendors
 with tables laden with flowers and candles. Although bustling at mid-day, the
 cemetery was also cloaked in a hushed reverence—a sense of subdued reunion.
 People spoke quietly and even laughed, obviously enjoying the opportunity to
 see class mates, relatives, and friends, many of whom now live at a distance
 from the town where they were raised.

 People arrived with entire families in tow: tiny babies in hand; toddlers
 bundled in snow suits marching between parents; older children skipping
 alongside grandparents or patrolling the cemetery to find neglected graves they
 could clean and adorn in a time-honored practice of neighborly care; sullen
 teenagers with ear buds hanging out of shirt pockets, slumping along several
 paces behind their parents. Others arrived alone, lugging buckets full of white
 chrysanthemums and plastic bags clanking with glass encased candles. Most
 graves had been prepared ahead of time in lovely patterns of flower, stone, and
 candle, each thoughtfully arranged in tidy designs.

 Wandering among the gravestones it was clear that for some the grief was
 fresh, the memory searing. Sequestered in their loss, faces etched in pain or
 cradled in hands, a natural cushion seemed to grow around them as people
 moved gently by, leaving plenty of space rather than pressing near. Most striking
 were the older women, and the occasional older man: arthritic hips gingerly
 perched on the side of a rock or against a tree; a few kneeling by gravestones;
 lips moving silently in prayer or in conversation with their beloved dead; utterly
absorbed and seemingly oblivious to the bustle around them; expressing that this was a familiar place, a comforting place, a place of knowing.

After a few hours the light began to recede. As evening approached we moved down the road to our small village with the cemetery on the hill. We left the car in the town square and made our way up to the cemetery. Entering through the arched gateway, we heard rustling and music. Most of the crowd was moving in one shared direction rather than scattering to graves. The small wooden chapel—normally dark and shuttered—glowed with bright light. Men, women, and children poured out the narrow door and onto surrounding pathways. “Mūsū Dievas”\(^2\): the priest’s voice echoed through loudspeakers and over the graves. As the sun set, the words of the mass floated out from the chapel to blanket the cemetery. While darkness set in, the choir sang, the priest read the Gospel and offered a homily, the worshippers prayed in unison. Throughout the cemetery scattered groups of men, women, and children continued to bend over their graves: lighting candles; clearing leaves and twigs; placing flowers; whispering quiet words to one another; praying in silence. When the tinkling of eucharistic bells showered upon us there was a clear tug from the chapel at the center, drawing young and old away from their graves toward the high point of The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. The music swelled once again as the crowd formed a line outside the doors of the chapel and down the walkways, patiently waiting to receive the host.

The cemetery was now fully veiled in darkness. The sky had deepened into black, but in every direction the horizon was alive with fire. For the first time I

\(^2\) “Our Father”
noticed that even within this tiny cemetery the ground moves and swells: waves of light; ridges and rises packed with flame; candles stacked on the ground and on the gravestones; a flickering, palpable presence of the communion of saints.

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Outline of Chapter

In this chapter explore Vēlinēs practices. In part one I delve into the details, describing what people actually do on Vēlinēs, and why they do these things. I also explore some of the social implications of these practices. I divide this exploration of Vēlinēs practices into four sections: relationship; generational shifts; taste and class distinctions; ritual of the church. In part two I consider the sensory regimes inherent in and constructed by these embodied practices, giving particular attention to three senses: sight, touch, and smell. In part three I turn to the work of Paul Connerton to describe Vēlinēs as a practice of incorporation, and to set the direction for the next three chapters.

Part One: Vēlinēs Practices

I frequently get the same response when I ask people to talk to me about Vēlinēs: “This will be a short conversation. There really is not much to talk about or explain here. This is simply something we do.” Vēlinēs is indeed something people do, but in their doing they mark time, order space, form and re-form relationship, and perform commitments and belief in powerful ways.

The basic contours of Vēlinēs practices have changed over time, but they have not changed dramatically. The materials are ordinary and quite predictable: flowers, candles, berries, pine boughs, rakes and spades, people. In earlier days
there were fewer flowers and simpler candles, and in some places an
incorporation of food. But the basic patterns are strikingly similar across space
and time. The specific bodily actions are fairly consistent as well: church
attendance for some; a pilgrimage to the cemetery for most; flowers and other
decorations arranged; candles placed and lit; conversation; a time of silent
reflection or a time of prayer; sometimes a meal shared with family or with
friends. One of the more remarkable realities is that this practice persisted in
some form in Lithuania through all the years of occupation, death, loss, and
displacement during the 20th century. And it persists now, hosted by the same
cemetery spaces under ever-changing circumstances.

Yet there are distinct variations. These bodily, material practices inscribe
memory and assure continuity, but there is dynamic change, stylization, and
improvisation within the structure of continuity. In one area in Žemaitija in the
northwestern corner of Lithuania, brass bands circulate throughout the cemetery.
Families pay the musicians to play at the gravesides. These musicians play at
other times of the year as well, particularly funerals, as part of a musical tradition
referenced as “The Hills of Žemaitija.” During Soviet times this regional musical
tradition was incorporated into the Sovietized celebration called “The Day of the
Dead.” This adaptation still persists in Vėlinės practices today.

In a region of southern Lithuania bonfires are set within the cemetery and
people sit around the fire to tell stories. One young man from this area spent
most of his life in a children’s home and didn’t visit the cemeteries when he was
small because alcohol and chaos disrupted any familial cycle of ritual or tradition.
When he was seven, a neighbor invited him to the cemeteries with her family. He vividly remembers approaching through the forest and seeing the smoke rise and hover around the graves. This remains his first and most immediate association with Vėlinės.

Given the simultaneous operation of constancy and variation, Vėlinės is a classic example of Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus.* The *habitus* involves improvisation within predictability. The very fact that most people are surprised that I want to talk about Vėlinės—insisting “there is really nothing to talk about”—indicates the formative power of this *habitus*. Inevitably, as the conversation continues, there *is* a lot to talk about. And people have much to say. But in order to discuss Vėlinės they are required to pull words from an experience that they never imagined there would be any reason to explain. Such is the power of the *habitus*.

**Relationship**

Vėlinės is all about relationship: relationship with the living; relationship with the dead; relationship with material objects and organic matter; relationship

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3 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 81. Bourdieu describes the habitus as “the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for the practices of co-ordination. …The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less ‘sensible’ and ‘reasonable’……a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks …and on the other hand, an *objective event* which exerts its action of conditional stimulation calling for or demanding a determinate response, only on those who are disposed to constitute it as such because they are endowed with a determinate set of dispositions.” *Ibid.*, 79-82.

4 *Ibid.*, 82. Bourdieu emphasizes that this improvisation does not require clear, conscious intentionality, but may operate as “the intentionless invention of regulated improvisation.” Within the unchanging there is change; the habitus exerts great power, yet not unchangeable or static power. The dialogical structure between the expected, external givens, and the more distinct and variant motivations and interests within produce what Bourdieu calls “generative principles of regulated improvisation.” Nonetheless, even the external structures—the regulating forces—are modified over time”, 78-79
with God. Robert Orsi describes religion as, “a network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many different sacred figures together.” In this sense, Vėlinės is intensely religious. Relationships in these Vėlinės cemeteries “have all the complexities—all the hopes, evasions, love, fear, denial, projections, misunderstandings, and so on—of relationships between humans.” One priest is very explicit about the deep form of relationship at the heart of these practices: “In Vėlinės we give a hug to the dead with our prayers.”

Vėlinės cemeteries are a place of reunion: reunion among the living, reunion with the dead; reunion with the memory of the dead. For Tarvilė the experience of cemeteries is distinctly different on Vėlinės than at other times: “For me it is very good this day to go to the cemetery. I don’t like to go on other days, but on this day it is different. The dead people come in to meet us.” Jonas focuses on the mystery: “This is a little bit mystic. So you know, we think that they see us and they are thankful that we remember them.”

Most often Vėlinės is described as subdued yet warm with connection and candlelight. The weather sets a reflective mood:

There are no special meals. It is the day when everybody is more serious…not drinking alcohol…no big celebration of food and drinks. And also the weather is normally not the best you can find. It’s the first of November so the weather also helps with being serious, and thinking about deeper things than everyday life.

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6 Ibid.  
7 Klebonas Tomas, male, age 50.  
8 Tarvilė, female, age 32  
9 Jonas, male, age 79.  
10 Jurgita, female, age 32.
On that day all your thoughts are about that. You are planning your time. You don’t want to do something very funny or loud, like the discotheque. It is very quiet, very cozy.  

Reunion in Vėlinės cemeteries centers on the graves. Candles are set among flowers and pine boughs. In recent years, the candles are encased in a non-flammable plastic tumbler or ensonced in a glass dome with a punctured metal lid that allows the candles to burn continuously through wind and rain. Candles vary in size and price and are available in abundance in supermarkets and open air turgus stalls during the weeks proceeding Vėlinės. Candles and flowers are also stacked at cemetery gates, where vendors arrange crates and tables to assemble a makeshift marketplace.

Flowers are significant in Lithuania. In fact, flowers have their own rules: white flowers at the time of death; never bring an even number of flowers to a living person as only odd numbered bouquets should be presented except at time of death; carry a flower to your teacher on September 1, the first day of school; flowers are a suitable choice for the customary gift when visiting a home. In the capital Vilnius, most shops close in the evenings, but the flower market remains open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Prominent during all seasons, flower markets explode with white and yellow flowers during Vėlinės, white chrysanthemums being most popular for occasions connected with death and memory. Some families grow their own flowers in their sodas—garden houses just outside town constructed on the small plots of land assigned to some families.

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11 Robertas, male, age 34
during the Soviet era when large portions of the population were moved off of farmland and into collective housing.  

So the preparation is very simple. For many years we were growing flowers at our own garden...mostly the one flower we always take to the cemetery—Chrysanthamus...we were growing them for sale but also for ourselves. Even now my mom is growing them. But if not, we buy them in the market—the flowers and candles. Sometimes we go to the cemetery one day before—or one week before—we put everything in ahead of time so that on the most important day we can just go and put flowers and candles, but the grave is already beautiful. Just flowers and candles. And that is all. It is already beautiful.

There is a certain artistry and play to the cemetery decorations. Some place their candles and flowers in the same patterns year-to-year. Others design and arrange the flowers differently each year as the materials and their own sense of order and beauty move them. Occasionally cemetery plots are awash in color, but generally the scene is more orderly and subdued: small, distinct little gardens, each neatly patterned in shades of white or yellow.

So normally the bouquets are put on the head part of that buried person. And the emphasis is on that coffin [the ridge on top of the grave in the shape of a coffin]. So inside of that shape many people also decorate. Sometimes we do the cross out of chrysanthemum blossoms...so normally crosses. Candles also in the central part...close to that monument but also on the head part of the buried person.

When the design tastes of the younger generation control, there is frequently a more modern flare: spare; sleek; elegant; contrasting colors.

A sense of duty and social expectation run thick at Vėlinės:

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12 Some families also grow flowers at sodybas, small plots of land and houses in a local village. Sodybas were generally either inherited or purchased from local families after the huge shuffling that took place with privatization.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.
One year I did not go when I was expecting [my first child], and we were worried we would get stuck somewhere, so we didn’t risk it. But when you do not go you really do not feel good, because you know what you have to do. You know. If you do not go, you know you are not doing something that you have to do. It is a very big guilt. It is a deep tradition. It is the day to remember the dead ones—the ones who left you. Since we were doing it since my childhood, you know it has to be that way.\textsuperscript{15}

During Vėlinės people pay attention to the details of adornment, and whether there are any graves that are not properly tended. When the grave is prepared ahead of time, the hours at the cemetery are an opportunity for reflection, conversation, reunion, gossip, silence, and prayer. Some families spend hours in the cemetery, greeting passing neighbors and friends the way one might welcome visitors at the threshold of a home. They stroll through the cemetery to look at neighbors’ graves, perhaps wondering about people who didn’t show up to tend to things as they should:

It is important to go all together, you know…to compare (laugh). Your neighbor grave--does it look the same bad or the same good as yours? I’m kidding. It used to be so… I remember what my grandfather liked very much about the first of November—he could meet people in the cemetery. He could meet relatives of people who were buried there because normally people come from all over Lithuania to the graves of their parents. So he was spending sometimes six or seven hours in the cemetery. It was a big event for him, because he was meeting people there who he didn’t see for many years. For us, maybe it is not the same. But yes, a sense of community. ...When we know families of our neighbors’ graves then we could—even by noticing such things like “oh this grave is not done properly this year”—we could say that the relatives of that person who is buried there are weak, or not healthy, or something happened to that family...that normally it was done very beautifully and now it is not. So you could make some predictions by observing.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Aurelija, female, age 37.
\textsuperscript{16} Janina. Age 32.
Those who are able to travel only on that day have to carry rakes, spades, and shovels along with the candles and flowers as they do the cleaning and decorating all in one day. The entire family will set upon the plot at once: tending, raking, pulling, and sending children to the heavily-laden trash bins just outside the cemetery gates. Once the tidying is finished, the family assembles for their time of silence or prayer and then chats with neighbors and friends. For some families though, the visit is quick and focused: scurrying from car to grave; assembling in silence; pausing to reflect and show respect; rushing back to the car to move toward the next cemetery; occasionally stopping to seek the warmth of tea and coffee in the home of a local relative or at the area kavinė.

There is increased mobility in Lithuania in the last century. The resulting marriage between families from different regions means it is not unusual for families to have five or six cemeteries to visit in scattered parts of the country. Some people manage it all in one day. Others take advantage of the nearest weekend to clean and decorate graves in one part of the country and then on Vėlinės visit family cemeteries in other areas. But sometimes it simply is not possible or desirable to go everywhere. Families then divide up the responsibilities and make choices from year-to-year about where to go. Husbands and wives might diverge, fanning out in different directions toward their own roots. A middle aged man in the north part of Lithuania describes a tradition

17 Under the Soviet system, individuals were assigned work and might be sent anywhere in the country. During this time the Vėlinės visit traced a contrary inscription on the landscape, moving them against the grain of the pattern set for them by the state and inscribing an alternate pattern of relationship.
in his family that is a product of Soviet days when Vėlinės was not a holiday and often fell on a work day:

My family lives all over Lithuania. We always meet at the cemeteries on the Saturday before Vėlinės, no matter the date, and then we gather for a meal together and to visit. We do not get to see one another very often. Seeing each other and visiting with our dead together is more important than a specific date. We did this during Soviet times and we keep that tradition still. That also means I can go to my wife’s family’s graves on Vėlinės itself.  

Many families move in caravans of multiple generations, following an agreed upon pattern and stopping at requisite cemeteries along the way.

The coordination for the day’s events usually happens ahead of time, as family members check work schedules, phone relatives, divvy up duties, plan gatherings, and purchase candles and flowers:

We call each other. I call my sister and we agree who buys candles and who buys flowers. She’ll call and say, “I got everything.” Or this year I took [an elderly friend] to the cemetery in Vilnius and I bought the pine leaves there, so I called her and said, “Don’t worry, I have the leaves”, and she said, “okay I will get the flowers.”

If grandparents are living, the planning focuses on them, with the grandmother (močiutė) in charge: “The oldest person is the most important; usually močiutė.”

For many, cemeteries are a place for reflection on formative relationships, and also an opportunity to encounter and visit with those who have died:

My mother is older and she is losing her memory, but sometimes when I visit with her she will reach out her hands and say, ‘Take me to momma, I want to see momma.’ Almost as if she is a little child. She is asking me to

18 Mantas, male, age 51
19 Aurelija, female, age 37.
20 Salvija, female age 48.
take her to the cemetery to see her mom. When she dies, that is where I will visit with her, as I now visit my dad.²¹

Though family dominates during Vėlinės, not all visits are to family graves. Godparents, teachers, friends, extended family, and colleagues are remembered as well. Teachers held a particularly esteemed place in Soviet society, and this respect continues for them beyond the grave, as former students visit to leave a candle. The graves of public figures also draw many candles, particularly the graves of cultural heroes—artists, musicians, poets, novelists. The burial sites of political leaders and of the political martyrs of the independence receive increased attention as well, providing the staging for the televised, outdoor mass with officials of church and state.

Colorful graves standing out among the sea of white and yellow may be decorated with a specially selected flower that was once favored by the person buried beneath. Salvija describes her Vėlinės pilgrimages to the cemeteries:

We meet relatives in the cemetery. I pick my daughter’s favorite flower which she would love...a pink flower, herbera [daisy]. I get candles and make sure that at least one candle is blessed. I meet other people who know my family and we talk. Some people I don’t know come and light a candle on my daughter’s grave. It is very beautiful. Very warm. We light candles; we stay silent; we pray. We talk about the people who have died and we tell stories.²²

I have known Salvija for some time and was in Lithuania the bitter winter several years ago when her young daughter died. Before we begin a conversation about Vėlinės, I tell her that I realize this may be a painful topic,

²¹ Ignas, male, age 54.
²² Salvija, female, age 48.
assuring her that we can stop anytime the conversation becomes too difficult.

She explains that *Vėlinės* is not the hardest time of the year for her: “New Year’s Eve is more difficult because that is when she died. *Vėlinės* is the time when we remember all people. In the last eighteen months I lost three close people. It’s sad because at the Christmas Eve table it is now only three of us; no longer six.”

It soon becomes clear that Salvija experiences *Vėlinės* as a positive time, a time of connection:

> It is a very beautiful tradition to meet the relatives in the cemetery—close relatives and the ones we don’t know that well. We meet together, talk, share our lives...as if we are sharing with the dead and the living ones. It is the day to meet when it is not too sad. All the happy celebrations like birthdays are in individual families, but this is when we are all together. So some relatives I don’t see for a year. Some come only on *Vėlinės* to light a candle. Some are eighty years old and they do not go out much. But on *Vėlinės* they come and light a candle. I live closest to the cemetery in [town], so everyone comes to my house. Next to the cemetery in the village my aunt lives—so we go there. It is like a tradition. We go to four cemeteries.

Salvija visits the cemetery where her daughter is buried most every day during the two weeks before *Vėlinės*.

> During the month of October we try to go more often. Lithuanians do go to the cemetery often. We try to clean and make it nice, and plant. Even if there is an unknown grave we try to clean it too. People travel to light a candle. It is an honor to have it cleaned. It is out of respect for the dead. To honor them.

When we wander to the nearby cemetery together to visit her graves, Salvija shows me the designs she carefully crafts on the grave surfaces using two different colors of stone. Each grave is marked with an elegant arc in contrasting
stone so that the grave of her young daughter in one section of the cemetery and
the grave of her parents in another section are linked by common pattern.
Salvija’s daughter’s grave is adorned with small angels, the first one placed by
Salvija and her husband when they buried her a few years ago, and all the others
placed in intervening years by friends and family. She is clearly thankful for a
time when everyone stops to remember:

You remember those people more on that day. They are more there.
Because you have time. You take time to remember them. Even maybe
to say sorry. To think about something you did wrong. Or just being with
them. Maybe you can forget them sometimes—go through the year not
remembering them. But you take that day to remember. Every day I
remember my daughter. Every day. I always think about my daughter. I
think about my mom quite often, especially when I need advice. I think
about the people...what they would be like now. Especially my
daughter...how she would be now. Usually I look at the stars and think
which one is my daughter, and which is my mom, and which is my dad. I
go to the cemetery alone with my husband when it is dark. So there is
nobody left. It is all candles and you can see the stars as well. We
remember her. We remember our daughter. And we remember all the
families who have lost their children

Immediate family members are responsible for cleaning and decorating
graves in Lithuania, but the number of candles on the graves will grow
throughout the day. A common practice is to bring extra bags of candles along
with buckets or bundles of fresh flowers. This organic, shared form of
remembrance is deeply important to Salvija and others who experience pride and
joy as they return to a family grave prepared earlier in the day and discover new
candles and flowers left by visitors who stopped to visit, to pray, to give thanks,
and to remember. This communal contribution to grave decoration wrests control
from individuals, requiring them to submit personal preferences and tastes to the
demands of community and relationship. Aurelija likes her graves to be arranged with particular materials: “Usually I buy little dried arrangements. Some people like plastic. I like natural flowers and natural colors. They usually have the leaves from the pine trees with them, and usually we put chrysanthemums in the vase next to grave.” Then, with a chuckle, she describes meeting family and friends on Vėlinės:

My sister goes with me always. If we go to the village where my father’s family is buried we usually meet other cousins. You never know who you will meet because everybody has lots of graves to do. It is always a surprise. You can meet anybody from the neighbors and relatives because everyone comes to the same place. And even when you come to your own graves you see extra flowers. And maybe you don’t like those red plastic flowers, but there they are!23

From birth to death, Lithuanians visit cemeteries; most on a regular cycle. Children learn about Vėlinės from their earliest days, bundled up and carried to the cemetery in a time before they can remember. These practices are a formative part of their lives. For some it becomes a place where they reflect upon and wrestle with changing realities around and within them. When asked if Vėlinės is important and why it is important, Salvija describes her younger daughter who was utterly devastated when her sister died a few years ago:

My daughter is a teenager now and she refuses to go to the cemetery. But on Vėlinės she wants to go to the cemetery. It is a sign of honor to buy the candles with her own money. She wants to buy the candles and she wants to go. She was really little when we started taking her to the cemetery and we were trying to teach her as well. And now, even if she is protesting about her sister’s death and really angry about it, she goes on Vėlinės and spends lots of time at the grave.

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23 Aurelija, female, age 37.
Salvija’s husband is also at the cemetery on Vėlinės. It is a place where he continues to wrestle with his daughter’s death: “My husband claims that he is not a believer anymore, especially after our daughter’s death. He says, ‘I am not angry with God; God is just sleeping somewhere.’ He goes now only out of respect.”

Salvija describes herself as a person of faith, but she explains that on Vėlinės the relationship with family and friends and the connection with traditional Lithuanian practices hold more importance for her than connection with the church:

There is a very strong connection between being Lithuanian and Vėlinės; a very old connection—maybe even from the pagan times. Lithuanians have an active tradition of remembering dead people, and Vėlinės is the day to connect with another world. It is all Lithuanians’ day. It is more about that. If I do not work I do go to church. The priest says mass, reads the names of the dead, prays the Lord’s prayer and the other prayers. There is singing. I often am not aware of all of that though. It may not be popular to say, but I am caught up in my own mind—remembering the people who are close. I am more in myself, remembering my own people.

For some Lithuanians, the religious dimensions of Vėlinės are more prominent:

I am Catholic. It is important to me that other similar people who trust the same as I do, that they will come. We say that the church is not the building, but the people. So they are coming...the people. We can speak about our religion here. About what is important to us. And we need to remember always to think about other people, not just ourselves…and that we need to do our best to others, to the people around us, to our relatives—including the dead ones.24

Robertas emphasizes that Visų Šventųjų Diena is a day of obligation in the Catholic Church; he always goes to mass on Visų Šventųjų Diena. Vėlinės mass

24 Paulina, female, age 31.
is not required, and he goes less frequently. But he nonetheless understands

Vėlinės in reference to Visų Šventųjų Diena. He explains that the church
remembers the saints because, “the saints show the way that we hope all people
will go—we ourselves, and the dead ones for whom we pray”:

…because we have the tradition to follow the saints. You know on the
road, the signs that show us how to go? Saints are like directions on the
road. They show us how to get to the next place. A saint…at first he
shows his own example of how to live in different situations of life.
Because you have to show it not just with words, but with your works. And
also with your prayer. ...You hope we will rise up some day…the
resurrection. That is the main religious part. We believe some are
saints…they are resurrected to look like Christ who is resurrected. They
could be resurrected right now. We have just such a tradition that Saint
Mary could be resurrected. But I’m not sure about all of them—all of the
saints. It is just a tradition of thinking but we are not sure about it. Of
course, we believe that at the end of the world we will all be resurrected—
to live, or to stay in hell. Some do not want to live and to communicate
with God here in this life, so they will probably not want to do that there
either…in the other life. On Visų Šventųjų Diena we are thinking about
those who are a bigger society. But on Vėlinės it is more private. It is just
your family, your relatives and friends. ...We will die some time. What
that candle means is that we are hoping to live and maybe experience
resurrection. It is a symbol of life and living.26

Robertas trusts that the prayers of those who are living help speed the
preparation for those who have died and who are not yet ready to meet God
face-to-face:

We believe that people who for example died—not all people are ready to
go straight away to heaven. Some go to Purgatory. It is like a middle
place…like heaven but we are not ready to look at God face-to-face. We
are praying that time there will not be long…that they will more quickly
reach the heaven. We believe that prayer has power, and we are praying
that God will bring them to heaven more quickly.

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25 Robertas, male, age 34.
At the same time, for Robertas—as for most everyone—Vėlinės is also about remembering: remembering the dead and remembering our own mortality. And Vėlinės is deeply bound up with pagarba (respect):

I understand they are somewhere...maybe in heaven or maybe in purgatory. But there is no possibility to know about it. But we just believe they are somewhere. Not here in the graveyard. We know that their bodies are there. And a body is part of a man. A man is completed only with body and soul so according to the respect of that man and his life and respect to his body we visit. And to remember that we also will die some day. And maybe we will meet together and we will communicate.

Many people describe a significant change when their Vėlinės visits shifted from something they did because their parents brought them to the cemeteries to something they do to respect people they knew and loved.

Inevitably, the shift was triggered by the death of someone they held close:

In childhood Vėlinės was the day when I saw my grandmother—usually the only day in the year when we saw that grandmother. That is what I remember. Then when my grandmother died—the grandmother on the other side of the family—that became when I would visit the grave on my own. I still go with my parents, but it is now the day when I feel I should go, that it is important to go.26

Before, it was my parents who would do more and prepare more. I would just be an extra person. Now it is more my wish to participate in it, more a wish to get ready and to spend time with them. It changed because before, when I was a teenager and was going to the cemetery with my parents, I would go more because of other relatives being there—more about talking and chatting and meeting them. Now when I go and there are many people, I go to the relatives who are not the close relatives. And then when the time comes, I go to my daughter’s grave, and now it is more about peace and quiet, and the calmness, and just being with your own thoughts rather than talking and meeting people.27

Nurture and formation in these practices extends beyond the family.

Vėlinės engages and reflects larger social relationships and responsibilities as

26 Karina, female, age 30.
27 Salvija, female, age 48.
well. Untended graves are considered a community responsibility during Vėlinės.

Some Lithuanians joke that in Lithuania people receive better care after they are dead than they received when they were alive. Others explain this practice as formation in neighborly care:

My children and grandchildren, they love to scatter throughout the cemetery to find graves that need to be tended. They clear them, lay candles and flowers, and light the candles. Most everyone brings extra candles so they can do this. It is a matter of pride for the children—and for the adults. And they enjoy doing it. It teaches them compassion. We would want someone to care for our graves if our family could not come, and so we want to do it for others. They are neighbors. It is part of caring for a neighbor. It is the right thing to do.\(^\text{28}\)

It is very important. It is important to remember those people. And all those candles lit on the unknown graves are very important. It seems you light one candle and then after awhile you then see more appear there. That is what warms the soul. You light the candle. You feel a peace. And it is very beautiful.\(^\text{29}\)

In regional children’s homes the resident children are cared for and raised by the state. Usually they do not have the opportunity to venture to the cemetery with their families, yet I have seen caretakers carefully instruct the children in Vėlinės traditions beginning as preschoolers, using coloring sheets with outlines of candles they can decorate with crayolas, and a darkened room, a lit candle, and quiet stories. Walks to the local cemetery to view the beautiful candles in the evening are then a common part of daily activity once the cemeteries begin to fill with light. These young children who are excluded from the fabric of their biological family participate in the larger community by cleaning neglected cemetery plots and bringing light to graves that are dark.

\(^{28}\) Silva, female, age 64.
\(^{29}\) Salvija, female, age 48.
Older children at the children’s home are encouraged to visit local family gravesites when they are aware of their location. They venture out to forests to find pine boughs, small plants, or hearty fall flowers to adorn the graves. Sometimes they create decorations in school or with their groups at the children’s home. The fall school break is planned around this holiday and occasionally these children are invited to join extended family on excursions to the cemetery. Many of the children also make the pilgrimage to Vėlinės cemeteries with their friends from the children’s home, leaving candles in places that mark the faint connection they still hold with the families who brought them life.

In one city, the local children’s rights office is very proud of their tradition of tending the graves of sick and abandoned babies who died without a family to care for them. They raise money in the office during the weeks leading up to Vėlinės, and on the last work day before the Vėlinės holiday they travel together to the cemetery where the babies are buried. “It is something very important to us. Our work is to attend to the rights of children. We feel these babies need to be remembered. Somebody needs to care for them and for their graves.”

Public schools also nurture Vėlinės traditions: “Year by year you get bigger and learn more. In school you are learning about it too, with pictures to draw, and learning poems. The poems are about...I don’t know...candles shining, and maybe our grandparents are watching us while we remember them.” Lithuanian families are given the choice between religious education provided by a representative of the local Catholic Church and moral education offered by a teacher. It is notable that in both religious and moral education

30 Paulina, female, age 31.
Vėlinės is often part of the curriculum, with one group emphasizing prayer for and communion with the dead, and another following the Soviet practice of remembrance—often with a political focus that is now Lithuanian rather than Soviet, and education in earlier antecedents of Vėlinės in Baltic nature religions.

The cultural director in one school was very proud to tell me that a few years back there was some interest in developing Halloween traditions in the school. They did allow a Halloween party in late October, with costumes and candy and games. But they emphasized Vėlinės as well. The teacher reports that the next year the student representatives delivered the message that the children preferred to focus on Vėlinės alone. She gave no explanation of the children’s decision-making process beyond those bare facts, but it was her opinion that the children had experienced both holidays, and they felt that Vėlinės mattered most. Likely, she suggested, because it was reinforced at home.  

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is also a time of reflection and reconciliation. Many, many people mention that in Lithuania, once a person has died, you no longer speak ill of him or her. This is simply a given. When asked for an explanation people will say something like this: “God is our final judge. When a person has died he or she is before God. Who am I to judge?”  

From a distance, this may seem fanciful: an attempt to re-narrate reality, or an example of denial. Yet when people describe their experience by the graveside, the tone

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31 Halloween is viewed by most Lithuanians as a consumer product imported from the west. The question of whether it is a threat to the traditions of Vėlinės is raised often in conversations about Vėlinės. There is no consensus on that question. Older people seem to frown upon the incursion, or simply shrug it off. Among younger people it seems that those who participate in Halloween rituals by themselves or with their children still feel that Vėlinės has a distinct importance tied to family and respect—a time and a focus very different than Halloween.
tends to be one of acceptance: “We may feel that this person was not very good in life. But I know God loves him. We are talking about life closer by God. But in our childhood we were talking about how they must be good people…must love another people…must fill their own hearts with good things.” Žilvinas connects this prohibition on speaking ill of the dead with practices at death as well as with formation in faith:

There is a saying: ‘Only good things about the dead or nothing at all’. Even before the funeral we pray for the person by his body and we apologize to him. It is hard to part without apology and reconciliation. We make mistakes in our real lives due to our weakness. Reconciliation with the dead is very well reflected in the “Our Father” prayer, but it is a lot older than Christianity …Some people might not go to church but stand by the grave and remember how good the dead person used to be. Russians used to have a tradition to bring a bottle and two shot glasses to the grave (or more shot glasses if there was more than one person buried). Drink one himself, and fill another one and leave it on the grave. And then apologize. Remember, Vėlinės invites people to visit dead people, light a candle and reconcile.  

Generational Shifts

Lithuanians born before 1980 remember formal cemetery assemblies during Soviet days, replete with poetry, music, torches, dancing by young people in national costume, and speeches by politicians. The ceremonies centered on remembrance of the soldiers who had died in World War II and glorification of the state. Aurelija sees these performances as an example of Soviet wisdom, “they probably were smart and they knew what they can do. When it is so deep in tradition you can not destroy it. How do you prohibit someone from going to the graveyard? A graveyard is a graveyard…you just go.” I ask if the poems that were read in the cemetary were written by Lithuanian poets:

32 Tarvilė, female, age 33.
33 Žilvinas, male, age 53
It was also part of the school. The teachers would teach the poems. They would select the best students to read the poems. It was Lithuanian poems. A lot of Lithuanian poets were told, ‘write a certain amount of poems for the Soviet Union.’ They were poems mostly about those unknown soldiers.”

Most comments about differences between Soviet times and now reference practical matters, like structure, materials, and mobility. These practical matters influenced relational realities as well. The choice of materials was far more modest during Soviet days. Small white berries available only in the fall were sometimes used to adorn the graves rather than flowers. The candles were wax pillars crafted at home or whatever commercial candles happened to become available at the local store during the previous year. The candles were not always white, but instead appeared in various colors.

My earliest memory of Vėlinės was when my mother picked me up from the kindergarten when I was five or six. She took me to the small cemetery, just to see the candles. At that time everybody was buying small candles—probably fifty candles in red or yellow—and they were called “candles from the Christmas tree”. Usually they were burning for half an hour, and it was a tradition that you were not leaving the grave until they were burned to the ground. And other people would bring big candles from the church. You would not wait for them to burn down as it would be a long time. It was usually cold.

Families used their ingenuity to press canning jars and other household items into service to shield the candles from the wind, thus allowing them to burn as long as possible. “You had to protect them from the wind and from the rain because you did not have that plastic around them then. People would bring newspapers to protect them, and plastic bags, and put the sticks around them to make a tent. Lots of things.”

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34 Aurelija, female, age 37.
35 Ibid.
Candles were not necessarily easy to find. Aurelija describes her apartment building buzzing with excitement when the local store had candles on the shelves or when someone arrived to sell chrysanthemums from a greenhouse in the nearby town.

When I was little it was less preparation and we usually had not so fancy flowers. It would be always chrysanthemums, and a very simple chrysanthemum…the simplest ones. Usually they would be dead immediately after the first frost. And those candles where you had to protect them. Now it is more convenient. The flowers you can buy a few days ahead. You can get candles anytime you go to the store. But in Soviet times, with those candles...you had an agenda. Half a year before Vėlinės you had to look for the candles because you just couldn’t get them anytime. If you find them in the store, you didn’t buy just one box, you buy many boxes because your relatives might need it, because you always had it saved up, because you never knew if you would be able to buy them.

Aurelija links these differences in candles and flowers to changes in practices at the graves:

It always somehow seemed very cold then, because we would spend a longer time in the cemetery waiting for the candle to burn. Now everything is a lot faster. Also because everybody has the car now, and you are able to visit all the graves. When I was younger we were not going from one cemetery to another one. You would go to one graveyard and that’s it, because you just are not able to do more. Now in a way you can see more graves, but really you spend a lot less time. I never get too cold. You just run, take care of the graves, put the candles on. You do not need to wait. You don’t stay. You really don’t even spend too much time thinking of the dead ones. You just arrange it, it looks nice, and then you leave. Back then, we were really spending more time.

Whereas older people describe a need for secrecy during Vėlinės when they were young, Aurelija remembers the Vėlinės celebrations in her small town as very open, with no attempt by anyone to hide what they were doing:

In a way, we didn’t have anybody to hide it from. Everybody was going. All our neighbors. We lived in a big Soviet apartment block. It was just clear everyone was going. There was lots of talk about the candles: “I got
the candles at that store”. Or someone would call and say, “they brought chrysanthemums from Druskininkai green yard. Now they have them for sale...you can get them and everyone has to buy them.” It was not a secret.

Kunigas Žadvilas was a teenager at the time of independence and attended seminary not long after. His personal memories of Vėlinės center on family and church, but he also recalls the simultaneous Soviet ceremonies in the cemeteries with bright lights, poetry, and official speeches. He particularly remembers teachers and officials being near the church on those evenings: “It was a time that even people who were in the communist party would move toward the church. They might not be in the church, but they would be in the cemetery, and when the mass started I would see them move so that they were standing just outside the door of the church. So they could hear the mass.”

Many of the most powerful stories of Vėlinės come from the oldest generation—those who spent their childhood and working lives during the upheavals of war and occupation. When independence came to Lithuania, many in this generation were already retired, or quickly lost their jobs. Most of their parents had been peasant farmers or worked for Polish-Lithuanian nobility. Death, loss, fear, and terror gripped their lives with a terrible immediacy during their formative years. Generally they are relieved to be free of Soviet control, but they often say that life is harder for them now. They hope things are better for their children and their grandchildren.

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36 Priest/Reverend.
Not all in this generation were faithful Catholics, but it is this generation that maintained Catholic practice through the years of occupation. For them, this time set aside for Vėlinės is laden with duty, constancy, and respect, and sometimes with agony. During Soviet days this was a season to quietly remember those who had been deported as well as those who had died. Rimantas is seventy-four. He remembers taking the bus from Vilnius to his home village after classes ended for the day at the tractor and car mechanic school he attended. He would arrive at the small town near the farm where he grew up, and then walk twenty kilometers to the village itself. He and his family would sneak to the cemetery at night, just as they used to slip into the church in the dark to take instruction for confirmation. When he started work and had young children the young family was not able to travel on Vėlinės when it fell on a work day; the weekend was then only one day—Sunday. Rimantas would always travel the Sunday before Vėlinės to clean and decorate the family graves: “All the locals would go on the day, and if the grave was not nice by then it was a bit embarrassing.”

Aurelija is younger than Rimantas. She was still in school during the transition from Soviet Lithuania to independence. She grew up in the small town near Rimantas’s village and her mother died when she was nine. “The first grave I had to take care of was my mother’s. My father was taking care of it and he was always asking me and my sister, ‘Did you visit? Are you taking care of it?’ So that is how I learned what you do.” A physician, married with children, and
living in Vilnius, Aurelija now tends to her father’s and grandparents’ graves as well. She notices changes in her own Vėlinės habits over the years and she thinks these shifts reflect movements in the larger society. After independence there were suddenly great varieties of candles and flowers available in an abundance that was new and exciting. Aurelija describes phases of self-fashioning as people enjoyed this new consumer experience:

In the beginning of independence it was so different—you got all those king size chrysanthemums and then different arrangements and everything…and then arrangements with the fake flowers. I went through all those stages because you know, I’ve been taking care of my mother’s grave already for more than twenty years, so I went through all those fashions about how to take care of the graves. From those times when you couldn’t buy the nice flowers and those times when they would say, “would you like some flowers” and they would sell the new plantings little by little, to those times when we didn’t have time…and I would put plastic wreaths on the grave. I would never do it again. At the time it would just be very easy to take care of. You develop different things…you develop the taste…everyone goes through different things. Just like the outfits.

Older Lithuanians also comment on these changes, often with a critical tone using the phrase “more, more, more”. Some see the burgeoning selection as a sign of prosperity and hope. But many more are wary of this shift, fearing that Lithuanian society is increasingly focused on western consumption and profit. They describe the flamboyance of Vėlinės displays as an opportunity to show off and parade wealth for neighbors and friends. These older Lithuanians fear that a wild new form of capitalism is undermining communal values and increasing the disparity between rich and poor. There is also a wry cynicism in

37 Aurelija, female, age 37.
38 Sigrid Rausing describes consumer practices in Estonia, another of the Baltic states: “The consumption of Western goods available in the shops indicates both success in the post-Soviet state, and a process of differentiation from the Soviet system, which also includes a distinction from the people who are not successful in the new system, and who are more likely to regret the...
many of these comments, with the frequent observation that the people who
benefited under the Soviet system are using those same connections to accrue
wealth in the new capitalist economy, and that the excess on Vėlinės is an
opportunity to display that wealth while also performing traditionalism and new-
found patriotism in response to shifting political realities.39

Kunigas Žadvilas shares in the criticism of the turn toward “more, more,
more”:

A Lithuanian is that kind of person who needs to be seen...who can see
and think, “if we won’t pray, we won’t think”. We start thinking, “if one day
we will die, someone will need to pray for us.” We think that maybe our
children will pray for us. But for some people it is not about faith. It is
about show: “I need to show how much I love my mom, or how much I
did.” So they bring lots and lots of flowers and then they think, “See—I’ve
shown how much I love them.”...In the last census 80% of Lithuanians are
Catholic. But as the Lithuanian society is getting more secure, it is more
commercial, so it seems like it is even unconsciously that people do this.
Looking at all the supermarkets, they have all those candles now. Then
by November 3 the candles will all be gone from the supermarkets and
they will start going toward Christmas, and people will buy it not thinking,
but buy it because it is cheap...because it is on offer. And then later they
think, “oh, do I really need it?” Some people follow tradition from the
faith...as in knowing what it is all about. But then most people do it just
because everyone is doing it. It is almost like they are being programmed
to do it by the merchants and crowds. It is more like psychological games.
Just following. Just going with the crowd. Earlier generations would know
how it was connected with faith, understanding what it is about. But less
so now.40

Aurelija acknowledges this post-independence zest for “more, more, more”, but
she views it a bit differently and notices another shift in recent years:

loss of the Soviet system. But these consumer practices are not without their ambivalence in
relation to identification and incorporation, and often the distinction between experiences runs
along age lines reflecting the degree to which the lives of bodies are easier or more difficult as a
result of the end of Soviet occupation and the development of an increasingly western state.”
Sigrid Raising, “Signs of the new nation: gift exchange, consumption and aid on a former
collective farm in north-west Estonia” in Daniel Miller, ed., Material Culture: Why Some Things
39 Svajunas, male, age 51
I would say that now it is getting again less. Not just because of the [economic] crisis. People developed that culture when we got independence and we got those fancy flowers and you didn’t know what to do. But now, you have the chrysanthemums and you don’t bring such bushels. You have a selection and you can see what the person would have liked. And somebody will buy plastic. It is a different culture taking care of the graves. I wouldn’t say it is “more, more, more.” I would say now it is getting back to something simpler: nicer; better looking.\(^{41}\)

The significance of Vėlinės for those in the “Lost Generation” (those who were educated and came of age in the Soviet period) varies considerably from person to person. During the Soviet period many in this generation lived far from their family homes. With no day free from work to travel, it was difficult to visit home cemeteries on Vėlinės. Cultural workers and educators participated in or even helped plan the Soviet remembrance events at their local cemeteries. Some speak with pride of the order and pageantry of the Soviet celebrations and long for the return of more communal participation, rather than the individualized ritual of families that dominates now.

Yet some in this generation did find a way to travel to family cemeteries on Vėlinės. One man, a former Soviet journalist, offers a vivid portrait of trains and buses packed with people carrying bundles of white flowers and candles, stealing away at the end of the work day to travel to cities and towns to adorn their graves. No one talked. No one discussed where they were going. But everyone knew. Barbora is fifty. She is a teacher and is grateful for the changes since independence, but she notices that the community fabric and sense of accountability are waning in some ways. She sees this particularly among

\(^{41}\) Aurelija, female, age 37.
students whose homes are deteriorating and who seem to be falling through the cracks. She also worries that the focus has become too much about consuming and making money, “...but when you open the door you let in the bad as well as the good. We opened the door to the west and overall I think it is a good thing.” Barbora’s daughter has had opportunities beyond her wildest dreams: studying in the United States in both high school and college and then finding a lucrative job in London. Barbora and her husband have been struggling as the recent economic crisis sent the business they built after independence into bankruptcy. Her feelings about the changes in Vėlinės practices are mixed as well.

It used to be that we would work all day and then we would get in the car and drive north to the city and town where our parents live. We would not arrive at the cemetery until eight o’clock in the evening after the ceremonies were over. When it was still dark. We would see the whole family—cousins, parents, grandparents—and we would decorate our graves and then talk and talk. Afterward we would go to my grandmother’s house near the cemetery. It is a very small house and it would be absolutely full with people talking and laughing. Then sometimes we would go back to my parents’ flat in the city to sleep and get up very, very early to drive two hours back for work that day. But usually we would drive back home that night and arrive at two in the morning. We would be tired, but happy. Now there is much more time. Look, this year it is a four day weekend!! But now when we go we often do not see the family because they have come at a different time. Everyone is not there together anymore. I miss that time together.

The Lost Generation was very young during the early days of Stalin when Vėlinės practices were actively suppressed. They were the youth trained to read poetry, play music, or carry torches when the Soviets changed course and tried to incorporate Vėlinės practices as their own, seeking to reshape the day as exclusively practices of remembrance with no religious overtone. This generation remembers the lights, the loudspeakers at the cemetery, the march of
torches, and the speeches.

Most of them were in college or launched into their careers at the time of independence. Some spent cold nights on parliament hill holding candles, or huddled with friends around fires in the blockade surrounding the Seimas building. Most all of them remember exactly where they were when they heard news of Soviet tanks rolling into Vilnius the night of January 13, 1991. They remember the thirteen coffins in Cathedral Square. Some are proud and hopeful, others quite jaded. They comment on the huge resurgence in participation in Vėlinės and other traditionally “Lithuanian” practices. Like the generation before them, they also notice that those who had connections during Soviet times seemed to have benefitted most in the transition. One man comments in his typical impish fashion, “Yes, the ones who were most red then bring the most candles now.”42

Among the generation of Lithuanians in university or just beginning their working life, feelings about Vėlinės vary across a much wider range. They have no memory of the Soviet period. They entered adult life following the collapse of the USSR and well into the new political and social realities of independent Lithuania. Like most Lithuanians, they fondly recall the childhood wonder with the excitement of thousands of candles flickering in the Vėlinės night: the cold air; the subdued yet celebratory mood. They also recall the adventure of seeking forlorn graves to clean and adorn, and the guidance of grandparents. Many of these young people still travel with family to visit graves each year, even as they resist the idea that there is one particular day set for remembering. They

42 Svajunas, male, age 52.
emphasize that the important thing is to remember in the heart and mind. Some resist the familial and social expectation of showing up on that one day. Yet they heed the family pressure:

I remember one day when I was visiting my friend. He lives here in Vilnius near Rasu graveyard. It is a really beautiful one with all those candles lit. When you come to the graveyard and your grave is not lit, it is like no one cares. I mean…I do care. You can come whenever in the year to visit the grave and to light the candles. But it’s like the same with St Valentine’s Day. Is it the day to express your love? No it isn’t. And is the first of November the day to express your love to the dead one. No it isn’t. It isn’t the only day. But I do go with my parents. And I would probably still go even if they did not.43

Some in this generation also venture out with friends to look at the candles in the city cemeteries, even when they do not make their own family pilgrimages. When asked, most all of them say that when they have children they will want them to learn these traditions.

A particularly interesting subset of these younger Lithuanians is those who have joined one of the Evangelical Christian movements that are growing in Lithuania. Cultural anthropologist Gediminas Lankauskas suggests this group is differentiating themselves from parents and grandparents by refusing or modifying traditional Lithuanian Catholic rites of passage and rituals.44 They express a sense of frustration that Vėlinės is just a “show,” an act that lacks authenticity and is not really connected with what one “believes”. Skepticism about prayer for the dead, sadness that there is so much despair among friends and family, and a longing for their family to share their Evangelical form of relationship with Jesus Christ are frequent themes in their discussions of Vėlinės.

43 Karina, female, age 30
They feel that Vėlinės looks backward toward the past and death. They long for family relationships focused on resurrection.

Fausta is at the upper end of this age range. She says her sense of Vėlinės is far more nuanced than it was when she first embraced an Evangelical protestant faith. Now in her mid thirties and the mother of two small children, Fausta grew up in a traditional Catholic, rural family in the north of Lithuania. She loves her parents but describes her childhood home as cold and lacking in emotional nurture and support. She remembers a lot of drinking and attributes this to a demanding rural life of hard work and Soviet monotony flavored by empty, Catholic practice. She experienced the local priests as a source of judgment, never hope and forgiveness. When Fausta moved into her teen years and on to university she became involved in Evangelical Christian communities where she felt a warmth, support, and faith that was deeply healing for her. She worked as a leader in these communities following graduation from university until she married and started to raise her family.

Fausta describes the years she was in university as a difficult time with her family. She would return home worried about and frustrated with her family’s Catholic practice which she experienced as hollow, and with life choices and behaviors she felt were damaging. She wanted them to share the newfound joy of her faith, and she tried to convince them to form a relationship with Christ in the way she now enjoyed. Her efforts were received by her family as judgment and caused conflict. During this period she was skeptical of all of the Catholic practices that had marked her childhood, including Vėlinės. But as she grew
older and had children of her own, her stance shifted. Though her family home is quite a distance from Vilnius and she is not able to visit each year during Vėlinės, it is important to her to bring her children to local cemeteries when not with her family. It is a tradition she wishes to continue with them.

A substantial number of young Lithuanians have rejected faith altogether, or are interested skeptics who are not sure if they would be accepted into the Catholic fold even if they wanted to be. Others in this generation consider themselves Catholic, though they are not certain of what they believe. And some are among the devout Roman Catholic faithful for whom the pilgrimage to cemeteries is tied deeply to their desire to follow Christ, their concerns about ultimate matters of judgment, and their participation in the communion of the faithful. The significance of Vėlinės for each of these individuals varies, but with all of them it is clear that this time of year belongs to these practices. Their bodies are oriented toward the cemeteries as October comes to a close and November begins, whether or not they follow that tug.

**Taste and Class Distinctions**

Matters of taste inflect both Vėlinės practices and their interpretation in the community. Discussion is lively over whether dried or plastic flowers are preferable to fresh flowers, as live plants soon wither in the autumn cold but plastic flowers are frowned upon by many. Perceptions of taste and the relationship of taste with notions of class and wealth are evident in these
distinctions. Western norms and stereotypes are increasingly a driving force in these judgments.\textsuperscript{45}

I don’t know what aberrations there are. The variation is only in how people put together things that can’t be put together. Or, I don’t know, the bad variations in flowers when they mix—especially people from villages—they mix things...they put these cheapest artificial flowers in big variations of colors and then different candles and so it looks just sometimes like Mexicans. I don’t know—just watching those graves you could see, you could say, what social level is the relative of the dead ones...knowing the prices...different prices of flowers, different prices of candles...you could say even how much money the relative earned, the economic situation...if these are poor people from the village, or if these are persons with more money and learning.\textsuperscript{46}

Class distinctions are not new to Vėlinės. Benita, age 58, and Harolda, in her eighties, grew up in a beautiful rural area west and a bit south of Vilnius. Their communities are good examples of the fluidity and complexity of class distinction in Lithuania during the past century. Benita’s mother worked as a caretaker and her father as a facilities manager for a local Soviet children’s home. The locals in the area spoke the dialect called prosty (“local”—a mix of Polish and Lithuanian). Though ordinary Soviet workers themselves, Benita’s parents used to caution her against adopting this local dialect. The children’s home was established in 1949 to provide care for the many children who were orphaned and displaced by the war. Not all the children were Lithuanian; some were German, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian. The home was located in a huge manor house that had once belonged to Polonized Lithuanian nobility. The manor house was set in a particularly beautiful estate and after nationalization


\textsuperscript{46} Jurgita, female, age 26.
the Soviets first designated it as a writer’s retreat, then later converted it to a children’s home. This area was also a crossroads for travel, and Benita describes interesting people who would come through town and the opportunities she had to see traveling puppet theaters and to meet “cultured” people.

Benita’s mother was born in 1930. She told Benita about Vėlinės practices during her own childhood when her father would slaughter a lamb and the family would bring some of the meat and a specially baked bread with them to mass. On the way to mass they would distribute the food to poor individuals from the village who would gather near the church to receive the offerings. The family would present the food and then ask the recipients to pray for their dead.

Harolda is from an area just north of where Benita lived. She was born during the period of the first Republic and her parents were peasant farmers. Their offering to the poor did not include meat, but she remembers baking the special white bread and the faces lined up near the cemetery ready to receive it: “If you did not do this they would come and haunt your dreams. My parents and grandparents would dream about specific people and then come and say, ‘why did you not give them bread—why did you forget them?’”

Ritual of the Church

According to Lithuanian tradition, headstones on graves are to be placed and blessed within a year of burial. Vėlinės is a popular time to dedicate new headstones, as priests are frequently available in the cemeteries to offer a
blessing. This is just one of many ways church ritual provides the structural scaffolding upon which Vėlinės practices are built. But it is a dynamic relationship. From the perspective of Roman Catholic theology and tradition in Lithuania, these practices of remembrance enact relationship between the living and the dead in powerful form; the performance of petition and reunion points toward and culminates in a horizon of eschatological hope. Lithuanians move in and out of this porous liturgical structure.

In many towns the Vėlinės liturgy ends in the cemetery. After the mass and the reading of the names of the dead, the priest processes to the cemetery to offer prayers and blessings among the graves. The church marks the season of Vėlinės for eight days, not just one; it is an octave. In some parishes the services on all eight days are in the church. In others, some of the eight days of Vėlinės are celebrated in cemeteries. This variation gives priests who cover a large area the opportunity to visit more distant rural cemeteries, as it would be impossible to cover all of the parishes and cemeteries in one day. In city churches that do not have cemeteries, the liturgy occasionally includes movement around the sanctuary rather than within the cemetery, pausing to light candles and to pray.

When asked to describe worship on Vėlinės people highlight the reading of names during the mass, a practice where congregants write the names of their beloved dead in a book in the church and offer a donation. Many also describe the music. Almost in passing, a few mention the eucharist. It is unclear whether they mention the eucharist as an afterthought because the eucharist is so central
worship that it is simply assumed, or because the specific significance of the
eucharist on Vėlinės is not particularly striking to them.

When asked about the priest’s homily, most people pause and then
stammer. Their comments vary: “He talks about praying for those who have
died”; “About the importance of remembering love—the way they loved us and
the way we loved them, about caring for them now”; “He speaks about
remembering that we will all die, and thinking about our life from that place”; “He
talks about the promise that we will one day be together again—about the
promise of heaven”; “He talks about the day when we will all be judged.” Tarvilė
remembers the priest focusing on prayer: “It depends on the pastor. I
remember, ‘please pray for Antanas, Petras, la...la...la...many names of dead
people’, talking about those dead people, prayers. What I remember is only ‘pray
for this and this and this...”™48 Harolda, age 83, responds with a sly smile: "Oh
priests...they say a lot of things. But they are very respected men in the
community of course. Very respected.”

Taurė pauses to think when I ask her what happens in mass and what the
priest says: “Oh no, I do not remember exactly what they say. I try to stand up,
sit down, and pray at the proper time. But I also try to bring something with me to
do—knitting or reading—as I do not easily pay attention to what is said.” As a
Protestant pastor ordained in a tradition that highlights preaching, the most
jarring thing for me about Taurė’s dismissal of preaching is her sense and
knowledge of the significance of Christian practice. Just ten minutes earlier in
the discussion she had fully and eloquently explained why Christian funeral and

48 Tarvilė, female, age 33.
memory rituals are so important. Tauré’s description was far closer to the early Christian understanding of the theology of the Christian community at death than any description I have heard from faithful, devout people in theologically and biblically literate churches I have served in the United States. Tauré elaborated on the call to care for the body of the dead, to materialize the presence of the larger church through our participation, and to walk with that person on the final stage of his or her journey toward God: To walk with him; to send him on his journey…I don’t know how you say it…with the touch of the church.”

I was genuinely startled by this combination of casual attitude toward preaching and worship and theological profundity. But then I realized that Tauré was not formed into this theology by words received in seated and passive isolation. Rather, she follows coffins in processions from church to cemetery and utters this theology with her feet: a “pedestrian speech act,” as de Certeau might say: In some spaces a strategy of the church hierarchy; in others a tactic of the people. In this *habitus* of words, body, space, and movement, it is the bodily movement that signifies most powerfully for Tadë.

Clergy themselves have a hard time recalling the specifics of their homilies, and say that that they generally talk about the love we share with one another in life, the hope that this love continues in death, the gift that we offer in praying for the dead and in asking them to pray for us, and the need to carry the love we have been given beyond the church and out into the world. The act of

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the clergy that impacts people the most during Vėlinės seems to be the movement of and blessing by the priest among the graves.

There are two decidedly different ritual practices at the graves themselves, but the boundaries between the two different rituals are fluid. Practices vary even within the same family. Those whose Vėlinės pilgrimage is interwoven with their identification with the Catholic Church usually describe their arrangement of objects at the grave as leading to a time of prayer and reflection. The prayers are formal prayers taught by the church and are offered in silence, though some people do speak of adding prayers of their own creation at the end. Most often, these Vėlinės pilgrims understand themselves to be taking care of and bringing warmth to those who have cared for them. They also believe that their prayers may speed their loved ones along their journey toward God. Doubts emerge, and questions. But this is an encounter with the dead in the presence of God. Some experience the dead as present with them, having returned to join the living on that day. Others describe an experience of the dead and living together with God.

For those for whom the religious aspects of Vėlinės are distant and for those who reject religion altogether, the time at the graves is described in relation to tradition. It is a time of silence and respect. Klebonas Zigmantas believes this is the most significant Soviet alteration of Vėlinės—a shift that has been

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51 The three private prayers mentioned most frequently are Angelo pasveikinimas Marijai, Viešpatis angelis, and Maldelė už mirusius. Most everyone who mentions prayers they say mentions the Maldelė už mirusius—the prayer for the dead. This is said at home too and is often referenced in conversation as “the amžinatis”. There is also a set Velinės liturgy for church and cemetery that is led by the clergy, Vėlinių procesija. See, Lietuvos Vyksupų Konferencija, Liturginis Maldyna: Penktas pataisytas ir atnaujintas leidimas (Vilnius, LT: Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai, 2007).
sustained in the post-Soviet period and has significantly changed Vėlinės practice from pre-Soviet times:

Tradition. Yes. The Soviet period was very harmful in that way, that people do it because it is tradition. But when you ask them why they are doing it they say just “tradition.” There isn’t anything deeper inside. They wouldn’t know why. The tradition from the Soviet Union was that you wouldn’t pray at the grave. You light a candle at the grave and you honor the dead in silence. But the dead don’t need that silence. They are in silence all the time there. The older people would still hold the essence of the celebration. The first thing they do is they go to the mass, they listen to the sermon, they pray, they receive the eucharist, then they go to the cemetery. They know exactly what the candle means. It signifies the light of Christ. Christ is the light of the world. It is the symbol of eternal life.

Most clergy describe their work on Vėlinės in deeply pastoral language. Traditionally, Vėlinės mass is celebrated on November 2. But because the public holiday is November 1 and family travel to cemeteries is more about the remembrance of those near and dear than about the remembrances of All Saints, many priests now offer Vėlinės mass in the evening of November 1, after Visų šventųjų diena celebrations have ended. Some priests also move out into the cemetery at the end of the mass, or even hold mass in the cemetery.

The theology of the church is shifting as well, with less emphasis on judgment and the requirement to pray for souls to secure their salvation, and more focus on the efficacy of prayer for one another, warmth, love, connection, and the hope of eternal life. The theological structure of Vėlinės was articulated through similar themes by most of the clergy I spoke with, but the specific teaching and emphasis varied within that uniformity.

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52 Zigmantas, male, 53.
Kunigas Haroldas is fifty and is a priest in Vilnius. He tried to enter seminary during the Soviet period but refused to sign an agreement to become an informant and was not accepted until after independence. He emphasizes the communion of saints when he describes his teaching and preaching on Vėlinės. He understands the communion of saints as drawing together all people of faith:

I talk about the communion of saints. I tell people, ‘you do not need to worry about those who are buried. They are fine. We need to pray with them and for them so that we may learn to receive and appreciate love: God’s love for us, and the ways we are called to share that love with one another.’”

Klebonas Zigmantas is in his mid-fifties and serves several churches in villages in the northwest region of the country. He did not grow up planning to be a priest and considers his call to be something of a miraculous experience. He is not sure what led him to the priesthood—likely spending time during childhood with his uncle who was also a Klebonas in this part of the country. He decided to apply to the priesthood on something of a whim and was to take entrance exams on the same day and time as his presence was requested to be evaluated for a return to the Soviet military after initial required service. He describes it as a fearful time. He asked the postal worker not to deliver the papers notifying him of the military appointment and he slept away from his home the night before the seminary exams to avoid being found. He took the exams and was admitted to seminary. Klebonas Zigmantas teaches that the communion of saints includes only those who have died and are recognized by the church: “Nobody can be declared saint when he is still living. Do you know why? Because we are sinful
in our lives. What if you commit a sin after you have been declared a saint?

How will you take the saint label off then?"

*Kunigas Žadvilas* is thirty-six and serves a parish in one of the five largest cities in Lithuania as well as parishes in the neighboring countryside. He emphasizes the practices of *Vėlinės* as undertaken for the benefit of the dead, but he casts his explanation in pastoral terms, with an emphasis on baptism:

> We don't get answers from the dead people. They don't talk. We talk to them. We help them. It is things we can do for them. We can go to them. We can pray. We can take communion. We can get the mass for them. To remember them. To pray for them. Of course we do grow closer to them, but it is we the living who talk to the dead people. It is we who communicate. It is we who help them. We the living are the ones who communicate. Baptism joins us in that community so we all are part of the same community.

Almost every priest I spoke with expressed concern about the commercialization of *Vėlinės*, but Father Žadvilas was most passionate on that theme:

> The church teaches that you shouldn't bring flowers and make it a big deal. That is not what it is about. It is the business people encouraging many flowers and many candles, making it so commercial. The church teaches we should not bring flowers...or not bring so many. It's to be subtle. ...The church has a whole week to remember the dead people. It is like we celebrate things with other people we know—with living people. We meet on Christmas, birthdays, other times. We buy a new car and decide to celebrate things like that. We rush, we run, and we don't remember the dead people. But we owe them a lot. So that week is a time to *stop*, and to remember them, and feel grateful. Because we all have relatives who died — not necessarily relatives even, just people who died and gave us so much. It could be our grandparents, our great-great grandparents. They made us who we are. We should be really grateful for what they did. So they did everything. They gave us everything they could. They made us who we are. It is almost our turn to give it back. To care for them, maybe pray for them.

In the midst of discussions of *Vėlinės* as a religious practice and *Vėlinės*
as tradition, the people who were most adamant that they were not believers were also among those most familiar with the history of the church and the church’s practices of Visų Šventųjų Diena and Vėlinų Diena. The most devout Catholics I spoke with—those who regularly attend mass and participate in their church communities—were also familiar with this history. For most others, Vėlinės was a season without clear distinction between the days. I suspect this is an indication that neither deep piety nor adamant denial of faith is the norm in Lithuania. Each requires a degree of intentionality that is not typical. For those who dwell in-between, which is to say the majority of people I spoke with, knowledge of the particular significance of each day and the church’s teaching on the matter is vague and piecemeal. What they know is that this is what you do. The embodied, sensory practices of Vėlinės imprint themselves most deeply on people’s memory and understanding. In the next section I will explore the significance of the sensory regimes established through Vėlinės.

Part Two: Sensory Regimes

Lithuanian cemeteries during Vėlinės are awash in contrast, a genuine feast for the senses: light and darkness; decaying leaves and fresh flowers; gathering and bidding farewell; silence, conversation, touch, isolation, cold, and warmth. The sensory evocations are overwhelming. A significant number of people born during the Soviet era or later describe their visits to the cemetery in primarily aesthetic terms: as a haunting and lovely experience. They choose to visit cemeteries even when they are far from family and have no specific grave to tend because Vėlinės cemeteries are, quite simply, a compelling place to be. But
the sensory reality is important even for the large group of Lithuanians who describe pilgrimage to specific cemeteries as a responsibility to visit "our" graves. Sight, sound, and smell dominate descriptions of Vėlinės: the scent of pine and burning wax; the ocean of lights; chrysanthemums; fresh dirt; rustling leaves; the murmur of voices; bells; car engines; smoke; burning wax; the empty sound of nothing. Touch and even taste mark the experience as well: wet rain; the bitterness of coffee; warm tea; salty tears; crumbling soil; snowflakes; hot flames; cold granite headstones; the touch of a mother's hand.

Sight and sound are generally at the top of the sensory hierarchy in western societies, while the senses of smell, taste and touch are associated with the lower classes. In descriptions of Vėlinės, however, sight, smell, and touch seem to evoke the strongest response. Recollections are immediate when those senses are named. Responses to questions about hearing come a bit slower. Many people have a hard time naming any taste at all, responding instead with "Nera apie ką kalbėti"—"There is nothing to say." I will therefore explore the senses of sight, smell, and touch as a sensory regime. I will then consider their implication for affect or feeling, which can be thought of as a bundling of all sense into forms of emotion that effect response.

Sight

There is much talk of seeing and being seen in discussions of Vėlinės. In current days there is concern about excess, drama, and flamboyance. Lurking within these comments is the suggestion that the wish to "be seen" is inauthentic: "there are some people who do this honestly—who do it consciously. There are

\[53 \text{ Ibid.}\]
The desire to "be seen" that is labeled as inauthentic takes two forms. It is portrayed as either masking a lack of substance and a sense of emptiness, or as affirmatively putting forth a false self as a decoy or form of deceit, thus covering over who one truly really is. Lingering within these ruminations is a continued engagement with a Soviet-era construct that suggests that a person does what he or she needs to do in public in order to get by, but this public performance is not the real person. Rather, the real person is defined by the intention and loyalty that lies within. These constructs developed within the intensely scopic Soviet regime, where it was generally assumed that someone, somewhere was watching, and that an ill-advised action could lead to disruption and danger. As an example, for some people the church and cemetery were not dangerous at all, for others there was too great a risk they they might be “seen.”

This is life described by Mirzoeff as disciplined and constructed by the “imperial look”. But the power of the imperial look is not entirely straightforward;

54 Mykolas, male 63
56 On the scopic regime see Martin Jay, With Downcast Eye: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). See also, Nicholas Mirzoeff, The Right to Look. For a critique of consideration of "the gaze" as exclusively connected with shame and unilateral control, see David Morgan, The Embodied Eye. These works focus on western philosophy and practice. Therefore, while they are helpful in thinking about the dynamics of state power in general their usefulness is tempered by the fact that dynamics within the USSR differed in significant ways from patterns within western nation states.
it is instead entangled in a complex web of relationship, experience, opportunity, and fear. The Soviet system of accusatory practices that first drove the terror of the Stalinist purges and later morphed into the more subtle constant of Soviet surveillance rendered most everyone unsure of their security or their role in the overall system. Families might contain both accusers and accused, victims and victimizers. Within this complexity of relationship individuals found themselves crossing and blurring those lines within themselves. At the same time, there were forms of countervisuality at work: images, movements, and practices that appeared to follow and reinstantiate the political and social order while simultaneously signifying and enacting a resistant imagination and vision. In this sense, Vėlinės cemeteries offer wonderful examples of both the power of and resistance against regnant sensory regimes. Political forces are not the only shaping and ordering element in sensory regimes. Family and church are embedded in forms of seeing, and in all other senses as well.

For nearly everyone, Vėlinės memories are rooted in the enchantment of childhood and the wonder and beauty of the candles flickering in the night:

I remember when I was four or five and my grandmother was alive. She lived in [a small village] by the cemetery. We would go to the meal at her house and when we were returning I remember it was late—it was very dark with little candles. We would drive with my parents by so many cemeteries and see those many candles and lights. For kids it was really fun. There was something magical to it. Three days not working. My parents were getting along better then...we would go to visit and there we were kids in a very small village. We would get to the cemetery first and visit all the graves with the beautiful candles.

57 For an exploration of the political dynamics behind this process and the social effects see, *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin’s Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Though the book explores life in factories in Moscow, it outlines Soviet process and policy that was prevalent throughout the USSR.

58 Paulina, female, age 31.
The reality of human mortality is also a huge focus of reflection during Vėlinės. This reflection on mortality is connected with light: shortened daylight and the light of the candles. At the midsummer festival in June (Joninės), Lithuanian daylight lasts for over 17 hours. By November 1, the day has shortened to a bit over nine hours. At the winter solstice six weeks later, daytime is a fleeting seven hours. Many people name Vėlinės as the beginning of this season of short, cold days. They light candles and smell flowers in the face of this turn to darkness.

It is about saying hello and saying good bye. At Vėlinės we go to say ‘hello’ to our relatives and friends; to tuck them in for the winter. Soon the snow will fall and we can not get to some of the cemeteries and graves so we say good bye too, for the winter. Then on mother’s day it is spring. We come back and say, ‘hello’!

Interwoven into these discussion of the magic of candles there is a reflection on mortality and eternity, and on the power, sustenance, and protection of light. Evelina’s father died when she was very young. Her mother was devastated, pulling the family into a closed little circle and limiting social contact with the larger world. It is clear that forty years later this loss remains a raw and open family wound. As Evelina and I discuss Vėlinės she shares mystical stories about sweet strawberries that grow on her father's grave, and candles that maintain their light against all odds. She then sends me to her brother to see video of a candle that they left in a jar at their father’s grave on a windy winter afternoon. The video testifies to the fact that when they returned from a walk in the forest, the candle was still burning. Flickering in the wind but never

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59 Taurė, age 48, female.
extinguished; a sign of hope. For Evelina it is a testament to her father’s presence, protection, and care. When I see her on my next trip the first question she asks me is this: “Did you see the video? Did you see how the candle continued to burn?”

The candle is also central to the Christian articulation of Vėlinės. The candle at the grave is a reminder of the baptismal candle—the light of Christ:

On the big Saturday—Holy Saturday, the day before Easter—we always christen a big Easter candle. A priest brings it to church saying, “the Risen Christ shines on us”. It symbolizes the light of eternity which leads us through life (from our baptism toward our death). After baptism the priest gives a candle to a baby saying, “Let it shine for you and bring you toward eternity”. By lighting it on the graves we witness this truth. We are going toward another life and we need to light up our way. We do not go toward the unknown but still there are many questions and answers we want to find out. This is the light for the long journey awaiting. The Apostle Paul tells us Christ’s word for the Jews: “You have to be prepared for the long journey,” and Jews used to take lanterns. And we take light with us too if we don’t know where to go. By lighting the candles we light up the way for the dead. We give a lantern to them—of course, in the spiritual meaning. And we support it with our prayers. People need material symbols which inspire certain associations and feelings. And people’s piety arises. I am joking now...God did one thing wrong. How can he ask us to believe if we cannot see Him. If he showed himself to us, we would believe in Him.

Candles are blessed each year on February 2, the feast day of Grabnyčios. The blessed candles are kept in a particular spot so that anyone in the family can locate them quickly. As a person is dying, loved ones rush to find their candles, as everyone wishes for a dying person to die with a candle in

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60 Evelina, female, age 48
61 While I strive to use inclusive language in my own writing, throughout the dissertation I am choosing not to change the language of anyone I quote and also not to include the [sic.].
62 Klebonas Zigmantas.
63 The derivation of this word is a form of reference to a coffin.
his or her hand as the light to show the way. Some people retain their baptismal candle, and that candle is lit during a marriage ceremony and at the time of death. Yet even if there is no baptismal candle, candles are kept on hand and there is an effort to put the candle in the hands of the dying person as close to the time of death as possible.64

Light is significant not only for the devout faithful, but for most everyone who describes the importance of Vėlinės. The senses intermingle in these descriptions, combining the light of the candle to provide a path and the warmth of the candle to warm those whose love once warmed your life. Aurelija, a physician, reports that candles are kept on hand in hospitals as well. When talking about Vėlinės, she connects the Vėlinės candle with these candles in the hospital:

The candle is a symbol of memory and also it is kind of a good wish for the soul, for the ones who died. Because when the person dies in Lithuania it is the belief that you have to light up the candle immediately. Even in the hospital now, if the person dies you light the candle immediately, and it has to stay because it says that the flame of the candle helps the soul to find the way. You always have candles, and if someone is weak you have the candle nearby. No one asks if you are religious. You just have the candle.65

“Seeing is the act of embodiment,” writes David Morgan, “taking a position in a body—one’s own or the shared boundaries of a social corpus.”66 Vėlinės candles position Lithuanians within overlapping and even conflicting social bodies. For the Lithuanian Catholic formed in the practices of the church, the candle on the grave marks a journey from baptism to death, and through that

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64 Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin, “We are All in Exile Here: Perceptions of Death, the Soul, and the Afterlife in Rural Lithuania”.
65 Aurelija, age 37, female.
66 David Morgan, The Embodied Eye, 5.
threshold toward an eschatological horizon that holds the promise of resurrection and reunion. At the same time, this candle joins Lithuanians in living social bodies: the body of the family for most; the body of the nation for many; the body of the church for some.

As Klebonas Žadvilas and many others recall, church and state functioned in parallel during Soviet times, with the formal Soviet celebration in the cemetery performed at the same time that the mass was underway within in the church. In this situation, the open door and steps of the church functioned as a dihliz-ian space between church and state for those who felt they could be near enough to the church for the sounds, smells, and even sights to penetrate their body’s space, but not so close that they would be censured by the imperial look of the state:

“I remember people who were part of the communist party, they would come by church…or at least stand by the door. They might not be in the church but they would be nearby…in the cemetery, but near the church door.”

Kunigas Žadvilas and others also contrast the bright light of cemeteries during Soviet times with the darkness of Vėlinės cemeteries today. Nearly everyone mentions the large torches that children carried in procession during Soviet celebrations. But that was not the only light in the cemetery. There were also large area lights hung from poles and trees, so that the cemetery was under a spotlight with every movement visible. Žadvilas describes these Soviet performances as “fake celebrations...there were lots of lights. I am not sure how they did it, but they made the cemetery very bright. At that time they were all lit. Children read poems. It was organized by the cultural center. Now it is different.

David Morgan describes this gaze as “the unilateral gaze”. Ibid., 70-71.
The cemeteries are dark.” For Kunigas Žadvilas the bright lights, torches, and speeches were a Soviet version of the “more, more, more” that worries him. In both cases, he describes the “more lights” or “more candles and flowers” as occluding the true focus and meaning of Vėlinės—the light of Christ shining in and through those who light candles to remember and pray for their beloved dead.

Yet within the bright light of Soviet cemeteries, there is also witness to countervisuality.68 This form of countervisuality is a communal gaze—a way of “seeing the social body of belief in the community.”69 Directly in front of and within the unilateral, imperial gaze of the state and under the scrutiny of bright lights, individuals enacted resistant remembrance. Many people describe lighting a candle at the family grave to remember the brother, uncle, or aunt who was shipped off to Siberia and whose fate was unknown. Others remember standing in what appeared to be silence, but was actually prayer. Here is a form of the devotional gaze—engagement with the divine in “rapt absorption”.70 Yet in this case it is a remembering of and longing for the beloved within the gaze of God.

**Touch**

Cold granite headstones, the softness of chrysanthemum petals, the biting cold of the wind, burning wax, small twigs and pine cones picked and pruned from the grave: all this and much more is mentioned as the touch of Vėlinės. But two particular touches stand out among the longer litany. The first is the touch of earth and soil: “The soil—the black soil and feeling it in my fingers with

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68 Mirzooff, *The Right to Look*.
69 Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 77-78.
70 Ibid. 73-74.
small pebbles. That must be coming from the tradition when people are buried. I’ve noticed that many people when they come to the cemetery, even if the ground is very even, they would caress the grave. Smooth it.”

The second is the touch of a person they love: “my mother’s arm”; “my wife’s hand”; “my child”; “my husband”; “my father.” There are obvious connections and parallels between the stroking of the ground, the hand across the coffin before it is lowered, the caress of the living body you hold dear. These actions are rooted in mortality, connection, limitation, and longing. They are a tactile remembering of and connection with the person now entrusted to the earth, and at the same time a relishing of the reassurance of loved and living bodies still near at hand. Formative memories and experiences are embedded within this act of touching, and the related connection between sight and touch.

This tactile engagement with soil and flesh is yet one more indication of the significance of the emplaced dihliz-ian experience of Vėlinės cemeteries: a liminal space that affords the opportunity to negotiate complex realities of relationship, experience, life, and death. Perhaps here within the realm of touch—more than in other aspects of Vėlinės—the significance of pilgrimage from home to cemetery is most evident. The movement itself—toward, within,

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71 Salvija, female, age 48.
72 Constance Classen, ed., The Book of Touch (New York: Berg, 2005), 1. “Touch is not just a private act,” writes Constance Classen. “It is a fundamental medium for the expression, experience, and contestation of social values and hierarchies. The culture of touch involves all of culture.”
73 I am defining pilgrimage as ritual movement that takes one away from one’s ordinary frame of reference and thus invites or even enables change and transformation. For discussions of pilgrimage see, Victor Turner and Edith Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Simon Coleman and John Eade, eds., Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion (New York: Routledge, 2004); Simon Coleman and John Elsner,
and away from the cemetery—is itself dihliz-ian, liminal space, offering and affording reinstatiation as well as transformation of relationship and of dynamics of power. A pilgrimage is a journey out of time. Or perhaps better, a journey that refuses the definition and confinement of time. Whether wandering down the block or driving across the country, Vėlinės pilgrims leave their ordinary routine and venture to cemeteries for encounter with their beloved dead.

Some understand this to be an encounter with the palpable presence of the one who has died. For others it is an encounter with memory. Yet for most everyone, the lighting of a candle and the arrangement of flowers is an exchange that ruptures the time-space continuum of normal routine. It is the giving and receiving of a gift within a relationship. It is an act of care. This relationship is emplaced by sight and by touch. Emplaced in earth and soil, and emplaced within the living community that forms and enriches life.

**Smell**

 Burning wax and pine leaves is the smell of Vėlinės for many, “it is a very specific smell.” Chrysanthemums, decaying leaves, and loamy earth also linger. But not all the smells Vėlinės evokes are positive. Car exhaust is

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74 Through a form of “tactile visuality, The senses of sight and touch converged for pilgrims in late ancient antiquity when they ventured to the Holy Land and sought, “an encounter with the sacred past as a present event.”Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 132, 104.

75 In the early Christian Holy Land pilgrimages, encounter with the place and relics of biblical stories became involvement in the story itself. Pilgrims not only encountered and experienced saints and places, they also established a means to recall and remember the encounter when they returned home to the ordinariness of their daily places and spaces. Georgia Frank, “The Pilgrim’s Gaze in the Age Before Icons,” in Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98-115.

76 Salvija, female, age 48.
prominent, a reminder of the increase in cars and crowds since independence.

Though in western societies the sense of smell is acknowledged and discussed much less frequently than sight or sound, it is in many ways the most powerful of the senses. It is elusive, invasive, and demanding; hard to escape or to limit. Smell can entice, yet it can also overwhelm and sicken. Smells arouse emotion and motivation, whereas sight correlates more closely with thought and cognition. Sight often distances and “frames” an object. Smell moves toward us to engulf and even invade.

Perhaps the strong responses to Vélinès smell are related to the intimate connection between smell and memory. Memories of smells seem to linger longer, and therefore smell and memory are tightly bound. When asked about their five senses and Vélinès, nearly everyone averts their eyes in order to recall each sense as it is mentioned. It is as if they reach for or travel to another place. A look of quiet peace and a slight smile often appears on their faces. Peace is the affect they most frequently claim to carry home with them from the cemeteries. I will turn to that sense of peace and strength now.

Affect

80 “Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitation.” Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., The Affect Theory Reader (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.
Two words dominate every discussion of Vėlinės: *pagarba* (respect) and *ramybė* (tranquility or peace). The two are related. To embody and enact the one is to make possible the other. Somehow Vėlinės practices help to hold chaos at bay in Lithuania. They guard dignity and ensure continuity. They enact reality in immediate time, yet also partake in some larger ordering of life and hope. Among the older generation, to perform the practices of Vėlinės is to respect the dead. To fail to do this is to fail in duties of respect. This respect is not a simple, private, begrudging responsibility. It has a larger social tenor: “It’s a custom. Somebody has said, ‘If you want to know what kind of people live in this area you have to go to the cemetery.’ The way I respect my dead is the way I respect the living.”

Though Lithuanians feel certain that this *pagarba* is critical—even essential—they struggle to articulate why. When I ask Mykolas to explain the importance of *pagarba* to me he tells me he needs more beer. But then he speaks: “It is a moral value. Moral respect. There is no other way to express your respect. Without it, it would be the world of artificial people—of people who are machines. It is very important to have this kind of soul relationship and communication…soul to soul.” For Mykolos, the relationship with the living is primary during Vėlinės, and going to the cemetery with his entire family is very important. But its importance lies in this structuring of a life of morality and depth that involves respect for the dead.

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81 Klebonas Zigmantas, male,
82 Mykolas, male, age 58.
Mykolas’s oldest daughter explains *pagarba* in very similar terms. To remember and honor the dead is to structure life with continuity, depth, and meaning:

These are essential things in your life, so if I do not remember my grandparents...those who were raising me, who put all their love in me, then who would I be? So I remember all my child and teenage years when I was together with them. In some parts of my life they meant to me more than my parents. They grew me in love.83

One of his Mykolas’s younger daughters paints a more complex picture.84 In her initial description *pagarba* is exclusively about the living—the family she loves. She is philosophical in talking about Vėlinės: “No…I would say it is not important for me. It is important for my parents, first of all. I know this is important for my mom. And my father. And I’m doing it…I think I would do it even if my parents wouldn’t go”. Then she reflects further on the importance of Vėlinės to her parents.

I always watch my mother praying, I don’t do that. I watch, and light that candle…and that’s it. Nothing else. I would say she is the most…pretends to be the most…religious in the family. And she really is the very emotional one. And she really cares what people say. And she loves her parents—she loves both of them. And that is really important for her.

I ask Karina to explain more to be about this *pagarba*:

I mean, it’s the same thing as without love. If you don’t respect your parents and don’t love your parents, you know…it’s the same. You cut the history and you live from your own life alone. You have parents, you have grands. I mean I really don’t know most of the people…I don’t know my grandfather who I’m visiting in the cemetery for 25 years. I don’t resemble the picture of him. I always stand and see the same date. And really, I can’t even remember the date. I think, “he is the father of my father.” And I think about what he—my father—is feeling more than me.

83 Jurgita, female, age 32.
84 Karina, female, age 30.
At the end of the conversation I ask Karina whether there is anything else she thinks I should know about Vėlinės. She pauses, and then she wants to talk to me about death: her own feelings about death, and the death of the grandmother she loved:

I wanted to tell you something...my grandma...when I was 15 years old she died. And she died in front of my eyes. And I think the whole of my life changed. I think it really changed when I was 15 years old. I see death differently. Before that I was afraid of death. But then, she died in front of my eyes. And I really cried out at the same moment. And then I forgot about it. And now I realize I don't feel anything when I stand in front of the grave. I loved her very much. And I was really saying the prayer in the hospital. And then I went to school...I went to call my sisters...and I wasn't crying. I went to put flowers all around. And I think I understood that is what death is. ...this is not my grandma. It is the not the same person. When I go to the cemetery I do not think this is people who are buried there. They are gone...Respect is connected to the love of my family."

For the older generation particularly, this care for and remembrance of the dead is deeply woven into a sense of human dignity and value, and to practices of resistance that pulsed through the years of occupation in Lithuania. Ruta, age seventy-four, talks about the importance of Vėlinės both for her life of faith and for her identity. She then starts telling stories about her childhood in a small village near the eastern border of Lithuania. She first describes the efforts of women to stay hidden, trying to avoid being raped or mistreated when Soviet troops were in town. "My grandmother was a very beautiful woman. Even she would hide. She taught us to rub coal on our faces to make us look dirty and less attractive. We were all scared."

Ruta then reminisces about the trains bound for Siberia that would stop in their village just before crossing the border. People from the village brought food
and passed it into the train cars. The Soviet soldiers would then remove the bodies of those who had already perished on that early stage of the journey.

It is terrible the things we saw. The way soldiers would treat the bodies of the dead. They would simply break the legs to make them fit in a cart. The way a person treats their dead reflects what they believe about the value of life. They were trying to scare us. What they didn’t understand is that they made us determined to resist them. We resisted them by taking care of our dead.

This enactment of pagarba invites and structures the other primary affect of Vėlinės: ramybė—tranquility, peace. Mantė has worked with children all her life, gently welcoming them into a firm but wide embrace. But life has been hard for her in the past ten years. Her daughter moved to London and her husband left and married another woman. Money is tight. Mantė was an only child, adored by parents who raised her near a forest. Though she remembers some of the fear of Soviet times, more than anything she remembers the love of that childhood family. And she misses them. When she talks about going to the cemeteries she fills with tears:

It is true. I feel sad when I go home. I go in the afternoon and I stay there as long as I can, just soaking in the tranquility (ramybė). It is peaceful and it is beautiful with the light and the gentle behavior. I remember who I am and who I love. I remember who loves me. I feel stronger. Life feels better.\(^{85}\)

In the midst of a world of immense change and upheaval, the Vėlinės cemetery is an oasis of peace.

This ramybė is certainly not the experience for everyone. As I will explore in the chapter on Trauma, one aspect of the powerful liminality of Vėlinės spaces is that they acknowledge and welcome death among the living. The form of that

\(^{85}\) Miglé, age 62.
acknowledgement varies according to family and personality. These spaces where death seeps into life and life seeps into death are profound places of tranquility and peace for some. For others they are spaces that restrain movement toward vision and hope.

Part Three: Vélinés as a Practice of Incorporation

Memory occurs within sensing, feeling, thinking bodies. Paul Connerton suggests that we think about social memory in terms of practices of inscription and practices of incorporation. He identifies both temporal and material elements to these two categories of practice, defining practices of inscription as practices that are generally intentional and that, “require that we do something that traps and holds information, long after the human organism has stopped informing.”

Practices of incorporation are bodily practices, “messages that a sender or senders impart by means of their own current bodily activity, the transmission occurring only during the time that their bodies are present to sustain that particular activity.”

Vélinés is an incorporative practice. Though resplendent with the rich visuality of light in darkness, the embrace of family and friends, the smell of chrysanthemums, wax, and fresh earth, the hush of quiet chatter and prayer, and

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86 Print and text are the most common example of practices of inscription, but inscription can be visual and auditory as well.
87 Paul J. Connerton, How Societies Remember (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72-73. Connerton believes that undue deference and attention has been given to inscriptive practices, while incorporative practices have been under-explored. At the same time, he claims that inscriptive practices usually depend upon and assume particular incorporative practices in their effort to order meaning, construct history, and wield power. As he points out, even inscriptive practices are impossible without a body that speaks, writes, and remembers. At the heart of his argument is a contestation of history (or text) as settled and given. He suggests instead a dynamic set of practices—both incorporative and inscriptive—at work in the process of social memory.
the power of unspoken ritual, Vėlinės is less symbol than it is habit. It does not signify; it performs. In a cadence resonant with Bourdieu's habitus, Paul Connerton describes habit this way: “Here a meaningful practice does not coincide with a sign; meaning cannot be reduced to a sign which exists on a separate 'level' outside the immediate sphere of the body’s acts. Habit is a knowledge and a remembering in the hands and in the body; and in the cultivation of habit it is our body which ‘understands’.”

This knowing and understanding is sensual, structured through “sensory orders” that form us to notice and value things in particular ways. The sensual ordering of this knowing becomes obvious when people talk about how they learned what to do on Vėlinės. To a person, the answer is the same: “I learned by doing it:”:

Just tradition. I was doing this from the age I remember myself. Every year. It is just tradition. And another thing: that tradition became part of me. I remember if there was some 1st of November when I was not in Lithuania, I with my mind and my thoughts was together with the people who were buried there. I with my mind am in that cemetery in Lithuania with my family...Again, we can’t imagine the things differently.

The obvious question, then, is what Lithuanians understand and remember through and within these Vėlinės practices. What is the form and formation of memory inherent in these practices?

In utilizing the term “incorporative,” Connerton leans heavily into the corporeal. He wishes to establish that memory is shaped by the body as much

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89 Ibid., 95. As we will explore in Chapter 7, this embodiment in critically important in relation to trauma in Lithuania.
90 At the same time, the data for that ordering is also embodied and sensory before it is cognitive.
91 Jurgita, female, age 32.
or more than by the sign. In the next section of the dissertation we will push Connerton’s focus on the corporeal and his use of the term “incorporate” a bit further to ask what is incorporated through these Vêlinês habits of memory?

More specifically: into what larger social bodies are individuals’ bodies incorporated through these incorporative practices? And how does that matter?

I will explore that question by focusing on the structures of social order that intertwine with and affect these practices: family, church, and state.
Chapter 4: Family
Chapter 4: Family

I was introduced to Lithuania by a gifted young woman who grew up in Lithuania’s capital city, Vilnius, in the late 80’s. Extremely bright, a star student, and intensely independent, Šarūnė was raised with a distinct sense of herself as Lithuanian. She avoided joining the Communist youth organization (the Young Pioneers) by skipping school on select days when initiation rites were planned. She took great delight in giving “Russian” [Soviet] soldiers incorrect directions when they stopped her on the street, always sending them to the worst part of town in the hope they might be robbed or beaten.

Šarūnė’s mom worked at a stable job in the Soviet bureaucracy and rolled along with the system. Behind closed doors she admonished her daughter, “don’t believe that stuff they are teaching you about history in school; it’s not true”. From an early age her dad was out of the picture. At Christmas, Šarūnė’s family pulled down the window shades and covertly celebrated the forbidden holiday. On New Year’s Eve they joined in the public revelry. Because Christmas was forbidden, New Year’s Eve was the grand Soviet winter celebration.

In summer, Šarūnė ventured to the countryside to stay with her beloved močiutė, eat berries, work in the garden, play, and relish the wonder of močiutė’s delicious homemade food. Šarūnė was baptized, confirmed, and received first communion in močiutė’s village church, a place where it was unlikely anyone would notice the priest meeting with children for Christian formation—a practice that was forbidden. Back in Vilnius during the school year, she enjoyed skipping
around town with friends. She now marvels at her freedom of movement at such a young age.

By clever happenstance, both Šarūnė and her mother gained permission to visit the United States, but at different times. As things worked out, Šarūnė was in the U.S. when the Soviet tanks rolled through Vilnius toward the television tower on January 13, 1991, culminating in a violent and deadly clash with protestors gathered to protect the tower. Her mother had returned from the U.S. and was back in Vilnius among those scattered across the hill near the parliament with candles in hand during the cold winter evenings of that heady time. Years later, as we drove around Šarūnė’s old neighborhood, she and her mother pointed to the bullet marks in the press building and spoke of the fear and excitement of those days. While in the United States Ruta was gripped by the life changing events in her home country, but she was locked out, informed that she needed to stay in the U.S. for her safety.

And stay she did, attaining amazing success in high finance, marrying, giving birth, and after painful struggles with U.S. immigration, eventually becoming a U.S. citizen. She seeks out Lithuanian friends among her cadre of international colleagues and acquaintances in the U.S. and returns to Lithuania as frequently as she is able. She also delights in visits from her mother and stepfather who are tote fresh preserves from the garden along with homemade koldūnai, cepelinai, šaltibarščiai and sundry other tastes of home. Over the years, the ties with home have been financial as well. Even as a graduate student, Šarūnė sent money to Lithuania to help her mother and brother make
ends meet in the volatile new market economy that developed after independence. Šarūnė’s story is typical of many of her generation in Lithuania: formed in late Soviet life and education, yet nurtured into an alternate narrative at home; afforded opportunities for mobility beyond anything parents or grandparents could have imagined; witnesses to profound political change; beneficiaries of a new economic system that is increasingly difficult and perilous; torn between opportunities in the larger EU and abroad, and a lingering longing for home.

Šarūnė’s family story is typical of Lithuanian families in other ways as well; deeply painful and shrouded ways. Her maternal grandparents grew up in tiny villages in north central Lithuania. In their early lives, both grandparents worked on the estates of Polish nobles who were the controlling power in the area. By the time Šarūnė’s mother was born it was the early days of Stalin and the small, poor, family of four scraped by on basic agricultural work. They lived in one half of a small house, with another family on the other side. Late one night they awoke to the dreaded knock on the door. The woman on the far side of the house answered the door and two men demanded to see Šarūnė’s grandfather. Her grandmother remembered his hands shaking as he stood to put on his pants. When Šarūnė’s grandfather appeared before the intruders he asked, “Why do you want to kill me?” Their response: “do not act like you do not know.” And then they shot him.

That night, Šarūnė’s grandmother periodically passed out as she cleaned the floor and prepared the body for burial by herself while seeking to comfort her
two small children. People in the community were afraid to help her lest they come under suspicion as well. The local priest refused to perform a mass without payment, so Šarūnė’s grandmother sold the most valuable of her few possessions, a table and chairs, to scrape together the money.

Šarūnė’s mother does not remember the night her father was shot, but tears roll down her face when she speaks of the years that followed. Her widowed mother barely able to feed her two children, even with the help of local family; locked in the house alone and terrified at age two or three when her mother was forced to go out to find food and work. The man who shot Šarūnė’s grandfather was himself killed a few years later. Šarūnė’s mother now lives in the same town as the children of the man who murdered her father: “I know them and they know me. I know that their father did this, but I do not know if they know this.”

Eventually Šarūnė’s grandmother found steady work on a collective farm and the family’s life stabilized a bit. Šarūnė’s grandmother remained a faithful Catholic all her years. Šarūnė’s mother and uncle were confirmed by and received first communion from the same priest who buried their father. They went to school and joined in local activities. The grip of fear in Lithuania lessened after Stalin’s death and each of them made their way to university and then found jobs: Šarūnė’s mother in a state agency; her uncle in the local communist party.

Šarūnė grew up with the belief that the men who killed her grandfather were Russians. Only at the age of thirty did Šarūnė learn that the men who shot her grandfather were not Russians. They were local partisans living in the forest.
The family still does not know why these men killed her grandfather. The grandfather had just slaughtered a cow that was no longer producing milk, and he walked to town the day before he was shot in order to sell the meat. Their best guess is that the partisans thought he was helping the Russians. But they simply don’t know.

The phrase “geras jeik, geresnis išeik” (“enter good; go out better”) is engraved above the door in the village church where every member of the family was baptized, received first communion, and was confirmed. As a child, Šarūnė’s uncle scrawled the same phrase above the door in their home. Šarūnė’s mother muses that her brother’s decision to join the communist party was in part a protest against the murder of their father. The uncle says that he thinks that independence is probably the best thing for Lithuania, and that there were certainly problems with access to cars and other goods in the Soviet system. But from his perspective, the Soviet years addressed glaring inequalities that needed to change, and in that sense it was a very stable time. He believes those economic realities are not adequately acknowledged or discussed in the present day. He also hopes the present political system will be better for his children and grandchildren.

This beloved uncle is the joker of the family, a man who married late and reveled in spoiling his young niece and nephew when he was single. At the time of independence there were fierce arguments in the family. Šarūnė’s mother and uncle did not speak to one another for an entire year. They’ve now worked through all that. Everyone is friendly and close. Both of them are now retired.
Šarūnė’s mother and uncle live within a forty minute drive of one another and share time in the countryside in summer, and spend birthdays and holidays in one another’s homes.

Recently I accompanied Šarūnė’s family on their Vėlinės pilgrimage to cemeteries. The first stop was the local city cemetery where friends and cousins are buried. Then on to the countryside where we met up with Šarūnė’s uncle, cleaned and decorated the graves of Šarūnė’s grandparents, left flowers and candles at the graves of aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends, and spent time greeting childhood neighbors and acquaintances who were also tending their family graves. During this visit Šarūnė’s stepfather Kajus went out of his way to direct me toward a striking grave marker—an interesting mix of the ubiquitous Lithuanian Rūpintojėlis (the “One Who Worries”) and the face of Munch’s The Scream. A sea of small, flickering candles surrounded the stone sculpture, and many people paused for a moment of silence or prayer as they passed that particular grave. “This is where the priest who was here for many years is buried. He was a very complex man,” was Kajus’s only explanation.

As we continued to wander the cemetery I started to wonder just how long that particular priest had been in the village, and whether he was the same priest who had demanded payment to bury Šarūnė’s father. At my request, my Lithuanian friend found a quiet moment to step aside with Kajus to ask him about the priest. Suddenly his speech became animated. “Yes! That is the same priest. He baptized the children and confirmed them as well. He was a strange, strange man.”
“He would not have liked you,” Kajus told my friend, “as you have brown eyes and he did not like women with brown eyes. He said that a woman with brown eyes tried to seduce him. He was not right in his head.” Kajus then told the story of the Christmas Eve after the birth of Šarūnas’s mother Eglė. It is tradition for the priest to ask if any new children have been born in the parish that year and to bless the children. Baby Eglė was brought to church for the blessing. The priest inquired about newborn children and Eglė’s mother brought forward her infant daughter. The priest responded: “Oh. A girl. Better to throw the child up against the wall.” “He was a very strange man,” Kajus pronounces again. “A very strange man.”

Both Šarūnas’s mother Eglė and her uncle had little contact with the church during most of their adult lives. It was Šarūnas’s grandmother who made sure Šarūnas was baptized and confirmed. But both mother and uncle have now returned to the Catholic Church and its practices, describing themselves as Catholics, though with some doubts as well. They are proud to give me tours of the area’s beautiful sanctuaries, recently restored following independence. They are respectful and speak well of the priests now resident in their towns.

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Introduction

In one sense the contours of this story are not unique to Lithuania. The formative elements of power, personality, confusion, chance, violence, and opportunity play into human dynamics the world over. Histories of deep loyalty and utter confusion, of religious practice, political reality, and family history ebb
and flow. Individual stories are overcome, twisted, and shaped by larger narratives of political conquest, and also inflected with discrete aspects of personality. Such complexity plays out in most any space on the globe.

But the details of Šarūnė’s story reveal specific realities that loom large in Lithuanian families, particularly in the present day as the people of Lithuania live, work, dream, regret, and remember in the first part of the twenty-first century. Memories of scarcity and fear among the oldest generations; differing relationships with the state system during the Soviet era; varying levels of religious participation and devotion; ambivalence about the church; family secrets and scattered stories told to some but not all; emigration of the young. These threads and tensions from Šarūnė’s history are laced throughout the complicated social fabric in Lithuania.

An intriguing question is how Vėlinės practices participate in weaving this fabric. In this chapter I will explore these incorporative Vėlinės practices in relation to family. I will focus on five aspects of this enormous topic: Stability and Change; Gender and Family; Boundaries and Contestation; Untold Stories; The Dead and the Power of Incorporation. In the two chapters that follow I will consider how Vėlinės practices weave these dynamics of family together with church and state in complex and sometimes conflicting forms.

Religious practice and visual piety might be imagined in terms of world-making: “This prosaic sense of world-making consists in the transmission of a world from one generation to the next, a tradition or handing down that both maintains the world of the elders and makes the world of the children. Thus,
making and maintaining are either side of a single enterprise.”¹ “Two essential features of any world,” argues David Morgan, “are the ordinary things people do again and again, and the extraordinary things people do in order to assert control over their worlds.”² In important ways, Vėlinės practices are both ordinary and extraordinary. They are ordinary in that they are constituted by ordinary objects, ordinary interactions, ordinary bodily movements, and ordinary people participating in ordinary, predictable yearly cycles. But they are extraordinary in that they pierce time and space; simultaneously orienting toward past and future, seeking in their own way to assert—or at the least call upon—alternate control over the realities of suffering, death, and separation.

Morgan suggests Erving Goffman’s notion of performance as helpful in understanding this world-making:

Goffman argued that humans fulfill a variety of roles in their interactions with one another, constructing a self in each performance that is identical with the role. We are each concerned with managing the impressions that we project to others. …Roles, in other words, whether scripted or improvised, are defined by a setting and belong to shared social routines. They structure our interrelations by providing the guidelines of daily interaction. In so doing, roles promote the sense that reality is an objective other and that the self is fully preset in the performance.³

Vėlinės practices perform family over shifting time; ordinary, treacherous, and extraordinary days alike. Until recently, space shifted far less than time in Lithuania, though the current wave of emigration will challenge that reality in

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² Morgan, Visual Piety, 12.
years to come. The complexity of this time-space terrain of family warrants examination, as do individual roles within the family Vėlinės performance.

**Stability and Change in Families**

In the midst of the chaos of the years before, during, and after the war, life in Lithuania was a shifting field of change. You might wake up one morning and discover that a neighbor was taken in the middle of the night, placed on a crowded train car, and sent to a work camp or prison in Siberia. Or perhaps your family is being moved to collective housing, with the land you have been farming seized by the government. If you are Jewish or Roma, you may be gathered and herded into a ghetto, worked until you are ragged, or shot. Working on the collective farm you may feel you have attained a level of stability as a supervisor and then discover that someone has accused you of consorting with improper people and you are being demoted and your job given to someone else.

Authority and control changed hands in Lithuania not only at the national level but at local levels as well, with different groups organizing police forces or resistance fighters, vying for leadership, and then disappearing.

Some found themselves alone, without family support of any kind. But for most people, if they had a web of stability, it was their family. One thing that is almost impossible to understand is the enormity of the Soviet power and effectiveness in decimating trust in the society. The Soviet system functioned by pressing people to inform on their neighbors, friends, co-workers, and even family. What this meant was that people drew their circles of trust very tightly, and did not speak loosely around children who might carry stories to teachers.
and friends. Even within the family, the Soviet state worked to break down primary family bonds, and to foster dependence on the state. This dynamic often isolated family members from one another and over time left many individuals feeling alone in the face of state power.4

As Aurelija noted in talking about her baptism, deportees lived with the lingering scars of trauma and terror, but many of them also felt a freedom that those who remained in Lithuania did not. In an important sense the boundaries of possibility were clearer for deportees. Some work and educational opportunities simply were not available to them, though through luck or skill their children might find their way to wider options. A portion of those who returned from Siberia lived in terror of being sent back. Others settled back into life in Lithuania with less emotional disruption.5 Some like Aurelija’s family lived with the attitude, “I survived Siberia. What can they do to me now??”

There were also Lithuanians who clung passionately to their religious convictions without apology. Those people were largely, though not exclusively, within the older generation. Some paid dearly for that conviction. Others were unabashed, but if they were not in leadership or teaching positions it was not a particular concern to the authorities. But here again, the vast majority occupied the messy middle. They simply went along to get along, finding their way through the complexities of Soviet life while maintaining some form of alternate Lithuanian or religious identity within family. If they had questions or doubts

about their way of life, they shared those questions with very few people—or no one.

Another important reality is that the fear, loss, and terror did not strike every family equally. Most every Lithuanian was affected by the trauma during the years proceeding, during, and after the war, but not all to the same degree. For many who were once tenant farmers or day laborers, it was a struggle to survive in the years before the war, during the war, and after the war. If they or their family were not involved in the partisan movement and not identified as a danger by the Soviets, then not much changed once things settled into more of a routine after the Stalin years, except that some the Soviet programs did provide them a more stable and secure life than they had previously known, with guaranteed work and housing. Because the Soviets sought to forcefully impose a new order, the families who were the focus of deportation and death were generally leaders in the society, those who controlled wealth, and those deemed a political threat. Many of the first deportees were well educated. Most fell into one of several categories: large landowners, public servants, teachers, university professors, high school and university students, clergy, leaders of public organizations or political parties.6 Though class was not the only determinant of likely deportation, it was the dominant criteria. The deportation net grew larger as time went along, partisan resistance expanded. Deportation then affected a wider and wider range of people.

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As in Šarūnė’s family, perspectives on the Soviet system might vary within the same family group, particularly as the fiercest terror and fear subsided after the death of Stalin and children were formed in the practices of Soviet education. Russian became the dominant public language and was a required course in school, though Lithuanian was the language of instruction and was still maintained in most homes. Participation in the Soviet youth clubs was expected for anyone who wanted to have the opportunity to go to university or gain access to good jobs. The clubs started at a young age with three different levels: Young Octoberists, Pioneer Youth, and Komomsol. Some youth participated in these clubs simply because it was the accepted thing to do and a great place to hang out with friends. But this was also the vehicle for identifying and grooming future leaders for public positions.

This Soviet formation sometimes caused conflict between generations, but more often things were simply left unsaid. Ignas, mentioned earlier, is 57. His parents grew up in the southeastern part of Lithuania in an area that has at different times been influenced and controlled by antecedents of current Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania. The mixture of people and practices and the Tutejsky ("Local" or direct translation "from here") dialect in that region still testify to that

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varied history. Ignas explains that in the area where his parents grew up there were two kinds of peasants: “enlightened peasants” who lived closer to the manor house and were a bit more secure, sometimes working for the Polish nobleman (Ponas); and “unenlightened peasants” who were the poorest of the poor. "My father was the "unenlightened--from away from this place", Ignas says with a chuckle. "My mother was closer--enlightened. My father was very far."

So they were very much local. Local people, they were simply surviving. They would run for their lives. They didn't take any sides. They don't have a clear ethnic identity. The United States of Europe already. They were, let's say, depending on who is in power—leaning more toward Russian culture, Polish culture, Lithuanian. Among my relatives I have people who identify as Russian, Pole, Lithuanian, Belarussian. Their lives were spent working very hard and trying to get by. These changes in political control did not matter a lot to them. They did not pay close attention except when they had to. Only later in my life did I learn that some truly horrible things happened to members of my family during that time. But mostly, my parents spoke of those times as people who were trying to stay safe and survive. Their entire life has been made up of very, very hard work with little material reward. Sometimes when I think about how hard their life was it makes me want to cry.

Ignas himself grew up in Vilnius, the most heavily contested portion of that region. He thinks of himself as local:

I find myself not so much from Lithuania. I am a Lithuanian patriot. It is my homeland and I will do my best for my homeland. But I identify myself with Vilnius. Basically, I would say Vilnius because Vilnius is a little bit different than other parts of the country. When I was a child there was a saying that when someone left Vilnius to go somewhere they would say, "I'll be back. I'm going to Lithuania." Vilnius became very Lithuanian in the last twenty years since independence. What happened here in the last twenty years, it is an absolutely different place than where I grew up.

Ignas's parents met in Vilnius after they both moved there to find work. His father became a truck driver: “a very good position; very well respected.” His mother worked in a factory. The family had a small flat in the old town of
Vilnius—now a very fashionable area, but then full of lower working-class families. His mother remained a devout Catholic and as a child he was in church “all the time…we literally lived right next door to the church. They were attached. In the basement of our building there was a wall where you could remove a few stones and step into the basement of the church. My mother is still very religious. She would love to pray and go to mass every day.” Within their household they did not talk politics and generally did not speak critically of the Soviet system—at least not directly. "I received very mixed signals about Russians. They were very liked and very disliked. I would hear jokes about them. But then sometimes we were together with Russians. Russians were very interesting."

Ignas’s mother was a bit more shrewd and practical than his father. In the de Certeau-ian fashion that is a well-known hallmark of Soviet life, she believed that in relating to the work bureaucracy, one should get what one could in every situations in an effort to support family. This included bringing home office supplies, food, or other goods from work whenever possible and capitalizing on connections to gain access to prized consumer opportunities. His father, on the other hand, had an unusual and scrupulous honesty about him,

He would not even bring home a piece of paper from work. My mother used to criticize him for that, “What are you doing? Don’t you care about your family?” Almost like he was a weak man for doing that. It was a bit puzzling to me. As I grow older and see the work I have come to do myself, I see that much of that comes from him. I am more like him.

Ignas also remembers his own disagreements with his parents at different points in his life. "I did very well in school. I advanced and was given many
opportunities—unusual opportunities. I was a leader in komsomol [the communist youth league]. To be honest, I was a true believer. I really believed in the Soviet system when I was young." When he was a child his parents were never critical of the Soviet system and never told him stories about their early life. But when he was in his early thirties and in a government position, his mother commented on the German and Soviet soldiers:

They started telling some of their childhood memories. But I didn't quite understand just how difficult it was. Their own memories. For example, in their memories they like Germans more than Russians. For me—trained in school that Germans were bad—I argued with my parents: "What are you, Fascists?" They were well dressed, clean, well-cultured, respectful. When Russians came they were dirty, rough, taking whatever they wanted to take. Not just Russians...Lithuanians and Poles too.

Only many years later, after Independence and when his parents were much older, did Ignas begin to realize how difficult and frightening his parents' early years had been:

I started to hear stories about people coming in the middle of the night. One person would come, take a person out...then another group would come. My father was tied up in the night. He would have starved if someone had not found him. He doesn't know who it was: A Lithuanian partisan? A Polish partisan? I wish I had asked them more questions because now it is too late to learn all of their stories. ...Sometimes now I think of things I said when I was younger and did not know these stories. I wonder if I caused them more trauma, having to listen to my indoctrination...to listen to me talk that way and just swallow it and not say anything.

Ignas, like his parents, was a hard worker and always had jobs to help provide extra money for the family. He is very bright and did extraordinarily well in school—partly, he says, because he was a student leader for the party, and partly because he followed accepted practices of shared learning and shrewd
connections. “I cheated. Yes I did. I would have to admit that.”

When he graduated he did his time of military service and was required to “sign papers that I would never talk about the things I was allowed to see—big, large missiles planted in the ground. Those papers are funny to me now, when I think of them.”

After military service he was given exactly the job he requested in the upper echelons of his profession, the youngest person in Lithuania to be placed in that position. He functioned well there for many years and was considered a Soviet success story. "I simply believed in the system...the system is so good...it gave me education, a position in society. So this dichotomy was very clear to me in my twenties: there is this official life and there is this other life. There is this real life and there is this life that is a lie."

But then he started to feel troubled by the absurdity of what he was doing: the formalities in which he would participate and the things he would say or do that were not true and were simply for show; the way he and his colleagues would do their work and then go out to drink beer and make fun of the leaders of the Communist party and the Soviet rhetoric and ideals upon which they drew in their work. It started gnawing at him: "But we were openly joking. Brezhnev was

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6 Ignas explains the process this way, “Ethical standards were very different. In a certain system we were all morally corrupt...to cheat was okay...I have to admit that I would also cheat. Later in my life I could not accept. Cheating everywhere in life was normal. ...Cheating literally in student life was what everyone did...write on hand, or over here, you take exam not in honest way but you cheat...you write from something...different techniques...some very skillful. Comes with little note...you open it and it is huge. It was normal. This double morality it was always there. Take advantage of every situation, cheat, lie...it is okay. Kind of it was respected if you deal with life in such a way, and if you don’t do it you are stupid.” In relation to this social expectation Ignas’s mother felt his father fell short.
the most popular subject of our jokes. We would open a meeting with 'as Mr. Brezhnev said', and then go out for dinner and make jokes about him.”

At night Ignas would listen to snippets of Voice of America that he was able to hear on the radio in spite of Soviet efforts to block the signal. "With my age, increasingly I was critical." The new ideas he heard on the radio percolated in his mind and triggered further questions for him. This piece of himself that he attributes to his father started to take command. He refused to lie on one of the many reports he was required to submit. He was called in by supervisors and encouraged to change his mind, as he was well liked and they did not want to lose him. People who had supported him and enabled his unusual and quick rise to prestige in his profession became very angry at his refusal. The conflict came to a critical point and he quit.

My parents were worried. They said I was stupid. Such a big career…and I was giving it up. They said I was stupid. A very painful thing. They were very practical people. They came from a very poor background. Their son became educated and [had this high position]. They could not believe I was doing this. I did not discuss with them that basically, I was a different person now.

Ignas thought he might end up sweeping streets, but through his connections he found alternate work in his field and was even moving back

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9 Ignas’s description of his conversation and relationship with colleagues and friends is in many ways consistent with the account offered by Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Generally, however, I feel significant caution in mapping Yurchak’s conclusions too tightly onto the Soviet experience in the Baltics because Yurchak is clearly writing from the Russian experience within the USSR. As Dalia Leinarte explains in differentiating her work from accounts of the experience of Russian women by other authors, she found that in her interviews with Lithuanian women “Their narratives contain no heroic pathos or pride; Lithuanian women identified themselves as citizens of an occupied country and adopted the Soviet reality as inevitable.” Yurchak is not arguing for “heroic pathos or pride” in his book, in fact in some senses he is doing the opposite, but the fact that his focus is exclusively on Russian Soviets means that he does not address the important differential between the Russian Soviet experience and the experience in the Baltics and elsewhere. See, Dalia Leinarte, ed., *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: The Stories of Lithuanian women, 1945-1970* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 3.
toward the kind of job he had left. But then as Glasnost took hold in the USSR he somehow managed to obtain permission to travel to Berlin and to gain brief exposure to life and ideas outside the USSR. “It was for me an absolute shock. At that point it was all over. I can not even describe the effect on me. Everything that I had believed…the way I was raised by Soviet education to see the world…it crumbled. I saw that it was possible for so many things in society to be completely different.”

Even though it was upsetting to people who had been helpful to him, it is a point of pride for him that he returned from that trip and immediately resigned from the Communist party:

I resigned from the communist party. I am very proud of this. It is now very clear from hindsight. But in the 1980's to 1990's it was not clear where it would come out. I wrote a letter and it was a big scandal. So many people told me, "no, don't do this...nobody does this...this system many not be good but it is like cement."

In fact, not much happened. He did not lose his job and Lithuania soon moved toward independence. With a smile he says, "I worked in a small unit. The person in charge now claims he was a dissident, but he told me not to do this."

When Lithuania then moved toward independence, Ignas's own life moved in entirely new directions, taking him out of Lithuania for western educational opportunities and then returning him again. In the midst of all this, Ignas still finds his grounding and orientation in cemeteries.

Partly it is the beauty. Cemeteries in Lithuania tend to be very lovely, with trees and quiet places. But it is more than that. When I visit other countries I always want to visit the cemeteries. It is often the first place I go. You learn a lot about a place from the cemeteries. And I feel comfortable there. I find it interesting and peaceful. Sometimes people say we Lithuanians have personalities like the weather. We like the grey.
I think there may be a bit of that—a to sadness. But I also think it is the truth that we are a small land between big powers. And the cemeteries speak some truth about this. Some truth about our lives.

Though some in the generation who came of age under Soviet rule did have exposure to religious formation during their childhood through parents and grandparents, many of them sputter a bit as we start talking about Vėlinės. They recount vague memories of childhood visits to the cemetery with parents and grandparents, but much spottier observance as they grew up, moved away from the cities, villages, and towns where they were born, and started working and raising a family. It is often clear that they wish to think of themselves as having been more devoted to traditional practices during the Soviet period than they actually were, and surer of their identity as Lithuanians as well. When they find themselves responding to questions and realize that one statement has conflicted with another they will touch their hearts or their heads and say, “I was always Lithuanian here,” or “I was always Catholic in my heart, but I could not participate as I wanted.”

Among this group I also hear fascinating gaps in stories: things that just don’t add up. Most often these gaps are connected with narratives about their parents. Some, like Ignas, are very straightforward in describing the ways their families did what they needed to do in order to find work and stability in the society: joining the communist party; avoiding being seen going to church; never speaking openly about doubts, questions, and cynicism while privately ridiculing the absurdity of the Soviet rhetoric among close and trusted friends or family. For others this understanding of self and family is too painful; it does not cohere
with the identity they wish to perform now. So they tell scattered stories full of ragged holes: the act of indignation about a father’s treatment at his workplace after many years of loyal service, and a sense of shock when he was not honored properly when he died; descriptions of how well respected their beloved parents were, and what high levels of responsibility they were given…with quick assurances that the parents would never have been involved with the Communist party.¹⁰

Yet for Ignas and for many others of this generation, Vėlinės practices were a still point in a shifting world. Multiple generations in a family, each with varying experiences and political alliances, found shared space in Vėlinės cemeteries. In that dihliz-ian space each could perform his or her role: pausing on family soil; touching and placing common objects of memory; tracing familiar patterns of devotion and movement. They participated in what David Seamon calls “body ballets,”¹¹ inculcated from birth. It was obvious when someone knew the proper steps in the ballet, and when they did not.

¹⁰ In her compilation of interviews with Lithuanian women Dalia Leinarte describes these holes in stories of many of the women she spoke with, as well as a wish to imagine themselves as having maintained a clear Lithuanian identity. Much of her analysis centers on the different ways lives were reshaped within Soviet society whether recognized or not. Yet the tone she describes is consistent with the tone of all except a few people I spoke with in my interviews in Lithuania—a sort of participation in but emotional distance from the Soviet construct: “Although most Lithuanian women accepted the roles imposed by the propaganda, they remained, in their hearts, mere observers rather than active participants in building socialism.” See, Dalia Leinarte, ed., *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality*. For interesting reflection on the function of these holes and gaps in stories, see especially pages 14-16.

Gender and Family\textsuperscript{12}

The role of women in these world-making body ballets invites deeper consideration. Here too we see the complexities of shifting social structure. The producers of Vėlinės family performances are often, though not always, women. As mentioned earlier, for many Lithuanians Vėlinės memories are intertwined with stories of močiūtė. In Visual Piety, David Morgan describes the significance of women in devotional practices in the United States,

For many believers, particularly women, the home is the preeminent symbol of Christian faith. It is perhaps the primary medium for conveying an individual’s or family’s religious beliefs. Moreover, the home is the site for the Christian formation of children, the building of family unity, and the daily manifestation of divine blessing. As the sign of material success, and therefore as evidence of divine favor, the home stands as the crown jewel in the ideology of bourgeois American Christianity.\textsuperscript{13}

Drawing upon interviews, Dalia Leinarte describes the construct of home for women in Lithuania during the Soviet period: “The majority of those who lived under the grip of the regime believed their private lives to be free of the grip of Soviet propaganda and rule – especially when safe within the walls of the home. Many hoped that family life would remain unaffected…”\textsuperscript{14}

Though the home space itself does sometimes play a prominent role as a place for gathering and eating during Vėlinės, the quasi-domestic, dihliz–ian Vėlinės cemetery is the central location. Keepers of that domestic space wield a


\textsuperscript{13} David Morgan, Visual Piety, 158.

\textsuperscript{14} Dalia Leinarte, Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality, 1.
distinctive power as they mark boundaries, determine who is in and who is out, maintain the family narrative, prescribe proper decorum, and perform religious devotion on behalf of the family. This home was a deep source of identity and a locus of resistance for many. But it could have its confining elements as well. And it did not always play out in the same political or social form.

During the early days of Stalin, when Vėlinės practices were discouraged and even dangerous, a močiūtė who was not employed by the state could bring her grandchildren to cemeteries with impunity. The presence of grandmothers and grandchildren at the cemeteries simply did not register the same importance with the authorities as the presence of those in their working years. Parents, particularly those holding state jobs and positions of power, faced greater risks, lest they return to work the next day to discover they have been demoted, dismissed, or worse. Haroldas, a maintenance worker in a public building, was a young child during the Stalin years. He feels the power of his childhood participation only now as he tries to talk about it. He begins to cry as he struggles to remember Vėlinės during his childhood:

My grandmother used to bring me to the cemetery because my parents were not allowed to do that. They would risk losing their jobs if they were seen there. It was a childhood joy to light the candles. But as I look back now and talk about it, I realize that it was also a political protest led by grandmothers...YES...it was a political protest!! With the innocence of grandmother and child we were crossing a boundary that we knew was forbidden. Making a claim about a different truth. It was powerful. And bold. Just talking about it makes me wish I had maintained this practice with my own family and taken my children to do this as my grandma took me. It was a privilege. It signaled something important—a sort of rebellion.

Under the Soviet system housing units, telephones, cars, child care and
most other aspects of daily life were assigned according to employment status. Employers kept lists and parceled out units as they became available, but the lists were notoriously arbitrary, with a much desired employee or a person with connections being bumped to the head of the line before others. This meant that child care was often a problem. If there was no family available children would be left on their own, wandering streets and playgrounds with keys hanging around their necks. Even in the later Soviet years when there was child care available, it was not clear that a person would become eligible for that care before the child aged out and didn’t need it.\textsuperscript{15}

Because of the scarcity of housing it was not unusual for several generations to live together in one flat.\textsuperscript{16} Both mothers and fathers were required to work, and although state child care was available in the later Soviet years, family members played a critical role in managing home and children. Therefore močiūtė was a significant presence in many children’s lives. Families who lived in the city but had roots in the countryside sent children to their home village to

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 27-35.
\textsuperscript{16} Dalia Leinarte suggests that the notion of the nuclear family home was well established as a norm in Lithuania by the 19th century and the practice of that time was to parents and adult children to live separately. When the daughter or son inherited the family farm they would provide the parents with separate house and take care of them. The Lithuanian term for this was išimtinė. Therefore there was not a settled practice of grandmothers raising grandchildren as there was in Russia. Dalia Leinarte, Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality. In my interviews it is clear that separate housing for single families was desirable but often not attainable during the Soviet period after nationalization, when housing became scarce in the cities. I heard stories of families waiting on a list for 20 or 25 years before receiving housing. One person I spoke with explained that his parents found housing because they moved to Vilnius just after the war. At that time there were many abandoned apartments because of the murder of so many of the Jewish citizens, the movement and displacement of the large Polish population, and the death and chaos of war. His parents moved from a rural area seeking work. They found a small apartment that was empty and simply moved in. Later the arrangement was formalized. He said he remembers that when they received a slightly larger apartment they constantly had relatives staying with them—sometimes individuals and sometimes whole families—as different family members left the village and sought work in the city. Even now it appears that income reduction, job loss, and parental aging may be coalescing to bring generations together in more and more homes. Clearly this is variable however, and my sampling is anecdotal.
spend summers with grandparents. As parents aged, they might move into the city to live with their children and grandchildren during the cold winter, when city flats were often warmer than drafty wooden or concrete houses in the countryside.

As noted above, the močiūtė frequently played a crucial role in the formation of faith and practice for grandchildren. As in Šarūnė’s case, it was quite common for children to be baptized, receive first communion, and be confirmed in their grandparents’ rural church. Religious involvement and belief waned in Lithuania during Soviet times, but less than one who simply watched the church doors each day might come to believe. Lithuanians who were teachers, worked for the communist party, or held other jobs with state responsibility generally avoided church services in the area where they lived. As Salvija put it, people were encouraged to stay away from church. If they did attend church, it was in a distant town or city, often at their parents’ rural churches where they were unlikely to be seen by anyone connected with their employment. They would slip away to these churches to be married or to baptize their children.

This is not to say that fathers and grandfathers were unimportant. I hear many fond and loving stories about the grandfather (senelis). Nonetheless, the dominance of the mother and grandmother in Vėlinės narratives is indicative of several realities in Soviet and post-Soviet life. First of all, the men were missing from many families. In the period of independence prior to the Soviet and Nazi occupations and the war, traditional gender roles of mothers as caretakers of
children dominated.\textsuperscript{17} Though the first republic was quite progressive in relation to women’s rights, including the right to vote and the appointment of women to government positions, traditional expectations of women as the caretaker of the home dominated. During the period of the first independence there was a huge movement from rural villages into the city as people sought better opportunities for their families. Nonetheless, the country remained predominately rural at this time. Women were actively involved in caring for farms and for small, family-based retail establishments. But regnant gender norms prescribed wife as homemaker.

Second, gender roles shifted in significant ways during the periods of Soviet and Nazi occupation, and many of those shifts were profoundly disempowering for men. Men were considered a greater danger to the state than women. Many men were either sent away or went into hiding. Petras, age 84, explains what young men faced during this time period:

For many years it was simply an impossible situation…especially for men. In earlier days the representatives of the Czarist Army would sweep through town and conscript men to a virtual lifetime of service in the Russian army; it was effectively a death sentence. Then once the Soviets took control, if a young man came from a family with any wealth or influence he had two choices: be exiled to Siberia where he was separated from his family and sent to a work camp, likely never to return; or run to the woods. Some young men joined local militia and helped the Germans when they arrived—they did some terrible, terrible things. Then after the war the men who were still living faced many of the same impossible choices: run to the woods or be sent away. Many of us believed that the United States and the west would never leave us to the hands of the Soviets after the war. There was an announcer on the radio who used to broadcast that promise: “just hold on; you will be liberated.” So many people stayed in the woods and hung on. And then they died there. They never came to liberate us.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.} 19-49.
\textsuperscript{18} Petras, male, 84.
It was not at all unusual for farms and households to function like the home in which Šarūnė’s mother was raised: run primarily by women, often with the help of mothers, sisters, and aunts. Because of massive death and deportation, there were many children who had no one to take care of them during and after the war. This led to varying familial relationships that one can trace through visits and candles during Vėlinės. With some frequency, when the children of that time visit the graves of those who nurtured, cared for and protected them, they leave their candles not only at their biological parents’ graves, but also at the graves of a grandparent, aunt, uncle, godparent, or neighbor who took them in and raised them when their own parents were killed or sent away. These more expansive lines of family are most often drawn through relationship with women.

Žilvinas’s compelling story is but one example. Born in 1949 in the western forests of Lithuania and baptized in the home of the midwife who delivered him, Žilvinas’s parents were partisans. They met and married in the forest after his father ran to the woods to avoid conscription in the Soviet army in 1944, and then his mother escaped to the woods after enduring grueling Soviet interrogations. Though a small farmer by today’s standards, Žilvinas’s maternal grandfather owned enough land to place him among those who were arrested in 1940 and then later exiled in 1945. His maternal grandmother had mental health struggles and ran away from the family. His great uncle ran to the forest and the younger sisters in the family found shelter with neighbors. This left Žilvinas’s
mother in charge of the farm at the age of 16 or 17.

In an effort to force Žilvinas’s mother to work for the KGB and to reveal the location of her brother and other partisans, the KGB periodically snatched her from the farm and beat and tortured her. After one such visit from officials, she fled life in the village and joined her brother. “It wasn’t done due to exaggerated patriotism,” explains Žilvinas, “nobody waved flags declaring they were going to die for Lithuania. It was simply because a normal life of a country man [sic] was broken. People saw that they were no longer the owners of Lithuania.”

Žilvinas has heard enough stories to know that his mother’s life in the woods was very frightening. “My mother’s sister was younger and once this sister saw my mother coming back into town with a man. She asked her, ‘Why do you need this?’ My mom answered: ‘You know how hard it is in the forest for a single girl?’ [My aunt] understood the meaning of these words only years later.”

According to the data my mother went to the woods in 1947, got married in 1948, and had me in 1949. …There were no orphanages. I was left at the place where I was given birth. My parents had separated from the squad by then and lived just by themselves in a bunker. A midwife looked after me. My mother could not take me with her as it would mean death for both of us. So I was left right after the delivery. My parents used to visit me, but one day someone denounced them. In 1950 during the Feast of Žolinės¹⁹ they were surrounded and shot dead. After the execution they were brought to [town] and laid in the square. People who were passing by stood around and watched. But they could not watch for too long or cry as the NKVD observed them. One woman who had known [my father] saw him lying on the street and a solder standing beside. So she just covered her face with the shawl and quickly ran into the church. She had grown up in the village with my father.

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¹⁹ August 15 is The Feast of the Assumption of Mary. As in Vėlinės, Catholic practices are interwoven with older agricultural practices and Lithuanians bring flowers, greenery, and the first fruits of the harvest to the church to be blessed on this day.
Until age ten, Žilvinas was raised by the midwife “in my second home.”

There he was baptized, had communion, and received confirmation. He then moved through three different children’s homes until he reached majority:

I had a certain limit of fear and I did not let anything or anybody too close to me. Do you know what a boy without family’s teenage years look like? Nobody was there to stand up for me and I always had to fight for myself. Besides, those were times when everybody lied about everything.

Žilvinas fulfilled required military service and went to university to become a teacher: “It was free education. That was very good in Soviet times. You only needed a wish to graduate from high school.” He married and eventually became Director at a gymnasium, the most prestigious designation for secondary education. His wife is a physician. During Soviet times he remembers being followed “all the time; we could not make an extra step, neither to the left nor to the right.”

Only after his wedding did Žilvinas learn his own family story:

It was my mother’s sisters who came to me and told me the story. Before that I had heard a lot of rumors about my family but I had never known even my mother’s surname. I still have my orphan identification badge. Do you have an image of Lithuania some 20 years after the war? In 1968 they were still judging and exiling people. Fear was all around. Some people were coming back, but others were being exiled instead. So when my mother’s sisters came to tell me my story it shook everything for me a little. At first I did not believe that it was my aunts and that they were telling the truth, I did not jump over to hug them either. They felt some kind of freeze from me and they realized that I would need time to take everything in. …Moreover, my father’s family never recognized me, they rejected me. They had been exiled and scattered all over, and they were full of fear. My wife’s uncle was a priest who had just returned from Siberia. He married us [in a small town] that was not somewhere close by. And again, we had the same feeling of fear and a need to hide. And amongst all this, two of my mother’s sisters come over and fearlessly say who they are. Since then a normal life and a normal communication has started between us.
When Žilvinas did master’s degree work in a nearby city he lived with his
godmother, but he did not learn anything more. “She would not say a word about
what happened. The ones who survived Siberia and the NKVD had had
enough...they didn’t want to talk about it anymore.”

Žilvinas is deeply involved in his home parish, and he emphasizes
education in Lithuanian practices and traditions as a priority in his school. He
attributes his faith to three things. First, his mother’s faith:

My mom’s family was deeply religious. My grandfather was maršalka20 of
his village. It was exactly the same on my father’s side. His father was
also maršalka. Living in the woods and already being pregnant my mother
would start every morning with a prayer. It came to me through my
mother’s blood. How can we say it is not connected to family?”

Second, Žilvinas recounts a mystical experience when he slipped into a church
as a teenager and had a powerful sense of safety and security in the presence of
God:

I cannot tell whether faith came into my heart at a certain time of my life.
…I only remember one thing today. I was a teenager studying at a
technical school...We came back from the beach and everybody
somehow gathered at the church. And I remember that I suddenly felt so
good. I stepped down into the corner and stayed there even after all my
friends had left the church. Since then I have been going to church...

Third, the influence of Žilvinas’s wife’s uncle who was the priest returned from a
Soviet work camp and performed their marriage in the distant town:

When we took the marriage sacrament we committed to many spiritual
responsibilities. Everything appeared at a different level. But we could
not go to church openly either. Then they moved my wife’s uncle to a
town nearer to us. He would come for late dinners to visit us and that is
how I kept in touch with and learned all of this religion. Someone saw me
walking with this priest and I was called in and questioned by the KGB
asking, “Why were you with him? What were you doing?” Do you know

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20 Priest’s representative.
him?" “He is my wife’s relative”, I said, “but he is also a priest. No one can stop me from kneeling in front of eternity." They did not say anything to me then, because they were afraid of eternity too. Like every human being.

Žilvinas has worked hard to recover his family story as best he can. He knows his father’s family story as well, but he is deeply hurt that they did not reach out to him when he needed them. He claims to have made peace with that, but he does not attribute his faith to their blood. Žilvinas is one of many Lithuanians who worked to arrange the repatriation of grandparents’ bodies from Siberia in the last years before independence. He now has a complex tapestry of people to remember on Vėlinės, and to forgive: “I have a trunk full of candles in my car. It is necessary to light a candle…it doesn’t matter how long you have to travel.”

The disappearance of so many men in the early Soviet years is not the only social factor influencing the performances of gender in Lithuania. Significant as well is the fact that women were encouraged to work outside the home in the Soviet system and the Soviet ideology heralded this new state system as a liberator of women. In the later Soviet years the state provided subsidized child care as well as support for unmarried women and women with more than three children. Oral histories and scholarly debate reveal a mixed bag in this regard. On the one hand, women were clearly afforded opportunities to advance in work and education beyond what was possible prior to the Soviet occupation. Those opportunities were more diverse than the options generally available to women at that time in Western Europe or the United States. On the other hand, pay
discrepancy and networks of influence dominated by men effectively restricted advancement for women in many different areas.\textsuperscript{21}

In addition, though women were encouraged to join the public workforce, they did not generally receive relief from traditional, gendered domestic duties. One oral historian has noticed that women who remember the Soviet period most fondly are women whose husbands had prestigious, well-paid positions that did not require them to work outside the home, or the smaller number of women who attained such positions themselves. Many women with children recall exhausting demands both at work and at home.\textsuperscript{22} The presence in the home of močiūtė or teta (aunt) sometimes helped to alleviate these demands. Several people I interviewed told me that although they loved their mother, it was their grandmother or great aunt with whom they had the closest relationship as a child, because that is who raised them.

The Soviet period brought additional complexity to gender dynamics. The Soviet state attempted to rework traditional gender norms to establish and strengthen its own power. Duties to the Soviet state were defined by gender. Women were to be worker-mothers who carried the responsibility to produce future workers while working themselves and managing a household. The Soviet state pledged to protect them as mothers and to liberate them by allowing them access to paid work. The men were to build and manage the communist system while the state took over the responsibility for care and support of the family. This in effect isolated both men and women and made them beholden to the

\textsuperscript{21} See, Dalia Leinarte, Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality; Sarah Ashwin, ed., Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia.
\textsuperscript{22} Dalia Leinarte, Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality, 1-49.
state as “universal patriarch.” Public benefits were distributed through mothers, and because the ideology was the USSR as the “Fatherland” men were, in a sense, displaced within domestic life, while women gained power outside the home. Lilya Kaganovsky explores the Stalinist ideal of manhood as one that idealizes strength and virility, but in a form that supports and does not challenge the state. She traces this theme through film and literature that continuously portrays and celebrates damaged male bodies that have been wounded and maimed through self-sacrifice for the good of the state. She then highlights the impossible position this created for men, since one of Stalin’s goals was to dispose of weak and frail bodies that were of no use in building the strength of the state. Scholars argue that this place of impossibility—being both praised and discarded because of a sacrifice of power or agency—continues to reverberate in Lithuania and other post-Socialist countries today. This is particularly true for men who no longer have the job security of the Soviet system, but live with the lingering effects of the sacrifice of personal agency and power required of them during Soviet times.

These shifts in gender roles were not destructive in all households, but they did create a larger social dynamic that researcher Artūras Tereškinas describes as deeply damaging for many working-class men, particularly after the shift to independence created high unemployment and exacerbated the pain,  

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isolation, and shame men were already carrying. Since independence a form of hyper-masculinity has been in ascendancy, resulting in a sense of marginalization among men who do not achieve success as defined by the new economic models at work in Lithuania. This is particularly true for men who are already marginalized for reasons of physical condition, race, ethnicity, or sexuality. Tereškinas argues that the increase in self-destructive behaviors such as alcohol abuse, violence, and suicide among this group is a result of the shaming and marginalization of the male who does not achieve and perform according to new normative standards. This has been destructive for family relationships as well. Since independence, Lithuania has experienced one of the


26 In an unpublished paper, Elizabeth Jones Hemenway suggests that gender analysis that attends to institutionalization of difference and power might identify some commonalities between the experience of Soviet families and that of black families in the United States. She references the western tendency to equate [white] "masculine" with "human" and normative, and to view variations from that norm as "either abnormal or 'feminine,'" and thereby to "feminize' individual bodies that are biologically male." As an example she discusses the use of gender as a tool of control in the antebellum south where white slave owners claimed free sexual access to female slaves and controlled, disrupted, and even punished relationships between male and female slaves. "Black men thus had little authority within slave families, which could be broken up at any time. This practice over centuries often led to the isolation of black men from families and enhanced the relationships between black women and their children within the antebellum, and later Jim Crow, South. Elizabeth Jones Hemenway, “Gender, Faith, and Film: Viewing Late Socialist Societies through a Catholic Lens”, Unpublished paper, Democracy, Culture, and Catholicism International Research Project, Vilnius, Lithuania, May 2011. Referencing, Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present (New York: Vintage Books, 1986). Though again not amenable to direct analogy because of differing conditions, Hortense Spiller’s essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” would be interesting to put into conversation with the Soviet experience on this question of the (de) formation of gender and relationship at the hands of social structures based in extreme violence and co-er- cion, and the implications for both men and women. See, Hortense Spiller, Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 203-229. It is also important to highlight the fact that I do not address same sex relationships in my discussion of families and gender. The experience of LGBT persons is an important and difficult reality in Lithuania, and subject to much debate and conflict in public policy. In my interviews I did not hear enough first-person stories to allow me to draw any conclusions in relation to the experience of Vėlinės among this group of persons. Therefore I do not address that question.
highest divorce rates in Europe. Domestic violence is also a significant problem.  

Post-soviet life has been difficult for women as well. In spite of the shift in gender dynamics, the channels of influence in Soviet life remained largely male and a wage gap between the average pay for men and for women persisted throughout the Soviet period. As in many other countries, access to work outside the home generally meant additional work for women; it did not relieve women of the work they were already shouldering at home. In addition, many of the state supports that helped women manage households were reduced or eliminated after independence while at the same time unemployment increased.

Amidst these disruptive forces, the matriarch of the family wielded significant power in maintaining and directing the family narrative through Vėlinės practices. This power is being challenged as it is now less common for multiple generations to pool resources in one household. Children and grandchildren work to establish separate living spaces of their own. Though the economic crisis is pushing some families back toward shared living spaces, more often it is pushing those still in their working years away from Lithuania in search of jobs and opportunities in the west. Among the resulting changes are signs that

močiutė’s identity as the one who has power to gather and direct the family is waning.

As mentioned in the last chapter, younger people frequently express both respect and puzzlement over the command performance expected of them at Vėlinės and the significance of that day to their grandmothers, indicating skepticism about such practices being required on a particular day. These attitudes may be a lingering effect of formation in Lithuanian identity within a Soviet materialist framework that sets the internal and external experiences as at odds with one another and privileges the internal as authentic. It may also be the result of grandchildren questioning their grandparents’ trust in the presence of and communion with the dead. Another possibility is that this change in attitude is linked to formation in western, individualistic notions of spirituality that accord importance to internal intention rather than external action. Whatever the reason, most everyone believes it is important to show up on Vėlinės; but some suggest that the elderly are more concerned about honoring the dead than about honoring life and the living.

Young Tėvas Žadvilas shakes his head when I ask him about these sentiments:

I have heard this attitude---from the immature young people who think they know everything; they are entitled to the world; they are the center of the universe. Spiritually they are empty inside. If we do not look to the past, we are nothing. That is the tradition that keeps us in our values, helps us know who we are. It is like building a house without a foundation. The past is what we build our future upon. It is like the house is built on nothing…being spiritually empty. It is not grounded without these traditions.
From a pastoral perspective, Tėvas Žadvilas understands the intense focus of the elderly on Vėlinės in terms of relationship:

If an old woman has her children coming on that day and for the whole year she won’t see them, or they won’t let her in, then maybe that is the most important day because she sees her family. She has visitors and community; she needs them; they take her to the cemetery. Maybe she can’t make it herself. It is all those things we don’t consider and don’t know.

Global mobility, new economic possibilities, and shifting family expectations come together in a larger societal discussion about care for the elderly. When I first started spending time in Lithuania thirteen years ago, Lithuanians expressed shock and surprise that people in western Europe and the United States do not care for the elderly at home. That idea is no longer so shocking in Lithuania. Gossip about greed and selfishness abounds: children seeking to take possession of valuable property owned by parents and grandparents; grandchildren abusing parents or grandparents and leaving them in hospital emergency rooms. Fraught dynamics between generations are nothing new, of course. Nor are they unique to Lithuania. But there is clearly a perception that the matrix of values and decisions has shifted since independence.

It is hard to predict the long term effects of emigration and Lithuania’s shift to participation in western markets. But there is no doubt that change is afoot. Most of the elderly people I spoke with lived alone but felt well tended and cared for by their families. They made it clear that it was very important to them that their children and grandchildren be able to pursue opportunities that they never
had. But there is also great sadness within these statements. One woman in her late fifties talked about her daughter who now lives in Norway and just gave birth to her second child. She pulled out photos of a chubby baby dressed in a Santa outfit and described cooing at him during a telephone call the night before. Then she shook her head and said quietly, “yes, we are a generation who are grandparenting by skype.”

This is not the first wave of emigration from Lithuania during the modern period. There were earlier periods of intense emigration, particularly during the Czarist period and on the eve of the Soviet and Nazi occupation. It is clear that some emigrants attempted to maintain Vėlinės practices after these earlier emigrations. But as one young emigrant stated, “it is hard when our graves are not here.” Vėlinės is a very material practice connected with the earth and with bodies; it is hard to transport.

Untold Stories

This latest wave of emigration is not only about moving toward opportunity, it is also about getting away from the complicated, often unspoken dynamics of pain, hurt, and strife that have gone unaddressed for several generations in this society where speech was restricted and dangerous—a society where some families did share their stories, but many did not.\(^{29}\) This reality becomes particularly striking when speaking with multiple generations within the same family.

\(^{29}\) Dalia Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality*, 1.
Karina, age 30, is a lawyer. As one of what post-socialist literature describes as the “new elite”\textsuperscript{30}, she has done lucrative work for the EU as a private contractor, consulting with east European countries who are working to join the EU but have not yet gained admission. From conversations with other members of her family I know that this family, like most others, suffered traumatic grief and loss in earlier generations: sons and daughters lost to the woods as partisans; family members conscripted into horrors by occupying regimes; haunted by untold stories. She repeatedly references a grandmother who she saw only on Vėlinės, describing that grandmother’s “cold kiss”, and alluding to strained dynamics in the larger family system—dynamics that were confusing to her as a young girl. I knew stories from other family members that explained much of that complexity, which is why I am surprised by her response when I ask her about the connection between the significance of Vėlinės in Lithuania and Lithuania’s history of intense suffering:

…the one thing I would say…when I went to Sarajevo and went to the graveyard, people were killed—they were shot—in the graveyard. I mean they have felt, you know, the suffering. They felt it…the people who were covering the graves, because they were burying the person and the shells were shooting into the graveyard. …I mean, I don’t remember anything, but even in the stories I didn’t feel that…maybe we suffered, we suffered something mentally…but not really…I mean, we still had a possibility to do something.

I ask her whether she means just her generation had suffered only mentally, or older generations too. I focus on her thoughts about the Stalin era and the Nazi occupation and murder of the Jews:

In my generation...nothing. I mean, I don’t remember anything. In the Stalin era, I don’t know anything about that. But I remember what I know—that we couldn’t go to church. But I’m baptized. I was born in 1980. So really, we had an opportunity. There wasn’t war...there was like, manipulation. ...I remember my grandmother’s story...when she was in the train car...but the guy felt sorry for her and...he told her “go”!! Because her brother...he was living in those forests...a partisan. He was sent to Siberia. My grandmother—she was in the same train—but then someone let her go. In Serbia, they were murdered in cemeteries. It is more immediate. Maybe it is more fresh. Maybe that’s what I know—myself. Because it really happened. Not long ago. I read about the world war, and you don’t feel it so much.

Before this conversation I had not heard about the grandma’s experience barely avoiding deportation to Siberia, or about the great uncle who was a partisan. But I had heard other tragic stories from her family that it seemed she didn’t know. It is profoundly confusing—even weighty or crazy-making—to live in the midst of so much acute history lying unspoken and even unremembered.

Henrika is close to the same age as Karina. She knows a lot of her own family stories: painful, violent stories that lie behind patterns of abuse, mental illness, and suffering in later generations. She also knows that her family is unusual in their candor, and that most Lithuanian children of her generation do not have an unvarnished family canon of stories like she does. She thinks part of that is a matter of parents trying to protect their children. Speaking of families who do not share family stories as hers does she states, “they are trying to raise children in a safe environment...so who needs to know that your granddaddy shot Jewish people? You want to give children a sort of hagiology of the family: ‘They were good people; somehow holy people.’”

Henrika’s parents did not tell her everything. They initially told her only
partial stories. Some things she learned by sitting quietly beneath the table while adults were talking. But her parents did tell her what they felt she needed to know. Henrika’s last name is Russian because her grandmother was deported to Siberia and fell in love with a Russian man and the grandparents together moved back to Lithuania. At the time of independence it was good to have an explanation of why your name was Russian—and to be able to prove you were really “Lithuanian”.

I respect my family that it was not that way. They had to account for the messiness...for our last name...because I grew up in a time when two tectonic plates of different eras collided. I need the narrative to make sense of what was happening...what equipped you about that story flipped. [My younger sister] has different issues to deal with. She doesn’t know stories. She didn’t need to. She also has a different relationship with my mom. [My littlest sister] grows up without many of the stories. Her last name is not a problem.

Henrika links the current wave of emigration among the younger generation to this pervasive pattern of loss, violence, and unspoken pain:

If I were to guess I think that is why so many young people emigrate. Because they feel the hopelessness. They feel the grief and the loss lingering here, and it’s weighing very heavily on them but they don’t have the narrative of why. And they have no coping strategy. I mean, because you can feel the effects of it on the country. ...It has affected the society and now the young people grow up without those narratives but they feel the effects of it. They don’t want to. And maybe even subconsciously, they leave to escape it.

One of the more interesting examples of connections between ragged and unspoken history and emigration away from Lithuania emerged with one of the young women who accompanied me to some of my interviews to help with translation. Benedikta recently returned to Lithuania after five years of work and study in the UK. Her father disappeared early in her life and she was raised by a
single mother who depended heavily on Benedikta's grandparents to care for her only daughter. Though she has grown close to her mom, Benedikta's grandparents were for many years her primary source of nurture and care. Benedikta now recognizes that the complications of this family history, along with painful experiences in her own developing relationships as a young woman, were the driving force behind her decision to move to the UK.

Thinking it would be easier for Benedikta to ease into her conversational role with me if we first spoke with someone familiar to her, Benedikta arranged for us to speak with her grandparents. The reality turned out to be quite the opposite of what we expected. As I asked Benedikta's grandmother questions, a wrenching and tearful story unfolded. My Lithuanian language capacities allowed me to understand that her grandmother was the only child of a single mother, that they lived in Vilnius, and that she had been separated from her mother when her mother was sent away during the Stalinist period. I could discern that she lived with relatives on a farm during this time, and that she has very clear memories of the day her mother suddenly appeared at her relatives' home. What I couldn’t understand was the larger story about why the grandmother’s mother had been sent away, so I asked Benedikta to interrupt the conversation for a moment and to translate for me. Benedikta turned to me with wide and tear-filled eyes and said, “I can not do that right now. I will have to talk to you later. I have never heard these stories before and I am finding this very overwhelming.”

31 The story Benedikta later explained to me was that her grandmother’s mother had been buying and selling calves in an effort to generate money to support her and her daughter: “It is called business now...then it was speculation” was her grandmother’s explanation. The mother was sent to jail for seven years and was cutting trees in Siberia. She was released after three...
When I met Benedikta she had not participated in Vėlinės practices since childhood and she did not feel much personal inclination to go to the cemeteries now that she is an adult. But her conversation with her grandparents changed that, and she willingly arranged for us to accompany them on a Vėlinės visit to her grandfather’s family cemetery in a small village. The experience with Benedikta and her grandparents brought to mind another theory Henrika offered about Lithuanians of her own generation. She senses a connection between ambivalence about Vėlinės and the repression of story: “…this whole connection to locus…why the practices of Vėlinės are not perpetuated. I think that maybe subconsciously they also feel that this brings them back to the place of grief, loss, sadness, depression that they don’t understand and they try to escape.”

**Boundaries and Contestation**

Notions of difference are first inculcated within the more intimate registry of family, then later reinforced or challenged through the institutions of church and state. Vėlinės is a boundary marker for families, and conversation about Vėlinės reveals the social assumptions, both conscious and unconscious, that determine these lines of demarcation.

Ignas emphasizes that he grew up in a different Lithuania than many other people because he was born in the Vilnius region, with its shifting languages and population. He is both puzzled and concerned by some of the zealotry of years when Stalin died. Benedikta was particularly affected by her grandmother’s description of trying to see her mother in the jail yard of a prison in Vilnius after she was arrested. The young ten-year-old could not see over the fence and was in a state of desperation. A Soviet guard noticed her and brought a crate for her to stand and look over the prison fence to see and speak to her mother. Benedikta also learned from her grandmother that there are other intense family secrets about who her grandmother’s father might be and how all of this unfolded.

32 Henrika, female, early 30’s.
extreme nationalism that assumes purist notions of ethnicity rather than a construct of nation based on citizenry. “I am very loyal to my country; I love my country. But I am more a person of this region than anything else. And this region is as interesting and wonderful as it is because of all the different people who have lived here.”

Over the course of his childhood Ignas spoke the “local” dialect of his parents in addition to Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian. Kids would be shouting several different languages as they played in the courtyard of their apartment house. “In many senses there were no secrets between all of us, we interacted very openly and naturally.” With one exception:

This district was a working class district. I met neighbors—Russians, Belarussians. One other family was from Lithuania. To this day, when I meet my friends we speak Russian, though we all speak Lithuanian very well. The Jews there were Russian speaking Jews. I went to school with them, but knew very little of their culture. The common language was Russian. ...I now remember more subtle jokes. Culturally they were very different. Most of them left to Israel and the states. There was a synagogue close to us. Whether they attended that I don’t know. Despite the fact that we were kids and friends—despite that—I did not know much about their private lives They would not share with us. I still felt—there were no secrets between Russians/Belarussians. Jews were different. There was a line there. A hidden anti-Semitism…now I am realizing that. When Jews were not around there would be jokes about that. When together it was different. We were friendly as kids, but also there was a clear distinction between Jews and the rest. But now I am realizing that Jews in my generation left for the states and Israel. Actually, they were treated differently.

By the time Ignas’s parents moved to Vilnius after the war most of the large, historic Jewish population had been murdered in the Shoah. The Jewish people who lived in his apartment block were largely sent there from other parts of the Soviet Union. One of the myths that fuels antisemitism in Lithuania today
is the myth that all Jews in Lithuania were communists, and that the Jewish people en masse assisted the Soviets in their first occupation of Lithuania. It is true that some Jewish Lithuanians were prominent in labor organizing and Jewish Lithuanians made up a fairly sizeable portion of the very small Lithuanian party before the occupation. But the notion that Jewish Lithuanians were a totality in relation to political affiliation, economic status, or religious observance is an utter distortion: an “othering” to use language popular in critical theory today.33

In actuality, the provisional government set in place by the Soviets after the occupation was made up of Gentile Lithuanians, as was the group that organized the fraudulent elections that followed.34 Though the population of Jewish citizens in Lithuania today is very small, the variance within the community in terms of experience, political affiliation, and forms of religious identity present in earlier times persists in Jewish communities in Lithuania today. They are not a totality. They wrestle with significant conflict among themselves, as most communities do.

As mentioned in earlier chapters and as I will explore more deeply in the Memory chapter, there are many registers to the discussion and debate about cultural memory in Lithuania, and particularly about the relationship between the painful realities of the Nazi Shoah and the purges and aggression under

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33 Šarunas Liekis, et al., eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772, 14-56.
34 For discussions of how Jewish involvement in the communist party was interpreted, see, Alexander V. Prusin, The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992, 130-140; For statistics on Jewish involvement in the Soviet government established in Lithuania see, Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772, 33-36, 305-330; Robert van Voren, Undigested Past: The Holocaust in Lithuania, 1-31
Stalinism. At the level of individuals and families the discussion is much more thoughtful than the strident public debate. It is revealing though, who is remembered and how they are remembered.

When I speak with people about Vėlinės, I generally ask about their own experiences first: what they do and why they do those things; memories; family history and stories; whether these practices have a religious connection for them; whether there is a connection between these practices and being Lithuanian. Tarvilė tells me that her family has been Lithuanian for many generations, yet she inserts a qualification about her father: “What I do know is that I have Totorian blood from father’s side, but my mom is full Lithuanian.” When asked how long her father’s Tatar family has been in Lithuania she replies, “from Vytautus. I don’t know the exact year.” 35 Vytautus was one of the medieval leaders in the Lithuanian region during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. This means her father’s family has been in the region of Lithuania for five or six hundred years, yet in Tarvilė’s understanding this is not long enough to exempt them from qualification when the question of Lithuanian heritage is raised.

For other people the person they mention was Polish and married into the family during the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, from a Jewish family who had lived in Lithuania for centuries, or a Russian uncle who served in the Czar’s army in the nineteenth century and married a local Lithuanian girl. Being “Lithuanian” does not seem to correlate with a particular length of time living among the ever-shifting political realities in the region. Rather, “Lithuanian” signifies a form of

35 Tarvilė, female, age 33.
ethnic “purity” that is likely present in very few families in Lithuania. It is a myth; or at the least, an imagined construct.

One of my last interview questions concerns what Lithuanians who are from different religious traditions do on Vėlinės: Protestants, Orthodox, Muslim Tatars; Jews; Roma. While most people answer earlier question I ask about who goes to the cemeteries with a hearty, “Oh everyone—all Lithuanians,” when I ask about these specific groups they generally pause and either say that they do not know, or that they have seen Protestants and Orthodox (referenced as Pravoslav) at cemeteries and they think they do remember their dead on that day too, even though they also have their own days of celebration. Some describe eggs on Orthodox graves, or vodka and food. A few tell me where I can find old Jewish cemeteries. One person offers to bring me to a Muslim Tatar cemetery in a nearby town.

And then sometimes they start telling me stories. Mostly stories about Jewish people they knew, or their parents and grandparents knew. Simonas becomes reflective. He talks about how the Jewish people tended to separate themselves and gather in their own communities. “They were a mystery. People did not know much about them.” I ask about the fact that many of the Lithuanian Jews in the city where Simonas now lives were merchants, professionals, and teachers, their shuttered synagogue now a beautiful brick building by the river near the center of town:

36 The Roma people in Lithuania tend to be either Orthodox or Muslim, but the majority population does not tend to identify them by their religious tradition.
It is terrible what happened. Terrible. In the small village where I grew up everyone knew who it was who helped the Nazis…who showed them the houses, brought them to the field, shot them. Two brothers. When the Soviets arrived they were tried and sent to a work camp. But they returned. My mother tells me no one in the village would speak to them. They were shunned.

Birutė, in her mid-fifties, describes a school friend who one day announced that her family was moving. Only later did Birutė realize that the friend’s family had been under pressure from Soviet authorities, and that they finally decided it was time to get out of that part of the world and move to Israel. Janina remembers a friend of her grandparents who used to share meals with the family on Saturday nights, always bringing his own knife and quietly slipping to the side to cut the first piece of bread off the edge of the loaf—thus being respectful of the hospitality of his hosts while remaining kosher. When Janina’s grandmother became very sick, this Jewish friend provided money for the grandmother to have surgery. When Janina would walk with her father in the evenings, he would always stop with a mixture of sadness, anger, and shame, and point out the house where the Jew shooter (žydšaudis) lived.

Auksė is in her early eighties. She once worked on the local collective farm and now lives in a small village outside a larger town in northeast Lithuania. “We had a neighbor. My mother used to say, ‘she is a very good woman; a very faithful woman.’ We would turn off her oven on Friday nights. My mother told us that we should try to be like her in the way we lived.” Auksė remembers the day in her early teens when the Nazis and their Lithuanian helpers came through town and gathered all the Jewish people. “It was awful…oh, it was awful.” “Did
they take your neighbor?” I ask. “No. Oh no. She had moved away by then. But they went house to house and gathered all the Jewish people. Then they placed them into a fenced area in town—like cattle. You could hear their groans. We tried to bring them food. I was scared and so sad. I didn’t know what to do.” “Where are the people who helped them?” I ask. “Oh, some left. They escaped to the west. But some are still here. We know who they are.”

A middle aged man from Vilnius begins talking about how awful the holocaust was and the shame of Lithuanian complicity, and about his Jewish friends who moved to Israel and his visit to see them. But then he starts reciting statistics indicating that a greater percentage of living Lithuanians were murdered by Stalin than living Jews were murdered by Hitler—an oft-quoted piece of misleading misinformation in Lithuania that is revealing in that it does not assume that Jewish people were citizens of Lithuania, even though they were.

Saulė lives in the area just north of Vilnius that changed hands several times between Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Germany. She is perhaps the most enigmatic and philosophical on these matters. She talks about the wonder and joy of her childhood, and about how that suddenly changed before the war. She mentions the Jewish boy who lived next door and how they used to play, and then tells the story of when he was found underneath a pier at a nearby lake with a block of concrete chained around his neck. She also remembers the awful days when the Jewish people were gathered and taken away. She is proud of an aunt and uncle who hid Jewish neighbors in their hay wagon and then later at their farm until they finally found a way to move them along to safety. “But they
weren’t all good people you know… not all Jews are good people. Some are good and some are bad. Just like the rest of us. Who is to judge?” Except, it seems, the Polish: “God forgive me… I like Jews better than the Polish. I just don’t trust the Polish.” Saulė’s mother worked for a Polish noblewoman when she was young and liked to read Polish periodicals. It was a point of contention between mother and daughter.

A leader in the Muslim community describes the long and rich history of the Tatar Muslims in Lithuania, claiming they lived peaceably with their neighbors throughout most of the last six centuries. “The only time we have had any problem is after 9/11.”

Then people started to become more suspicious. When news stories told about criminal activity, if it was a member of our community they started identifying them as “Muslim”. I called the paper and television and said, “you do not say, ‘this Catholic robbed the store,’ so why do you say ‘this Muslim’ and identify us by religion when someone violates the law… why do you do this to us and not to others?” We went out and talked to groups to try to calm them down and to remind them that we have lived together here for hundreds of years. That Lithuania has actually been a model of tolerance for the world, with Jews, Muslims, and Christians living and working side-by-side together. It has gotten much better lately.

Then I ask him about the Shoah. He becomes very quiet, stares out the window and says, “something bad happened then. Something very bad. I don’t think any of us has figured out what happened. What went wrong.”

At the family level, conversation about the Shoah and about Lithuanian complicity is vastly different than the public debates, outrage, apologies, and even insults that are lobbed between groups. This is not to say it is always healing talk. With some the conversation is laced with fear, suspicion, and “us
and them.” The lines around family first sketch who is in and who is out; who is to be trusted and who is not. It is profoundly complicated and messy. As a practice steeped so deeply in family, Vėlinės is a piece of this formation. The messiness finds its way to the cemeteries.

**Hybridity**

Some of my most interesting conversations were with people who were born into families that transgress, or bridge, some of the more significant boundaries within Lithuanian constructs of identity. Tolvyda is twenty-six. Her father died when she was four years old. Born in 1919 to a Jewish family in one of the larger cities in Lithuania, Tolvyda’s father was much older than her mother who grew up in a Gentile family in the second largest city in Lithuania, Kaunas. Tolvyda is sketchy on her father’s family history because the only two remaining relatives live in Israel and Paris and she is not close to them. She does know that her father was raised in a very religious family. “My father attended religious school—primary school—taught by a Rabbi. A true Jew. Not disguised by Russians. I don’t know how long they had been in Lithuania.” She also knows that he managed to escape the Shoah by fleeing east. He ended up fighting with the USSR army against the Nazis and was wounded. A well respected academic, he believed deeply in the Soviet system:

My mom said that my father died quicker than he should have died in normal circumstances because of independence, because he truly believed in communism. He was a very well known ideologist and that is related with his status as a professor...he would never have become a professor if he would not have been a communist. But he was really believing in communism and he fought for communism in war and had some wounds. And so I think that my mother didn’t lie to me that he believed in communism.
Tolvyda speaks of herself as a Lithuanian, but when she speaks of her father she distinguishes him as being Jewish:

Having in mind that my father was a Jew he naturally perhaps supported the idea of some international living because Lithuania was perhaps not so important for him. Because he was not Lithuanian…but that is my speculation combined with my mother’s tellings. I can not say anything more objectively. … Well he was Lithuanian born Jew. He spoke fluent Lithuanian…well he also spoke fluent Russian, fluent Yiddish, fluent Polish. He was raised as a typical Jewish boy. He fought in the war not for Lithuania but against Nazis. It is very different. He was quite young—19 or 20—when he became a soldier. And naturally he fought for communism and then he was also an ambitious guy and he wanted to make a scientific career, and also without being a communist you can not make a career. I can just say what my other said…that the reason he fought for the Soviet army was to escape holocaust. His brother was shot. I do not know if he was shot in war or holocaust.

Tolvyda does not experience a strong strain of antisemitism in Lithuania.

She attributes much of the concern about antisemitism to poor standards of journalism and a Lithuanian penchant for “reading ugly stuff”. She thinks Lithuanians like to read “ugly stuff related to Lithuanians” too.

That Lithuanians were bad to Jews? I do not even think that they were bad because I have heard so many stories of rescuing Jews. Yes, both things—Lithuanians participated in murdering Jewish people and Lithuanians helped to save Jewish people. I somehow am quite normal about that.

Tolvyda offers very specific details of how she has wrestled with her own complex history, and her understanding of herself as part Jewish as a piece of wrestling with her own identity. Yet she also distinguishes herself from that reality when talking about public perceptions.

Perhaps I don’t feel this [antisemitism] because I present myself as Lithuanian, not as half Jew. Only the closest people know that I am half Jew, and they know me too well to think some stereotypical things apply to me. They accept me as a person, not as some background or something.
So, I don’t know. I think it is exaggerated very much because we have only 5000 in all of Lithuania. It is simply so very few people.

Clearly the most cherished value for Tolvyda is education. She highlights that she was not raised in Jewish practices and so perhaps does not understand or feel the pressure of antisemitism. She is also a high achiever. She, like other highly educated people I spoke with, attributes antisemitic prejudice not to family formation, but to lack of education.37

Maybe because I have grown up as totally Lithuanian, I didn’t have some influence of Jews who would say that, you know, “they are lying…they are somehow hiding something.” I didn’t face any stuff like that. I graduated from a good school and in this school we have good teachers with quite normal views about the holocaust, and even touching views. They are really wanting us to understand what is the harm, and what is the amount, and that we should not think that it is somehow constructed—or just made up history. Maybe because of that, it was because I was grown in a quite educated community—almost the best school in Lithuania…So I think it is the problem of maybe people don’t have what to say or what to do…just writing these ugly comments in delif38 and some internet sites. But I don’t feel any kind of intolerance to me as Jew…half Jew….perhaps I am not similar to other Jewish people and people do not think I am Jewish. I don’t know.

Tolvyda grew up going to Vėlinės cemeteries with her mother and brother. She rarely goes now, both because she is a participant in a competitive sport that requires intense training during that time period, and because she finds the day to be “artificial.”

To be quite deep, I somehow, maybe intentionally, maybe not…tried not to pay too much attention to that so-called feast day of commemoration. Because, maybe it was too difficult for me to do that, or maybe too complex. Because I have not created my identity yet maybe. Maybe now I am quite sure of what I am doing and what is meaningful to me, but

37 My own conversations lead me to believe the strict connection between antisemitism and lack of education is not necessarily valid. Some of the most open, self-critical, and thoughtful people I spoke with were poorly educated. And some of the most openly hostile on questions of race and ethnicity were well educated.
38 A local media outlet.
earlier I just played or did something that might be considered more important but actually it was some form of escape.

She prefers to go to the cemetery alone, and she finds this more respectful to the dead. Her father is buried several hours away from where she lives, but she visits his friend’s grave in the Jewish cemetery that lies just a few blocks from her home. Sometimes she does go on Vėlinės: “there are candles and people: never very many; not crowded. But it is very tidy.” She describes pleasure going at other times as well:

I especially go to the graveyard alone, not with family—mother or brother. It might be at any time—in spring or summer or winter. Especially then I go to Jewish graveyard [near my home], where my father is not buried—but a friend of my father. Where I am formally, absolutely not obligated to tidy something or to clean something. Nonetheless I feel quite convenient while cleaning or tidying, or just walking. But then I go there when I feel it is quite needed for me, but not when it coincides with some date.

Tolvyda then describes a recent Vėlinės experience:

Last year I was in Antakalnis graveyard, where all the main actors of our state are buried—actors, artists, poets, politicians. I was with a friend who is a sculptor and he explained how the monuments are made and are supposed to be made. And it was quite a good experience from a spiritual sense, but also from a scientific sense as I learned what it is to be. ...The spiritual can hardly be described in words. Some mysterious atmosphere. Especially when it is dark and only the candlelights are shining. And when I was with my friend, sometimes I could not see him but feel his voice and the steps. I met also some professors there who taught me. And other people somehow I met and I felt almost like at home so it was quite interesting I think...if not positive...quite touching.

Throughout the conversation, Tolvyda described herself as on a journey toward clearer identity, and of late specifically toward spiritual identity—a grounding in principles and commitments beyond her own impressive capacities for logic and analysis. This description of her personal journey by Tolvyda correlates in
striking ways with her ambivalent relationship with Vėlinės traditions.

Perhaps the most warm and inviting welcome I received in a Lithuanian home was from a family from the group that is most clearly constructed as “out of place” in Lithuania—the Roma. The family I met has been working hard to try to provide stability and a more hopeful future for their four beloved children. At almost every turn they have had to fight municipal policies and administrative roadblocks to gain those opportunities. I was brought to their home by some young women who have been helping them in these struggles. The family had just moved into a very modest flat and they proudly showed me the beds and couch that furnished the house.

Both parents have experienced significant hardship. The father, Paulius, grew up in Lithuania and was wounded by a powerful man in his home village when the man got drunk and became hostile. The local officials refused to press charges because of the man’s connections. Paulius will carry significant wounds from this encounter for the rest of his life. Zosia, the mother, has family in both St Petersburg and Lithuania. Both sets of grandparents suffered under Nazi persecutions. Zosia and Paulius shared family stories of executions, and explained how the Roma people survived during that time in the cold and the forests through practices and ingenuity passed down through the generations: planning the nightly fire so it would burn low enough in the evening to warm a pit where the little children then slept; scouting out safe spots to rest; moving from forest to forest.

The most fascinating thing for me was that Zosia spoke about Jesus more
than any other person I talked to—even the clergy. Her understanding of Jesus was based in love and welcome. She kept telling me how honored she was to have a pastor/priest in her home, and she outlined the things she tries to teach her children about Jesus and the stories in the Bible. Baptized in the Orthodox faith and then raised Catholic, she worships in whatever church is nearby when she wishes to pray. On Vėlinės she goes to mass and then she and her family visit graves. Along with flowers and candles they bring fruits, food, and other items like cigarettes to the graves—whatever the person might have enjoyed. This is an Orthodox practice that is now being discouraged by clergy who instead encourage families to bring their food and goods into the church to be blessed and distributed to the poor.39

As Zosia spoke I was struck by two things. First, both her theology and practice transgress theological and liturgical boundaries of practice in each of the traditions she experiences as her own. Second, her description of the world weaves together and welcomes not only her children, family, and ancestors, but also me. As she offered her beliefs and her trust in Jesus, she continually included me and all people as the ones beloved by God. As we turned to leave and were waving out the car window Zosia was telling me that my presence brought blessing and light and that it was an honor to have a religious leader

39 A very kind, articulate, and compelling Orthodox clergyman explained to me that the care for the poor is connected with these practices and they are trying to focus energy that way and discourage patterns of consumer excess. He also says that on days of remembrance they refuse to bless any grave when alcohol is involved. Though I found his explanations compelling, I was also struck by how disconnected they were from the descriptions I was hearing from people I spoke with. One other interesting anecdote: one of the young Lithuanian women I spoke with told stories of when her grandfather was conscripted into the USSR army and sent to serve on the front lines in Russia. One of the ways he stayed alive was by stealing eggs and other food from graves in Russia. She whispered the story with a bit of a giggle. But from the priest’s description this provision for the hungry was one of the practical functions of the practice.
cross their threshold—reminding me that I was always welcome in their home—
anytime I am in Lithuania. All this from someone who is daily reminded that she
is “other” among the majority population with whom she lives. Humbling;
humbling indeed.

The Dead and the Power of Incorporation

Henrika attributes the incorporative power of Vėlinės to an ongoing
relationship with ancestors, suggesting that church and state are interwoven as
families engage in these practices not only with their own family, but also
together with the larger community. In the maintenance of these practices during
Soviet times she sees an embodiment of the belief that there is a reality beyond
the materialist reality that was enforced through regnant ideology—a material
reminder:

…I think that there is an assurance of doing it together. This was one of
the few practices, the other being perhaps Kučios, that affirmed the
possibility of a non-material reality in which the whole country
participated. So in some ways it also affirmed something of Lithuanian
national identity, because whichever way you want to construct it—as
Catholic, as pagan, as syncretic—it has always been connected with the
cult of the departed, which means that the departed family members were
still part of the family. In a different way…but they were still part of the
family. And if you affirm that, you affirm that the reality in which we’re
living goes beyond the material reality. So I would say there was probably
even something of the resistance—either conscious or unconscious
resistance—to denationalization and despiritualization of the country in
these practices.

In the next chapter we will explore the diverse ways these shared practices
incorporate Lithuanians into the penumbra of the church.

40 Christmas Eve. This celebration is also freighted heavily with remembrance of the dead,
including particular prayer and the preparation of food. Christmas Eve dishes and food are left on
the table in the evening so the dead may return to dine.
Chapter 5: Church
Chapter 5: Church

Irena and Lukas live in a concrete block home in a small village in northeastern Lithuania. Chickens wander outside; bushels of newly picked apples sit in the center of the floor in their sparse kitchen. The small living area has wallpaper, wood paneling, and molding. A rope draped with a sheet separates the living area from the more barren sleeping areas. Irena has lived in this house her entire life.

I comment on the beauty of the large carved cross on the wall. Painted in a beautiful folk art style, it is an imposing figure in such a small space. [See figure 12]. Irena is suddenly full of stories. Clearly a central object of importance and reverence in her family, she traces the history of the cross back to her great grandfather and a young boy who helped tend the cows. In gratitude for her grandfather’s kindness in letting him sleep in the barn he carved the crucifix for the family. She explains how the crucifix has healed and sustained them over more than 120 years. Passed down the generations; hidden in straw in the barn; clung to like a doll or a precious blanket during times of fear and terror; offered as a bold sign of who this family is and what matters to them; prayed with and sought as shelter during times of sickness, fear, and terror. They now have people coming to their home trying to persuade them to sell the cross, but Irena says she will never part with it.

One of Irena’s earliest memories is hiding under the bed when the local communist official appeared at the door to demand that her father take the crucifix from the wall and destroy it. She remembers watching his shoes as she
listened to the conversation above. Her father was adamant: “I will not touch it and I will not allow anyone else to touch it.” The cross stayed where it was. “My father seemed very aggressive in his discussion and I was afraid they would take him away. But he remained.” She cries as she tells another story about a stormy and frightening evening when Lukas did not appear at home after work and she feared he had been taken away: “I looked at the crucifix and thought, ‘I will hug it to my chest and run into the woods and hide; it will protect me.’”

Figure 1, Cross decorated for Palm Sunday.

During the Soviet years Lukas was a tractor mechanic at the local
collective farm. His skills were required in the Soviet army and he was sent to Moscow for a period of time. When he returned he became the fire inspector on the same farm. Irena was a pharmacist. The first thing Irena wants to make clear is her hatred for communism. Hailing from a family who took pride in their resistance, she is very proud that their daughter never joined the communist youth organization despite pressure from teachers. The daughter was a very good student, and they worried this decision would limit her prospects for university education. But the independence movement broke things open and she was able to attend university.

Irena becomes most animated when she talks about her church. She scurries back to find a prayer book that her priest entrusted to her as a young woman during a particularly demanding time during the Soviet years. He requested that different members of the parish pray for the church at specific times of night and day. Typed on an old typewriter and then bound in grey paper, the prayer book contains a series of daily prayers and suggested hymns. Irena holds the book gingerly as she opens the cover and turns the pages for me to see. Touching the prayer book; gazing upon the crucifix on the wall; reciting her daily prayers: these objects and practices remind Irena of the power of God’s sustaining presence throughout a demanding and difficult life.

Lukas is a bit more circumspect. Born in 1940, “just four months before the war”, he did not like the Soviet regime. But he was not raised in the adamant resistance of his wife’s family. He describes the joy and relief the news of independence brought them, but he becomes most animated when I ask if life is
harder now than it was before independence. He has a lot to say, describing
how they barely survived in the early years as they suddenly became small
farmers trying to live independently on a tiny piece of land. They honed their
skills and learned how to do the work they needed to do to survive. It is work
they still do at ages 65 and 72. Raising chickens, growing a modest field of
crops, tending a garden, and barter and trade—all supplements to their meager
pensions. Their only daughter lives in an apartment in the nearby town, a
pharmacist like her mother. Lukas worries about the current wave of emigration
as so many young people leave the country for better opportunities. He is not
sure how the government will be able to support people like him as they grow
older and are unable to work.

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Now a visual artist and teacher in her mid thirties, Neringa grew up in
Vilnius. She was trained in public schools and after graduation entered the most
prestigious academy of art in Lithuania. Nine or ten years old during the time of
independence, she remembers the excitement, the fear, the jubilation, and then
the hard years of rationing that followed. Neringa is quiet and thoughtful:
appreciating the exposure she has been given to people and practices through
travel and workshops in Europe and the United States; working hard to make
ends meet by teaching and painting in the capital city; proud that she just
recently managed to purchase her own flat and to learn to drive, but concerned
that the economic crisis makes it difficult to earn enough money to support
herself.
When asked if she is a Christian she replies, “I think so.” A Roman Catholic? “I would like to be.” “What do you mean?” “I do not know if the church would say I am a Catholic,” she murmurs quietly, “I do not know if I do the proper things.” When asked if she has been baptized, a sheepish grin creeps across her face: “Yes, I have. But only recently I learned that.”

Neringa occasionally went to church as a child—with močiūtė. She lived near her grandmother, but not with her. When she visited cemeteries on Vėlinės it was with močiūtė as well. Recently Neringa discovered that when she was a toddler, her grandmother invited the local priest to her small Soviet apartment. There, in secret, Neringa and her brother were baptized and given baptismal names. Neither of them knew anything about the baptisms—nor did their parents—until močiūtė died a few years ago and left them a letter revealing the baptisms, telling them their baptismal names, and conveying their baptismal certificates. “How do you feel about that?” I ask Neringa. “I think I like it. It makes me happy. To know that my grandmother would love me that much to do that…to take that risk for me. It is a very special thing.”

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Svajunas, age fifty-two, is a pied piper when children are around. He is independent and huge of heart. An artist, designer, and sailor, Svajunas marches to the beat of his own drummer and revels in sly comments. His father was an astronomer. Also an independent soul, the father encouraged his children to have their own opinions and to take social expectations and political posturing with a grain of salt. Svajunas remembers the candles in the
cemeteries during his childhood in Vilnius and his mother making her pilgrimage to Vėlinės cemeteries. Rarely did he go with her to visit the graves of grandparents and family, though now he and his partner Taurė do attend mass with his mom on Christmas and Easter. He scoffs at the pageantry and excess on Vėlinės. But after a time we start talking about his father’s death and the Vėlinės just passed. Svajunas tells me about how he was arriving home on the eve of Vėlinės. Taurė picked him up at the airport on a very foggy night and together they went to visit his father’s grave in the deep dark and mist. For the first time, he arranged candles and lit them at the grave. And then he wept.

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Bernardas, age thirty-one, is a father of two young children. He works for a computer networking company in Vilnius and spends many weekends in the home of his in-laws in a town north of the city. A diligent husband and son, he spends most weekends helping his in-laws with projects or tending to his children while his active and ambitious wife is busy with projects for her work. He is not sure whether he believes in God. His children have been baptized because his wife feels this is important, and he is willing to support her wish to bring them to church. He has no real use for Vėlinės practices. They were not important in his family home, but they are very important to his wife’s family. He accompanies his wife out of respect, and believes it is probably a good thing for his children to learn these traditions.

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Introduction

Incorporation into the Catholic Church is both pervasive and imperfect in Lithuania; so too in Vėlinės. The array of relationship typified by Irena and Lukas, Neringa, Svaunus, and Bernardas is quite typical. While nearly every Christian cemetery space in Lithuania has been sacralized by the rituals of the church, Lithuanians vary significantly in their relationship to the Catholic Church. Vėlinės cemeteries are true dihliz-ian spaces. Most everyone enters with an awareness of the presence of the church—and generally with an attendant decorum in relation to the church as well—yet this space hosts a fascinating panoply of both religious and a-religious identities, many of which are formed and expressed through attention to alternate practices and meaning within traditional Roman Catholic practice.

The Roman Catholic Church is a powerful force in Lithuania, but in a distinctively Lithuanian form. Some aspects of the church’s power are obvious; others quieter, yet widespread and foundational. Although a significant number of Lithuanians disavow or demur any religious motivation for their practices, it is hard to find anyone who has not been touched by the church in some way—whether through participation, curiosity, or opposition. Most everyone seems to lie somewhere on the spectrum between Irena and Bernardas: clinging to faith; ambivalent and curious; resistant to the church; or participating out of a sense of respect.

This is not to say that the church is a primary focus of life for all, or even most, Lithuanians. It is not. But the Catholic Church is assumed in the social
and political imaginary of the vast majority of Lithuanians as a hegemonic\(^1\) yet not fully controlling social presence. Within the imagination and performance of everyday life in Lithuania, the “hegemonic strategies” of the church hierarchy are subject to the “common sense” everyday practices and understanding of ordinary Lithuanians.\(^2\) As we shall see in this chapter, even a distinction between church hierarchy and ordinary Lithuanian is insufficient in describing Lithuania, as within each group there are a plurality of expressions of and relationship with the Catholic Church. Yet the notion of hegemony and local “common sense” agency are still helpful, as they highlight the fact that the Catholic church is assumed as a powerful, primary, and strategic institution in Lithuania, yet also an institution in which Lithuanians assert agency through tactical, everyday forms of life.\(^3\)

While a significant number are like Bernardas and have never had much relationship with the church or are turning away, I have met almost no one who lacks an opinion about the church. For many, the church is an institution that exerts specific forms of influence on the structure of reality, but that influence is read, understood, and analyzed in relation to any number of complementary and competing social forces: family, state, media, social goals and commitments.

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1 For a very helpful application of Gramsci’s notions of hegemony to the situation in historically Catholic countries and Lithuania in particular, see Ingo W. Schröder, “Catholic Majority Societies and Religious Hegemony: Concepts and Comparisons” and “The Elusive Religious Field in Lithuania”, in Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder, Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society: Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania (Surrey Uk: Ashgate, 2012), 17-36, 79-98. As Schröder notes, Gramsci differed from Marx and Engels in that he, “recognized religion (which, due to his focus on Italy, mostly meant Catholicism) as an active mode of experiencing the world and social relationships, which had played an important role in the social development of Europe.” Ingo Schröder, Catholic Majority Societies and Religious Hegemony: Concepts and Comparisons”, 22. Schröder finds Gramsci’s formulations insufficiently nuanced for the present realities in Lithuania and turns to the work of Pierre Bourdieu to frame his larger arguments.

2 Ibid.

3 Michel de Certeau, Practices of Everyday Life.
With the exception of devoted practitioners of Catholicism like Irena, the most common disposition toward the church seems to be a mix of critique of overt political involvement by the church, acknowledgement of traditional and historical presence and authority, and individual selection in relation to aspects of “believing” and “belonging”. For some this means total lack of involvement with the church, for others there is selective involvement or curiosity similar to Neringa’s, and for many there is a pattern of participation on feast days and family occasions.

The expansive yet ambivalent space occupied by the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania is fleshed out in interesting ways in conversations about Vėlinės. As noted in the first chapter, Lithuanians generally describe Vėlinės with some reference to the church, but there is frequent mention of early pagan rituals as well, accompanied by an explanation of the Catholic practice as an overlay on much older practices. The name Vėlinės is in fact a derivation of the word Vélės—the spirits who inhabited the fields. And traces of earlier agricultural and nature-oriented practices clearly mark Vėlinės practices today. For my

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5 In my Protestant milieu in the United States fellow clergy and I used to denominate this group as the “Chr-Easters”, those who attend on Christmas and Easter. In Lithuania the occasions of attendance vary according to family.

6 For an interesting discussion of the phenomena see the description of the wedding of two young people with varying relationships with the church and with Lithuania’s national history in Gediminas Lankauskas, “From Confrontation to Conciliation: On Syncretic Rapprochement between Catholics and Charismatic Evangelists in Lithuania, in in Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder, Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society: Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania (Surrey Uk: Ashgate, 2012), 99-124.

7 For an exploration of the current formalized Lithuanian neo-pagan movement Romuva, see, Michael F. Strmiska, “Romuva Looks East: Indian Inspiration in Lithuanian Paganism”, in Mildą
purposes, the details of this syncretic relationship with older nature practices are less important than the frequency of the references to these earlier agricultural rituals and to Lithuania’s relatively late conversion to Christianity. Important as well are the reminders of the entanglement of the conversion to Catholicism with political realities of warfare and conquest. One person’s pithy characterization of that is history is this: “Sure, I’m a Christian. In the early days they burn two brothers and the thirst brother responds, ‘Oh yes, I convert!’” Taken together, I hear these multiple references as expressing a strain of “common sense” practices or tactics that both participate in and resist the hegemony of the Catholic Church in Lithuania. As Salvija described in chapter two, it is also a tactic that allows family and friends with widely different political views, beliefs, and experiences to gather together in meaningful ways.

Following the practice of setting grave markers only after a period of mourning, Svajunas and his family recently placed a monument on the grave of Svajunas’s father, the free spirit married to the devout Catholic. [See figure 13] Svajunas’s partner Taurė explains that they planned the design with particular attention to the dynamics of family by crafting a large, solid, stone cross with symbols from earlier Baltic rituals and mythology within the center of the cross:

He wanted the cross to be very solid, archaic, with no unnecessary details. The cross as a symbol was used because Svajunas and his family—like many other Lithuanians—believe it is one of our oldest

Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder, Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society: Ethnographies of Catholic Hegemony and the New Pluralism in Lithuania (Surrey Uk: Ashgate, 2012), 125-150. As Strmiska outlines, Romuva is of fairly recent origins and draws on a set of diverse and localized, “polytheistic, nature-centered religious traditions of pre-Christian Lithuana that have been preserved in folklore and other aspects of Lithuania culture, providing the basis for Romuva in the current time.” Ibid., 127.
symbols. This cross is not the place where Jesus was sacrificed. It is sky and earth, day and night, life and death; a crossroads. This is one of the oldest symbols humans developed and understood. Svajūnas’s dad was a person of individuality and free will, so he wanted to have a “free cross” for his dad. The Thunder (Perkunas) is one of the old gods for people from Žemaitija, and as his dad is from Telšiai, the highest Pagan GOD's symbol is inside the sun, and has the cross inside.

Figure 13.

This triangling between Catholic practice, regional myth and ritual, and notions of identity in relation to political regimes is also a common thread in explanations of Vėlinės practices. Mixed into the mélange is the effect of
inculcation in Soviet culture, which included the promotion of festivals and practices which were portrayed as genuinely regional and nationalistic, though often they were simply a creation of Soviet ethnography and folklore.\(^8\) The incorporation in Žemaitija of singing and instrumentation on the Soviet “Day of the Dead” described by Klebonas Zigmantas in chapter three is a fascinating example of this hybridity of local interest in “authentic” nationalist folklore practices and Soviet creation of a folklore narrative to inculcate a Soviet practice as a regional distinctive. This is but one more example of the different ways Vėlinės cemeteries both host and perform a dihlij-i an wisdom that allows Lithuanians to live amongst and between differing knowledge traditions, faith commitments, and power dynamics while also maintaining relationship and identity.

Ethnic nationalism is on the rise in Lithuania, as it is in other parts of Europe. Some of the leaders of these movements focus on the pagan past and rituals of nature worship in an attempt to circumscribe a distinct Baltic heritage embedded in early tribal practices.\(^9\) But this focus on earlier nature-oriented practices is in no way limited to ardent nationalists and ethnic purists.\(^10\) In one conversation, an ethnologist linked the focus on pagan origins to the vital role of traditional Lithuanian dance and other ethnic practices in maintaining Lithuanian...

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identity during the time of Soviet occupation.\textsuperscript{11} Whereas participation in formal or “traditional” religions\textsuperscript{12} was discouraged by the Soviet party, maintenance of local practices linked to a portrayal of innocent and joyful notions of agrarian life were encouraged and even actively constructed, particularly in the later Soviet period.\textsuperscript{13} As noted earlier and discussed in the next chapter, in many parts of the Soviet Union—and particularly in the Baltic countries—some of these dance and song clubs provided a network for quiet but subversive resistance. When the push for independence emerged they were a vital chain for both communication and leadership. The scholar I spoke with believes that the same energy that carried people toward hope and independence is now directed toward a new search for authenticity and grounding as Lithuanians find themselves adrift amidst massive political and economic change and the lure of western consumerism. He describes this fascination with nature practices as “play,” and

\textsuperscript{11} As noted above in note 8, the actual origins of some of these practices may be in dispute.


suggests a craving for a re-enchantment of the world and for a return to nature and joy.\textsuperscript{14}

Another scholar who is well versed in Lithuanian media notices this same turn to nature practices, but ascribes it instead to articles and television programs that appear on the eve of any national holiday that correlates with the Christian calendar. This scholar notes a lingering pattern from Soviet journalism, where the job of the journalist was to convey the narrative of the ruling Communist party, and thus to discourage a religious narrative by highlighting ethnic folk cultures. One former Soviet journalist describes embarrassment about the things he was required to write at that time: “I was supposed to do stories about milk maids on the collective farm being so happy and full of joy about their rural life. It was ridiculous.”\textsuperscript{15}

Yet another explanation is grounded in a kind of puckish pride in the actual history of conversion in Lithuania: a history marked by ditch and dive moves by Grand Dukes who were trying to avoid being conquered by the Teutonic knights while also refusing forced conversion to Christianity. As noted in chapter one, through these moves Lithuania did avoid control by the Teutonic knights to the west and the Livonians to the north. Conversion finally came through Poland to the south. Particularly some older Lithuanians tend to have ambivalent feelings about their relationship with Poland, a relationship that was formally drawn as a partnership of equals in the Union of Lublin, but was in

\textsuperscript{14} I heard this comment as part of a confidential interview about the scholar’s personal experience of Vėlinės and under the terms of the release I am unable to offer the scholar’s name.

\textsuperscript{15} This comment was also offered in the context of a confidential interview about the scholar’s personal experience of Vėlinės.
actuality a relationship in which Poland was the dominant force, resulting in Polishization of many Lithuanians through intermarriage and through education. Polish became the language of the nobility and the Lithuanian language faded. The tie between the Catholic Church and Poland therefore rubs raw for some. A scholar of church history observes that Lithuania has not always entered the papal fold with willingness and ease, noting that at a couple of earlier points Lithuania even evicting representatives of the Holy See when scrutiny from Vatican representatives was deemed inappropriate or intrusive by the powers that be. Also, for much of the Soviet period the Catholic Church in Lithuania functioned in isolation from the larger Catholic world. The church is still finding its way to a new form of relationship post independence. Whatever the reason, it is generally true that even many devout Catholics exhibit a “common sense” combination of respect and skepticism when it comes to the Catholic Church, while at the same time claiming identity with the church and marking its significance in their lives.

In this chapter I will explore more deeply the relationship between Vėlinės practices and the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania. First I trace the antecedents of Visų Šventųjų Diena and Vėlinų Diena in the Roman Catholic Church. Though these practices clearly do have antecedents in earlier agricultural practices in Lithuania, I do not trace that lineage except to the degree

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16 Due to space limitations I do not outline the complex history of the Catholic Church in Lithuania. Two English sources for that history are V. Stanley Vardys, The Catholic Church, Dissent and Nationality in Soviet Lithuania (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978);
that it informs current practice and perception of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{17} Second, I briefly outline how clergy describe these practices and the difference between the perceptions of clergy by young Lithuanians expressed in conversations prior to my research and my actual experience with clergy during my research period. Third, I offer a brief history of the church’s relationship with the state in Lithuania. I develop this description as context for the explanations of Vėlinės and of the church offered by both clergy and non-clergy. The intent of this exploration is not to parse out in detail the complex experience of the church in Lithuania or to exhaustively examine current religious practice. Instead, I seek to argue that the function of Vėlinės in Lithuania is in keeping with many of its historic antecedents in All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day practices in the Catholic Church, yet it is also expressive of distinctive aspects of the Lithuanian experience.

**Roman Catholic Evolution of All Saints’ and All Souls’ Days**

**All Saints’ Day**

Dynamic relationship between Christian practices and alternate cultural practices is not unique to Lithuania. The Christian practices of remembrance and anticipation that developed into Roman Catholic All Saints’ and All Souls’ days first emerged in the context of earlier Roman refrigerium practices. Refrigerium means “refreshment”; in this case refreshment of the dead. Funerary art from the fifth century BCE to the sixth century CE depicts scenes of paradise with the

\textsuperscript{17} For background on folklore and the roots of local nature practices that intermingle with Catholic practice within Vėlinės, see, Juozas Kudirka, Vėlinės. Vilnius: Mokslo Leidykla, 1991. For background on Vėlinės within the larger context of death rituals, see, Pranė Dundulienė, Lietuvių Ethnografija (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1982), 256-268, 326-331. For general background on folklore material relating to Lithuanian calendar festivals see, Jonas Balys, Lietuvių kalendorinės šventės: Tautsakinė medžiaga ir aiškinimai (Vilnius: Mintis; 2-asis papildytas leidimas ed., 1993).
deceased reclining on a couch while being attended by servants and spouses. Children, pets, flowers, food, and table also appear in the depictions. There is debate about the meaning of these images, but what is clear is that traditional Romans engaged in a practice called refrigerium interim, an occasion of drinking and dining at the graveside of the beloved dead at set times of the year.\textsuperscript{18}

Funeral banquets were celebrated at the graveside on the day of burial and the ninth day after the funeral, thus delimiting the official mourning period. They might also be held on the fortieth day after death, and in later years on the deceased’s birthday as well as general days set aside for commemoration of ancestors (parentalia and lemuria). This was an opportunity for social contact between the dead and the living. There were two purposes to the celebrations: survival of the memory of those who had died, and comfort and refreshment to immortal spirits. The banquets were sometimes reverent and other times raucous—a sort of laughing in the face of death. At the conclusion, food and drink was left for the spirits and for the local poor. Specific grave architecture was prepared for these purposes, including tables placed over the grave and containing holes so refreshment for the deceased could be poured directly into the grave. Other tables included indentations for foods to be symbolically shared with the dead. More elaborate graves might have permanent furniture and even

\textsuperscript{18} Robin M. Jensen, “Dining with the Dead: From the Mensa to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity”, in Laurie Brink, O.P. and Debbie Greed, eds. Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context: Studies of Roman, Jewish, and Christian Burials (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 107-144.
plumbing for clean up and feeding tubes or a tray for food to supply the dead with nourishment. ¹⁹

Christians continued these memorial practices and adapted them to their understanding of death and the afterlife. Drawings in the Roman catacombs show tables with wine, bread, and fish. It is unclear whether these are a depiction of the eucharist or of refrigerium. What is clear is that Christians continued to share meals with the dead—whether as a funeral banquet or as an evocation of the great banquet to come; or perhaps both. Funeral inscriptions indicate the presence of refrigerium practices as well. Tables or “mensa” were assembled for the memorial feasts. Christians honored their own family dead, but they also extended their practices to include clergy, and particularly bishops. In honoring people who were a part of their extended church family, Christians incorporated those individuals into their cult of saints or martyrs.

The cult of the saints provided a place for pilgrims to encounter the continuing power of the remains of a holy person. As the cult of the saints grew, large funeral basilicas or funerary halls were built. While they were not parish churches, they did contain altars, baptismal fonts, mensae and couches. St. Peter’s was likely one of these funeral halls. Gatherings in these halls sometimes became rowdy, leading to complaints from Augustine ²⁰ and other church leaders. Church leaders found themselves in a bind. Though they might not approve of the raucousness, they wished to curry favor with their wealthy and

¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Augustine, Epistle. 29.10-11 as cited in Robin Jensen, “Dining with the Dead”.
powerful Christian patrons and also to maintain practices that were important to rich and poor alike.  

Eventually funeral halls fell out of favor while saints’ shrines grew in popularity, developing into basilicas dedicated to martyrs with relics buried under the main altar. The popularity of *depositio ad sanctos* (burial near the remains of a saint) ascended as these bodies of saints and relics were moved into churches near the altar. The church worked to shift the *mensa* table of the refrigerium to the altar of the eucharist and encouraged families to celebrate mass in memory of their dead. Ceremonial meals faded and eucharistic celebrations on the anniversary of death were encouraged. Evidence of eucharist at the actual funeral rather than a memorial feast at the grave first appears at the end of the fourth century, stirring a controversy over the question of whether the host should be placed in the mouth of the corpse.  

The early Christian practice of veneration of the saints held significant power and popularity among poor and wealthy alike during the period of late Antiquity. In contrast to the understanding that the soul separated from the body to reside in a distant area of light, the cult of the saints emphasized the immanence of the holy at specific sites on earth, as the remains of the holy dead brought that light to shine amidst the material realities of life. The tombs and relics of the saints were a meeting place between heaven and earth where the

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21 Robin Jensen, “Dining with the Dead.”  
22 Robin M. Jensen, “Dining with the Dead.”
light from above dwelled near the physical remains of those who were holy. Access to this holiness brought power, protection, and companionship.  

Peter Brown argues that historians of late Antiquity have erred in developing a “two-tiered” model that categorizes the cult of the saints as a “popular movement” that acquiesced to the lingering pagan desires of the lower classes. Under this model the debates over the cult of the saints are framed as a conflict between correct teaching and beliefs, and practices which are branded as “superstitious” misconceptions of “true” teaching. Instead, Brown notes wide participation in the cult of the saints among all classes. He describes “not the growth of new beliefs within the Christian communities, but the restructuring of old beliefs in such a way as to allow them to carry a far heavier ‘charge’ of public meaning.”

To understand the dynamic development of the cult of the saints, Brown points to the tensions simmering beneath the polemics about true teaching and correct practice, particularly tensions between family and community. Noting a tendency in medieval society “to see areas of feeling and experience through kinship colored glasses,” Brown emphasizes that in the Christian church “[r]eligious practice took place with the family and for the family,” and suggests that Bishops in the fourth century sought to honor these family practices while also instantiating a powerful new kind of community:

…its central ritual practices and its increasingly centralized organization and financial administration presented the pagan world with an ideal community that had claimed to modify, to redirect, and even to delimit the

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23 Ibid.
bonds of kin. The church was an artificial kin group. Its members were expected to project onto the new community a fair measure of the sense of solidarity, of the loyalties, and of the obligations that had previously been directed to the physical family. Nowhere was this made more plain than in the care of the dead.25

This distinctive community was sometimes expressed through inclusion of the poor and of non-Christians in burial practices, and even more often by exclusion of those who had been ex-communicated. The celebration of the anniversaries of the deaths of the heroes of the Christian faith was also a prominent part of the rhythm of life in the Christian cemetery. But the family celebration continued to dominate, and as the Christian community included more and more elite families there was an increased risk that the ostentatious cemetery celebrations of wealthy families would create division within the community26, and also that families might use their wealth and influence to obtain bones and relics of saints for their own private family edification rather than for the good of the community as a whole.27

In response to these concerns the bishops sought to become the patrons of the benefits that derived from access to the remains of holy martyrs, thus integrating family celebrations into larger communal celebrations. This was one piece of a larger effort to inculcate communal rather than private responsibility for care of the dead. Because intense feeling about care for the remains of martyrs is important in Judaism and predates Christianity, Brown believes this struggle for power and control of bones and relics likely lies behind the debates about the

25 Ibid., 31.
26 The apostle Paul raises this same concern in relation to the celebration of the eucharist in the early church. See, I Corinthians 11-13.
27 Ibid., 32.
cult of the saints, rather than the “two-tiered” concern framed as correct teaching of the elites versus superstition of the masses.\textsuperscript{28}

This harnessing of the powerful energy around the cult of the saints had multiple effects. First, the push of the cult was then to draw people into the group rather than to define people out of the group and create division. It also enhanced the bishop’s power and encouraged a sense of connection between the earthly life of community and the promised great eschatological banquet after death: The buried martyr became the, “invisible, heavenly concomitant of the patronage exercised palpably on earth by the bishop.”\textsuperscript{29} By maintaining feasts and festivals while nudging the celebrations toward more official, communal status, the bishops continued to provide the close, feeling-filled interactions that held such power for families and pilgrims while also directing energy and identification toward the larger Christian community. These feasts performed power in a very distinctive way. No one presided. Rather, these were “full dressed banquets given by the invisible patroni to their earthly clients. …one passing fleck of unalloyed joy in the grim lives of the peasants and drovers…”\textsuperscript{30} But the bishop was the visible patronus present in these performances—present on behalf of the invisible martyr. Through these emotion-filled festivals church leaders worked toward a widening of the definition of the community.

At this time…the Christian church was placed under pressure to offer its own definition of the urban community and to provide rituals which would make this definition manifest. The Christian definition of the urban community was notably different from that of the classical city. It included two unaccustomed and potentially disruptive categories, the women and

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 32-35.  
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 38.  
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 38-39.
the poor. The cult of the saints offered a way of bringing precisely these two categories together, under the patronage of the bishop, in such a way as to offer a new site for the solidarity of the late-ancient antique town.\textsuperscript{31}

As pilgrims ventured outside the bounds of the city to the liminal space of the cemetery, class and gender distinctions blurred in this common place of worship, prayer, and pleading. These celebrations allowed for the inclusion of the stranger and the alien as well as the sharing of resources between rich and poor. Significantly, the cult of the saints opened up to women possibilities for leadership and prominence that were not available in the tight structures of Roman society. And there were other benefits. During this period great wealth was pouring into the church. The construction of monuments and churches and the endowment of feasts and festivals created an outlet for the display of that wealth and the prestige that accrued with it, an outlet that was not in a private forum but on a civic level.\textsuperscript{32} In all of this, the church “redefined the bounds of the community by accepting a new class of recipients and designating a new class of givers.”\textsuperscript{33} Far from a popular movement for change from the lower classes, the shaping of the cult of saints was thus an initiative of leadership, inclusion, and increased prestige and power for the bishops of the church.

As time went along, the move toward formalization and control intensified. Bishops instructed patrons and pilgrims to shift their resources toward the giving of alms, and to move their memorial celebrations into the church. Paulinas of Nola, a powerful leader at one of the more prominent veneration sites in the cult of saints, commends a friend for his charitable act of welcoming and feeding the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{31} Ibid., 41-42.
\bibitem{32} Ibid., 40-49.
\bibitem{33} Ibid., 46.
\end{thebibliography}
poor as an act of remembrance. It was in the midst of these shifts in power dynamics that the funeral mensae were adapted and moved inside to churches for a Eucharistic celebration “at the table of the saint” rather than a meal at the table of the dead.

Peter Brown argues that the most significant effect of the church’s encouragement of the development of the cult of the saints was to enable communities that were far from the center of the Catholic Church’s power to develop an intimate awareness of connection with and participation in the sacred through material manifestations of the church. This relocation of the sacred materialized God’s presence and immanence far from the locus of power in the church, thus allowing freedom in practice and celebration as well as integration into the everyday practices of life. Ultimately, this heightened the power of the center as the loci of sacred bestowal. The movement of the saints’ physical remains and other relics also created a web of relationships based on an ancient systems of patronage and obligations between those who bestowed the relics and those who received them, effectively knitting together individuals and communities that might be physically quite distant from one another.34

As the reach of the church expanded, this enchantment from afar rendered immanent and local became particularly important in areas like Lithuania where the community was largely agricultural and life was lived close to nature and the agricultural calendar. The church’s reach came late here and there was little likelihood of much direct participation in the church’s halls of

power. Therefore, as the church fought against the enchantment of nature in these distant areas, they simultaneously offered material traces of the sacred through celebrations and festivals that connected people with the wonder of the holy dead and with relics that the church hierarchy from afar could bring near to the daily lives of believers.35

Eventually, amidst these multiple practices of veneration at burial sites, shrines, and churches, All Saints Day was introduced as a focused celebration on a particular day. The Roman Catholic feast of All Saints now celebrated on November first can be traced to the late eighth century, well before the conversion of Lithuania. An oratory by Pope Gregory III in St. Peter’s for the relics of the holy apostles, saints, martyrs and confessors speaks of “all the just made perfect who are at rest throughout the world.” The November first feast of All Saints was declared a day of holy obligation through a decree of Louis the Pious in 835 under Pope Gregory IV.36

All Souls’ Day

The Christian roots of All Souls’ Day run deep as well. Like All Saints’, this day of remembrance and prayer developed out of a complicated cultural milieu and was an established practice long before the conversion of Lithuania in the late 14th century. But the genesis of the celebration reveals particular reasons why the resonance in Lithuania might be so strong. Shared humanity is the impetus and power behind the celebration of both All Saints’ and All Souls’

35 Peter Brown, Cult of the Saints, 90.
days, with theological striving joined to very concrete dynamics of power, practice, and politics.

Saints were of a different order than the common person. The human remains of saints linger as a link between heaven and earth and their presence offers warmth, hope, and power to those struggling in the daily vicissitudes and conundrums of earthly life. Saints and martyrs did not sleep in anticipation of resurrection. Rather, they experienced resurrection directly, just as Klebonas Zigmantas explained the relationship with the saints in the Lithuanian Catholic church: “We hope one day to join them.” Therefore the graves of the saints had power to heal, to give hope, to refresh, and to grant the miracles which, “made visible the invisible refreshment of the saints. …At their graves, the eternity of paradise and the first touch of the resurrection come into the present.”

Pilgrims could catch a glimpse of that paradise because the tombs of the martyrs were exempt from the facts of death. Paulinas of Nola describes a deep peace of sleep showing forth from the bones of the martyrs as they await the time when all would be whole again at the resurrection. For the larger sea of souls, death and judgment continued to loom large. It was felt with greater intensity as the monastic movement brought new emphasis to themes of sin, repentance, and judgement. All Souls’ Day emerged as a time to mark a continuing connection between the living and dead in a shared hope for refreshment for those who did not rest in the assurance of the saints.

The All Souls’ Day celebration on November second was established in the beginning of the eleventh century by Saint Odilo, the fifth Benedictine abbot

37 Peter Brown. *Cult of the Saints*, 75-77.
of Cluny and was soon adopted by the rest of the western Christian church. It is highly likely that the Cluniac ceremonies were the culmination of earlier church ceremonies and practices. The goal at Cluny was a society made right through strict orthodoxy, working to form the visible world toward its consummation in the Second coming of Christ. Founded by William of Aquitane in 910 and fueled by the wealth of the nobility, Cluny intensified and redirected the liturgical and political aims of the Carolingian past as they sought to “make good on the religious and social promise of the Carolingian Empire, 77 years after its formal collapse.”

In 794 a creed of Charlemagne at the Council of Frankfurt placed the judgment of the dead at the end of time, but prayer for the dead continued and was justified against an eschatological horizon that emphasized commonality between the living and the dead. Concern for the dead was then interconnected with concern for the living as the condition of the dead epitomized the existential condition of the living who are waiting in a state of eschatological expectation.

Patristic authors describe a period of waiting in a place of refreshment (refrigerium) or torture (tormentum). Gregory the Great emphasized that most ordinary, imperfect Christians are subject to a time of punishment to purge away

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39 Ibid., 490.
sin,\textsuperscript{40} while the Bishop of Saragossa taught that the flames are intellectual in nature.\textsuperscript{41}

What was clear was that the ordinary believer held a different status than the saints and martyrs who shine forth as a site of comfort and hope, but have attained a place that is not yet available to the common sinner.

In this as in other rituals, early Christians criticized structures of the pagan world while also adopting and incorporating them into their own practices. In the case of All Souls’ Day, Christian tradition took up an ancient pagan anthropology that saw the human soul as subject to possession and inspiration. This divided soul was the focus of liturgical and political efforts at Cluny.\textsuperscript{42}

All Souls’ Day is a product of the anti-demonic side of this eschatological program of prayer and liturgy for the dead.

During the feast of All Souls’, the monks walked chanting through the graveyard of their monastery, communing with souls who still shared with them the tribulation of temporal existence—souls who, like the living monks, were waiting for the end of time and the end of their trials. The condition of the dead, in the clutches of demons, epitomized the existential condition of the living. To pray for them was to pray for oneself.\textsuperscript{43}

This intensified liturgy and prayer for the dead at Cluny was consistent with a larger push to Christianize Europe and had wide-ranging political implications for efforts to gather territories from across the continent into the Christian sphere of power. These territories included Poland, the route through which Christianity eventually entered and took hold in Lithuania. But the forces coalescing to shape the territory now called Lithuania were distinctively different.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 488. As found in, Carol Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 59-60.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. As found in, Taio, (Bishop of Sargossa, ca. 600-683), Taonis et Isidori Nova fragmenta it opera, ed. Eduard Anspach (Madrid: Imprenta de C. Bermejo, 1930), 12-17. See also, Jacques Le Goff, \textit{The Birth of Purgatory}, Arthur Goldhammer, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 489.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 493.
than forces afoot in other parts of Europe. The Orthodox church was also pressing upon and exerting influence over Lithuania from the east and the leaders of the Grand Duchy were forced to respond to these varied and fluid dynamics—a that is not always included in discussions of the development of the western Christian church.

Almost since the inception of the monastic system, prayer for the dead was a pastoral activity connecting monasteries to patrons and allies. With the establishment of All Souls’ Day these practices of prayer “transcended this familial atmosphere to address the plight of unknown souls not cared for by the close-knit arrangements of monastic prayer.”44 The prayers on All Souls’ Day were directed toward helping not only all those Christians who had died in the past, but also the souls of all those now living, and all who would go on dying until the end of time. It was prayer on a “cosmic, totalizing scale”45—a cosmological vision of history connecting the living and the dead through common suffering under the attack of demons and other present pains and punishments. Even the great Abbot Odilo, the revered leader at Cluny, was remembered as struggling with demons on his death bed.

In the midst of this reality of sinfulness and vulnerability, the resurrection of Christ was the promise of liberation: all others die by plight; Christ dies by choice. ...the liturgical event was connected to a global, meaningful structure of time, stable and already completed in the mind of God. ...Odilo’s project for All Souls’ Day, with its universalist protection of the dead, assumed such a structural conception of time.46

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44 Ibid., 492.
46 Ibid., 492.
Prayer was to be offered for all Christians and for Christian souls who had died and would die between incarnation and the return of Christ. The warrant for the spread of Christianity was part of this totalizing vision. The vision later took on global proportions as church and crown joined forces in claiming territory for Christ and ordering humanity according to racialized regimes in a terribly distorted form of that vision. The seeds for this global warrant for use of force in claiming territories for Christ lay here in a universal vision of Christian salvation.

The theological commitments expressed in All Souls’ Day had other political implications as well. The line between the living and the dead was neither clear nor sharp. The dead retained enormous influence over the living as together they shared in this common plight of suffering and pilgrimage of hope. One of Odilo’s great projects was the Pax Dei, the Peace of God, through which the monks of Cluny urged fighting nobility to take oaths to refrain from private warfare at specific times and to refrain from attacking women, the unarmed, or the poor, thus establishing the peace of God. Striving to establish peace for the earthly poor in relation to social order, the monastery also sought to offer peace to the poor souls of the departed through ritual prayer for the dead.

The dynamics of All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day in western Christianity described by Brown and others remain important in the Lithuanian traditions of Visų Šventųjų Diena and Vėlinių Diena. Sometimes in similar forms, other times differing in response to shifting political and cultural realities. As an example,

48 Ibid., 493
class distinctions and care for the poor are an integral part of the history of Vėlinės in Lithuania, as they were at Cluny. Over time though, the locus of the class distinction in Lithuania has shifted from offerings of meat and bread for the poor to artifice—and some would claim excess—of candle and flower at the grave.

My mother tells me that during this earlier time all people brought very simple things, whether they were wealthy or poor: small white berries or flowers, pine boughs, and perhaps a homemade candle if one could afford it. I remember very lovely designs, but very simple. The graves were clean and pretty, but not fancy. People did not spend a lot of time there, but they did what they needed to do, decorated the grave, prayed, and showed respect. I remember it more this way during Soviet times as well. We went to the cemetery, but what we did at the graves was much simpler. Plainer. In many ways I liked it better.

There is continuity as well in some of the power dynamics and structure. As the political and ecclesial performance at Antakalnis cemetery on Vėlinės displays, a desire to gather the community by honoring and remembering the lives and deaths of heroes and saints can be an expression of respect and at the same time what one priest describes as a "political bonus" for state and church alike. Theological descriptions of Vėlinės also share continuity with the Cult of the Saints and Cluny. That is where we will turn now.

**Clergy Description of Vėlinės Theology and Practice**

*Klebonas Zigmantas offers an eloquent explanation of the theology of Visų Šventųjų Diena and Vėlinų Diena:*

From a Church perspective it has been said that when a man dies he is born in Heaven. And we signify it in a special way: we order mass and we visit the cemetery on the day of his death. Of course, it is painful to remember the moment of a dear person's death. Especially if you were lucky to be beside him. All the beautiful memories come back at that

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49 Benita, Female, age 58.
moment and also if you are a person of faith there appears hope. Hope that not everything has ended. That at the end of my days we will meet again. How it is going to happen my mind is not able to know. We listen to what Christ has said he promised—that we will meet again. We trust Him because many things he had said already came true. I am a part of a Catholic Church and Christ says that we are all brothers and sisters, who were redeemed by Christ’s blood. And there is one day in Church life when all of us in the whole Catholic world pray for all who died. I pray for your dead, for his dead, for her dead, and for their dead. And you pray for mine. And I am happy that somebody is asking for something for my dear dead. And it is very important for me! This day gives me an opportunity to pray. We have to have a special day for this.

The Klebonas then carefully sketches the relationship between Visų Šventųjų Diena and Vėlinų Diena while also distinguishing between the two:

There is a difference between Vėlinų Diena and Visų Šventųjų Diena. On Visų Šventųjų Diena we direct our prayers to all saints and we look at them with joy because they are in heaven already. We ask them to intercede for us...we look at the skies having hope. For example, we do not look toward ground (earth), because dirt is there. We read the stories about the saints and we dream that our dead would be with them there. This is why on Vėlinų Diena we pray to the Lord for this. And not only on Vėlinų Diena, we pray the whole octave until the 8th of November.

Most every priest I spoke with articulated a similar Vėlinės theology, though with differing nuance. Klebonas Tomas suggests a deeply relational understanding of Vėlinės and of the function of the church’s doctrine of purgatory:

We pray for God’s mercy for the dead, in the church the teaching is purgatory. The Prayer of Vėlinės is a sign of our love for people who we loved. Purgatory is the state of the soul. We are all waiting for salvation. Purgatory is a place of waiting. There is the place of heaven... purgatory ...hell. Those in hell we can not help. That is the teaching of the church. In purgatory we can help. We believe our prayers can reach God. God is listening to our prayers. We do not know who from our beloved people who are dead are in heaven or purgatory...or where they are. As always, we want for those we loved and still love—we want all the best. And we wish all the best. ...We pray for my friend, mother, grandmother, grandfather, godmother, neighbor, father, brother, sister. We pray to God, “You know everything. I ask your mercy, I ask your help for me, for my
beloved ones who are dead, for my beloved ones who are living with me.” This prayer is a sign of our belief—our faith.

*Klebonas* Tomas also connects the teaching and prayers of the church with the common *Vėlinės* habit of tending to neglected graves:

The church is inviting people to pray for those who are not remembered by anyone. And in Christian conscience it is encoded that you have to help the poor. And the poor is the one who does not have anywhere to go; who doesn’t have any shelter; who is neglected. So it is very Christian that you look after the graves of the ones who are not remembered...who do not have anyone else to remember. Christ in the Bible says once you feel mercy for the weak, you feel mercy for yourself.

*Klebonas* Tomas then expands this notion of praying for the dead beyond the known dead to a more inclusive vision:

Of course, it is very natural that people are praying first of all for those they love...those who are near and dear to me. I recall them in memory. I refresh their faces, the details of the life we spent together with parents and friends and classmates. And then we pray for all those who are not remembered by anyone. And in this we include all people. Everyone. The church invites us to pray for *all* people, especially for those who have no one who could remember them.

The most striking aspect of my conversations with priests was the consistent pastoral quality to their explanations of *Vėlinės*. Whether walking me through the liturgy for the day, rendering a picture of the theological vision behind the celebration, or explaining the significance of *Vėlinės* in parishioners’ lives, every priest I spoke with emphasized a redemptive and hope-filled faith that

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50 It is important to note that I am not suggesting that my conversations with clergy are in any way dispositive for an analysis of the nature of clergy formation and functioning in Lithuania today. I found my way to the clergy I spoke with both through recommendations and referrals from friends and acquaintances and through “cold calls” when I wished to speak with clergy members in particular regions in the country or demographic locales (urban or rural). Therefore, some of my conversations were pre-selected by others as people likely to be helpful to me and were probably selected by friends to reflect well on Lithuania and the church. Others were fairly random. For a description of more harsh and reactive interactions with clergy in ethnographic interviews, see Gediminas Lankauskas, “From Confrontation to Conciliation: On Syncretic Rapprochement between Catholics and Charismatic Evangelists in Lithuania.”
underlies the celebration of Vėlinės. They also focused on how these practices connect with parishioners’ lived experience. This is not to say that the priests I spoke with were naïve or uncritical. Some were very critical, particularly emphasizing a perceived culture of excess. But the driving force in their comments was always a sense of invitation to weave the dead with the living and heaven with earth, as well as a note of compassion about why these promises and practices are important for a people for whom hope has been very scarce in the last century.

When lay people explain the theology of Vėlinės the overriding theme is frequently fear of judgement. Interestingly, this was not a primary theme in the theology of Vėlinės outlined by the clergy I spoke with. Quite the opposite. The notion of purgatory was most often framed as an opportunity to prepare to be in the presence of God rather than a time of suffering. The deep and faithful Christian life was fleshed out as a life preparing to live in the presence of a God who is a loving parent, compassionate and fully of mercy. One who embraces rather than one who fiercely and punitively judges.

One scholar explains this discrepancy between the theological explanations of lay people and that of clergy by talking about the slow reception of the liturgical and theological changes under Vatican II in Lithuania, explaining that most clergy have now been introduced to the greater focus on formation of the faithful in Vatican II, with a diminished emphasis on sin and judgment. The theological framework of many priests has now incorporated this new teaching and instruction. Because training in the practices of Vėlinės in families still tends
to run through the older generation who participated in catechesis pre-Vatican II, family religious formation retains judgment as a primary framework. At the same time, Other people I spoke with suggested that at this point there is still no interpretation of Vatican II translated into Lithuanian, and even among the clergy the effect of Vatican II varies according to the degree of conservatism and openness to change in the individual, so parishioners hear very different things depending on the priest with whom they speak.

The real reason the depth of the pastoral sensibilities of the clergy surprised me was that I had heard such opposite characterizations of clergy from many of the people I’ve met in Lithuania, particularly younger people. While older Lithuanians enjoy telling the occasional story about the priest who exhibits odd behaviors and habits or the deliciousness of gossip about priests who were rumored to have hidden wives and children or to have collaborated with the KGB, most elderly Lithuanians speak with some deference when talking about clergy. This is not true of many younger Lithuanians. Those who are deeply involved in parish life do generally speak appreciatively of clergy. But those who are nominally Catholic or who attend services only out of respect for family are frequently very critical.

Here again, it was fascinating to watch the reactions of the younger Lithuanians who accompanied me on interviews. They usually came away rather shocked by the warmth and humanity of the priests. In several cases they wished to extend the conversations beyond my questions and offered to return

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51 The younger priests who went to seminary after independence were trained in the precepts of Vatican II.
with me anytime I wanted to meet with clergy again. One of them even announced a plan to return to set a meeting with the one of the priests herself. What I came to realize over time was that the criticism of many of the younger people I spoke with was not criticism of specific clergy, because most of the particularly ardent skeptics did not actually know any clergy. Their critique was instead a critique of the involvement and influence of the Catholic Church in Lithuanian politics. They conflate the clergy and the church into one construct. The reasons for this perception of the church are many. In the next section I will focus on the church’s experience in Lithuania during the last century as a context for these perceptions.

**Clergy and Church’s Relationship with the State as Context**

**Clergy**

Not surprisingly, the church's presence and performance during the years of occupation in Lithuania were multivalent and even conflicted. The church itself was of a piece with all those in the messy middle: finding a way through charred and unfamiliar terrain; serving as both a site of a resistance and a force of collaboration; under stress as the eras of occupation and independence unfolded in shifting and violent forms. Amid fluid and often traumatic change the church served as agent of hope and healing, but also purveyor and herald of distortion; hero, villain, victim, martyr, and one who simply stood by.

The pervasive presence of the Catholic Church in Lithuania enabled her to stand as ground and sustenance of a form of ordinariness that pointed to a reality and horizon beyond, and even against, the regnant ideology of the state. Yet at
times the church locked arms with the state. In important ways the state governed, disciplined, and monitored the church, and there were certainly leaders within the church who cooperated and supported the state in violence and repression. There were also those who put themselves at great risk to shelter and to save.

As noted in the first chapter, faith in God served as a powerful sustaining force for individuals deported to Siberia, tortured in prisons, and perilously finding a way amidst the treacherous and shifting landscape of Lithuania prior to, during, and after the war. The church also nurtured and offered counsel to Lithuanians who took the woods in partisan guerilla warfare. They managed this even as many among the clergy and leadership were themselves deported, imprisoned, and killed by the Soviets.

The response during the period when the Nazis took occupation of Lithuania was far less heroic. While it appears that individual priests and an occasional bishop did speak out against the genocide of the Jewish people, most did this belatedly, and only after the majority of the killings had already taken place. Formally, the church crafted a careful stance that did not directly challenge the German occupiers and at critical moments even encouraged cooperation. Yet sermons and statements show that local priests were appealing to theological doctrines claiming all people as God’s children and speaking out against violence as it escalated into unimaginable horror. Some courageous individuals within the church put their lives at risk to protect Jewish neighbors.52

52 Šarunas Liekis, et al., eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772. Liekis, et. al. draw particular attention to Father Bronius Paukštys, a parish priest in Kaunas who
Once Lithuanians came to realize the full scope of Nazi plans for occupation and violence, more clergy found the courage to address the atrocities that some members of their own parishes had helped to enact or had witnessed.\textsuperscript{53} Significantly, the church was a seedbed for movements to resist both the Soviet and Nazi occupations, but most of the efforts in the Nazi occupation came far too late to protect the bulk of the Jewish and Roma communities. At the same time groups within the church also supplied structure and membership to organizations accused of collaboration with the Nazis in the murder of Jewish citizens.\textsuperscript{54}

Gintarė’s story offers a glimpse of the complexity of relationship inherent in these times. She was a sleepless and excited young girl the night the soldiers arrived; her lacy white dressed laid out on her dresser in anticipation of her first communion the next morning. Her aunt who was a Catholic nun and also her godmother had just arrived to share in the celebration:

When my mother came into my room so early in the morning I was so excited. I was jumping up and down saying, “Oh!! Are we going on an adventure?” But then I saw the Russian soldiers, and realized my mother sheltered a large number of Jews and after the war was arrested and spent ten years in Soviet labour camps.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.,

was crying. The boy who was leading the soldier through the house was a Jewish boy who went to school with my brother. He kept asking where my brother was. I do not think he was really involved with the Russian soldiers, but he and my brother did not get along, and he wanted to make sure they took my brother. My father heard them coming through the house and my father shoved my brother through a false wall at the back. The two of them hid there until they had taken all of us away.

Gintarė later learned of her father’s agony that morning, unsure if he should step out and accompany his wife and other children, knowing his son would be killed if he did.

We were brought to the train yard and loaded into train cars and then sent to Vilnius to join the longer train going to Siberia. Our car was full of families from our area. They did not take my aunt the nun. They told her to return to her convent in Kaunas. She was able to find out where the train yard was in Vilnius was located and to bring food to the train car. That food kept our family and others alive on the long journey. She also brought a note from my father who was in hiding. The note said he was alive and he did not know what to do. My mother sent a note back to him telling him he made the right choice, and to go into hiding and not to come to them as they were separating all the men and boys from the women and children. They were sending the men to prison work camps. Most men never came back from those camps. My mother and my brothers and I made it back. Slowly. Separately. One-by-one. It was hard and took many years. But we made it back.

There were many different families in Gintarė’s train car on the journey to Siberia. Some had been warned to plan and they brought clothes, money, and jewels. Several months earlier Gintarė’s stately home had been visited by a Soviet soldier garrisoned in Lithuania before the formal invasion. He warned Gintarė’s mother of coming dangers and so she hid warm clothes outside in a milk can buried in the ground. Other families had only the shirts on their backs. All were families from the area who owned land or houses that the Soviets wished to nationalize, or who the Soviets believed posed a political threat. Some
were Catholic, some Jewish.

When they arrived in Siberia everyone lived in a large, unheated longhouse. They helped and supported one another, sharing food and resources and tending to children. Life was ferociously difficult with little to eat and expectations of demanding daily labor and production from both mother and children. “It didn’t matter if we were Catholic or Jewish or anything else. We were all trying to survive. And we helped one another when we could.” As the war progressed and the Nazis invaded Lithuania, Gintarė’s godmother—the aunt who was released that morning—became involved in hiding Jewish children to try to protect them from the Nazis. During that time at least one child was hidden in the same house from which Gintarė had been taken away.55

These interactions between Catholic and Jewish Lithuanians—both friendly and hostile—were woven into daily ordinariness of school, work, and commerce, then tested, challenged, distorted, and remade under severe trauma and hardship. They were based in everyday family functioning. They were fairly typical in Lithuania before the occupations and the war. Though each group tended to maintain separate social and religious organizations, there was interaction in daily life. Basia, whose family fled during the war but then returned and managed to maintain Jewish practice during the period of Soviet occupation, tells stories about the hotel her family managed before the war, and how the patrons were among the people who helped her family escape. This is not to say

55 Gintarė’s aunt's was posthumously awarded the Žūvančiųjų gelbėjimo kryžius (Life Saving Cross) by President Valdas Adamkus in recognition of her efforts to save Jewish children. See, http://www.president.lt/ew/lt/prezidento_veikla/apdovanojimai/valstybes_ordinai_medaliai_ir_kt./zuvanciuju_gelbejimo_kryzius.html [accessed March 31, 2013].
that all was happiness and light. Far from it. There were long simmering strains and tensions, with periods of intense antisemitism waxing and waning.  

Nonetheless, as the Muslim imam suggested, it is true that from the days of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Muslims, Jews, and Christians had lived side by side.

In relation to the Soviet occupation the role of the church is complex as well. The church was deeply involved in Soviet resistance movements. Some of these resistance groups were formed during the Nazi occupation and others developed when men and women fled to the woods after the Soviets re-entered Lithuania at the end of the war. There is great difference of opinion about whether various individuals among these groups were heroes, collaborators, thugs, or simply desperately trying to survive.

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56 See, Šarunas Liekis, et al., eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772.
57 Arūnas Streikus, “The Resistance of the Church to the Soviet Regime from 1944-1967” in Arvydas Anušauskas, ed., The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic States (Vilnius: Du Ka, 1999); Arūnas Streikus, "Democracy and Catholicism in XXth Century Lithuania: Between Catholic Action and Christian Democracy", (Unpublished paper). Delivered at Democracy, Culture, and Catholicism International Research Project, Lithuanian Regional Colloquium, Vilnius, Lithuania, May, 2011. See also, Arūnas Streikus, “This History of Religion in Lithuania Since the Nineteenth Century”. The form and significance of involvement by the church and particularly by organizations formed within the church is currently a focus of research and is a point of disagreement. This is a complicated topic for several reasons. First, though drawing upon pre-war relationships, much of the infrastructure for these groups was developed during the first Soviet occupation and the Nazi occupation. While there is evidence that some members of this group opposed the actions of the Nazis, there is also strong evidence of collaboration with the Nazis and there is much contention about how these individuals should be remembered today. In addition, Streikus argues that the social network of former Catholic youth organizations and the attendant social teaching of the church played an important role in the resistance movement. He also points specifically to the role and guidance of priests and Catholic social teaching during the partisan wars. He objects to the contentions of western scholars who construct the partisan wars in Eastern Europe, and Lithuania particularly, as a product of a pre-modern society based on strong rural community. He takes particular issue with Roger Petersen who conducted a study in rural Lithuania and developed arguments about how feelings and relationships play out in movements of resistance and rebellion and the development of ethnic hatred. See, Roger D. Petersen, Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons From Eastern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Petersen, Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Another interesting source of reading are paper pamphlets printed in the United States by the Lithuanian emigrant community. For example, A Trakiskis, The Situation of the Church and Religious Practices in Occupied Lithuania (No printing or copyright information available).
The repression of the church during the Soviet era was indeed extreme.\textsuperscript{58} Driven by an ideology of atheism and antagonism toward religion, Soviet policies toward the church were severe. Huge numbers of clergy were murdered or exiled. One priest emphasized to me that one in three priests was sent to Siberia and that there was only one bishop in Lithuania for most of the Soviet period because the others had either been imprisoned and killed or escaped west as refugees. Priests experienced significant pressure to cooperate with the KGB and to become informants.

Most church property in Lithuania was confiscated by the state and converted for use as factories, granaries, theatres, gymnasiums, art studios, and even prisons. As just one among many examples, a prominent church in Vilnius became a museum of atheism: a monument to the ideology of the state. Others were converted to factories, gymnasiums, sculpture workshops, theatres, or granaries. Worship was permitted in churches that remained open, but teaching and catechesis was officially forbidden. This confiscation of property and imposition of restrictions was not limited to the Catholic Church. Protestant and Orthodox churches, Jewish synagogues, and Muslim mosques received similar treatment, as did the people in leadership in those communities.

As occupation forces took hold, much of the Lithuanian Catholic Church went underground locally or into diaspora in places as far flung as the United States, Australia, and Argentina. The church also surreptitiously emerged in

striking and strong form in gulag camps across the icy tundra of Siberia, many of them populated by both priests and lay people. As in other locales, the suppression itself nurtured a form of tenacity, intensity, and devotion among many believers, and thus served to perpetuate and even strengthen relationships and faith for some. The underground church later produced a periodical called The Chronicle that reported Soviet actions against individual priests and parishes.\(^{59}\) There was also frustration and isolation. While diaspora communities in the United States formed religious identity around political appeals to western governments and to Rome, the discussion of the changes of Vatican II is but one example of a deeper reality: the church in Lithuania was cut off from growth and change in the larger Catholic church, and was forced to create ad hoc lines of authority, catechesis, definition of membership, and trust.

In relation to leadership today, the church in Lithuania faces a daunting task as it seeks to heal from years of oppression, distrust, and hardship while also integrating into a common body priests with profoundly different life experiences. Many among the oldest generation either escaped to the west or were deported, imprisoned, or murdered. Some survived because they collaborated, others because they found a way to navigate the system, and still others because they were deported and later managed to return. Those who entered seminary and served as priests during the Soviet period also have multiform experiences of existence and survival. Some who were refused entry to

seminary during Soviet times were finally able to serve after independence. The seminary experience before and after independence was markedly different.

One striking pattern is that many of the clergy who survived exile and returned to Lithuania seem to have served as mentors and guides to priests and devout laypeople seeking to find their way in Soviet Lithuania and in the church. Often these priests were sent to small towns rather than to cities for fear they would lead resistance movements in cites. Though they returned from Siberia with memories of terror, those who survived frequently exhibited the sort of spiritual freedom described by Aurelija’s father. Priests who were not exiled but who refused to obey KGB requirements were also sent to small towns and villages to reduce the likelihood that they would provide leadership to resistance movements. In many cases, these returned deportees and quiet Soviet resisters emerge as the person who led young men to consider the priesthood, who sheltered people hiding from Soviet authorities, and who shared forbidden learning with lay people, sometimes drawing on theological and Biblical texts that friends and parishioners had secreted away for them in barns and attics until their return.

The story of Klebonas Tomas is a fascinating glimpse into this dynamic. He felt a call to be a priest from a very young age. Tomas tells the story of his local priest’s earlier deportation:

He told me that in the early evening one KGB officer visited. They talked about this or that. The KGB officer came and brought him a red rose flower. He didn’t understand why...what does it mean? At daytime the KGB officer visited him, and that night he was exiled. He was also invited to sign an agreement to collaborate. He said “No.” There was a mock trial. He said to me, “I told them ‘you are the judges now here, but do not
forget that there is one judge above you who is really a just judge. And this judge does not forget anything on the earth.” And then he was sent away. He was there for seven years and then came back and was only allowed to work in small village parishes.

This priest had an enormous influence on Tomas:

My family was not very religious. My mother was religious. I was baptized as a child, did first communion, confirmation, etc. My father never went to the church. Only when I became priest he visited my first mass and took part in this. The parish priest was a huge influence on me. He was really an intellectual. I remember I was a child and he invited me to his apartment for coffee or cake after Easter or Christmas mass. The first thing that made a huge impression for me was his library. A huge library…walls covered with bookcases and books in German, French, Latin, English, old Encyclopedias. My eyes were big. This was in the middle of a small village. He was also not very fond of the Soviet government. He was not allowed to work in a big parish in a big town or city. So [my village] was the biggest parish he was allowed to have, because he was not good for the Soviet Government.

The Soviet state closed most of the seminaries in Lithuania, leaving open only the seminary in Kaunas. It was closely monitored and controlled by the state. The number of priests trained in the country was radically curtailed.

Admission decisions were determined only after applicants had been interviewed and approved by the KGB. Klebonas Thomas describes the process:

The seminary was fully controlled by the KGB. The hierarchy of the school and of the Catholic Church were formal leaders only. No students were admitted to the seminary without the consent of the KGB. Their admission procedure was like this…for example 50 potential students applied for admission. The administration of the seminary would send the list to the representative of religious affairs for the government…the KGB. They would decide the number to be admitted. Their priorities went in this order: 1) Those who agreed to cooperate would be admitted immediately; 2) People with lower intellectual skills were considered less dangerous, also those with weaker health. The Soviet government thought they had

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potential opponents in clergy, so they wanted to limit who could have that role. Mainly it was just people in those two categories who were admitted.

After graduating from school Tomas took a year off while the military was preparing paperwork for him. He worked in a factory and planned to take the seminary exams. He was not admitted to the military for health reasons. While working at the factory he became ill with a kidney infection and was admitted to the hospital. He is quite entertaining when he talks about his interactions with the KGB:

Just after arriving at the hospital there were exams for seminary. I told the hospital administration that I needed to go, that if they didn’t let me go for one day I would leave for good. I said, “I need just one day free out of the hospital and then I will come back.” A few weeks after I returned I was advised to meet with a visitor in a visiting room at the hospital. I had a sense it was the KGB. I visited with him in the hospital for two hours plus. The main thing he wanted was for me to sign the cooperation agreement with the KGB. He said, “You are quite gifted. Your marks in school are good. You can go to university and study whatever you like…why did you choose seminary?” I said, “I have worked half a year in the factory and I fell sick. I can not do any strenuous work. After only six months I fell sick. I can only pray rosary with old ladies and say mass. I can’t do anything else that is too hard.” He said, “let’s say you are a student in pre-seminary and you see friends and other students organizing against the Soviet state. What will you do?” I said, “I don’t know, maybe I will go to my mother and say, ‘mommy, what should I do?’” Or maybe I will go to the rector and tell the rector.” He said, “No, not good. You must come directly to us and tell us. Here is this piece of paper—you sign and agree.” I said, “No…I can’t do it. I will not sleep. I will have to go to ask my mommy.” We played this game back and forth. I do not know if I convinced him that I was weak not only physically but here in my head, or what. Back and forth we went. Finally I say, “Oh no…I would have a bad conscience. I must check with my priest in my parish. Maybe we can meet some other time.” He then said, “okay, you want to study in priest’s seminary? Now your answer here will define whether you are going to study there or not.” Then he said, “you must sign a new sheet of paper that says you will not tell anyone about this conversation.” I said, “yes, this I can do.” And I wrote on a paper, “I, Tomas G., promise about this conversation I will tell no one.” And then just signed it. I came back home from the hospital and in the beginning of August I received a letter from the priest’s seminary that I am admitted.
Klebonas Tomas emphasizes his luck, “what I wanted to say is I was just lucky. It was coincidence. It happened that something was wrong with my kidneys and it just happened that this KGB officer had to come to visit me at the hospital during that time.”

After requiring Klebonas Tomas to sign his secrecy paper, the KGB officer pulled out his calendar and told Tomas that he would be having his first break from seminary over Christmas and that Tomas was to meet him at a set hour and day in a hotel in a city near his home. Nervous and unsure what to do, Tomas contacted the priest from his home parish: “Of course my parish priest knew about these meetings. I always told him and he advised me what to do: ‘Don’t eat or drink anything. They can put something in your drink or food.’” This was not the first time Tomas had relied on this priest for guidance in his life:

For example, when I was a child in the school...maybe 10th grade...and my auklėtoja (head teacher) said, “you are a shame to this school. You regularly go to church, you do not join komsomol.” This Head Teacher gave me an assignment to give an atheistic lecture. I went to the Klebonas crying and said, “I am going to miss lessons. I am not going to go to school on that day because I will not do that.” Klebonas told me definitely to go to the school and to give the lecture. He gave me information. He said the name of the lecture would be “world religions.” The teacher’s face became very, very red and angry when I gave the lecture. I talked about the roots of Christianity, Judaism, etc. After awhile I got the same assignment—to prepare another atheistic lecture. Klebonas told me in this lecture to talk about most popular book ever written, so I spoke about the Bible and talked about the authors, how it was written, how many times it was printed, Old Testament and New Testament, its importance to humanity. It was not atheistic but catechesis. This Priest was a very wise man. Very kind and smart. I was not asked to give a lecture again.

Tomas followed the older priest’s advice again when he was in seminary and he
met with the KGB officer.

I remember I was so scared. I went to the hotel as I was told. “You want tea?” the KGB officer said. “Oh, no, no, no!” “Coffee?” “Oh no!” I was just curious myself what will happen next, and I asked him, “what must I do in priest’s seminary?” He looked at me, “Nothing…you must be a good student. You must be an example, to study well, and nothing else.” So we talked maybe half an hour about not important things… I do not remember the topic…but I remember I asked him what to do and I expected he would give me some assignment. I was astonished that he said, “just study hard and good.” Then he said Easter vacation we will meet in same room at 12:00. Same procedure—nothing important. I think in such a way they used to teach young people, so they got used to their presence…to remind them they are there and watching. We met, we talked for half hour, then he said you will have summer vacation and in June on this day we will meet at 12:00. I talked to my priest and he said, “In summer on this day when you have the appointment it is a church festival.” My priest said it was a very good reason not to go there. “You are a student of the priest’s seminary. 12:00 is liturgy, and you are a student in seminary and must be there. It is a good excuse and let’s see what happens if you don’t go.” And I didn’t go. After that I had no more contact.

Yet Tomas continually felt that he was being watched, and that he must be very careful:

In the last year they tried to put pressure on me about military service. I went to the hospital. I was really always very lucky. I met a good doctor; a young doctor, and also Catholic. We became somehow friends. He said, “In your papers we can see some changes in your kidneys. It can be nothing worse and just something from birth, and yet you can say whatever you like—it is subject to interpretation and can not be diagnosed clearly with x-rays. You can pretend you are sick, if you think so.” “Yes I am,” I said. And he wrote those conclusions, and it was very, very good for me.

After seminary Tomas was assigned to a large parish in a northern city. He became involved with the Sąjūdis movement, eventually being elected to the people’s Seimas, a group that was elected through local citizen’s gatherings to

61 Devintinės is a Catholic Celebration of Christ's Body and Blood (also known as God's Body Celebration or Vainikai in Žemaitija). It is celebrated on Thursday of the ninth week after Easter. It usually falls between the 25th of May and the 23rd of June: http://www.day.lt/sventes/straipsniai/devintines
provide a temporary alternative to the Soviet Supreme Council designated by the USSR. During this time he was again contacted by the KGB. They wanted him to give them information about other people in Sajūdis:

I said, “Sorry, I can tell you nothing about people. If you want to know something, then go and talk to them.” I said this because they could do nothing to me. I was a priest then. They could not stop me from being a priest. That was what I wanted to do—be a priest. I was not afraid of being sent to a small parish. That was fine with me.

Tomas and others also tell stories about mistrust and jealousy in those years, and about priests and bishops who were given opportunities that raised eyebrows: “You know, nobody talked about such things in public. But we always suspected... It was really a hard time, but an interesting time.”

It is indeed significant for these older generations of priests that Vatican II brought huge changes to Roman Catholic churches around the world, but not to Lithuania. A distinctive of Catholic polity and practice is that it is ruled and governed by doctrine and law, but the effective interaction and participation of most Catholics is through embodied ritual and sacrament. It is difficult to maintain depth of teaching and clarity of understanding within such ritual bounds when the larger social reality is premised on a question of who is to be trusted and who is not. Affirmation and commitment are continually unsure and contested. Nothing is as it first appears. The meaning and nature of the "true" church becomes elusive. Even moreso when contact beyond the boundaries of one’s own world is limited and monitored. The dizzying nature of that complexity is just now emerging as more and more of the voluminous files and transcripts from the Soviet state apparatus are opened to public review and varying forms of
collaboration and resistance are brought to light.\textsuperscript{62}

**Lay People**

Yet the church did continue, and in powerful and pervasive form. Complexity framed the life of lay people as well. Officially, anyone connected with the Communist party put themselves, their jobs, and their families at peril if they were identified with the church. Though the form of censure varied from risk to life and home during the early Stalinist years to risk to job and promotion after Stalin's death and "the thaw", surveillance of church activity is assumed as a given in most stories from the Soviet period.

As noted earlier, those who lived in rural areas and were ordinary workers on collective farms often describe a laissez-faire attitude among locals, with only rare instances of intervention by officials to punish or discourage church participation. But that participation is generally described as sporadic and marginal--centered more in practice at home than in participation at church. As noted in previous chapters, for educators and those who held state positions, the surveillance was at a different level. Those who lived in the larger cities and wished to visit a church would go to grandparents in the countryside to seek out priests to bless marry, baptize children, and provide formation for first communion and confirmation. Rural educators and leaders would travel to a family acquaintance in a different village or in the city.

This practice of withdrawing to another area to participate in church practices was so common that it is not really credible to believe that Soviet

\textsuperscript{62} See, Gediminas Lankauskas, “From Confrontation to Conciliation: On Syncretic Rapprochement between Catholics and Charismatic Evangelists in Lithuania”.

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authorities were oblivious to what was happening. While there is little doubt that many individuals were punished for participating in activities that were not deemed proper, whether or not they had actually participated, it is also clear that although the State condemned religious participation, the actual State apparatus sometimes enforced a respect for the pretense of atheistic ideology more than a true formation in and ascription to that ideology.

Many people chuckle over seeing fellow workers who were also attending mass in a nearby city, both parties pretending they did not know the other. Jaunutė, in her late fifties, smiles as she tells a story from her childhood. She grew up in a very religious family and was herself drawn to the church since childhood. She remembers constructing her own little space in the family home to pray and say the rosary. Her family was also unusually open in sharing stories and family history. When she was in elementary school an official came to her class and asked the children if they prayed in their home. Her hand shot into the air, along with a couple of other children. The teacher asked the children to stay after class that day, but instead of berating them, the teacher simply explained that if they were ever asked that question again it would be a good idea to answer, “no”.

Rytis is deeply involved with the Catholic Church. A gentle and witty man in his sixties, he chuckles as he describes a childhood visit in the home of a friend whose father was one of the local KGB officers in his small town. When it was time for dinner the father invited Rytis to say a prayer. Rytis’s parents were teachers and he had been schooled in caution by his family. He responded, “Oh.
I do not know any prayers!” A smile crept over the friend’s father’s face and he said, “Oh, alright then. Let’s just go ahead and eat.” “He was very kind to me all through my life and never approached my parents,” explains Rytis, “but it was clear to me that he knew we were a religious family.”

The State did seek to supersede and even replace the traditional practices of religious formation in the church. One of the most pervasive and effective tools in that effort was enculturation through the Soviet youth organizations. Narration of that experience varies greatly by family formation and by age. As I will discuss in the next chapter, many speak wryly of their time in red neckbands, playfully participating as part of the larger social milieu of their childhoods. Other children and youth were more heavily involved and deeply devoted.

Having witnessed the movement of the church from a murky yet somewhat heroic role at the margins of power to a powerful and highly criticized place at the ideological center of post-independence politics and posturing, those in the Lost Generation and younger tend to be respectful of the church, yet most are hesitant to grant the church too much trust or authority. An interesting exception to this is a group of younger Lithuanians who deeply identify with the church and find solace in the traditional norms for family they find there. They experience this structure as a welcome contrast to Soviet based family formation.

Marija, a woman in her early forties, is an example of another group who feel indebted to the church for sustenance, survival, and hope. She is a teacher in the local school and the mother of eight children. Her family lives beside a
small pond in a rural town just down the hill from the church. As we sit around her table with several of her children variously pouring tea, offering apple cake and crawling into their mother’s lap, a sense of peace fills the air—a peace that is stunning to me as a mother of only two. These children clearly feel both loved and secure. Marija looks out the window, smiles and says, “isn’t this a lovely place to live? We feel so fortunate.” She grew up in this small town in a home tinged with strain and fear. Her father was an alcoholic and was physically violent. Money was scarce. Though she lived with a large extended family nearby, she felt very alone.

At the age of sixteen Marija became deeply ill, both mentally and physically. Her mother took her to doctors and even found a way to bring her to a hospital in Russia. Nothing helped. She found healing through a mystical experience of prayer and vision. That experience initiated a fervent life of prayer and a well of deep faith. Her face glows and tears well up in her eyes as she talks about that time and about the gifts God has granted her since. “I always wanted many children, and I was given all of these.” One of her children has Downs’ Syndrome. She describes her as “the child who has helped my heart grow the most.” Her oldest daughter recounts the magic she feel when her family gathers in the cemetery as the sky is growing dark and the mass is beginning: “It is a very warm feeling there together. I like it very much.”

These younger families who center their lives on the church are clearly in the minority in Lithuania. But many Lithuanians do maintain that the Catholic
Church was an important aspect of identity maintenance during the Soviet occupation and the independence movement in the late 1980's. Even here the lines blur though. Individuals I interviewed went out of their way to offer examples of Soviet cooperation and participation not only among those from the Lithuanian communist party, but also among those who joined the push for independence—and even some of the most famous leaders of the Sąjūdis movement. I will describe this intermingling of church and state a bit more in the next chapter. What is important to note now is the simple fact that the church’s role is murky even at the point of individuals and politics. This is not surprising given the complexity of the situation and the variety of people, incentives, and experiences.

People differ in their personal perspectives on these questions. Some feel that there is a clear separation between identification with church and identification with state. Others feel that the two go hand in hand and the strength of one depends upon the strength of the other. When asked about the link between being Lithuanian and Vėlinės Klebonas Tomas is very clear:

In the Lithuanian church we do not put emphasis on any nationality but we pray in the first place for brothers and sisters in our faith and for all who went to sleep with the hope to rise with Christ. Every religion—Islam, Buddhism—talks about the eternal life. The church when praying for the dead does not exclude any religion, any confession. We pray for all deceased. Every person is a child of God.

Tolvyda grew up in a family that was not at all religious. She suggests a distinction between the function of Vėlinės in Soviet times and draws that distinction in relation to the church:

Perhaps in Soviet times when it was forbidden to be religious or to attend
church, everything connected with religion was related also to the identity of being Lithuanian, or to be more precise to be non-communist. But again I think it is artificial because when we are independent this link is broken totally. Now being Lithuanian and being religious is not the consequential sense.

Following independence the church experienced an exhilarating resurgence. Sanctuaries were full as Lithuanians reveled in the freedom to congregate and to affiliate as they wished. The church was a significant carrier of the new spirit of nationalism. Things have changed since then. Žilvinas sighs, “Thousands of people fled to churches during Sajūdis. Where are they all now? It is also a matter of fashion.” Both Klebonas Zigmantas and Žilvinas see this very differently than Tomas or Tolvyda. To their mind, there is a loss of strength and hope in the nation that is directly related to the decline of participation in the church. Žilvinas talks about his daughter who is dating a man from another country. The man does not think that marriage is important and this worries Žilvinas. He raises this when he is trying to explain to me the importance of Vėlinės:

It is the same like loving homeland. Or wife. Sacrament is the base of our life. We baptize our children and there is the sacrament. You can never abandon your child. That [boyfriend] is not religious, but my daughter is religious and she wants to get married. He does not understand why they need it. And this is how the whole house of cards starts to collapse—family/nation/state. If you break the family, the country will also get broken. My mother grew up in a beautiful, harmonious family and it was painful for her to lose it. This is why she left for the woods.

A movement called Misija Siberas developed in Lithuania after declaration of independence from the USSR. Through this program, young Lithuanians now travel to Siberia to the sites of Lithuanian deportation and prison camps in
Siberia. While there, they do restoration work in cemeteries, meet Lithuanians who did not return to Lithuania and instead remained in the area, and explore some of the painful realities of their country’s history. The program was developed out of concern that the long years of loss in Lithuania and the suffering and courage of the deportees would drift from memory and be forgotten. It is significant to note the deep connection in this program between attentive maintenance of memory and care for the resting places of the dead. The program is connected to the church—hence its name misija (mission). Yet its focus is upon the maintenance of identity as Lithuanians, and on the awareness and transmission of history from one generation to another.

It is also important to note the agency of movement and place enacted in this project. Young Lithuanians travel to Siberia to attend to graves, to hear stories, and to witness the material remains of a severe history. They then return to Lithuania to share that experience with the hope that they will integrate their personal experience and knowledge into the conversation and awareness of their own generation in Lithuania. In their pilgrimage toward Siberia these youth follow the channels of centralization and dispersion imposed by the USSR. But when they carry that experience back to Lithuania—a space that was periphery in the USSR but is now center under the Lithuanian Republic—they trace a contrary movement that heralds an alternative narrative: the narrative of contemporary church and state in Lithuania. Thus, the practices of memory in the now peripheral cemetery in Siberia are vested with enormous and contrary power by this new center. But it is not really new, as it was a site of identity and hope all
along. In addition, this program re-inscribes space in powerful ways by resisting the center of power imposed during Soviet times and tracing a path that places the center of power within Lithuania and the church.

It is tempting to immediately point to the dangers of this conflation of nation, family, and religion. The horrors of the Nazi Final Solution are but one example of many such dangerous entanglements in our world. I will explore those concerns more deeply in the next chapter. To understand the nuance and complexity it is important to listen to two other responses from Žilvinas, responses that indicate the danger of distortion inherent in trying to fit the messy experience and challenge in Lithuania into a neat western box labeled “tolerance”.

When I ask Žilvinas whether everyone in the country is considered Lithuanian or whether only Catholics are Lithuanian he responds in a very matter of fact way:

Let’s use historical knowledge to answer this. Gediminas brought the Jewish here in the 13th century, Vytautus brought Kairaites in the 14th or 15th century, then there were Belarusians, finally other nations, such as Germans, who have lived here from the Medieval times. The Chronicle of the Dukedom says that they all were citizens of the Dukedom. Nowadays all national minorities are considered citizens as well. Of course, there are separate nationalistic groups who declare that Lithuania is for Lithuanians only but they don’t deserve any comments. Now the Polish issue has been exaggerated too much by politicians! Lithuanian and Polish scientists and historians meet and have a nice dialogue and cooperate. Those who need a political bonus send a random Polish man to shout out loud that he is the “real” landlord here. Real Lithuanian Polish people who have lived here since the Union of Lublin in 1569 are exactly the same as Lithuanian citizens and have equal rights.

He is similarly unequivocal when asked about the history of the Jews in
Lithuania and what is taught in school:

We teach from the history textbooks. It is mentioned there that part of Lithuanians took part in the Holocaust. You can’t hide it and you can’t change it...you can’t run away from the fact that Lithuanians took part in Jewish shootings. And those people are not treated with respect nowadays. ...I can only speak about the intelligent people...It doesn’t matter that they [Jewish people] held the bigger part of wealth before the war. If that wealth had been acquired illegally the owners had to be tried but not killed. You may know that the Seimas has decided to pay compensations ...It is like a symbolic apology. They were innocent, they died without knowing why.

At the end of conversation Žilvinas gets tears in his eyes when he connects the prayers of Vėlinės with his recent trip to Rome over Easter and his vision of the true nature of the church. “I am sorry the Lithuanians don’t have much chance to experience the global church. I was at the Vatican on Easter. That night I had a dream that my family and the whole school was with me…feeling and experiencing the church around the world.”

One of the gifts of Catholic ecclesiology and practice is a wide space to walk and to pray. Catholic ritual marks space, but it is porous space. As I witnessed in the relationship between evening mass and graveside ritual during my first Vėlinės experience and in many cemeteries since, people quite literally move in and out of these dihliz-ian Vėlinės spaces. The boundaries are not tightly patrolled. There is no one checking for individual intention, meaning, or authenticity at either the gate to the cemetery or the door to the church. This fluidity leaves the church open to the danger of ill-chosen and even dangerous alliance. At the same time, it is also a carrier of hope. In the next chapter we will further explore the interweaving of family, church, and nation but give attention to
national identity.
Chapter 6: State
Chapter 6: State

In the cemetery where my mother is buried, when you walk into the cemetery there was a grave of soldiers and they would always have that flame on. Always. And girls in the national outfits, and they would read poems about remembrance. And even people from the communist party would be there talking and giving the speeches. And now after we got independence, it turns out that those graves are not even soldiers. Now it is rewritten, and they changed the grave stones on the top and it is all the names of the partisans…the ones who no one knows where they were buried. So who is buried in it? Nobody knows. When I was a kid it was always the grave of the unknown soldiers. …We as kids always thought of the Russian soldier of the Second World War. Now it is names of Partisans. So who is really there?—Aurelija, female, age 37

Introduction:

In this chapter I will explore the relationship between Vėlinės practices and ever-shifting political identity as Lithuania has moved from the experience of occupation into the expectations of a liberal state and membership in the European Union. I will particularly focus on the different ways family and church function within notions of nation. I will highlight some of the dangers in those formulations. More than that though, I will consider Vėlinės cemeteries as dihlizian spaces that both receive and inform the experiences of struggle and ambivalence at the heart of the Lithuanian political experience in the modern era.

I begin by outlining some of the complexities of the Lithuanian political imaginary. I then turn to Etienne Balibar's notion of fictive identity in order to show a process of group identity formation that operates through family, education, and language, together creating a notion of nation parading as an organic reality though it is in fact an imaginative construct. This fictive identity draws some people inside of the circle of belonging and marks others as outside. I will then briefly discuss some of the manifestations of fictive ethnicity in both the
past and present in Lithuania. Finally, I will turn to the stories of three different people to explore how their relationship to notions of state intertwine with their participation in Vėlinės.

Although I acknowledge and explore the dangers of ardent nationalism in this chapter, it is critically important to keep Lithuania’s recent years of violence and insecurity in mind when formulating and offering critique of the nation state. Lithuanians paid an unthinkable price when the first Lithuanian Republic disappeared into the horror of the Soviet and Nazi occupations. While the first Republic of Lithuania was clearly constructed upon imagined and sanitized glories of the past, it was nonetheless a period of relative stability and peace—even if not great prosperity—for most of its citizens. As land reforms took hold and an increasing number of people gained access to education and market participation, it was a time of economic improvement for many of its citizens. That sense of security was torn asunder in unspeakable ways at the advent of World War II. The rumbling from the earthquake of that time continues still. Though most people in Lithuania speak of concerns about current realities, nearly everyone recognizes that the current form of political stability—imperfect though it may be—is a far cry from the experience of the war years and after.

The quote from Aurelija that begins this chapter indicates the quizzical nature of political performance in Vėlinės cemeteries. Her family is but one of many families who were deeply marked by the scars and confusion of these violent spasms of history. Though Aurelija is now a member of the “new elite” and living a very secure life in the capital city, her father spent his life unable to
access certain positions of power and responsibility because he was marked as a deportee. Her grandparents were deported because of allegations of participation with partisan activities: "There was no proof, but a neighbor could simply make an accusation, sign a paper, and that was it." When the Soviet soldiers arrived to take Aurelija’s grandfather’s family away, the parents managed to push one of their small sons out the window, telling him to run to his grandparents’ house. The other son, along with Aurelija’s grandmother, her two month old son, and her husband were taken away to a brutal existence. As they were being transported by train to Siberia Russian women would come to the door of the box car and beg Aurelija’s grandmother to give them her infant son, saying “he will not survive the trip with you anyway.” But Aurelija’s grandmother refused, managing to keep her infant son alive by breast feeding throughout the journey.

The conditions were harsh: frozen tundra beyond anything they had managed in Lithuania; giving birth to a child and nearly starving; long hours toiling in the forests; being forced to move when the authorities felt they were doing too well and earning too much money; sickness and fear. Aurelija, a physician, particularly remembers one story about receiving a package of food sent from Lithuania that contained lard. Out of generosity the family shared a bit of the food with a neighbor who was barely surviving, but his system was so malnourished that he could not digest it and he died the next day.
Aurelija’s grandfather was one of four brothers. Only one of those brothers was alive when her grandfather was sent to Siberia with his young family:

The other two had a connection with partisans. Toward the end of the war [World War II], Russians came and killed all the kids. They had nothing to prove that they were partisans. The sons were planting potatoes or something—getting ready for the spring events. My grandfather was a newlywed who lived separately in a different house. But he was helping them to do the job. My grandfather left the house and then a soldier came and killed both boys in the eyes of the mother. [My great grandmother] grabbed a brick and threw it at the soldiers. They were all buried in the village cemetery.

**Imagined and Disappointed Community**

The second Republic of Lithuania, like the first, is an imagined community. Yet this community was imagined within and against the Soviet political reality. Sajūdis, the leaders of the independence movement, drew upon visions of the days of the Grand Duke as well as wounds and longing from the loss of the first Republic, but they also responded to current Soviet reality. As we have seen, Lithuanian identity maintenance within families was a piece of social reality during the period of Soviet occupation, as was the marginalized—yet in some senses symbolized—church. As one person put it, “to look at a church was to remember you were Lithuanian, even if you did not participate in the church.”

Another important element in the independence movement were dancing and singing groups that maintained cultural practices throughout the occupation period. The Soviets invested in the Baltic States in a variety of ways including the introduction of new industries, construction of collective housing, and
additional physical and social infrastructure. The Soviets intended their support of cultural practices to communicate that all regions in the Soviet system were part of a brotherhood, with the Communist party as the father intending good for the whole family. In Lithuania and the other Baltic states, it did not really work out that way. Whereas in other portions of the USSR the Soviet authorities created *ex nihilo* and mapped alleged cultural continuity and practices onto areas that shared little to no sense of common identity, in each of the Baltic states a political imaginary was already in place—albeit one with fractious disagreement and struggle between groups within the polity as the contestation over Vilnius and the ebb and flow of antisemitism in Lithuania indicate.

What this meant was that as much as the Soviets may have strived to control these public performances and rituals to further their intention to enhance the state, they simply did not have complete power over mind, body, and affect. Within Lithuania song and dance organizations and the attendant gatherings and festivals are frequently cited as examples of Soviet strategies that were poached upon and reclaimed for the purposes of tactical political organization and independence. Practices of the church and ordinary calendar festivals and

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1 It should be noted that one of the reasons some Russian scholars object to the characterization of the Soviet presence in Lithuania as colonization or even occupation is that Russia invested in physical and social infrastructure and the investment in the Baltic region was actually quite large compared to other areas. When the Baltic countries raised the specter of reparations for the harm and destruction of their countries the Russians claimed that they had been invited into the country by Lithuania and that Lithuania should be reimbursing them for the investment and improvements they had made there.


occasions functioned in this way as well. As we have noted, Vėlinės cemeteries provided this same kind of dihliz-ian space. Though Klebonas Tomas sees Vėlinės as a church festival and does not believe there is much connection between Vėlinės and being Lithuanian, he does suggest that Vėlinės was tied to national consciousness in Soviet times. It was a space where resistant practices were performed in the midst of the strategic power of the state:

Vėlinės during Soviet time, it was also a certain sign of opposition—of disagreement with the atheistic regime. So Vėlinės at that day, the whole of Lithuania was on the streets...with cars and on foot. Now it is the same. But now everything is free. We have no need to demonstrate our disagreement. But that time when everything was under pressure, people did it also as a sign of opposition or resistance against Soviet ideology. Of course, a secondary effect was that it would initiate the national consciousness.

Some see Lithuanian identity as primary both in Soviet times and now, and they frequently connect this with the pagan roots of Vėlinės:

It is all Lithuanians' day. It is more about that... There is a very strong connection between being Lithuanian and Velines. And a very old connection—even maybe from the pagan times. Lithuanians have an active tradition of remembering dead people and Vėlinės is the day to connect with another world. My grandparents used to tell stories about waiting at night. The souls would come back and walk through town and we should light candles to welcome them and keep them warm and show them the way.—light a candle and warm them up on their way.4

Yet the nature of this connection between being Lithuanian and Vėlinės is complex. It is not a simple, straightforward “blood and soil” nationalism. It is tied up not only with these notions of the pagan roots of these practices, but also with a social priority on care for the dead. Jonas is eighty years old and is an expert

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4 Salvija, female, age 48.
beekeeper. His life has been quite hard. Vėlinės practices are deeply important to him. He feels a profound connection between his Lithuanian identity and these practices: “So if the person for any reason is interested in Lithuania…he or she should get interested in Vėlinės. One of the important features of being Lithuanian is that you take care of the graveyards.” He also feels a deep tie between these practices and both pre-Christian and Christian understanding of relationship with the dead, exemplified by his talk of “spirits” and his talk of God. This interwoven relationship has sustained him through the years:

I pray for those who are deceased…I get the feeling that they are with me and are helping me. So I am saying what I am feeling. So one day all of us will die. And what those spirits and we are giving each other on Vėlinės…the day will come that we will probably be giving to one another who are alive. Sometimes I think there are many times when I think I could have died. But probably the God and the spirits helped me and kept me alive. So I think I have a deep connection with Vėlinės…with the spirit. It is not the body—it is the spirits.

Jonas’s father fought in World War I and also fought in the battles with Polish troops trying to capture Vilnius. When independence came he was given a farm as compensation for his voluntary participation in the wars. After the Soviets took control of the country Jonas’s father was jailed and killed because he was accused of partisan activities. Though Jonas and his mother knew he was dead, they did not know what had happened to him and did not discover the facts until after independence when they were able to obtain copies of his execution orders. They still do not know where he is buried.

Jonas had to go to great lengths to obtain an education as he was continually rejected from schools because he was a partisan’s child. Eventually he found his way through the system by convincing officials that although he was
a partisan’s child he behaved as a Soviet. He was then given significant responsibility on collective farms. Jonas is a deeply religious man and prayer is very important to him, though he is independent in his understanding of what that means: “It depends when I pray….I do not agree with what some of the older women do…run to church, go through the rosary, with discussions about the skirts and the church. I pray, but not always in the church—it is from my heart.” When he talks about going to the cemetery he speaks of praying the traditional prayers of the church, meeting with his beloved dead, exchanging care and attention, praying for them, and receiving their help.

At this point in his life Jonas feels deep gratitude:

Interesting thing…when you ask about sights I can tell you a lot. There are not only sights but also visions. I am going to be 80 very soon. There is the reality for me personally, I believe it is time for me to say thank you. I am not asking God for anything for myself. I am asking the God for others. I can only thank God…and thank God for the people I met…and for the doctors who were able to help my heart. And I thank the bees that they worked so hard for me. And sometimes I thank for myself…that I worked so hard and was able to do these things. I thank God and thank God for other people who are around me. Not just my family, but others who are around.

Jonas is one among many people who talk about the connection between Lithuanians and cemeteries. Some speak of it honorifically—as a structure of respect and a backbone of society. Others speak of it as a Lithuanian disposition toward sadness and grief, sometimes even connecting it with the typically grey weather in the area. Tolvyda, age twenty-six, is quite philosophical when she talks about the connection:

Somehow I didn’t think of this. Lithuanians are called the nation of sadness. As a nation of not happy people. We commit many suicides. We are always complaining about something. Partly to stereotype but
partly it is true. I would be cautious about that. But I think it is really close to reality. But I can’t see a direct link—or even an indirect link—with Vėlinės. There is also some feature of Lithuanian thinking that they can overcome anything…absolutely anything…can adjust to any conditions. This can link to Vėlinės somehow. There is some cult of death in Lithuania. I think I have read some close to scientific stuff…that we are so fond of death. That we like it. We like to be sad…to be attached to this black side of life. We like it. And yeah, I think we can tell. I think you know it on your own. I have attended the course of Baltic mythology…But I don’t think Lithuanians think about this…This is the one-side track that Catholic tradition makes…good or bad. In Baltic mythology bad can be good…cycling…birth/death…same God.—more like Buddhism

The theme that consistently emerges in these conversations is that cemeteries are important in Lithuania because wrestling with death—the immediacy of death—is important. It is of a piece with being Lithuanian, and any form of hope that is to be trusted is linked to this centrality of death. This is a vital part of the Lithuanian identity that was maintained and nurtured during years of occupation, and it played out in important ways in forms of resistance and assertion of identity when the push for independence emerged.

Yet the power of the singing revolution and the hope it performed were not simply an action against an occupying regime. They were part of an action toward something. Toward the reclamation of independence and statehood, but also toward the west, and toward a vision of freedom and prosperity connected to an imagination of western markets and democratic tradition as a new future of possibility.

Now, more than twenty years later, Lithuania has achieved a big piece of that vision in its establishment of open markets and democratic system and in its accession to the EU. But it has also felt the pain of that transition and of unreal and unfulfilled hopes. There is a rising “new elite” who has profited mightily, but
many who stood and held hands in a human chain from Vilnius to Tallinn during the push to independence have not found their way to a better life since independence arrived.\(^5\) In fact, particularly for the rural population and the elderly, life is often much harder.\(^6\) Not only older Lithuanians are mindful of this reality. Tolvyda expresses these worries, hopes, and questions quite eloquently. Speaking of Vytautus Landsbergis, the hero of the Sajūdis\(^7\) movement, Tolvyda states,

I think that Vytautus Landsbergis is a talented guy. Because he not only made Lithuania independent but also encouraged other states to fight for similar liberties. So I think he did a great job...maybe he has drawbacks like any person has...I respect him as a man and as a politician. But how to say...maybe we have not grown up to the values and ideals we fought for. Or to be precise, that maybe our elder compatriots fought for. But it does not mean that independence is bad. It just means that we are on the way to achieving something more fundamental. More liberating because...well, to be occupied, it's not good in any case. But we must admit that for a very large number of people occupation was truly better than independence now economically and socially. Everyone had a job. And everyone felt more secure. Maybe not everyone, of course. But many people felt more secure...even with KGB and so on. Because now, I can say about sportsmen...in Soviet times...it was much better. More support, more books, more camps, more coaches. Everything was better. What we have now, we have the relics of this system...We don’t have support/infrastructure/etc. ...So, you know something, we must be precise in numbers at least, and in conditions that some people had in Soviet times and they do not have now.


She offers the example of her mother who had a secure job as a mathematics professor during Soviet days and transitioned smoothly and was able to continue her work after independence:

She wasn’t bothered by the independence movement. She is very tolerant. She understands that independence didn’t lead us to things that were guaranteed: free market, free thought, social guarantees—everyone will be rich. Ridiculous. Some people became richer and some people have become poorer. It is imbalanced.

While few claim a desire to return to Soviet times, many will admit disappointment, fear, and a sense of vulnerability about the Lithuania of today, a feeling Lauren Berlant suggests is generated by western forms of consumptive longing and imagined communities of identity and belonging that keep us tied to visions, institutions, and processes even when they disappoint us. She labels this “cruel optimism.” In a sense, this cruel optimism is the reality that haunts Lithuanians in their current reckoning with the meaning of national identity and experience.

**Fictive Identity Amidst Shifting Political Realities**

It would be difficult to identify a country more attuned to modern nationhood than Lithuania. They have not one, not two, but *three* national holidays celebrating the establishment of Lithuania. In addition, January 13 is marked as the Day of Freedom Defenders in honor of the thirteen civilians killed by Soviet tanks at the television tower; June 14 is Mourning and Hope Day

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9 July 6 is Statehood day, marking the coronation of Mindaugas as the first king; February 16 is the Day of Re-establishment of the State of Lithuania, celebrating the declaration of Lithuania as an independent state following World War I; March 11 is the Day of Restitution of the Independence of Lithuania, remembering Lithuania’s declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1990.
memorializing those who were exiled to Siberia; August 23 is Black Ribbon Day, a day to remember the victims of totalitarian regimes; September 23 is a day set aside to commemorate the victims of the genocide of Lithuanian Jews.

Étienne Balibar follows Benedict Anderson\textsuperscript{10} and others in exploring the notion of the nation-state as a social imaginary, explaining that “Every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary…based on the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name and on traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past…”\textsuperscript{11} Balibar uses the term “fictive ethnicity” to talk about the community created by the nation-state.\textsuperscript{12} This fictive ethnicity is produced through two primary processes: language and race. “They constitute two ways of rooting historical populations in a fact of ‘nature’ (the diversity of languages and the diversity of races appearing predestined), but also two ways of giving a meaning to their continued existence, of transcending its contingency.”\textsuperscript{13}

While ethnicity is the more prominent category, race functions in Lithuania as well, particularly in designating the “other” race—whether that be Roma, Jew, or the occasional Asian or African American. Sometimes, though infrequently, Tatar are included in the designation of race. The fact that they are mentioned


\textsuperscript{11} Étienne Balibar, “The Nation Form,” in Race, Nation, Class Ambiguous Identities, 93. Italics in original text.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 96. Balibar makes it clear that “fictive” does not indicate illusory. Rather, “…the term fiction…should not be taken in the sense of a pure and simple illusion without historical effects, but must, on the contrary, be understood by analogy with the personal ficta of the juridical tradition in the sense of an institutional effect, a ‘fabrication’.” The declaration of corporations as “persons” within the US legal tradition would be one example of such a fabrication.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 96-97.
less frequently is likely a sign of the greater integration of Tatar Muslims into national life. Language and race are largely constituted through two social institutions: school and family. School is the primary institution for the production of linguistic community. However, language alone is not sufficient for the production of the nation-state. It is too “open”. The formation and policing of the boundaries of the nation-state require more closure in order to mark inclusion and exclusion. That closure is provided through the imaginary of a common race. “What we are solely concerned with here is the symbolic kernel which makes it possible to equate race and ethnicity ideally, and to represent unity of race to oneself as the origin or cause of the historical unity of a people.”

This imaginary or “second-degree fiction…derives its effectiveness from everyday practices, relations which immediately structure the ‘life’ of individuals.” Family is the primary locus for these everyday practices. These boundary defining habits of family are inculcated into the operations of the state. “The idea of a racial community emerges when the frontiers of kinship dissolve at the level of the clan, the neighbourhood community and, theoretically at least, the social class, to be imaginarily transferred to the threshold of nationality.”

14 Ibid., 98-99. “It is not, however, the only one: the state economic exchange and family life are also schools in a sense, organs of the ideal nation recognizable by a common language which belongs to them “as their own.” For what is decisive here is not only that the national language should be recognized as the official language, but much more fundamentally, that it should be able to appear as the very element of the life of a people, the reality which each person may appropriate in his or her own way, without thereby destroying its identity.”
15 Ibid., 99.
16 Ibid., 100. “The symbolic kernel of the idea of race…is the schema of genealogy, that is, quite simply the idea that the filiation of individuals transmits from generation to generation a substance both biological and spiritual and thereby inscribes them in a temporal community known as “kinship”. That is why as soon as national ideology enunciates the proposition that the individuals belonging to the same people are interrelated (or, in the prescriptive mode, that they should constitute a circle of extended kinship), we are in the presence of this second mode of ethnicization.”
The many political transitions in Lithuania offer evidence of the success of these operations of fictive ethnicity described by Balibar. They witness to their failure as well. At no point has “nation” been fully established in Lithuania without gaps and fissures. Family and church operate inside these Vėlinės habits of memory to enable the successful instantiation of “nation,” as well as the failures and ruptures.

Balibar critically examines the role of religion in the nation-state imaginary. While acknowledging that religion promotes forms of community and social morality and that theological discourse underlies much of the rhetorical structure operating within the sacralization of the state, Balibar suggests that the transfer of religious devotion to the state is propelled less by some innate religious urge or even by religious practices, but rather by an alternate form of imagined community which integrates religious identity and then ends up replacing it. He calls this the operation of fictive ethnicity. Vėlinės practices participate in and also challenge the creation of fictive ethnicity.

Resistance Practices, Vulnerability, and the National Narrative

Two dominant themes emerge as Lithuanians talk about their history: first, a powerful pride in practices of resistance; second, a profound awareness of vulnerability, both political vulnerability and geographic vulnerability. As examples of tenacity and resistance, Lithuanians will sometimes cite the medieval period of the Grand Duchy when Lithuania managed to hold off the raids of the Teutonic knights out of Germany and to resist forced conversion. They also draw a connection between this early history and resistance practices.
that led Lithuania to be the first of the nations within the USSR to declare
independence. Not infrequently, they distinguish their country’s history from the
history of surrounding Baltic countries because of this vein of resistance
practices.\(^{17}\)

Whether that assessment is accurate, it is descriptive of a certain self-
perception common among Lithuanians. The narrative they learn in school and
the sense of identity nurtured in family and home focus on The Grand Duchy as a
great and powerful force in the history of the region—sometimes holding off
greater powers with an almost miraculous stubbornness, at other times
functioning as the actual aggressor and amassing the largest territory in the
region. This pride in a history of resistance during the days of the Grand Duchy
echoes through descriptions Lithuanians now offer of Lithuania’s ability to survive
during the serial occupations of the twentieth century.

The narratives of state formation since the fall of the Soviet Union also
draw heavily on this vision of a golden age. A form of stubborn identity as
Lithuanian—and as “other” than German, Russian, or Polish—is a prominent
theme in stories Lithuanians tell about their country. But as discussed in earlier

\(^{17}\) In terms that sound eerily similar to the treatment of African Americans in the United States, a
Lutheran pastor explains rather apologetically that guidebooks for German pastors during the
period prior to the first Republic instructed pastors in Latvia to encourage only memorization of
the catechism among Latvian believers, and not to pursue more complex teaching, because
Latvians were not believed to have the intellectual capabilities to manage more abstract and
difficult concepts. These same instructions were not given to pastors in Lithuania. This Lutheran
pastor believes this discrepancy is due to the fact that Lithuanians did not experience the
denigration of captivity, enslavement, and forced labor in their earlier history in the same way
Latvians did. Therefore, although the poorest in Lithuanian society faced the kind of hardship and
poverty that serfs and tenant farmers faced throughout Europe, they were not subjected to the
emotional and psychological captivity of people in bondage.
chapters, the actual control of terrain, establishment of boundaries, and formation of the state has been quite a bit messier.

Even within the country, there has been fractiousness and differing notions of identity. Kaunas, the city to which political leaders fled when Poland overtook Vilnius during the First Republic, is often mentioned in other parts of Lithuania with a bit of an eye roll. Known as the region that considers itself the “true” Lithuania, there is a “blood and soil” claim for Kaunas as the heart of Lithuanian identity. This portrayal is not shared or welcomed by all. Some inhabitants of Kaunas express this pride in national identity this way: “Vilnius is the capital of Lithuania; Kaunas is the capital of Lithuanians.” This characterization of Kaunas is particularly fascinating in light of the fact that as recently as 1910—in the years just prior to independence when the population of Kaunas was in the range of 70,000—only 17.6 percent of the population in Kaunas considered themselves Lithuanian. By 1939, when the population had grown to 154,000, that population was 60%. In fact, that may be the reason for

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18 References to and discussion of Kaunas would be a fascinating study in and of themselves. There is both pride in and frustration with this region among Lithuanians from other parts of the country. Though I encountered ardent nationalism in many parts of Lithuania, Kaunas is frequently offered up as the locus of much of the more ardent neo-nazi nationalism that is attributed to lower class status and lack of education. As an example, when discussing historic citizenship and belonging in Lithuania one middle aged man responded, “I can only speak about the intelligent people. I have no idea what is going on in some unemployed suburb of Kaunas.” My anecdotal conversations and reading indicate that the insurgent, aggressive nationalism is not confined to the poorly educated population. One person described it this way, “Most of the leadership live in Vilnius and other cities, but they have a rural mentality.” Much of the support for these movements came from smaller towns with difficult economic conditions. One individual who has been tracking the upsurge in nationalism puts it this way: “I have a feeling that they have a base much larger than the results of the recent election shows. Lithuanians are kind of rational people. They think these guys are good and they are fighting for Lithuania, but inside a rational voice says at the last minute, ‘I better go with the known.’” My sense is their base is much broader and the sympathies may one day break through.

19 Šarunas Liekis, et al., eds, Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772, 17. Following the establishment of the first Republic many rural Lithuanians moved into the city. This is when Kaunas and other cities experienced significant growth and took on an ethnic Lithuanian
this frequent nationalistic association. Whereas the capital Vilnius had long been
established as a significant center of commerce and learning, Kaunas grew into
and adopted a significant role in consort with the first establishment of a national
republic.

The northwestern portion of the country has its own complications. Žemaitija is considered by some to be the “truest” Lithuania and the original locus
of the customs and practices that most deeply define Lithuania. It is also known
as the fiercest of the regions. Žemaitija is credited with preserving a Lithuanian
culture that was nearly extinct at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th
centuries. This cultural identity served as the basis for the first push for
independence. But Žemaitija has a fractious history within Lithuania itself and
has periodically threatened to secede from the larger country. A favorite joke in
Žemaitija is to inquire of Lithuanians visiting from other parts of the country
whether they showed their passports at the border when they entered the region.

In the westernmost portions of the country both the architecture and the
more concentrated presence of the Lutheran church reveal a pronounced
influence from Germany. This territory was once part of Prussia, and the region
demanded distinct rights and jurisdiction during the period of the First Republic.
This was the portal the Nazis used to move toward occupation of the entire
country.
The southernmost part of Lithuania is nestled up against Poland. One border city in this region was known as an area of wealth and ease during Soviet times because access to and control of trade created market opportunities for locals. Intermarriage with Polish citizens is common here. In southeastern Lithuania there are cities where Polish continues to be the dominant language. Every so often lively argument breaks out about the level of Lithuanian knowledge required in Polish schools in this region.

In conversation, Suvalkija is often heralded as the touchstone for “true” Lithuanian language, being designated in lore with the status of lingual purity. But the official language authorities cite Aukštaitija in the north and east as producing the dialect upon which proper Lithuanian is built. It is the largest of the cultural regions and it includes Vilnius, the capital. With Belorussian and Polish identifying populations in the east, and with boundary areas in the north that have shifted between Latvia and Lithuania, areas of Aukštaitija have been contested when different political regimes controlled the region. At the same time, Aukštaitija is considered roughly equivalent to the territory that initially formed the Lithuanian Grand Duchy and contains what is likely the first capital during that time, Kernavė.

Lithuania does have the smallest minority Russian population of all the Baltic countries and has had many fewer public altercations over minority rights than neighboring Latvia and Estonia, but it is far less homogenous than the grand narratives would indicate. Nonetheless, the notion of Baltic purity has done service in the construction and imagination of the modern Lithuanian state. By
drawing on a romantic genre of Lithuanian poetry, nurturing local folk customs, and encouraging a resurgence of Lithuanian language, leaders in the first independence movement funded people’s imagination of a separate republic and established fictive ethnicity through many of the means described by Balibar. These themes of pride and resistance threads throughout the stories of the first Republic. It also serves as foundation for many of the narrations of the establishment of the second Republic after the independence movement.

A second dominant theme that emerges as Lithuanians describe their history is a powerful awareness of vulnerability. Wedged between daunting forces both east and west, Lithuania has served as a tramping ground and a focus of occupation throughout recent history. While Balibar correctly identifies language as a way to police the boundaries of the state and to delineate who is “in” and who is “out”, passion about the maintenance of pure Lithuanian language is in many ways a product of this intense awareness of vulnerability.

Shortly after declaring independence in 1990, the ruling Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania established the State Commission on the Lithuanian Language (“the Commission”) and charged the Commission with the regulation and standardization of the Lithuanian language and the implementation of Lithuanian as the official language of the state.20 In 1993 the Seimas (parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Law on the Status of the State Commission on the Lithuanian Language of the Republic of

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Lithuania, which was then amended in 2001. This legislation establishes a commission to police the use and development of the Lithuanian language.

Onutė is twenty-four. She majored in Lithuanian language in university and is now pursuing a doctorate in Scandinavian languages. Her parents are successful doctors. Having navigated the Soviet system well, they supported independence and currently enjoy the benefits of new opportunities for further training and compensation in their respective fields. A linguist herself, Onutė is highly critical of the Commission and of the laws regulating language usage in Lithuania. “I think this is not the way people really live. Language needs to change naturally. It is an odd and silly thing to spend so much time trying to control language!”

Robertas views things very differently. In his mid-thirties, Robertas’s grandparents were exiled to Siberia. His father was born there. Robertas is deeply patriotic and a devoted member of the Catholic Church.

It is important to maintain and protect the Lithuanian language. We are a very small country living between much more powerful nations that try to absorb us. We feel threatened most of the time. For good reason—we have been occupied by other countries for most of our recent years. Our language is one of the most important ways to continue to remember who we are and to preserve our history, traditions, and identity.

In understanding Lithuanians and their diverse perspectives on their country, it is critical to keep these two larger themes in mind: pride in a history of

resistance and deep awareness of geographical and political vulnerability. Lithuanians with widely divergent political views all tend to raise these two themes, even when their recitation of places and events in Lithuanian history and the path of hope they see ahead differ dramatically. These themes are also important in hearing and understanding the reality of life and practice during the occupations by the Nazis and the Soviets, and the complex performance of power and identity in cemeteries during Vėlinės, both then and now. Elements of Balibar’s fictive ethnicity are at play in the efforts of both the former occupiers and the present Lithuanian state. They are present as well in the practices of resistance deployed by Lithuanians themselves.

**State Identity During the Occupation and Independence**

Over the course of the last century several different occupying forces sought to incorporate the Lithuanian territory into a larger, dominant political entity. They both played upon and disrupted practices of family, church, and state. The Nazi commitment to ethnic cleansing is an example of Balibar’s operations of fictive ethnicity in their starkest form as the Nazis had a specific agenda to eliminate both Jewish and Roma populations as well as the mentally, emotionally, and physically vulnerable among the general population.

The details of how the Nazi efforts played out in and through the operations of Lithuanian national identity are horrifying. Several larger themes underlying the Nazi’s success in murdering so many Jewish people in Lithuania are important here. First, it is critical to remember that when the Nazis invaded Lithuania they were able to play upon what might best be described as a
wounded and captive nationalism. The imaginary of the Lithuanian nation that became the first Republic of Lithuania was nurtured by the poetry, writing, and political leadership of a growing intelligentsia that developed after the abolition of serfdom and the opening of educational and leadership opportunities to a wider group of people. But it was built on the foundation of the rural peasantry and tended by the fires of a resurgent pride in Lithuanian language and a focus on local cultural traditions and Catholic religious identity. The religious piece had an additional complexity because of the fraught relationship with Poland and the close connection between Poland and many clergy.22

It is also important to note that although the underpinnings of the first Republic of Lithuania emerged under German occupation during World War I, the Republic was largely defined in contrast to the earlier, and much longer, Czarist occupation. The russification efforts during the Czarist period characterized by the imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet and the restriction of Lithuanian language use were particularly significant. The identity of the first Republic was thus forged through the very elements Balibar defines: language, education, and family, all operating to establish a fictive ethnicity as the basis for nation building.

The cultural fabric established in this nascent period of nationhood was disrupted in terrifying and catastrophic ways when the Soviets marched into Lithuania in 1940. This first Soviet occupation was short lived, but it was utterly brutal. Land was seized and nationalized, thousands of people were identified as “anti-Soviet elements,” arrested, killed, tortured, or deported. The number on the

list of anti-Soviet elements eventually reached 320,000. The first massive deportations reached their zenith in June, 1941, when over 16,000 men, women, and children were rounded up and successfully deported to Siberia in just a few days, this only weeks before the operation was interrupted by the Nazi’s successful conquest of Lithuania. Many died in freight cars en route to Siberia. Those who survived faced inhumane and harsh conditions when they arrived. Though the focus of the initial deportations and arrests were the intelligentsia, the military and political leadership, church and community leaders, and wealthy landowners and bankers, the devastation touched everyone. Several of the people I interviewed described terror in the rural areas as well the cities, with the Soviets burning and ransacking villages as they retreated ahead of the Nazi advance.

As in other parts of Europe, no one can identify for certain what specific factors created a situation where a group of Lithuanians who had lived side-by-side with Jewish neighbors could suddenly turn and join the Nazi efforts at total elimination of a people. Many explanations are offered: lingering antisemitism that was stoked and encouraged by the church; popular local mythology and folklore that construed Jewish people as the threatening “other”; a totalizing form of scapegoating of Jewish people that painted all Jews as Bolshevik collaborators who enabled the Soviet invasion; jealousy over the commercial success of some of the Jewish population; basic wariness of the relatively closed and tightly defined communal boundaries of practicing Jews. Nor is there a clear formula to identify why a brave few Lithuanians resisted the Nazis and risked
their own lives to protect their neighbors. What is clear is that the Nazis were
greeted as liberators by much of the Lithuanian citizenry who had been terrorized
by the brutal Soviet invasion. Though their hopes were later dashed, many
Lithuanians believed that Germany would allow them some form of independent
rule.

The complexity of this time has yet to be fully examined and unraveled in
Lithuania. But the confusion is clear in stories about Vėlinės. In the recitation of
family history there is occasionally a grandmother, great aunt, or grandfather who
is receiving monthly payments from Germany for the time they were conscripted
into forced service to the Nazis. Several families tell stories of aunts or
grandmothers who were called into the police station to identify bodies, with no
clear understanding of whether the family members were killed by the Germans,
the Soviets, or partisans from the woods. Some tell stories of patriotism and
brave service by their ancestors through the Catholic youth organization
Ateitininkiai, a group who nurtured leaders for the freedom movements in
Lithuania but also supplied some of the young men with white arm bands who
gathered Jewish citizens at the behest of the invading Nazi regime. People’s
memories generally become vague when asked about the details of those times.
In the words of a man whose father lived in Kaunas in the midst of the horrific
bloodshed during the murder of Lithuanian Jews: “As an older man I now realize
there were questions I never asked my father and probably should have. He was
a person who answered only the questions asked of him.”

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23 Ričardas, male, late sixties.
The Czarist occupation of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries and the Soviet occupations of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century played upon fictive ethnicity in an attempt to establish political control. The Czarist occupation operated along the lines of what might be called a more traditional colonial model: a clear center in Moscow enforced its will among occupied lands through locally established administration and governance.\textsuperscript{24} In the early part of this occupation a greater degree of local autonomy was granted as regions were largely governed by local nobility. In the face of growing revolt and resistance, Russia became more restrictive and established russification policies controlling language and education and intending to force amalgamation into the Russian empire. This is when teachers were hired to move from home to home teaching Lithuanian and book runners were organized to smuggle Lithuanian language books and newspapers from printing presses in Lithuania Minor to the west. The independence movement that nurtured a new Lithuanian identity emerged in the midst of these resistance practices.\textsuperscript{25}

The Soviet project did not undertake nation building according to Balibar’s “traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past.”\textsuperscript{26} Rather, the Soviet project sought to propel people toward an ideal of that which might be: a brotherhood of all people subject to the leadership of an authoritarian fatherland who collectively shaped and bent all people toward a common good. Within this framework the


\textsuperscript{25} In the introduction to the book they edited, Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonski, and Chaeran Freeze note examples of antisemitic writing in the underground publishing of this period. See, Šarunas Liekis and Anthony Polonski, Chaeran Freeze, ed., \textit{Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772}.

\textsuperscript{26} Étienne Balibar, “The Nation Form”, 93.
terror and brutality were justified as necessary means to propel society forward toward the goal of unity and equality for all.\footnote{See, Francine Hirsch, \textit{Empire of Nations}.} This project was placed into operation through a vast array of practices including language and education requirements, displacement of populations, and nationalization and collectivization of land. Particularly significant to an understanding of the disruptive power of Vėlinės during this period are five Soviet initiatives: mass deportation, arrest, and terror; accusatory practices of suspicion based on networks of informants; assumption of control of all genealogical records once kept by the church; the effort during the late Soviet period to absorb life events marked by church ritual into the apparatus of the state; initiatives to nurture local ethnic identity to support the ideology of shared brotherhood amidst the diversity of all people.

As noted earlier, many people talk about the brutal treatment of bodies during the Soviet occupation and the importance of the recovery of deported bodies and care for distant graves in Siberia after independence: the bodies of partisan soldiers dropped in the town square; victims of KGB torture secretly buried in a cemetery on the banks of the Neris river in the center of Vilnius; decayed and mutilated bodies dropped out of cattle cars at the border of Lithuania as deportation trains passed into Russia; thousands of missing bodies, hastily buried in forests at sites unknown to family and friends. Bodies loom large. It is clear that throughout the Soviet period Vėlinės was a time when these suffering and absent bodies were remembered and acknowledged, often in secret and in silence.
Absent bodies mattered in particular ways in these times and spaces. People who disappeared or were sent to Siberia could not be named publicly, but they could be silently incorporated as memory in these habits of remembrance. The significance of the reburial of returned bones after Lithuanian Independence and the inherent power of welcoming exiles back into the dihlīz-ian space of the Lithuanian cemetery is a practice bound up with the memory habits of Vėlinės. Here the larger social space is marked by absence, and in the dihlīz-ian space of Lithuanian cemeteries the “inside” and “outside” is marked by a hope and longing for the absent and a refusal of the transgressive present.

The accusatory practices that were foundational for the Soviet system of discipline and control also play into Vėlinės practices. Because one never knew who might be an informant for the state, trust was a rarified commodity in Soviet times. Yet no matter what one’s history or allegiance, Vėlinės spaces provided common ground to gather and to remember, thus strengthening family bonds even when work, politics, and fear in the larger society pulled against them. As Salvija put it, “people set everything else aside during Vėlinės. It provided a space where we could all be together.” Nerijus is in his sixties. He worked for the communist party and continues to believe that in many ways the communist ideology was correct in the goals it set for the country and the visions of equality it sought to nurture. Though he considers himself religious now, he was not and could not be an openly practicing Catholic as an employee of the Communist party. He too describes Vėlinės cemeteries as a welcoming space where he
could gather with his mother and his extended family to honor and remember the people they loved. It was a space he could trust.

Perhaps the most powerful expression of fictive ethnicity within the Soviet construct was its reconstructive work in relation to families. Though the Soviets deployed highly developed rhetoric and financial incentives to encourage the growth of families, the Soviet system was ultimately focused on displacing loyalty to family with loyalty to the Soviet Federation. Balibar identifies the intervention of the nation-state in the public registration and codification of family events as a critical point in the shift from extended kinship as the primary identifying unit of the family to the state as the keeper of “the archive of filiations and alliances”.

During the Soviet period the records of births and marriages were removed from religious institutions and kept in central records facilities in regional governmental centers. Just as the Soviet state usurped family and church in managing land, guiding and determining occupation, forming and molding youth through state organizations, and determining gender roles through state requirements for work, they also took over the documentation of lineage, thus marking the state as the primary unit for identity and identification.

But Vėlinės simultaneously inscribed another truth. Vytautas, age seventy-one, describes trudging across frozen ground and silently slipping into the village church for Vėlinės mass and then stealing off to the cemetery to quietly light a candle at the graves of his grandparents during the frightening early days of Soviet rule. For him, this was an alternate form of identification.

28 Balibar, 101.
Though he dutifully served as a civil servant in his daily job, Vytautus defined who he was in relation to the church cemetery. Year after year he ensured that somehow he and his family made the trip in late October from Vilnius to the small village cemetery where his parents and grandparents are buried. He considered the truth of that journey to be more fundamental than the truth enacted around him in his daily work.

In the later Soviet period the government buildings that held birth, death, and marriage records also contained marriage chambers with stained glass windows adorned with Soviet workers at labor in fields and factories, the stained glass aesthetics invoking an alternate chapel. Only the state could authorize a marriage. Soviet rituals were also developed for the naming of children in place of baptism and for the Day of the Dead. Yet even when enacted amidst orchestrated state celebrations, these Vėlinės memory habits frequently incorporated bodies into a hushed national identity as Lithuanian, and/or as Catholic, amidst larger practices of social discipline that incorporated the same bodies into the avowedly atheistic Soviet body. Though the Soviets attempted to maintain and claim the Vėlinės habits as ceremonies of political remembrance with no religious significance—and so to incorporate Lithuanians into the body of the USSR—Lithuanians now witness to a variety of contrary incorporative experiences in that same time and space: shared forms of political resistance; quiet enactments of forbidden faith; and even participation in increased prestige
and power “poached” from the regnant “official” celebrations. Here the larger social space is marked as empire and colony—or in the alternative commonwealth and republic. But in the dihlīz-ian space of Lithuanian cemeteries the “inside” and “outside” is much more complex, constructing and offering hospitality to bodies resisting the social discipline of and full incorporation into the Soviet body. As discussed in earlier chapters, the relationship between Vėlinės practices and the state has shifted since independence. Yet as the televised mass in Antakalnis cemetery in Vilnius reveals, a Balibar-ian operation of national imagining that incorporates religious practice and family ritual is at work now as well.

**Individual Relationship to State and Nation**

Simonas’s stories of Vėlinės offer a fascinating example of both the effectiveness and the ineffectiveness of the efforts at state formation undertaken by the Soviets, efforts that are at work in different form in political configurations today. Simonas is in his late fifties, a member of the Lost Generation who came of age after the thaw. He lives in a small city and has ably—in fact shrewdly—led a social services organization during the Soviet years, through the transition, and now well into twenty years of independence. He grew up in the countryside in the northern part of Lithuania, the son of parents who once held jobs working for Polish nobility and were then gathered into work on a collective farm—a farm named “Path to the Future”, he says with an impish smile. Raised in the Soviet

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educational system, Simonas is fluent in Russian as well as Lithuanian. In more
recent years he has learned French and is now working on English as well.

As a child, Simonas participated in the Vėlinės cemetery celebrations that
were organized by the local communist party: He remembers the torches they
carried and the march to the cemetery where they would listen to a presentation
and then find their parents and family by the family grave markers gathering for
silent prayer and leaving flowers and candles. The story he is most anxious for
me to hear is not about Vėlinės though. It is instead about the death of a
motorcycle-riding priest much beloved by the local youth. “We went to the
communist youth meeting,” he says with a grin, “then together—with red
kerchiefs around our neck—we marched to the church to attend the funeral of
our priest.”

Simonas is one of many who navigated the messy middle: participating in
the practices of the Communist party as required, but maintaining a sense of
identity apart from the larger narrative; a double-consciousness of sorts. His time
in the Soviet system was marked less by terror than by cautiousness and even
wry humor. The effects of that formation continue. I have seen him extend
himself and take profound risks for the individuals in his care at his workplace. I
have also witnessed the deep anxiety he feels when he senses that his careful
navigation of the system may be flawed or exposed.

Yet Simonas is deeply patriotic, believing in and devoted to the Lithuanian
Republic that was formed after independence. Like many Lithuanians I spoke
with, his eyes cloud with tears as he remembers joining the Baltic way on August
23, 1989 and standing hand-in-hand with fellow Lithuanians as part of a huge human chain that stretched from the Cathedral Square in Vilnius, through Latvia, to Tallinn, Estonia in the north. Planned and coordinated by activists during the period of glasnost in the late days of the Soviet Union, citizens of all three Baltic countries joined together in this peaceful protest of Soviet Occupation on the date of the 50th anniversary of the notorious Molotov-Ribbentorp Pact—Hitler’s and Stalin’s secret agreement to divide eastern Europe between them and to designate separate spheres of influence.

A history buff, Simonas is very familiar with the details of the last two hundred years of Lithuanian history. He is not without criticism of his country, believing like many in his generation that since the time of independence and exposure to western political and economic structures, cultural values are increasingly dominated by a desire for money and consumer goods. He senses Lithuanians have become complacent: that the older generation does not wish to take responsibility for their own welfare, and the younger generation lacks the commitment to hard work and family relationships necessary to create stability. He also worries about the corruption he sees as rife within government, a corruption that mirrors practices during the Soviet period. But then he is fairly philosophical about it all. Speaking at the height of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States, Simonas says, “We have our own 98%. Eventually the corruption and inequality will become too much, and people will arise”.
Baptized Catholic, Simonas is like many in his generation who only now and then go to church. Every Vėlinės though, he and his wife and sons drive north to the cemeteries and to his elderly mother. He offers no trenchant critique of the political pageantry in Antakalnis Cemetery on Vėlinės, but he dismisses it with the wave of a hand as “what politicians always seek to do,” and “of no interest to me.” What is important to him is the trip north, “When I go there I remember”, he says quietly, “I remember that my life too will end.” Asked whether he senses the presence of those he goes to remember, he quietly says “yes.” And whether he believes he will meet them again: “I hope.” The sounds he associates with Vėlinės are the rustle of leaves; the sights are the torches of his childhood; and the touch, his wife’s hand.

There is growing worry in Lithuania over iterations of the conjoining of ethnicity, church, and state and the ascendant popularity of nationalist and proto-fascist groups. There is clearly evidence to support such worries and analysis. Marches on Lithuanian independence days in recent years have attracted fairly large crowds shouting slogans such as “Jews Out!” or “Lithuania for Lithuanians!”. Some people suggest external funding from Western Europe is supporting these neo-nazi groups and other xenophobic movements. In recent national elections these ultra-nationalist groups failed to gain any seats in the Seimas (the parliament), but they have made inroads in scattered local elections.

It is tempting to apply a critical analysis of Lithuanian culture according to western norms for tolerance. However, my conversations in Lithuania lead me to believe that we have to be careful when we try to fit the complex dynamics in
Lithuania into neat, western, neo-liberal categories. This is not to say that there is nothing to worry about, particularly given the immediacy of the history of horrific violence in the region. But discussions with two very different young leaders in Lithuania serve as nice examples of the complexity of the issues and their localized form.

Having read and heard about growing intolerance in Lithuania and a swelling movement of younger Lithuanians promoting ethnic exclusivity, I contacted a leader in one of the more prominent groups and met him in a restaurant for an interview. In some senses, Saurimas was what my own stereotyping would expect: exuding machismo; set jaw; military aura; scanning the crowded restaurant as if he was the front man in a secret service detail. But when we sat down to talk I was forced to set many of my preconceived notions aside as the reality of his life and his political passion was much more complex than I expected. He scheduled his interview with me when he did because he was off work and on paternity leave so he needed to wait for his wife to return home to take over care for the children he had been tending all day. His little daughters came traipsing into the restaurant late in the interview and he tenderly greeted them and set them at a table to order food.

Born in the northern part of the country, he grew up in Vilnius and attended university there. Clearly the most formative experience of his life was his time in the military. He served in the Soviet army and returned just as the independence movement was hitting its zenith in Lithuania. He claims he was at the television towers the day the Soviet tanks rolled into town and he and his
former military friends helped to organize the crowds. He believes they were attentive to what was happening in a way that other people were not—thus helping to reduce the risk of dangerous outbreaks of violence.

In her studies of trauma, Dr. Gailienė has identified one group of people who have suffered since independence in a particular way: veterans of the Soviet army who served in Afghanistan. By all accounts the war in Afghanistan was a particularly traumatic event, and similar to Viet Nam veterans in the U.S., those who served in Afghanistan did not return to a hero’s welcome. The Afghan vets in Lithuania returned to a shifting society, one in which the country did not wish to take responsibility for tending to the wounds of a war fought on behalf of Soviet occupiers. While throughout Lithuania there are monuments to partisan soldiers and to those who served in World Wars I and II, until recently there was no monument to veterans of the Afghan war, brutal and unforgiving though it was. “It is like they do not exist,” commented a young Lithuanian friend. “Nobody wanted to claim them.” In the last few years a monument has been erected—outside the central area of town and across the street from a former morgue.

The rate of alcoholism, suicide, drug addiction, and domestic violence in this group is extraordinarily high. I asked Saurimas if he had experienced any of this alienation and disappointment. He was dismissive of the entire idea: “We have groups that take care of these people. We tend to our own. I do not believe in this notion of trauma and post-traumatic distress.” Saurimas believes that true strength and leadership is best developed through military training and
experience. His claim is that in suffering we learn to survive. He focuses on human resilience and on a deep identity formation tied to land and soil—and to ethnic identity.

What caught me off guard is how deeply Saurimas connects these military skills with a love of the natural world. Throughout the conversation his comments return to reflections on paramilitary youth camps he has helped developed. What is important for him is less an equipping for military service, and more a development of skills to survive and even thrive in nature. He continually expresses an appreciation of and respect for the nature. He is wary of Russia. But he is equally wary of the EU. Dependency on the west signals weakness for him. He believes that Lithuania has in fact become dependent on the west, and on western markets. He offers a sophisticated critique of globalization, western consumerism, and its effects on family and nation. And he ties all of these themes into his experience of Vėlinės.

Like most Lithuanians, Saurimas travels back to family villages and leaves candles and flower in the local cemetery. He also attends mass at his local church. He appreciates the Catholic Church and is very complementary of the church’s role in promoting Lithuanian nationalism. And he likes the Vėlinės mass: “I think it is particularly good when the priest ties the Vėlinės practices to earlier religious practices,” he says, “practices tied to nature and land. That is when the Catholic church is at its best, when it draws us back to nature, to the land, and to our ancestors.” For Saurimas, Vėlinės is primarily about the sacrifice of those who have gone before us, particularly sacrifice for nation.
Saurimas’s sensory evocations of Vėlinės recall his time in the military and center around the candles, the light, and the smoke. “I think of a bunker on the battlefield; the smell of the smoke; the sun rising after a long, cold night; the courage and commitment in the air.”

Vėlinės is also profoundly important to Celė, age 32. It is a predictable and fairly tightly scripted family event and she tries to participate most years. At first appearance, Celė is almost a perfect foil to Saurimas. A committed political leader of her generation, the organizations she works with regularly work in opposition to and protest the actions of Saurimas and his compatriots. Celė’s father was born in Siberia after his parents were deported. Both of her parents feel deeply about Lithuania, human rights, and the call to a just society. Her father was heavily involved in organizing fellow Lithuanians during the independence movement and their family has been involved in public service ever since.

Celė grew up ensconced in Lithuanian Catholic practice: baptized in the church, first communion, confirmation, Lithuanian dance troupes. Celė participates in a gospel choir but refuses to sing with the choir when they lead worship. She feels alienated from the Catholic Church and is appalled by their current involvement in nationalist politics. She feels that they are neglecting the church’s rich heritage of commitment to human rights.

Celė is trained in the law. Human rights, inclusivity, and tolerance are her passions. She works tirelessly at both the structural level of advocacy and policymaking and the hands-on level of relationship, help, and support: tutoring;
encouraging families dealing with poverty and prejudice; marching; raising money; organizing youth camps. Celé is among a group that some scholars label the “new elite” in Lithuania. Having come of age during the time when western, democratic countries were pouring money into training and infrastructure, Celé has spent a lot of time outside of Lithuania and has participated in training and work throughout the European Union.

From Celé’s perspective, Lithuania’s participation in the EU is a very positive thing, bringing not only support and resources, but also applying pressure on Lithuanian society to become less xenophobic and more open to notions of tolerance and human rights. A remarkably hopeful and compassionate person, Celé nonetheless expresses exhaustion and discouragement amidst her hopeful endeavors. She feels deep bonds with the other young people working toward similar goals, but she is overwhelmed at all the things she believes need to change in Lithuania for it to become a more tolerant country.

Celé is deeply formed into a western lens on culture. Cultural anthropologists exploring this western formation of young people in the Eastern European and Eurasian post-Soviet states describe a pattern where promising individuals are identified within the population and then given opportunities for training and education through NGOs working in the area. In the process these promising young leaders establish contacts outside Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

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30 As noted in chapter 1, I am using the term “post Soviet” rather than “post Socialist” as I think the term post Socialist is misleading since there is great variety in the governmental systems throughout Europe and some of them have strong socialist strains. Yet many of the countries studied by cultural anthropologists specializing in this field are not technically post Soviet as they were not part of the countries federated in the USSR but were effectively controlled as their governments were installed and supervised by the USSR and they were subject to many of the same methods of control and discipline.
and come to enjoy the ease of life and opportunities in many western countries. When they return to their own countries they find themselves feeling alienated within the network of relationships in which they were raised, seeing many of the familial and political practices as parochial and self-defeating. Many of them end up drawing upon their newly acquired education and relationships to “parachute” out of the country. Thus, the ironic effect of the work of western NGOs and governmental organizations is sometimes to encourage a brain drain in local economies, pulling the brightest and most highly trained individuals toward opportunities in the west. 31 This is not the path Celė has followed, though she admits that she really wanted to stay in Brussels when she was training with the EU. It just didn’t work out.

Celė helped to organize an event as an alternative to the march through downtown Vilnius that Saurimas’s organization organized on one of the Lithuanian independence days—a march described by some as pro-Lithuanian and by others as a neo-Nazi event. She and Saurimas regularly clash on other issues as well. Yet when they describe their hopes and their worries there are some remarkable similarities. They glimpse the same problems, yet offer radically different solutions.

Though Celė sees Lithuania’s participation in the EU as essential, she also worries about the effects of western consumerism on Lithuanian society. For her it is a worry about the growing disparity between rich and poor, and a sense that economic gain trumps all other values, including a concern for the

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common good. She too is wary of Russia, though. Her Facebook page generally displays articles about tolerance programs, gay and lesbian rights, Jewish history in Lithuania, and programs to integrate the Roma population. But these days articles about the women of the Pussy Riot protest in Russia show up on her page, along with objections to their arrest after a protest in a cathedral in Russia.\textsuperscript{32} Celé’s lineage as a child of an exiled family looms large here, but her concern for human rights is most prominent.

Like most Lithuanians, Celé feels a deep connection to nature. For her it is a place for renewal. Her sense of the importance of the natural world is also connected with the importance of Vėlinės for her. It is an opportunity to return to family, place, and community as a site for grounding and connection, a chance to remember the people whose love made her who she is. In her family the Vėlinės gatherings on her father’s side take priority, as her grandfather’s birthday falls within the same time frame as Vėlinės. It is a ritual of family festivity as well as solemnity, and an opportunity to reconnect with aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Her mother grew up in a rural area closer to Vilnius. The family also makes pilgrimage there when they are able, but her grandparents are no longer living and the timing on Vėlinės itself does not have the same importance. Like many in her generation, her childhood memories are tied to these places of Vėlinės pilgrimage where she used to spend summers with her grandparents. She tears up as she talks about the stories her grandparents used to tell her and

the questions she used to ask. Visiting those grandparents—alive and dead—is central to her Vėlinės practices.

For Saurimas language of identity, distinction, and resilience are central to his passion about Lithuania and to his descriptions of Vėlinės, an identity that draws clear lines around specific groups and a resilience established in contestation and warfare. For most of my conversation with Saurimas I did not understand why he had been portrayed to me as one of the extremists in Lithuania. Though we clearly see the world differently, his explanations were coherent and even at times compelling. Until I raised the question of what non-Catholics do on Vėlinės, and particularly what Jewish people and Muslims do. “I don’t care. It doesn’t matter,” was his first response. I encourage him to talk more about that. “But so many Jewish people died here during the holocaust, and they were Lithuanians too,” I say. “You said that Vėlinės is very much tied with remembering Lithuanians who have perished.” He caught himself. “I think they should remember their own. Yes. But it does not matter to me whether they are remembered.”

Soon he was off on a rambling form of holocaust denial packed full of the language of “othering”: “they” say this; “they” say that; “they” are not really Lithuanian. Citing changing numbers, undue focus on the deaths of Jewish people during World War II, western neglect of the realities of death and suffering among Baltic Lithuanians, and power and conspiracy theories about Israel, Saurimas then unveils a view of Lithuanian identity based in a pure form of ethnicity that is descriptive of very few people in Lithuania; in fact, it is descriptive
of very few people the world over. Under Saurimas’s construct it is not clear who makes the determination of who is “truly” Lithuanian and who is not: “I just know.” For him, Vėlinės marks firm lines of who is “in” and who is “out”, and those lines run along notions of pure, ethnic family lines. As someone commenting on approaches like Saurimas comments, “Lithuania has tried this way in the past. It has been violent and damaging for everyone.” Yet for Saurimas it is the path of vision for the future.

By contrast, for Celė the language of human rights and tolerance is paramount in her description. It issues out in a vision that seeks to embrace and welcome all people and resists ethnic and national categorization. She is deeply engaged at the most strained points of exclusion in Lithuania: amongst the Roma people; the LGBT community; those working to nurture memory and conversation about the history of Judaism in Lithuania; those opposing the Catholic church’s efforts to encourage legislation defining families and family values; efforts to address growing wealth disparity in the society. She describes her grounding in Vėlinės practices as a remembering of the love in which she was formed. She understand her larger life in the world as a working out of the implications and demands of that love.

It is clear that I am more drawn to Celė’s vision of the world. But what was most striking to me as an outsider listening to both of these articulate people within a few days of one another is the fact that there seems to be no space in the public register and rhetoric to explore their common concerns, or at the least
to explore those concerns respectfully and face-to-face—particularly concerns about the implications of Lithuania’s dependence on western economic models and concerns about and connection to the natural world. Given the strident tone of the press and of most public discussions in Lithuania, it seems there are few places to carefully differentiate and understand mutual differences either.

Relationship with the Catholic Church is significant for both of them: for Saurimas as a place of identification and for Celė as a site of long but now conflicted relationship. But because of these differences, the church is not a shared space either. Nonetheless, both Saurimas and Celė venture to the cemeteries on Vėlinės. The cemetery is a shared space, a dihliz-ian space that matters to both of them, and matters deeply.

Western analytics of neo-liberal political institutions, tolerance, and human rights don’t quite fit in Lithuania. It is dangerous to graft them onto this very complex space whole cloth. That is not to say that the concerns underlying those institutions and dispositions are without importance. Rather, there is a danger of an alternate form of colonization in applying analysis born of the western European and US experience onto a place whose history and whose position in the vectors of power in the modern era is so vastly different than our own.

Western notions of democracy, tolerance, and human rights have largely been framed within a cold war rhetoric that divided the world into an “us” and “them,” with the “iron curtain” as the dividing line and with a “third world” of subaltern

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There are a growing variety of websites and blogs in Lithuania where public issues are explored and debated.
people and territories as the object of domination and bartering between these two “first” worlds. Lithuania does not conform well to this analysis.

Alternately forged, formed, pummeled, and praised between two dominant spaces of first world “othering”, Lithuania and the region Timothy Snyder labels “the bloodlands” invite more thoughtful and nuanced consideration. As revealed in the lingering effects of trauma that I will explore in the next chapter and the debates over memory that I will explore in the chapter that follows, Lithuania faces a profound task of healing: healing from suffering and loss; healing of trauma; healing of memory; and healing of trust and hope. The twin themes of pride in resistance and acute awareness of vulnerability are important in this healing.
Chapter 7: Trauma
Chapter 7: Trauma

Witnessing the suffering that remains involves encountering the ways in which death pervades life; it entails attesting to the temporal distortions and epistemological ruptures of an experience that exceeds a radical ending yet has no pure beginning.¹

After three hours of conversation, Ugnė suddenly exclaims, “I have never told these stories all at once—we are not people who talk about ourselves.” With that, she looks off into the distance, takes a deep breath, and describes her retirement after decades as an English teacher in the Soviet and Lithuanian public schools: “On my last day at the school they had a lovely reception. Different people who had worked beside me for decades stood to offer best wishes and to say kind things about my work and my life. As I sat there I felt very alone, because inside I was thinking, ‘You have no idea!!’”

Ugnė’s sharp mind, diminutive size, and gentle strength belie her seventy-four years. She is worried about things in Lithuania: worried that the focus for everyone now seems to be economic gain; worried that politicians can not be trusted; worried most of all about Russia. “I had a Russian friend when I was young. She was very dear to me. Her father was an officer in the army and was killed by Stalin. We live in a rough neighborhood here you know. I sometimes think the west is naïve about that—with talk of multiculturalism and all.” In further conversation it becomes clear that for Ugnė, multiculturalism means trust in and welcome of Russia. “I just think they have very dangerous ideas. Bad ideas. To starve three million of your own people in the Ukraine? How can we trust a government with such ideas?”

¹ Shelly Rambo, Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining, 15.
At the age of 13 months, Ugnė was exiled to Siberia with her older brother and her parents. Their family had a large farm in Lithuania and were among the first to be sent east, by train and then by river, to the northernmost portion of Russia—above the Arctic Circle. The wooden boats that carried them were used to make small huts above a pit dug into the frigid ground. Huddled in these pits, survivors scratched an existence from the cold tundra by any means possible.

Ugné’s mother died in Siberia and Ugné was returned to Lithuania at age seven when her father took ill and realized he too was dying. Mustering skills in bookkeeping and Russian language, and with the help of resources family in Lithuania had gathered after selling household goods, he bribed his way onto an airplane with his children and flew to a town below the Arctic Circle where he was able to secure a month-long train journey back to Lithuania. Once in Lithuania, Ugné was separated from her father and brother—each parceled off to a different small village to stay with family, lest they be discovered together and returned east. Her next memory of her father was the morning she woke perturbed because her aunts had not jostled her from bed in time for school. They told her that there would be no studies that day because her father had died and they were all going to make the trip to their home village. Only in death was it safe for her father to return home.

In the years between Ugné’s return to Lithuania and her first year of university, life remained unsettled. Separated from her biological brother, she was passed from one family to the next. She retains only sporadic memories of the care, sacrifice, loss, and generosity of the various family members who came
to her aid. “One thing you must understand was that everyone was AFRAID; everyone,” she emphasizes. “I talk to other people and they remember running around the outside of the house or picking cherries from the tree in their childhood”, she murmurs. “It disturbs me…I simply have no memories of such things. But I do remember the important times—such as when my father died.” One legacy of the fear that gripped Ugnė’s early years is her loneliness at her own retirement party.

In the book *Trauma and Grace*, Serene Jones attempts to think through the implications of trauma for “the healing work of theology and faith communities today.” She begins by outlining some of the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): excessive vigilance, numbness, emotional and cognitive deadness, dissociation, intrusive memories, compulsion to repeat traumatic events, loss or diminishment of memory and routine language use, unraveling of agency, powerlessness, loss of hope. Jones writes, “these factors in combination create for trauma survivors what is perhaps the most insidious feature of PTSD: a sense of isolation from their primary communities of affection and care.”

In witness to one woman’s encounter with Christian practices within a life marked by trauma, Jones writes, “part of the beauty and power of church for her

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2 For my purposes, when I discuss trauma in Lithuania I intend something more akin to an “ordinary” use of the word—as significant emotional, psychological, and/or bodily distress caused by severe mental, emotional, and/or physical stress. Though I draw upon the insight of people who work with and diagnose individuals under clinical “trauma” labels I do not claim or intend to offer such diagnosis here.


was the comforting order that our stories and our order of worship provided...it was not just the content of the stories, either. It was also their repetition and their constant reenactment, at an embodied level.⁵

Though Jones makes mention of embodiment and ritual, she directs her primary attention toward imagination as formed by practices that center upon words, suggesting a theological engagement with the traumatized mind through “healing imagination.” While the deep insight that Jones offers into the potential power of Christian imagination for survivors of trauma is evident in Ugnė’s life and in the lives of others, it is David Morgan’s definition of belief that is generative for theological understanding of the power of Vėlinės memory practices for Ugnė: “how people behave, feel, intuit, and imagine as ways of belief.”⁶

This focus on behavior, feelings, and intuition in addition to imagination is important for several reasons. First, because under both Nazi and Soviet occupation, what people said and wrote was tightly monitored and disciplined. As the stories and memories of so many Lithuanians demonstrate, the form of life in these countries still bears the deep marks of that disciplining and secrecy. Trust takes distinctive form and is carefully rationed in Lithuanian society, as is open dialogue and conversation. Embodied actions are primary. Words come much less readily. And even when words do come, they are best heard in the context of the “affective, voluntaristic, and practical” aspects of Lithuanians’

⁵ Ibid.
embodied experience.\(^7\) Only then can we begin to understand the significance of what is said about these practices, or the texts and doctrines people consider important in understanding and explaining them. As Morgan writes, “we think and remember with feelings and with our bodies.”\(^8\)

Ugnė visits the cemeteries with her husband:

I go to a mass at church sometime during those days, and then we visit all our graves. I bring some flowers and some candles. We clean the graves and arrange things, say some prayers, and then we spend time there—in the quiet. Yes. It is important. It is very important. But I can not tell you why. Because I feel such love when I am there. I remember. And I am grateful. Grateful for them and for life. I hope that if we feel and know and remember that love, we might live with greater humanity. Treat one another with more love. I always anticipate going there. The time is so important. And when I come back home I usually feel sad…and so alone.

The provision of a place to gather up trauma-shattered memories is one of the gifts Ugnė receives in these dihliz-ian Vėlinės cemeteries. As she speaks of prayer candles, pulls down photos, and shares her new three-volume devotional Bible with lectionary readings and photographs, it is clear that Ugnė’s life is sustained by Catholic practice. But she flusters when she tries to explain. When she was younger and the grip of Stalin was tight in Lithuania, she did not visit her graves on Vėlinės. But when she got a job and started earning money it was one of the first things she tried to do. As a teacher, she could not always get away to travel to her family’s cemeteries on the exact day, but she would then visit her husband’s family’s graves in town and go to her own graves another time. Now she visits them all. “I just don’t have the words. But it is so important. It is something I do.”

\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Ibid. 56.
Ugnė’s experience of the long term effects of early trauma is far from unique in Lithuania. In this chapter I will explore the dihlij-ian Vėlinės cemetery space as a “Saturday space”: space where death seeps into life and life seeps into death; therefore a place that acknowledges death and suffering, and through that acknowledgement offers a measure of peace and hope to Lithuanians whose lives have been scarred by trauma. I am not a trauma scholar and my intent here is not to offer Vėlinės practices as a therapeutic model or cure available to professionals treating individuals with trauma. Quite the opposite; what I wish to argue is Vėlinės practices as tactic. In these Vėlinės cemeteries ordinary Lithuanians draw upon historic practices of family, church, and state in service of pagarba (respect) and ramybė (tranquility)—experiences of affect and emotion that are frequently elusive for individuals in the grip of trauma.

One of the many debates in current trauma theory centers on the prominence and centrality of discussions about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Related to this discussion is a struggle with the definition of trauma

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9 See, Danutė Gailienė and Evaldas Kazlauskas, “Fifty Years on: The Long-Term Psychological Effects of Soviet Repression in Lithuania”; Danutė Gailienė, Ką jie mums padarė: Lietuvos gyvenimas traumų psychologijos žvilgsniu.
10 Shelly Rambo, Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining.
11 For an overview of some of the differing perspectives and debates in the field of trauma theory see, Kristen Brown Golden and Bettina G. Bergo, eds., The Trauma Controversy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).
itself. While I will draw upon these debates for the purpose of description and analysis, I am making no scientific claim about how many Lithuanians have experienced a form of trauma that would be recognized according to western analytics of diagnosis. My claim is much more basic: I wish to offer witness to the traces of trauma in the lives and stories of the Lithuanians I have met. I draw upon the scientific categories only to have language to talk about those traces, not to draw conclusions about their pervasiveness, effect, or prognosis.

In the dissertation thus far we have looked at the people, places, and practices that constitute Vėlinės: the history of Lithuania, the Vėlinės cemeteries themselves, and the practices embodied and enacted there. We have also explored the social order entwined within and around Vėlinės by considering the complex incorporative dynamics of family, church, and state. Now, in Part III of the dissertation I seek to examine this complexity in relation to spiritual struggle.

In this chapter I suggest that Lithuanian experience is on intimate terms with death. And the truth of this death-bound existence is gathered into, acknowledged, and reframed in Vėlinės cemeteries. These dihliz-ian spaces

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14 Gailienė and Kazlauskas argue persuasively that much more study needs to be done on both severe, prolonged traumatisation as well as the long term effects of political repression, among those effects being non-recognition of trauma and lack of opportunity to express or acknowledge the experience of trauma and lack of a sense of justice when those who perpetrate trauma have not been publicly identified or subject to trial. See, Danutė Gailienė and Evaldas Kazlauskas, “Fifty Years on: The Long-Term Psychological Effects of Soviet Repression in Lithuania.”
welcome, acknowledge, and honor the messiness of trauma, suffering, and
death; and for some, the horizon of hope as well.

Again, my overriding purpose here is to think about the Vėlinės cemetery
as “Saturday space”, a term suggested by theologian Shelly Rambo and inflected
with images of the Christian tridium—the three days marking the death of Jesus
on Good Friday, the Holy Saturday in the tomb, and Sunday as the day of
resurrection. These three days lie at the heart of the Christian calendar year and
the Christian witness. Rambo suggests that we tend to neglect Holy Saturday by
lashing it to either the suffering of Good Friday or the future-oriented vision of
redemption on Easter, the day of resurrection. Rambo argues that this is
theologically problematic for the church. More specifically, it is theologically
problematic for the church’s capacity to offer solace and hope to people whose
lives are marked by trauma, and whose continuing experience resonates with
Holy Saturday—a space where life seeps into death and death seeps into life.
Rambo turns to the biblical text and the narrative in the gospel of John to claim a
Saturday space for those marked by trauma. I will turn to the lived, sensory,
embodied, and emplaced Vėlinės cemetery.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part I outline some of the
particular features of the experience of trauma in Lithuania, and place this trauma
and Vėlinės cemeteries in conversation with Rambo’s theological reflections on
Saturday spaces. In the second section I give specific attention to the dihliz-ian
quality of Vėlinės cemeteries, with particular consideration of the significance of
the church’s inscription upon and simultaneous lack of control of these spaces.
Part One: Traces of Trauma

Julija vividly remembers the day the world shifted: “During Soviet times there was never bad news. Bad news was not allowed. As Glasnost was unfolding I heard a news story about a cruise ship sinking in the Black Sea,” and I knew that everything was changing—bad news was the beginning of good news.” In a very important sense, during the years of Soviet occupation the cemetery functioned as one of the few places for good news, good news precisely because it was the antithesis to Lenin’s enshrined and preserved body in Moscow and the way that body evoked a required form of life under the Soviet system. A Soviet journalist speaks with a mix of wonder and scorn as he remembers the assignments he was given: “No bad thing could be reported; no tragedy; no discouraging news. The message was always supposed to be the same: the success and the march forward of the Soviet state.”

In this important sense, cemeteries stood as tangible, grounded, emplaced sensory contradiction: weighted with the truth of death and pressing, for some, upon the horizon of hope beyond death. Amidst the cemetery marches, torches, and poetry of the late Soviet years, cold grave stones spoke of death; white flowers and humble wax candles glimmered with reunion and with memory; journeys to village cemeteries traced connection and relationship contrary to the state’s directives for work and placement in far flung cities and towns.

16 Julija, female, early 50’s.
Julija is a highly educated Russian translator and a voracious reader. She is going through a painful divorce and is struggling with financial hardship and depression, but for the first time in her life she feels free and out from under the control of any domineering personality. Earlier that day we visited with her amazingly bright and forceful eighty-two year old mother Saulė who had the photo albums and the history books waiting for us when we made our way into her deteriorating cement block house. Once Saulė started talking she didn’t stop. She spoke in long soliloquies more than sentences, jumping from one story to the next in classic flight-of-thought, removing most of the oxygen from the room in her frenzied speech: describing the neighbor who was murdered, the classmate who joined the partisans, her father’s business, exciting trips to Moscow when she was in university; leaning close at critical moments to share an important confidence, and at the end of the conversation showing me watercolor paintings she had drawn of her hopes and fascination with the new president of the United States: Barack Obama.

The raw sadness at the heart of this family emerged about two hours into the conversation, when Saulė spoke of the death of her beloved husband after only eight years of marriage, leaving her with three small children. This is when her eyes brimmed with tears. On the way home Julija started talking about the mystery of her father’s death. Before his marriage to Julija’s mother, her father had been sent to Siberia. No one knew quite what he did there or why he was sent. But they believe he was injured and that this injury led to his death. Julija particularly focuses on a photograph her mother showed me of her and her
brother and sister as children--posed properly and looking frightened—like deer in the headlights:

Do you remember that photo? I looked at it and thought, “That is a photo of our life! Frozen. Always scared and separate.” When my father died my mother stopped our life right there. The house is still as it was then. She did not want us to interact with other families. She kept everyone close, staying home at night and never allowed to leave. She is a brilliant woman, but it was not easy to be her daughter.

Julija had recently read a book about trauma by Professor Danutė Gailienė17: *Ką jie mums padarė*—“What Have They Done to Us?” “I started that book and I could not put it down,” she say, “I was reading about my life in that book. That is what our family was like. We were controlled by a trauma we did not even know or understand. I always felt afraid.” Gailienė18 emphasizes that trauma theory often fails to take account of the effects of long term fear—the cost to society and to individuals of life within the threat of violence and ever subject to the *imperial look* or the *unilateral gaze*.19 For many, this is an experience of social death.20

Odeta is almost eighty years old. Her beautiful brown eyes and her gently rounded facial features reflect her Russian and Lithuanian heritage. She cries when she talks about her days in school training to be a teacher. She lived with four young women. They would take turns standing in line waiting for food to bring home, but they were so hungry that sometimes the courier for the day’s food simply could not stand it, and would start eating the bread as she walked

18 See, Danutė Gailienė and Evaldas Kazlauskas, “Fifty Years on: The Long-Term Psychological Effects of Soviet Repression in Lithuania”.
20 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*: A Comparative Study. For a brief description of Patterson’s explanation of social death see the introduction to this dissertation, pg. 27-28.
back to their shared flat, arriving with guilty and empty hands—nothing left for her apartment mates. “Labai sunku” (very hard) was the intermittent refrain as we talked through the different eras of her life. Odeta’s granddaughter was helping with the conversation. She and her mother and aunts were hoping that I might pry out of Odeta information that they were unable to get from her on their own. “Whenever we start talking about those early days she just changes the subject and focuses on someone else.”

A warm and loving woman in the style of grandmothers who heap huge mounds of food on your plate as soon as you have managed to clear even a small portion, Odeta is deeply devoted to her family. She spent her working life first as a teacher, but for most of her years as an assistant director and then director at children’s homes within the Soviet system. She readily talks about this time, suggesting that the children’s material needs were taken care of, but remembering the heartbreak of stepping into rooms filled with little children who would jump on any visitor, begging for affection and crying out “Mama!! Mama!!” It also pained her to feel so helpless and have nothing to offer when children who had grown up in the home would come to her begging for any scrap of information she might have about their parents as they scoured for a clue that might help them solve the mystery of identity and loss.

Odeta’s husband was a much beloved school teacher and coach in their city, and they were among the lucky ones who were assigned a small sodas on the outskirts of town—a tiny plot of land to grow food for the table and maybe
flowers, while also enjoying fresh air. Odeta and her husband raised three beautiful daughters and she is grateful that once things settled down in Lithuania and they found jobs, they always had enough to eat. Odeta has trouble sleeping, pacing in the night after sounds and nightmares awaken her. This has grown worse in recent years since the death of her beloved grandson. She is haunted by questions of what she could have done to recognize his pain and depression before he reached the point of despair and took his own life.

Odeta’s early life holds the secrets her family wishes they knew. As I start probing into that era of her life she repeatedly turns to her granddaughter and pleads, “maybe this is enough!” We learn only scraps before I reach a place where I feel I can probe no more deeply because the pain is simply too vivid and I feel my questions may cause her further injury and suffering. The details are murky, but stark. They lived in a small village. Her father was some sort of government functionary. Their small house was next to the police station. Though there was a wooden fence between their house and the police, the fence had a hole. She remembers the bodies the police would bring into the yard: entire families executed—men, women, and children. She also remembers their conversation as they unloaded the bodies, particularly the afternoon when the supervisor came out to the yard and declared, “No! This is the wrong family.”

Odeta’s father died when she was young and the cause of his death remains mysterious; perhaps drowning, perhaps something else. She visits his

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21 These sodas developed great importance for many displaced agrarian families during the Soviet period as they provided a respite from routine and fertile soil they could call their own. Though the size was very small—approximately 600 sq. meters or 6 aras, some people managed to build small houses so they could sleep at their sodas.
grave infrequently. Her mother was left desperately poor and alone trying to tend the children. They barely survived, but Odeta did manage to do well in school and to achieve advanced degrees, to gain a place in the teacher’s school, and to muddle through until she could find a job. Her mother lived in the nearby village for many years and would sometimes come and stay with them. She tends to her mother’s grave as well as the graves of her husband’s parents.

Odeta’s granddaughter came away from the conversation reflecting the frustration with haunting, untold secrets and sadness that Henrika described as gripping so many families and as driving the younger generation out of Lithuania. “This is our family’s history. We need to know!” she exclaimed. “Once she is gone there is no way to discover these stories.” Odeta’s granddaughter and her aunts believe it is not only trauma over the past that restricts her grandmother from telling her painful stories. They think it is a pressure and fear her grandmother feels because of her Russian ancestry amidst ascendant new nationalism in Lithuania: “Our family—and that must be just one of many other families in Lithuania—think that my grandma is not telling her story because of the truly patriotic context of independent Lithuania. In simple words, she feels ashamed to be called a communist descendant.”

This fear of revealing complex, hybrid, and messy history in the midst of the heralding of ethnic purity is a form of trauma in and of itself, particularly given

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22 After our visit Odeta’s granddaughter came up with a creative solution. Her grandmother is a great letter writer. She contacted her grandmother and told her that she knew she did not want to talk about these painful stories now and she respected that, but she also felt it was important for that family history to be known and preserved. She asked her if she would write down the stories in a journal and then she promised that no one in the family would look at that journal while her grandmother is still alive. Grandmother agreed. Odeta’s granddaughter and her mother purchased a bound journal at a store near where they live in Ireland and mailed the journal to her grandmother. They hope her grandmother will keep her promise.
the fact that it is the experience of the vast majority of families who made their way in the messy middle during the years of war and serial occupation. This regnant norm of purist nationalism perpetuates dynamics of fear and repression that Professor Gailienė mentions as typical of the Soviet period and as crying out for research and response: a sense that one’s own reality and suffering can not be acknowledged and a sense of danger and secrecy. Clearly Odeta has witnessed and experienced horrors that revisit her time and time again, as trauma so often does—unbidden, uninvited, and out of her control. She is intimate with death and with suffering. Yet in the larger society and even among family, she has found no safe place to acknowledge this fear and messiness.

It is hard to imagine carrying that kind of pain in the midst of the disciplining silence and cultural insistence upon secrecy that characterized Soviet society as well as the current regnant norms for being in place rather than out of place. Henrika believes this is the reason Vėlinės cemeteries are so important to the oldest generation of Lithuanians. They embody and emplace a truth that was silenced and denied for most of their lives:

It has significance on several layers. People could not publicly acknowledge that what had happened to them had been traumatic. It was in fact portrayed—and the official line was—that it was good. That what had happened was good. That it was a cleansing of the country from those who exploited it. That this is how liberation and freedom came. But people had no way of publicly acknowledging that they had lost their loved and dear ones, that they had lived with horror, that there has been injustice, trauma, death, loss, confusion. It was kind of this torn identity. And I think they were grieving not only for the dead, but they were grieving for the part of themselves they lost. That was a way to publicly acknowledge that it happened not only on an individual level, but also on a national level.
The other thing is I think…if we look at it, every family had been affected by the second world war. It was one thing if one lost relatives and loved ones to the Nazi regime. There were ways to acknowledge that publicly. I mean in some way, during the Soviet Union. “Yes, the Nazis were bad and they killed people; they took our people away.” That was how it was portrayed…and then the Soviets came and liberated. Right…they brought freedom; they ended the suffering. But so many families in Lithuania had been affected by the Soviet deportations. So how do you grieve those whose destiny you don’t even know? How do you grieve those who for example remain in Siberia never to come back? How do you grieve those who died there, and especially for the deportees who returned, how do you grieve that which you have lived through? It cannot be otherwise publicly acknowledged, so maybe that is the only way it can be acknowledged.

And for other forms of trauma, other modes of suffering—for the messy middle—perhaps it can not be acknowledged even now.

The trauma is not limited to the repression and violence of the early Stalin years or the cautious fear and denial of the later Soviet years. As Odeta exemplifies, there is also trauma in the vulnerability of transition to new economic and political structures. These new structures focus on neo-liberal visions of future prosperity at the same time they bring job loss and economic hardship to the generations who came of age and worked for most of their life under the Soviet system. The message they receive is that it is time to move on to a new society. Henrika reflects on her grandmother who was born in Lithuania, deported to Siberia, married a Russian man in Siberia, and then was sent back to Lithuania:

Yes, there is a push to get on with it. And every period offers their own revisionist account of history. So how do you account for that period: when families were torn; when identities were confused. I mean, there was no way to publicly express what you feel…the overall grief and trauma the country went through. I think it is still a grief of loss. Not only of the departed. But of loss in general. I mean, whatever the regime was, there were people who lost their life several times. I am thinking of my
grandma, losing the life she had in independent Lithuania, creating a new life in Siberia, losing that life to return to Lithuania, rebuilding her life in the Soviet Lithuania, losing that to independent Lithuania...and that keeps on changing. So there is a sense of loss that permeates the society. Especially for the older generation. The younger generation may not feel that loss as acutely. That is maybe why this holiday is not so important to them.

Shelly Rambo wrestles with the significance of trauma for the way we do theology. She suggests that trauma has a double structure: the actual occurrence of the traumatic experience and then the absorption of or reckoning with that experience. One of the hallmark definitions of trauma is that trauma is beyond the normal frame of meaning: a deeply disorienting experience that cannot be made sensible or be integrated into life’s known patterns. This is why people “split off” traumatic experiences and store them in a part of their being distinct from their normal functioning; there simply is no place to fit those experiences within the “normal”.

But it is not possible to truly discard experience. Experience sequestered eventually revisits, often in destructive ways. It remains. Trauma haunts life: ravaging daily experience; numbing emotions; shattering reassurances of normality; ripping open gaping holes in memory; searing life with reminders of all that is beyond our control. It is frightening and overwhelming. Death and fear continually seep back into life, even as life seeks sustenance amidst death.

In response to the experience of lived trauma, Rambo offers a theological vision rooted in the significance of Holy Saturday as a day suspended between the Friday of Christ’s death and the Sunday of his resurrection. She expicates this vision through a careful reading of the passion story in the gospel of John.

Rambo is critical of theological constructs that seek to lash Saturday onto Good Friday as a witness to participation in Christ’s redemptive suffering. She also rejects theologies that tie Saturday too tightly to the day of resurrection as a celebration of victory already won. “By linking redemption so closely to one event or the other, we can run the risk of elevating suffering or of negating it. But what if we began to see the work of witnessing, the work of the Spirit between death and life, as redemptive?”

As an alternative, Rambo offers Saturday as a rich and vital time for people who bear the scars of trauma, and thus inhabit a porous space between life and death—a place where death seeps into life and life seeps into death:

This book attempts to honor the ways in which people move on and envision life where no signs of life can be found. These experiences point to a different way of envisioning life in the Spirit. It is a theology of the Spirit birthed from the middle rather than one birthed from the resurrection event. The presence of the Spirit is more fragile and unrecognizable in the middle space. It is divine presence marked by absence. Forsakenness, abandonment, and alienation are truths of the cross that remain, extending beyond death to transform the landscape of life. The question for Christian theology is this: is this remainder a threat to proclamations of resurrection, or is this remainder the seed of witness upon which all resurrection claims must be grounded?

Through the witness of Saturday, Rambo explicates a “theology of remaining.”

Rambo’s work is highly textual. Leaning heavily into Cathy Caruth’s literary explorations of trauma Rambo carefully exegetes the death and

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24 Ibid., 14.
25 Rambo, Pg. 13.
26 Cathy Caruth’s work is significant in the corpus of the very complex literature on trauma studies. It is also not without controversy. While the arguments I seek to make here do not rest on notions of specific forms of trauma or theories of therapeutic healing, I think it important to acknowledge the objections to Caruth’s work before relying on a theologian who draws heavily from that work. Several objections seemed to be lodged against Caruth’s work: that in its focus on the literary it removes the discussion of trauma from lived life and instead makes it an object of academic discourse; that because she discusses the effects of trauma on both the victim and the
resurrection narratives in the gospel of John as she mines the literary layers of the Gospel in search of insight into the effects of trauma on the life that remains.

Following Caruth, Rambo argues that the defining characteristic of trauma is that it is an event that cannot be contained or naturalized within life’s frames of meaning. It is an experience beyond speech\(^{27}\) that shatters the treasured givens of life so essential to order, security, and dependability.

victimizer she ignores issues of justice; that in rendering trauma as unspeakable or beyond what can be integrated or expressed, she depoliticizes trauma and does not push toward accountability; that her work is written from the perspective of white Western privilege and ignores insidious, everyday, structural forms of trauma; that the whole category of trauma is inherently unstable and rests on assumptions that are unfounded in biology and are mutually contradictory—the “mimetic” and the “anti-mimetic”, one assuming that a person can break off and take a stance outside of one’s own experience and the other assuming that trauma’s effect is to obliterate sense of self; that she mischaracterizes the literary texts she works with. These objections to Caruth’s work are expressive of larger debates in trauma studies. Michael Rothberg suggests that Caruth’s work is being unfairly characterized in some of the most heated critiques, and that the critics both misunderstand the literary work from which she is drawing and also ignore the qualifications she makes as part of her analysis. For Caruth’s work see, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1996) and *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995). For a searing critique of Caruth and Bessel Van der Kolk (see note 11 above) in the form of a genealogy with no proposal of alternate models but the suggestion that trauma can be represented in ordinary narrative in the course of therapy or other settings see, Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For a discussion of Caruth and others as part of a larger critique of academic “deconstructive trauma studies” as “quickly moving from an understanding of trauma as injury to specific people to the abstract, metaphorical notion of trauma as a welcome disruption of existing frameworks of social and institutional incorporation” see, Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weinböck, “Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma (or How I Learned to Love the Suffering of Others Without the Help of Psychotherapy)” in Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, eds, *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 229-240. For criticism of the notion of trauma as the “unspeakable” see, Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable: Literature, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007). Michael Rothberg discusses the work of Caruth and her critics in the context of his discussion of multidirectional memory. Rothberg’s analysis is particularly interesting as he draws on the work of recent postcolonial critics who place the much debated story at the center of Caruth’s work (Tancred and Clorinda) in its original setting as the slaying of an Ethiopian woman by a crusade. He then goes on to discuss Aimé Césaire in response to these discussions in trauma studies. see, Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 88-90. Drawing upon Amy Nowak, “Who Speaks? Who Listens? The Problem of Address in Two Nigerian Trauma Novels,” Special Issue on “Postcolonial Trauma Novels,” *Studies in the Novel*, 40, nos. 1-2 (2008): 31-51.

\(^{27}\) This notion of trauma as experience beyond speech is the focus of much of the critique of Caruth. My very limited and anecdotal life experience leads me to believe that trauma does often have this effect on people, though not always. What I would argue is that whatever speech is possible, it is often not adequate for healing. Therefore my notion of trauma is in many ways broader than that of Caruth and Rambo. Nonetheless, I think their insights are highly relevant for
Although Rambo focuses on biblical and theological text, in her exegesis she draws attention to the movements and expressions of Mary Magdalene and the Beloved Disciple, and asserts that these stories bear witness to the truth that in the face of trauma, words are inadequate. We must attend instead to "a pneumatological sensorium at the interstice of death and life. This sensorium is shaped by an unseeing that shifts to seeing but only through hearing, and a hearing that requires altered naming; touch is suspended as well." Like Caruth, Rambo outlines this space of death and life through attention to gaps in text—biblical text. She notes in those gaps a space of ragged edges and cavernous holes that perform the inadequacy of words to the actual experience of trauma. But the space Caruth offers is defined by words nonetheless.

By contrast, Vėlinės cemeteries are actual Saturday spaces, marked less by words than by the rough granite of headstones, decaying leaves, pungent pine branches, fragrant chrysanthemums, soft murmurs, silent prayer, hefty movements of quiet crowds, and flickering flames that pierce the darkness. These cemeteries do not describe a “pneumatological sensorium,” they are that sensorium: liminal spaces framed by possibility, hope, and promise; spaces where trauma breaks in, not to be resisted and shuttered away, but to be acknowledged and even honored. These spaces admit death. They glimmer with communion and community, trust and betrayal, confusion and surety, death and resurrection. Not in spite of, but because of the death that seeps into life

Lithuania and support the point more basic point I am making: that Lithuania has been profoundly shaped by trauma and that Vėlinės cemeteries receive and host this trauma as people engage in everyday practices in search of healing, wholeness, and relationship.  

and the life that seeps into death, these spaces become a refuge of peace, and even hope.

Whereas so much of present life in Lithuania is either/or, these spaces are both/and. Vėlinės cemeteries are powerful because they embody the truth of modern experience in Lithuania: it is messy. Death does linger in life, and even in joy. Trauma continues. The way forward is not always clear. New possibility brings with it new confusion and pain. So much that matters is rarely spoken. Secrets pervade all realms of life. Hope and possibility dance with shame and regret.

It is therefore not surprising that some people describe the cemetery on Vėlinės as a sanctuary of ramybė—of peace: wishing to linger and never leave; feeling bereft as the day ends; full of sadness and separation when they return home. Vėlinės cemeteries are a refuge that breathes truth. While the great push to join the western narrative of unlimited possibility pulses beyond the cemetery gate, the space of the cemetery acknowledges the most profound of human limits: death and loss; violence and pain; regret and gratitude. The rules of the new economy in Lithuania tell people to move along and to make a way out of no way. The cemetery space performs alternate rules. It is a place where Lithuanians can dwell with the truth of the world as it is, rather than the world they are now expected to embrace. The cemeteries are spaces of death-bound hope. Sober hope, but hope nonetheless.

Is this choosing death? I suspect not. The pagarba and the ramybė of Vėlinės are of a piece. The peace on offer during Vėlinės is intertwined with the
duties of the Vėlinės practices themselves: the duty to preserve a place for respect—true, deep, unblinking respect; the demand for beauty, reverence, and memory amidst the cruelties and complexities of this tumultuous time. Perhaps these cemeteries are safe and trustworthy spaces for so many Lithuanians because they embody and emplace a truth reconciled to and bearing integrity with the messy reality of the last century of life in the bloodlands.

Here, where pagarba leads to ramybė and to the structuring and dignifying of life in the midst of the relentless traces and return of trauma, it is helpful to turn to the work of Orlando Patterson in his analysis of slavery as social death, and his focus on life lived in the immediacy of death and asymmetries of power. The older generations in Lithuania lived in close intimacy with death. Ever in peril; death bound existence. As Julija’s daughter and Odeta’s granddaughter exemplify in differing ways, intimacy with death in one generation marks the lives of generations that follow. Patterson suggests that the asymmetries of power that support and protect slavery are sustained by a complex nexus insuring escalation of honor and psychological power for the master, and dishonor and disempowering psychological pressure on and within the slave. Though the forms of alienation and loss for people in Lithuania differ significantly from the experience of enslaved people, the asymmetries of power vesting honor in the violence and threat of the ruling authorities and dishonor in the individual who is relentlessly subject to the imperial look have resonance here. As does the huge

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It is reasonable to suggest that the experience of some Lithuanians was in fact much closer to the experience of enslaved people, particularly the experience of individuals who were taken from Lithuania to be imprisoned in Nazi or Soviet concentration camps and gulags. However, this was not the experience of the most of the Lithuanians with whom I spoke nor the majority of Lithuanians, therefore the qualification is appropriate.
focus on *pagarba*—respect—in the comments of most everyone who speaks about *Vėlinės*.

The world of *Vėlinės* cemeteries counters the master-slave relationship, even when the master narrative is enacted within that very space. Each person who bends to light a candle and to pause in prayer or memory embodies a continuity of relationship and vision that pierces the limited horizons inscribed and enforced by the state and resists the vigilant and violent claim that the orientation, telos, limit, and possibility of life is prescribed and delimited by the state. Speaking of the reality performed by the Soviet state apparatus, Henrika reflects on this refusal of limitation:

…it was a very materialist ideology so if it is only a body and the body is dead and has deteriorated it’s gone, right? Are you there because of the bones? No. You are there because of the sense that there is a possibility—like even in memory, if you define memory broadly as making present that which is in the past, there is already an acknowledgement that there is a possibility of a reality beyond the material world. So that is why I think *Vėlinės* is so important is that it affirms and acknowledges the sense that people have that the material world is not “it.”

Rambo claims that when we think about cycles of trauma—whether individual, historical, or global—it is imperative that we attend to the “traces” of traumatic events by noting the marks trauma leaves upon those who survive.\(^{30}\) *Vėlinės* spaces point to the marks of trauma and invite such notation. This sober accounting of loss and trauma is not a negation of hope. It is a truthful hope. The marks and visitations of trauma are received and recognized within a larger performance in which individuals have agency to move, to think, to feel, and to

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 13.
enact an alternate trajectory. The stories of trauma are woven into a larger story through the simple act of embodied presence.

This does not mean that the story is always joy and light, or that the thread any individual brings to weave into the larger fabric remains constant. Many older pensioners shifted from a life that was demanding and austere but generally secure to a life rife with choices...for those who could afford it. While the support may have been minimal in Soviet days, it was guaranteed. Now many of the guarantees are gone. Yet most Lithuanians say they would not choose to return; that they would never go back. As one older man told his daughter, “I may not often be able to afford sausage. But when I can afford it, I am free to choose what I would like.”

Older Lithuanians sniff promise and possibility for their children and grandchildren, but day-to-day they wonder how they will pay the electricity bill. Visit any Lithuanian market in winter, and you will see stooped elderly men and women buying chunks of lard and crusts of bread to get them through the cold winter when access to meat is unlikely because they must preserve their litas\textsuperscript{31} to pay for at least some warmth in their small flats in Soviet housing blocks. In the end, they say, it is about the future: “my life is harder, but independence is a good thing because it will be better for my kids”. Is this simply altruistic, sacrificial parenting? Unlikely. They are not fools. They are speaking what they know is true. Rain falls on the just and unjust. The cemetery speaks that truth as well. And the cemetery acknowledges that even if they wouldn’t go back, life now is not easy.

\textsuperscript{31} The lita is the form of currency in Lithuania.
The cemetery speaks another reality too, a reality that cries out for justice with a voice that sometimes seem to fall to a gaping void: the person who persecuted and tortured me is now one of the wealthiest men in Lithuania; the same people who had connections and benefited under the Soviets are benefiting now. This is the source of much of the skepticism about suddenly flamboyant graves: “The more candles now; the more red they were then.” Cynical? Perhaps. Or grounded in reality. And another form of truth embodied and emplaced in Vėlinės cemeteries.

In the midst of jaded humor and wry observation lies a space of promise. Reflections on post-Soviet life often describe this sense of lost security as nostalgia or escape. But something much more complex is afoot as Lithuanians wrestle with questions of hope, identity, and the future. Perhaps this assessment of past and future is instead a search for what is real. It is not an either/or choice: the past is better or the future is rosy. Life seeps into death and death seeps into life. That is simply the way it is. The theological question is then, “Where is the witness of hope in the midst of that complex reality?”

The seepage of life into death and death into life is true not only for the older generation who lived through the displacement and horror of war. The consequences of loss and displacement visit themselves upon each generation in varying forms. The 180 degree turn from the Soviet Union to the west was sudden and thrilling for Lithuania. It was disorienting as well, for some even devastating. The shift took varying tolls depending on age, experience, and connections. Those in the middle of their work life scrambled for their place in
the new order or were shifted into retirement. Trained in Soviet thinking they were suddenly expected to function in a market economy. As in many former Soviet countries, people with connections in the previous economy leveraged those advantages to gain property and power in the new political landscape. As a result, many of the winners under the new regime were winners under the Soviet system as well.

At the same time, true believers in the Soviet political system who did the work to maintain the party structure on local levels or produced information and images to support the Soviet propaganda machine nationally suddenly found themselves without a clear place in society or a viable living, as their work and commitments were held up to ridicule. Others who went along to get along, largely maintaining a sort of agnostic political non-alliance, were now thrust into new definitional frameworks, finding themselves disillusioned and disenfranchised as they sought to transition to a new economy and political system. Midway through life the world was shifting under their feet.

It is arguable that the youngest generation benefited the most from this shift. New opportunities for education and travel opened before them. Western businesses, NGOs, and governmental programs poured resources into educating and training young people as the hope for the future. But the benefits from the west did not flow evenly in this generation either. Over time cities thrived, while rural areas and smaller towns slipped deeper into poverty and unemployment. And all the untold secrets, sorrows, and horrors lingered. Following a similar pattern to other post-Soviet countries, many of the young people who benefited
most from western investment eventually parachuted out of their home country to follow glimmering opportunities available to them through proffered educational opportunities in the west and the mobility of the new EU. In addition, lack of guaranteed employment and the sudden disappearance of Soviet accountability structures took a heavy toll on families through alcoholism, violence, and poverty. The children and the elderly often suffered most. They still do.

As print media was untethered from governmental control after independence, the larger media outlets veered from their role as purveyors of Soviet propaganda to become tools in a new game of raw capitalism. Power and wealth often determined the stories that were told in the media, and who was allowed to tell them. At the same time, as the notion of free speech took hold people tentatively started telling their own stories. The suffering of exile, the horror of the gulag, and the brutality of the KGB emerged as a surprise and horror to some. For others it was truth finally spoken.

For many it is still too painful to tell. While diaries and letters revealed some of the lost history of the region, public attention tended to turn toward the stories of the living. With 95% of the Jewish population murdered at the onset of World War II there were few left in that community to tell the story. That painful narrative was quickly engulfed and suppressed by the stories of those who suffered at the hands of Stalin rather than Hitler. Five years into independence, Lithuania gained dubious distinction as the country with the highest suicide rate.
in the world. Suicide rates remain extraordinarily high today, particularly for young males.\textsuperscript{32}

Here too, the cemeteries host truth in a way that shiny new office towers and promises of western education and market opportunities can not. The pace of global culture makes little space for aging and death beyond potential possibilities for profit. Trauma is not universal or linear, nor is it efficient. This is another reason people hesitate at the cemetery gate. Wishing to linger a bit longer in the mysterious glimmer of candles; reluctant to re-enter a pace of life that generally denies the presence of death, even though death lingers in powerful forms in Lithuania; constitutive of both identity and hope.

Patterned by the cyclical nature of the church year, \textit{Vėlinės} affords an opportunity to acknowledge and to dwell with the truths of suffering without the expectation that each turn in the cycle will register linear growth beyond the pain. Shelley Rambo highlights the fact that in dominant theology in the United States the work of the Spirit is frequently cast in terms of a forward movement: as a drive to life, and as the re-creative and renewing force of God. The lens of trauma brings to focus an alternative theological vision of healing and redemption.\textsuperscript{33}

The challenge in addressing trauma is to continually resist the temptation to cover over—to elide—the suffering in an effort to witness to it. The challenge is to attend to the ways in which violence continues to mark


\textsuperscript{33}Rambo, \textit{Spirit and Trauma}, 10-11.
persons and communities long after the violent event. This work of resisting and attending is the work of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Vėlinės} cemeteries do Spirit work. Rambo contrasts the work of the Spirit in the midst of trauma with the presence of the Spirit at Pentecost, suggesting it is "...instead, a Spirit persisting between death and life that is witnessed in and through the words and movements of those who remain."\textsuperscript{35} A theology of the Spirit as Rambo develops it is less clearly a driving life principle and more a sustaining power that continually witnesses the ruptures, moving between life and death.\textsuperscript{36}

As a parish pastor from the United States, the stories of \textit{Vėlinės} convince me that somewhere along the line we have stopped preaching resurrection and started preaching restoration instead: ever claiming that one day all shall be as it once was and all that is lost shall be restored. But in the face of traumatic death and loss, restoration is a false and hollow promise. Life will never be restored because the person who experiences trauma will never be the same. "The experience of survival is one in which life, as it once was, cannot be retrieved. However, the promise of life ahead cannot be envisioned."\textsuperscript{37}

Resurrection is not restoration. It is new life, with hope. When Jesus returned from the grave, those who were closest to him did not recognize who he was until he broke bread and spoke with them at table. He did not appear as the same friend who was tortured and killed just a few days before. He was made new. Only when the disciples touch Jesus’s wounds or share with Jesus in a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{34} Ibid., 13. \\
\footnotetext{35} Ibid., 82. \\
\footnotetext{36} Ibid., 13. \\
\footnotetext{37} Rambo, \textit{Spirit and Trauma}, 7.
\end{footnotes}
familiar practice are their eyes opened to recognize this person as the one they followed to the cross.\textsuperscript{38}

Lithuanians know this truth. In the media, in political discourse, even in school civics lessons, national narratives touting the by-gone days of glory under the Dukes are pressed through the sieve of a brief eighteen years of independence, and then remade as a rallying cry for Lithuanian national purity and power. But this is not the promise performed in cemeteries on Vėlinės. One Lithuanian clergy leader chortles sadly in his assessment of the power of Vėlinės practices: “Yes, Lithuanians are good at endurance and survival. Where we struggle is with creating something new; knowing what is next.” With Rambo, I suspect that the constructive future hope this leader longs for is bound up with this tenacity of endurance, this refusal to pretend things are other than they really are.

While granting the many vicissitudes and frustrations described by individuals working for constructive change in Lithuania, I suspect that all is not as dismal as it seems. Rather, as Lithuanians enter the dihliz-ian space of these cemeteries and maintain the everyday practices\textsuperscript{39} of Vėlinės, they consecrate and reclaim space, matter, and time. As they scratch soil, arrange blossoms, greet neighbors, and set candles afire, their bodies negotiate the complex truths of memory and hope. In these dihliz-ian spaces cruel history encounters warm memories of endurance and strength; bitter moments of betrayal, disappointment, and confusion are embedded in the wonder of reunion. The

\textsuperscript{38} Luke 24; John 20.
\textsuperscript{39} De Certeau, \textit{Practices of Everyday Life}.
scattered narratives of individual lives are recalled through movement, body, and speech, and woven into a larger narrative of community. Here death seeps into life and life seeps into death, haltingly and imperfectly framing possibility, hope, and promise.

Rambo suggests that the church must learn to theologize from this “middle” space if we are to offer a reliable word of hope in our shattered world. The theology she suggests takes the form of witness.

Looking from the middle, we are oriented to suffering in a different way—always in its dislocation, its distance, and its fragmentation. This orientation calls for a theology of witness in which we cannot assume presence or straightforward reception of a violent event but, instead, contend with excess of violence and its tenuous reception. Without witnessing to what does not go away, to what remains, theology fails to provide a sufficient account of redemption. The challenge to theology, then, is to account for what exceeds death yet cannot be interpreted as new life. The challenge is to account for what remains—to provide a discourse of remaining that can speak to life in the aftermath and to the shattering of familiar frameworks by which persons and communities have oriented themselves in the world. Theology must navigate uncharted waters in the attempt to witness experiences that “fall outside the range”.40

Lithuanians weave a theological vision of healing and redemption through memory practices in cemeteries during Vėlinės. It is sensory witness. It is also fluid and permeable witness. It is embodied belief: “a shared imaginary, a communal set of practices that structure life in powerfully aesthetic terms. Belief is perhaps best framed as a pervasive community of feeling because the holding that it involves is public and verifiable when it consists of holding to other people

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40 Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 8. Quotation marks indicates language taken from the *DSM-III*. 392
and the institutions they share."\(^{41}\) In the next section I will consider the significance of the church’s presence in the midst of this belief.

**Traces of the Church**

Although church doctrine and liturgy provide the scaffolding beneath Vėlinės, they do not control the impact or power of these practices in Lithuania. “Vėlinės overflowed the banks of the church.”\(^{42}\) As I will explore throughout the remaining chapters, in a region that has been buffeted and trampled upon by larger powers and agendas, this lack of control yet active presence within porous boundaries may in fact be a source of credibility, and the most powerful witness the church can offer. While the Catholic Church is understandably concerned about the suppression of catechesis and formation during the Soviet occupation and the attendant lack of theological and biblical knowledge among Catholics, the church did continue its practices during this period, and the practices of the church took on powerful form as symbol of and participation in an alternate reality. As the complicated entanglement with nationalism exemplifies, this was and is a messy reality. Nonetheless, the church was a carrier and harbinger of both strength and crushing brokenness in the midst of Soviet suppression and discipline.

My conversations with young Lithuanians indicates that among all but a small group of very active neo-traditional Catholics, the church is losing some its

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\(^{41}\) As David Morgan suggests, belief may be defined in many ways: dogmatically, as the affirmation of tenets; affectively as the experience of certain feelings and emotions; voluntaristically, as the necessary or willful performance of certain duties; and practically, as participation in a group’s discrete or definitive practices. David Morgan, *Religion and Material Culture*, 5. On emplacements, see, David Howes, *Empire of the Senses*, 9-12.

\(^{42}\) Private conversation with historian.
authority and allure by overt and dogmatic engagement with political issues such as definition of family.\textsuperscript{43} The church’s significance and presence during Vėlinės, however, cuts in the other direction. I believe it is a redemptive and healing direction given the understandable suspicion toward and resistance of the imposition of ideas by force. The church’s presence during Vėlinės is powerful because the church marks Vėlinės cemeteries with the integrity of its own practices and commitments. It does this not only within the church walls, but also in public space. But this is dihliz-ian space:

\begin{quote}
    a liminal space that defines “inside” and “outside” while also enabling an engagement with conflicting identities and power relationships.\textsuperscript{44} "Unlike a border that serves as a territorial demarcation between sovereign territories and criminalizes improper crossing without authorization, the dihliz is not a criminalizing space but a welcoming space.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Klebonas Tomas expresses this truth eloquently as he distinguishes between various aspects of the church’s presence during Vėlinės, noting differences between the liturgy and the homily during the mass, and the prayer and the candle at the grave. When asked about the deep wounds of trauma and memory in Lithuania he suggests that the liturgy of the mass, and particularly the prayers, respond to the reality of lingering trauma and connect the experience of Lithuania with the lives of people around the world:

\begin{quote}
    …the position of the church is reflected in the liturgy. So when the church prays we list the people, or now the groups of people as it is impossible to give all the names. So we talk about those who were killed in war, who died in the prison, who were refugees, who experienced some other loss or pain. Which means the church acknowledges—now we have quiet times in the prayers too—but the church acknowledges that there was loss and trauma in the past and prays for it. And now we have also families
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{43} Memory politics are also relevant in this regard and I will address them in the next chapter.  
\textsuperscript{44} Ebrahim Moosa, \textit{Ghazāli & The Poetics of Imagination}, 48.  
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 48-49.
who still have wounds of the past—families who lost their beloved ones from one side or from another side, from one political group or another political group...somebody was killed by Russians, somebody was killed by Germans, somebody was killed by some concentration camp. It’s really a very sophisticated history and very complicated. The past left wounds almost to every family. And in spite of this, that we now have quiet times and we can enjoy peace and welfare and all these things, but also in our days there are countries and people who suffer, and who every day die in some military conflict and in some other things. We pray for those too. We don’t know, we can not list their names and family names and so on, but we know that God knows everything, and we embrace them in our prayers—all those who were killed in the war, all those who are dead in accidents, all those who are dead in concentration camps. And it is the meaning of the entire liturgy of Vėlinės.

I ask about the potential for the church to bring leadership and healing to the complex issues of history and memory, particularly the often unspoken and publicly painful topics of collaboration, Lithuanian collaboration in the murder of Jewish Lithuanians, and participation in Soviet violence and persecution. Klebonas Tomas and other priests I spoke with turn to the wide space between the “must” and the “may” when they answer this question—the same space all pastors and priests navigate in faithfully seeking to connect the congregations and the people they serve with the healing and guiding resources and practices of their particular traditions. Most all priests were careful to distinguish the church’s “position” or “teaching” before speaking to their own pastoral response within that tradition. Klebonas Tomas phrased it this way:

It depends on the individual approach of the priest—where he wants to put the accent in the prayers and the sermons. Separate priests...when they preach, then it is personal approach to Vėlinės and the meaning of Vėlinės. One priest can emphasize one thing. Another priest will emphasize another thing that seems to him important at this time...for this community; for these people. But liturgy is shared by all.
Klebonas Tomas emphasizes distinctions within practices at the cemetery as well. He separates the function and power of prayer and remembering from the significance of the candle. The prayers are relational. They connect the living and the dead with God:

We believe what can help the dead is our prayers and our hearts. We embrace the dead not with our hands, but with our hearts—with our prayer. We embrace them with our memories. We call them back to our memories. We visit the cemeteries. We are back with the deceased—with our beloved people—and we think about them. … Prayer of Vėlinės is a sign of our love for people who we loved, for the dead. What is very important is the mercy of God is more important. Another aspect is love, and God’s love….asking for mercy…reconciliation, help, and love.

Whereas prayer binds the living and the dead with God, Klebonas Tomas describes the candles in relation to the living, and to the power of light:

Light…symbolizes eternity because Christ is the light of the world. It reminds us of the paschal candle. It is more important for those who are living; it reminds us of eternity. In the Easter liturgy we praise the Lord…Christ shines light on us. Christ is the light of our life. The candles, they remind us of this religious truth. Because for the dead, one candle, two candles, no candles, one hundred candles. It’s all the same for those who are gone.

Klebonas Tomas also explains Vėlinės as a significant time for those who reject the church:

Another aspect is reviving the memory. Those people who don’t pray by the grave remember, they remember the life they shared with the deceased and remember that they—the living—are the continuation of the people who died…This Vėlinės practice is very important for the development of the religious consciousness of people. Even those who are not religious are going to the cemetery and they are expressing their religious consciousness, even if they do not speak about it.

As an example, he tells the story of a famous Lithuanian poet who periodically spends time in his community:
He was an atheist, but he used to come...and we would have discussions. I was surprised by how religious he was. He used to declare how atheistic he was...but I was surprised at home, just how religious he was. More than me. That cult of the dead was so deep in his consciousness. He would always ask me to bring candles from the church for him to bring to the cemetery. He would go not just at Vėlinės, but at other times as well. Even for people like [him] who grew up in the Soviet/atheistic context...Vėlinės meant a lot...it is an original gift that comes in the genes of the human being.

If Vėlinės is simply a matter of doctrine or expression of ideational belief, it is easy to throw up warning flags about all the many possible distortions—a common and popular sport in US theological circles today: the dangers of incorporation into nationalist agendas; loss of communal notions of faith within the cult of the consumptive individual; “new age” ideas about the paranormal and relationship with nature and the dead; syncretism and dangers of ethnic particularism. My argument is not that these cautions and worries are to be ignored. Each of them portends possibilities for the encouragement of human violence and distortion. Rather, I wish to shift the frame of the question and to ask how the church might be present as hope and witness in the midst of these blurred boundaries and messiness. And particularly, how might the church’s marking of dihliz-ian cemetery spaces participate in their function as opportunities for sanctuary and healing for those who have lived through the violent years of the bloodlands and their aftermath.

There are many, many responses to that question. I will highlight three. First, these are embodied, emplaced practices. Therefore they invite and allow an alternate narration of relationship with the beloved dead and with the terms of

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46 I am less and less certain what this phrase means, but it is used both in Lithuania and in the US so I include it in the litany.
life and existence within which that relationship is lived and understood. Lithuanians who go the cemeteries embrace their beloved dead against an alternate horizon. Through candle, prayer, and liturgy, the church enacts relationship in relation to the liminal horizon of eternity. But as Henrika eloquently expresses, even for those who refuse, question, or feel ambivalence about the horizon set by the church, within cemetery spaces individuals exercise agency to perform, respect, reconcile, question—and even reject—a form of relationship. This agency is not purely individualistic. It is exercised within a sure and steady performative script. Yet it is also volitional—drawing upon affect, emotion, sensation, idea, and emplacement in its power and significance.

Among those who work with trauma survivors there is ongoing discussion of the most efficacious treatment, along with new proposals of varying paths toward healing and health. A huge emphasis is placed on the shattering of experience and the pattern of anecdotal and sporadic memory that splits off from and then revisits and haunts ongoing life. Therapists often work to help trauma victims form a coherent narrative to integrate their experiences. This is particularly important with memories that intrude and control. Integration into a larger narrative frame may vest greater agency, security, and control in the person who experienced trauma, with the hope that the power of the recurring trauma will be reduced.  

47 David Morgan, Religion and Material Culture
48 See, for example, Bessel A. van der Kolk, et. al., eds., Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society (New York: Guilford Press, 2007); Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma (New
There is debate, however, about the power of words. Here two questions are raised. First, does re-narration of trauma actually re-victimize trauma victims, so rather than healing them it mires them more deeply in the grip of trauma? Second, are words enough? Or more to the point, are words even the best path to healing? Trauma appears to imprint itself not only on the mind, but also on the body. Often the experience of trauma is more visceral than cerebral: restrained breathing; tingling skin; cloudy and fuzzy dizziness; specific pain in precise parts of the body; insomnia; fatigue; claustrophobia; panic. Because trauma is embodied some therapeutic forms of trauma recovery as well as self-help resources focus on re-patterning the body.49

I am in no position to draw conclusions about the efficacy of any of these interventions. What I do wish to point out is the way that Vėlinės practices engage all of these elements of human “being”: body, place, sense, thought, idea, word, relationship. Furthermore, Vėlinės practices engage these aspects of human “being” within a larger performance as one’s individual acts and agency are narrated within communal ritual. This does not mean that these annual performances are necessarily healing. They can easily be wounding as well. But I suspect that the pagarba and ramybė claimed by so many within the dihliz-

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ian space of Vėlinės bears some relation to this dynamic of embodied, emplaced agency within communal performance and narration.

Second, the church does offer a clear articulation of its own performance of these practices, thereby providing a fairly steady frame to be adopted, rejected, poached upon, or ignored. While there is some variance in explanation and narration from priest to priest and parish to parish, the prayers and ritual both within the walls of the church and in the Vėlinės cemetery itself offer an element of predictability and dependability amid the chaos that trauma and violence visit upon human beings. Vėlinės participation in a cyclical calendar year does this as well. Again, in suggesting the significance of this stability and predictability I am not claiming that the church’s narration of meaning is adopted by all participants, or even important for them. I am simply suggesting that the church’s presence is significant in inscribing that stability and predictability. The cardinal rule for trauma recovery is that individuals must first find a way to feel safe. I suspect many who dwelled in the bloodlands over the past century never found their way to that safety, and many still do not. But for those whose witness bears out a groping toward healing and wholeness within annual Vėlinės practices, the factors of stability, predictability, and shared communal practice are clearly important. In Lithuania that predictability and practice bears traces of the church, whether or not those participating experience that as important, reject it, or are oblivious to its presence.

Finally, the church’s inscription of this space without assertion of control is of profound importance. As referenced in other chapters, most Lithuanians resist

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50 See, Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155-174.
the imposition of any strict narration and requirement of meaning on their thoughts and experiences. That resistance is expressed in rural and urban settings alike.\textsuperscript{51} In trauma victims particularly, sensitivity to control is likely to be pronounced.

Most Lithuanians I spoke with are highly sensitive to and critical of the church’s efforts to intervene in political decision making or to offer dogmatic platforms for public policy and morality.\textsuperscript{52} This general resistance to the church’s flexing of muscle in public policy was in evidence again and again in my interviews, including interviews with people who attend mass with some regularity. In the words of a man in his late fifties:

I am certainly Catholic. I have been Catholic my whole life. And I attend the mass on most Sundays, although sometimes the priest looks at me like he is surprised to see me. But so often what is said in the church is insulting—like cheap moralizing. Not connected to the deeper questions but things like, “Don’t drink, don’t do this, don’t do that.” I do not need to hear that. I know that. I am not impressed with how the church is trying to be powerful in politics. I do not think this is right.

Of course, this situation is not unique to Lithuania. The church is navigating the same challenges it has faced for centuries in discerning the role of faith formation in individual and communal life in relationship to the church’s constructive role in the larger society. Indeed, before critiquing the church for current involvement in matters of public policy and action it is wise to give pause to remember that one of the most trenchant and painful critiques of the

\textsuperscript{51} A cultural anthropologist who studied beliefs and practices about death in a southern rural Lithuanian village documents the forms of this resistance. See, Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin, “‘We are all in Exile Here.’”

\textsuperscript{52} Again, the one exception I found to this was a group of young people who are drawn to the very clear and traditional parameters of the church in relation to social structure and morality. They express a sense of freedom in this as an alternative to Soviet construction of gender and family.
Lithuanian church is the critique of her failure to become involved in public discourse and to speak out in opposition to the mass murder of Jewish Lithuanians in 1941, a public discussion I will address in the next chapter.

My intention then is not to impose judgment. Rather, I wish to witness to the many and varied ways Vėlinės practices refract through all of this, and to suggest that the church’s presence in these practices in very tangible and sensory form alongside its relinquishment of any claim of control of the practices may itself be a powerful gift the church offers to victims of trauma. Again, in the words of Rambo: “The challenge is to attend to the ways in which violence continues to mark persons and communities long after the violent event. This work of resisting and attending is the work of the Spirit.”

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Chapter 8: Memory
Chapter 7: Memory

...debates about collective memory and group identification are primarily struggles over injustices of recognition, over whose history and culture will be recognized. Such injustices are real, but the rethinking of the relation between memory and identity can contribute to a rethinking of cultural recognition beyond zero-sum logic.¹

Telšiai is a small city in Žemaitija, the northwestern province of Lithuania. In the winter of 2006 the temperatures in Lithuania dropped to frigid depths; all of Lithuania was frozen tundra. Telšiai was without heat for several days. The hearty Žemaitijans bundled up and traversed the icy hills in the town center as usual, returning to stone-cold apartments in the evening. Life in this region was not easy then, nor is it easy most of the year for the vast majority of people who live here. In the more temperate month of October, the center of Telšiai beckons with beautiful stone churches, wooden homes, and carefully tended shops perched above a lovely lake in the town center. As in many Lithuanian cities, both the quaint and the majestic architecture quickly disappear at the edge of town where large, concrete, Soviet-era apartments crowd around a power plant. Just beyond the power plant outside Telšiai another hilly vista appears on the left, with a beautiful chapel reaching to the sky atop a hill and beside a forest. A dramatic wooden sculpture draws attention and marks an access road to the site.

This is the Rainiai Massacre memorial. In the late hours of June 24, 1941 and into the early morning the next day, Soviet forces fleeing the invading Nazi army evacuated approximately 73 political prisoners from their makeshift prison in Telšiai and brought them to these quiet woods to endure long hours of brutal

¹ Michael Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 20.
torture: tongues, ears, genitals, and scalps removed; mutilated genitals stuffed in the mouths of victims; fingernails pulled from fingers; skin burned with fire and acid, skulls crushed. Finally death for all the victims, followed by burial in a shallow, hastily dug pit. The exact number of victims at Rainai was initially uncertain, as the bodies were so mutilated that full identification was impossible. The small, ornate chapel on the hill is a memorial to those victims, with names inscribed on the outer wall and a tall steeple towering above the center. Across the parking lot from the chapel a stone walk leads to a sculpture in the forest at the actual site of the torture and murder. On the other side of the highway, an oak forest is planted in memory of the dead.

Lithuania is marked with countless sites that might be designated for commemoration of Soviet brutality both during the war and after. But Rainiai holds particular significance in Lithuania both for the level of barbarity and for the rallying force of the Rainiai memory for Lithuanians during the years that followed. The funerals for the victims turned into a protest against the year-long Soviet occupation. The invading Nazis then suggested that some of the Soviets who perpetrated these horrors at Rainiai were Jewish, and offered that suggestion as fuel for and justification of the mass murder of Jews that was carried out throughout Lithuania and neighboring countries. Later while Lithuania was still under Nazi occupation, Soviet airplanes flew over Žemaitija and dropped pamphlets blaming the Rainiai atrocities on the Nazis rather than the Soviets. This was all in the hope of encouraging unrest among Lithuanians who were realizing that the Nazis were not liberators as they had hoped, and that Hitler had
no intention of restoring the young republic's independence. When the movement for Lithuanian independence stirred during the years of Glasnost, Vytautus Landsbergis and the Sajūdis movement pointed to the Rainiai massacres as emblematic of the brutality of Soviet occupation.  

After independence the symbolic power of the site continued. Within a couple of years money was raised to erect the chapel and memorial park. The perpetrators of the atrocities had by then fled the country or died, but a trial was held in absentia and following a guilty verdict, Lithuania requested that Russia extradite some of the guilty parties. Russia refused. This remained a contentious issue between Russia and Lithuania and was one of several reasons why Vytautus Landsbergis in 2004 caused a stir by encouraging Valdus Adamkus—then the president of Lithuania—to boycott the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow marking the sixtieth anniversary of the May, 1944 surrender of Nazi Germany to Soviet forces.

The war years in Lithuania were brutal. Both the Soviet and the Nazi occupiers were far from kind. But for most Lithuanians now living, life under the Nazis is remembered as far preferable to the previous year of occupation by the Soviets. Older Lithuanians will often comment that the German officers were clean and polite while the Russians were gruff, smelly, and cruel. As one young woman put it, "My grandmother told me that same thing. Life was better under the Germans. Unless you were a Jew."

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2 Though the death and horror at Rainiai are clear, contention about the details continues, as it does at many sites. This is because thorough historical work based on Soviet records is in its early stages. The story I recite here has been pieced together from conversations, guide books, etc. I offer it not as an example of historical writing but as an attempt to convey the narratives that accompany this site and the site I describe below.
As outlined earlier, the fraught and complex history of the years before, during, and after World War II are a raw and painful topic. The Rainiai chapel is not the only memorial site at the edge of Telšiai. A kilometer or so further down the same road a brown sign on the right indicates a Jewish death and burial site. The signage is far from grand. In fact, it is confusing. If you manage the quick turn onto the uneven road it is difficult to figure out where to look or where to go next. To the left is a modest home with a noisy dog in the yard; to the right the dilapidated remains of a collective farm loom above a gas station. Straight ahead the road soon deteriorates as it wanders between small wooden houses surrounded by gardens. Only when we turned around and made a second pass back over the bumpy, dirt road did we notice a dark marble marker, barely two feet high, adorned with a star of David: a modest invitation for the public to make a turn and follow the gravel driveway. At the end of the driveway a few headstones become visible, and then a stone memorial inscribed in Hebrew and Lithuanian indicating that in 1941 fourteen thousand Jewish citizens of Telšiai were murdered here and at several other sites in the surrounding forests. One candle with the cap removed and cigarette butts are the only adornment on the memorial marker.

This discrepancy in memorialization is pervasive in Lithuania. The number, scope, and centrality of monuments attesting to the brutal and rapid murder of more than 200,000 Jewish Lithuanians in the summer of 1941 are paltry and marginal in comparison with the memorialization of the enormous suffering and death under the Soviets. In this chapter I delve more deeply into
this fraught and dangerous territory of memory in Lithuania.

It is a little frightening to write about this. Within the contentiousness of memory discourse in Lithuania I am acutely aware that I enter these spaces as a stranger. The shattering enormity of the loss and suffering is so overwhelming that I find myself wondering why the truth of shared pain is not a unifying force here, for as Klebonas Tomas suggested in his reflection on the function of the liturgy, “[t]he past left wounds almost to every family.” But then I have to remind myself that I did not hear Soviet troops wandering through my house under the guidance of my neighbor as they looked for my brother; I did not help unload bodies from box cars bound to Siberia; I did not hide in a neighbor’s barn to survive the murderous rampage of Nazis who were assisted by my neighbors; I do not turn on the television and see the person who once interrogated my father now lauded for his prowess in business; I do not carry family stories about how they required my grandparents to dance before they shot them; I did not stand by my family’s graves praying for my uncle in Siberia while large microphones all around me blasted poetry lauding the brave soldiers of the Soviet Union; I do not wake up each day on another continent with no living trace of family and only some vague notion that the family into which my grandmother was born was herded into a ghetto across the world and then shot outside of town next to an open pit. In other words, memory is enormously messy here. It is freighted not only with unimaginable pain, but with questions of justice. And with gaps in basic information as well: Who did kill my grandfather? And where is his body?

Discussions about the complexity and meaning of cultural memory occur
not only in Lithuania, but also in many other parts of the globe—and in the western academy as well. My intention here is not to offer any particular clarity or insight to discussions of individual or collective memory. Rather, in this chapter I engage with Michael Rothberg’s work on multidirectional memory to argue two things: 1) that it is important to understand the fraught memory discourse in Lithuania within spasms of pain and power in the larger world, and to recognize that the construal of identity within the chaos of the period of the bloodlands was constructed in relationship to these larger power discourses; 2) that the very messiness of these memory discourses may in fact be a source of hope, and that the messiness of Vėlinės may have the potential to participate in that hope. I approach these arguments in three parts. First, I outline in more detail some of the nuances of conflict about memory in Lithuania. Second, I introduce and engage with the work of Michael Rothberg in his book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Third, I explore the experience of two young Lithuanians alongside some recent political events to highlight the complexity of multidirectional forces at work within Lithuanian memory today.

**Current Memory Conflict in Lithuania**

Some of the reasons for the imbalance in memorialization in Lithuania are obvious. Many, many families in Lithuania—perhaps most families—have parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, or friends who suffered at the hands of the Soviets. Some suffered through deportation, others by force of imprisonment, imposed military conscription, torture, or death during

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3 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*. 

the partisan conflicts of the Stalinist years and the years of political repression that followed. The need to remember this loss and to feel the acknowledgement of that long-silenced grief is an enormous burden in Lithuania, and a powerful political force in both government and church.

For the Jewish people the story is different. They too suffered under the Soviets. As Gintarė’s story attests, the first deportations in 1940 included both Jew and Gentile. Jewish religious practice was discouraged and even punished by the Soviets, as was Christian and Muslim practice. Throughout the Soviet years the leadership periodically worked to purge Jewish people from its ranks and to make life particularly difficult for them. But very few Jewish Lithuanians are alive to tell that story. Though the Jewish culture was once a vibrant part of life in Lithuania, numbering 250,000 participants during interludes before the start of the war, the Jewish population in Lithuania today is approximately 5,000. Many in the current Jewish community were born in other places and were relocated to Lithuania by the Soviets, each family carrying his or her own story of family displacement, fear, suffering, and death. Though some were very successful within the Soviet system, I have met no one whose family was unscathed by the trauma of the bloodlands.

If a Jewish person born in Lithuania is alive today, it is far more likely that he or she lives in Israel, South Africa, Australia, Argentina, or the United States than in Lithuania. The remaining Litvak community is small. For many of these Jewish survivors and their descendants who live in other countries, Lithuania is both a place of longing and a focus of anger and horror. As one Jewish leader
explained it, few Jewish people return to live in Lithuania because the Jewish scriptures teach that the people shall never again live on land that was purchased with their blood. A younger Jewish woman is more circumspect: "People come back and they long for the place they remembered: the bustling square in Vilna; the synagogue on the town square; the merchants; the vibrancy. But it is no longer here. What is left is an empty shell, a sign for all that what was lost will never be again. It is so very, very sad for them."  

Because of this tragic and horrific reality, the voices within Lithuania pressing for honest accounting and active memory of Soviet atrocities are far more numerous than the Lithuanian voices crying out on behalf of the victims of the Shoah. The deep irony, of course, is that these voices are so few because Hitler's diabolical plans were carried out so effectively in Lithuania. And the truth that is spoken only hesitantly is the fact that the speed and effectiveness of these mass murders was due in part to help from local Lithuanians. There is pressure toward Jewish memory here, but much of that pressure comes from outside Lithuania.

The reasons for the imbalance in memory go deeper still, though. Most—though though not all—Lithuanians concede with sadness and some shame that Lithuanians did participate in the mass murder of their Jewish neighbors. What varies dramatically is the narrative offered once that fact is acknowledged. A well educated and thoughtful man in his fifties from one of the small cities in Lithuania points to the fact that Jewish and Christian communities lived largely separate lives; though they interacted in commerce those relationships rarely crossed

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4 Kelila, female, age 28.
family lines through marriage or even deep friendship. A woman in a tiny rural village remembers and reveres her Jewish neighbor, yet there is a shroud of mystery around the neighbor even in her goodness; a separateness. A thoughtful and politically involved man in his fifties believes that a deep strain of antisemitism from before the war remains in Lithuania, and though it does not govern formal public life it is still transmitted though families and even through festivals and practices. He also suggests that of late, some of the loudest spokespeople on behalf of Jewish history and memory have done the Jewish community no service by playing fast and loose with facts and actively criticizing governmental efforts to research and surface strong, factual, historical work on memory. And as discussed in an earlier chapter, a small but vocal group denies the scope of Jewish death in Lithuania and promotes a vision of Lithuania that embraces pure Baltic tribal blood alone.

Yet even this shrouded pain and complicity from the past and the attendant disagreement and infighting does not fully capture or explain the extent of the contentious memory around the suffering and death during World War II and the years following. Within Lithuania itself, Jewish citizens rightfully claim that the memory and acknowledgement of the horror inflicted on their community is muted at best. They justifiably point with alarm at differential treatment of the activities of Jewish Lithuanians who found shelter with and aided Soviet partisans and Lithuanian militia who aided the Germans. At the same time, in relation to the discourse and vectors of power in the larger western world, Lithuanians who are not Jewish point to the reality that the political and financial resources that
western powers devote to maintaining the memory of suffering and death inflicted by the Nazis dwarfs by many magnitudes of scale the resources devoted to understanding, memorializing, and educating the world on the suffering inflicted by the Soviet regime, let alone seeking justice on behalf of the victims.

There is truth in this perspective as well. The likes of the Nuremberg trials have never been conducted for the masterminds behind the brutal regimes of torture and murder during the early days of the Soviets, or the more quiet but pervasive surveillance and repression in the years that followed. Nazi hunters scour the world seeking to find individuals who participated in the evil work of the Nazi concentration camps. Yet there are no gulag hunters. It is difficult to enumerate the exact number of deaths in Lithuania by force of the Soviet government because there is contention about which deaths to acknowledge as politically motivated, and some records are only now becoming available. So too it is hard to pin down a number for deaths throughout the territories scarred by Stalinist rule. The conservative number offered for many years was twenty million.\(^5\) As more and more records are becoming available, some now place the number as high as forty-three million.\(^6\) Nonetheless, the history of the eastern front in World War II and the Soviet presence in the borderlands usually receive


\(^6\) R.J. Rummel, *Lethal Politics: Soviet Genocide and Murder Since 1917* (Piscataway, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2d edition, 1990). It should be noted that the discussion about whether murders by the Soviet regime should be labeled genocide is also an area of great debate. The debate involves disagreements about the meaning and application of the term genocide and also the concern that labeling them both genocide is an equivocation that suggests that they are the same crimes. At the heart of the debate is disagreement over whether Stalinist murders were focused on the elimination of an ethnic group.
considerably less attention in western educational curriculum than the battles of the western front and the horrors of the Shoah.

Lithuanians are aware of this truth, just as they are aware that the heroic victory of the Allies in Western Europe and the liberation of the concentration camps is given much attention in the self-narrative of the United States and other countries. What is less celebrated is the fact that following the war, President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Stalin signed a pact that subjected Lithuania and their neighbors to a reign of terror and loss that expanded and continued a trauma that was already underway in this region. As noted previously, when Lithuanians describe the "Forest Brothers" [and sisters] who took to the woods as partisan soldiers after the war, the narratives vary dramatically: some describe them as heroes; others as young boys escaping conscription or deportation; still others as mercenaries or thugs. But one common memory is invoked again and again:

There was an announcer on Voice of America who used to say, 'hang on...you will be rescued...you will not be abandoned by the west.' And many of them believed that. Many of US believed that. We could not accept that we would be abandoned, particularly with so many Lithuanians now living in America and other countries. So those young boys held on in the woods. And they died. Because we believed.7

One clergy person expressed the perception and frustration of many Lithuanians this way:

Honest people will say that yes, there were some Lithuanians who participated in these terrible atrocities. Worse still, there were Lithuanians who not only killed Jewish people, but also brutalized and looted their bodies. And some of them did this just after kneeling at the rail to receive the body and blood of Christ in the church. It is horrible. And there is no explanation or excuse for it. We understand that. But what it is not proper

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7 Petras, male, age 72.
to say, but many feel, is that these countries in the west who come and tell us that we are bad to Jewish people and that we need to become more tolerant do not understand how this looks to us. These are most often countries who had a very small percentage of Jewish citizens or who had only very recently given Jewish people the right to be citizens. They are countries who were turning ships full of Jewish people away from their ports when these people were fleeing Nazi Germany. And often they are people who do not know the history of loss and pain among those who live here, the fact that we lived side by side with Jewish people for hundreds and hundreds of years. I am not saying it was always happy or cordial, but we lived side by side for hundreds of years in this region—for more years than some of these countries who tell us what to do have even existed. And that is what galls most Lithuanians I know...what they will say in quiet: that to emerge from the Soviet days and then hear the west call us Jew killers and be portrayed as just that in the larger world without also acknowledging this long history and all the suffering Lithuanians have been through... it is very hard to swallow. Really. Very hard.  

Jadvė, a woman in her late fifties, pauses thoughtfully when talking about these contestations of memory. Her reflections evoke some of the complex awakenings and triggers that Michael Rothberg associates with multidirectional memory:

We clearly need to be honest and to talk about these things. What is hard, I think, is that so many of us did not know about all the horrors that happened when we were young and that even were happening later under Soviet rule. But then after independence people started telling their stories about life in gulag camps and the deportation experience in Siberia—even printing and selling their diaries. I remember when I first read them, I was staying up late at night and crying and crying. I simply had no idea. And so just as we are trying to understand and absorb these things, other countries from the west come and tell us, "you are Jew killers; you must take responsibility." I do think we must talk about this and take responsibility, but that came at a time when we were just beginning to try to understand what had happened.

As mentioned earlier, because of the work and financial contributions of descendants of Lithuanian Jews now living in diaspora throughout the world and some efforts by the Lithuanian state and by local communities, there are now

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8 Clergyperson, male, early forties.
monuments at many of the Jewish murder sites in Lithuania. Efforts are also underway to restore and preserve some of the Jewish cemeteries that were desecrated by the Soviets. The Lithuanian government has also worked with the EU and other western governments to initiate tolerance and holocaust education programs in schools. The long term effects of those efforts are still unclear.\textsuperscript{9} One striking development, though, is that among the group of young people like Celė who long for a Lithuania that welcomes participation in the European Union and celebrates tolerance and diversity, their activism often includes a deep commitment to honor and acknowledge the victims of the Shoah in Lithuania and to engage in honest conversation among fellow Lithuanians about the meaning and significance of that history for Lithuania today. At the same time, people who work within these groups tell stories about being startled that the same people who fervently work for equality and honesty in memory may then turn around and tell a joke that has clear antisemitic intent.\textsuperscript{10} The memory is complex indeed.

As mentioned earlier, conversation with individuals about this painful history can be quite nuanced, laced with insight, empathy, puzzlement, shame, regret, and remorse. Yet the public discourse is strained, and on a political level the rhetoric is often polarized. They are conversations in different registers. The desire for justice, reckoning, and compensation has been the understandable focus of the public debate for many years, thus the tone is juridical and very different than the tone in face-to-face, individual conversations. The priorities of a sensationalist press and particularly one newspaper have contributed to

\textsuperscript{9} See, Christine Beresniova, “When Intolerance Means More Than Prejudice: Challenges to Lithuanian Education Reforms for Social Tolerance”
\textsuperscript{10} Celė, female, age 32.
stridency in public rhetoric.\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, public resources are being devoted to greater attention to and study of the murder of the Jewish population in Lithuania. Though in relation to the magnitude of loss of life and property the recent commitment by the Lithuanian government to pay compensation to survivors of the Shoah and to Jewish organizations is only a symbolic gesture, some hope this will open the door to further honesty and healing. Others believe that it is both too little and too late.

Two different political controversies in the last several years exemplify the complexity of alliance, experience, and memory bound up in the dynamic of memory in Lithuania, particularly in relation to the entanglement of family, church, and state. When I was beginning my formal research in the summer of 2010 a friend breathlessly sought me out one morning to ask if I had heard the news of Brazauskas’s death. Algirdas Brazauskas was the first elected president of independent Lithuania. He was also a prominent member of the Communist Party in Lithuania, moving up through the ranks until he became First Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania. He was in this position when the communist party in Lithuania broke from the communist party of the USSR. Some attribute to him the relatively minimal loss of life in the transition from governance by the Soviet Union to governance by an elected body under the newly independent Lithuania. Others view him as an opportunist and a chameleon, first oppressing the people of Lithuania and then claiming status as a

\textsuperscript{11}See, Šarunas Liekis, et al., eds, \textit{Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772}, 51-56.
hero for returning the Vilnius Cathedral to the church and other acts of reorganization after independence.

Having worked in high levels of the Soviet government since 1965 there is little question that Brazauskas was involved in repressive activities under the Soviet regime. He named the return of the Cathedral to the church as one of his most important actions as leader of Lithuania and asked for the forgiveness of Lithuania. On behalf of Lithuania he also asked for the forgiveness of the Jewish people for the atrocities in Lithuania. Several people reported that after the establishment of the new Republic he himself returned to the church to worship periodically, attend confession, and receive the sacraments, and that he received extreme unction and was given last rites upon his death. One of the people I interviewed the week he died was friends with Brazauskas’s daughter and had recently seen him at his granddaughter’s wedding: “He went into confession in the church,” she said, “he received the eucharist, like any proud grandfather at his daughter’s wedding.”  

What amazed me in the days following his death was the complex outpouring of emotion not only about him, but about Lithuania’s transition from Soviet control to independence. In her book on political life of dead bodies in the terrain that was once the USSR, Katherine Verdery suggests that the corporeal, material reality of dead bodies make them an “important means of localizing a

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12 Taurė, female, age 48.
claim.”

Yet bodies are also important because they come with, “several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being considered.”

…among the most important properties of bodies, especially dead ones, is their ambiguity, multivocality, or polysemy. Remains are concrete, yet protean; they do not have a single meaning but are open to many different readings. Because corpses suggest the lived lives of complex human beings, they can be evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions. While alive, these bodies produced complex behaviors subject to much debate that produces further ambiguity.

During the days following Brazauskas’s death everyone had an opinion. I caught new glimpses of deep and differing experiences that lay beneath tensions I had felt between friends—tensions I knew of but never really understood.

Brazauskas’s death soon became a great controversy because the Catholic Church made the decision that his body would not be allowed in the cathedral, though the church would conduct a funeral mass. The current president of Lithuania objected and chastised the church. Members of Brazauskas’s political party vehemently objected. The media was ablaze with on-the-street commentary: some affirming the actions of the church, but more offering objection. At first the church said it had its reasons for refusal but it would not share them. When the public outcry increased the church listed a laundry list of reasons: Brazauskas was divorced; he persecuted the church; bodies are not generally brought into the cathedral or other large urban churches for funeral mass. In many ways, the litany of reasons simply fanned the flames of controversy and turned public attention and sympathy toward the family caught

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14 Ibid., 28.
in the middle. In the months following the funeral public opinion of the church plummeted.

Since that time I have been asking the people I talk with what they think about that controversy. Most nuance their responses a bit but end up saying they think the church was wrong. A few applaud the church. One or two offered thoughtful theological reflections on why the church did what it did.

There is also gossip. Some say that Brazauskas’s political party was pushing not just for the body to be in the cathedral for the mass, but for the body to be buried in the cathedral alongside kings and dukes. Others say it was simply a bumbling effort to handle the first death of a living president in the new Lithuania. One very practical layman suggested that it was a matter of faulty communication skills and an opportunistic media: “Our Cardinal Bačkys is a diplomat. When he worked in the Vatican he performed diplomatic functions and due to this habit he is not able to explain things in a straightforward way to simple people. The media took advantage of this.” A friend nearby chimed in that she was not happy that they had not allowed his body into the church, but “if he had been a man of faith he wouldn’t have cared if it was a Cathedral or a simple chapel.” Yet another devoted lay person viewed the debacle as a missed opportunity for witness by the church, explaining that denying the request to bring Brazauskas’s body into the church was likely a very popular decision with families who had been deeply hurt during Soviet times and felt there had been no accountability, but it was generally accepted that Brazauskas had in fact returned to and received the sacraments of the church. Therefore, whatever he had done
in his past, this was an opportunity for the church to witness to the power of God’s work of reconciliation and forgiveness.

In May 2012 another controversy erupted over the remains of the dead when the office of the prime minister of Lithuania authorized the expenditure of government funds to help fund the repatriation and burial of the remains of Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis who was the head of the provisional government during the initial occupation by Nazi forces and who signed Nazi protocols authorizing, among other things, the gathering of all Jews in Kaunas into a ghetto and the establishment of authority for use of force. Historians Šarūnas Liekis Antony Polonsky and Chaeren Freeze write,

On 5 August 1941, Juozas Ambrazevičius, who headed the Provisional Government, in a meeting...attempted to distance his government from the murders [of Jews], claiming that its authority had been restricted and that it ‘had not the means to restrain excesses, for example, the executions being carried out in Kaunas and in the countryside’. This should be regarded as merely a ham-fisted attempt at *ex post facto* exculpation."15

The provisional government later disbanded and Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis escaped to the United States where he lived out his days and was buried in Connecticut. His family requested that his remains be returned to Lithuania. A prominent archbishop who survived imprisonment in Siberia publicly praised Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis who was reburied in a place of honor at the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Kaunas. A former president and a prominent leader of the Sajūdis independence movement attended the services.

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A conference in Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis’s honor had been planned at the major university in Kaunas but it was cancelled after the public outcry, with university officials suggesting that it had been planned without their knowledge. Some parliament members and public intellectuals issued statements opposing the subsidy by the state. Public debate was again lively. Some argued that he was a man who had done what he thought best for the country at the time. In an open letter a group of intellectuals and leaders suggested that he was a morally compromised leader and that it was perfectly appropriate for his family to ask for the repatriation of his remains and burial by the church, but it was an embarrassment to the country for the government to be involved in funding and planning.

The complexity of the dynamics within these frequent controversies is dizzying; as are the details. The generation who witnessed and experienced the most acute form of pain is quickly dying. But as I have tried to outline in previous chapters, the reverberations of that pain are all around. To many younger people the reality feels intractable: either a dull, inaccessible depression that looms on the horizon, or a frustration with a seeming obsession with victimhood and an endless focus on who benefited and who suffered. Deep at the heart of it all are questions, fears, denial, and secrecy about whether one’s past links to heroism, to horror, or to both and neither.

**Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory***

Michael Rothberg suggests that the painful questions of complicity that haunt sites of memory such as this are also a source of constructive hope:
The rhetoric of complicity suggests both a form of binding and a degree of distance: to be complicit is to be responsible (bound to certain events, processes, or people), but it is not identical to being guilty. Complicity suggests an ethical binding distinct from legal guilt, although they can surely overlap...\(^{16}\)

In exploring complicity and multidirectional memory Rothberg emphasizes the important shift from direct memory, the memory of those who lived through these traumas, to post-memory, the search for understanding by the children of those who knew the events firsthand. It is this move from first, to second, and now to third generation that Professor Gailienė named as her hope for the future as Lithuania seeks to reckon with traumatic memory and its effects on the lives of individuals and the community.\(^{17}\)

This intergenerational shift has been studied extensively in Germany. As both Rothberg and Professor Gailienė point out, real discussion of the truths of World War II in Germany and the horrors of the holocaust did not emerge until twenty years after the end of the war, and true reckoning with the Vichy legacy in France occurred even later. Rothberg also highlights the connection between growing awareness of political torture by European governments in connection with anti-colonial movements and the first articulations of Holocaust memory and discourse.

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\(^{16}\) Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 250. Rothberg also draws upon the work of Mark Sanders on South African intellectual and apartheid to distinguish between two kinds of complicity: a “narrow sense” that is tied to specific events and a “general sense” that accompanies “human being as such”. Together these constitute an “aporia of responsibility.” Rothberg, quoting Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 8.

\(^{17}\) Professor Danutė Gailienė, “Traumatized Society, Democracy, and Catholic Religious Belief”, May 18, 2011, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania.
As mentioned in previous chapters, such discussions are complex in any country that has experienced the kind of pervasive loss, suffering, and terror that beset the Baltic for so many years. But it is a particularly vexing and complex process in Lithuania and in other post-Soviet countries. The discussion was delayed in Germany, France, and other western European countries, but when it did emerge it was in the context of a society that claimed to value free speech, even if—as Rothberg outlines—the government did not always enact those values, and in fact sometimes went to great lengths to restrain critique of its contemporary actions.

The situation in the countries controlled by the Soviet Union was vastly different. While discussions were emerging in Germany and elsewhere, Soviet countries lived under a fear and silencing that for many people became a form of self-censoring, as communication was tailored to acceptability within the rhetorical and ideological parameters set by the Soviet leadership. But it is even more complicated than that. As Henrika emphasizes, some memory was allowed and encouraged. Though the disciplining took a more fear-filled and controlled form in the Soviet world, there were parallels between the state operation in the Soviet Union and that in the western European countries: the form of memory that was allowed and encouraged was that which would comport with the regnant ideology. In Soviet Lithuania that meant that memory of death and suffering during the Nazi occupation and the earlier period of independence was encouraged. Acknowledgment of suffering at the hands of the Soviets was not, though even the Nazi memory that was allowed was tightly policed in form.
It was not about Jewish death; it was about Soviet heroism.\textsuperscript{18}

Because of these differing cultural and political realities, open discussion of the sorrow, complexity, and horror of the war years and following is relatively recent in Lithuania. To paraphrase Professor Gailienė’s comments at the conference in spring 2011,

Just as in Germany, discussion of the war did not really even begin until twenty years after. It has been delayed here. There the discussion started behind closed doors among academics. It was just too hard, too immediate, too painful. We are at twenty years past independence now. It is time for this hard word to begin on a new level.\textsuperscript{19}

Rothberg highlights these generational shifts in narrations of history and memory as he explores the dynamics of collective and contentious memory through multidirectional memory, "a model based on recognition of the productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance." He contrasts this model of memory with "competitive memory":

…many people assume that the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interaction of different collective memories within that sphere takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for preeminence. Because many of these same commentators also believe that a direct line runs between remembrance of the past and the formation of identity in the present, they understand the articulation of the past in collective memory as a struggle that is thus closely allied with the potential for deadly violence.\textsuperscript{20}

 Rejecting this competitive memory approach, Rothberg offers the model of multidirectional memory as an alternative: "Against the framework that understands


\textsuperscript{19} Paraphrase taken from notes taken at lecture: Professor Danutė Gailienė, "Traumatized Society, Democracy, and Catholic Religious Belief", May 18, 2011, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania.

\textsuperscript{20} Michael Rothberg, \textit{Multidirectional Memory}, 3.
collective memory as *competitive* memory—as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources—I suggest that we consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive—not private.”

Contending that comparison, like memory, can be productive, Rothberg explores memory as generative, "...producing new objects and lines of sight—and not simply as reproducing already given entities that either are or are not 'like' other already given entities." By rejecting competitive memory, Rothberg also rejects a strict formulation of winners and losers, arguing instead that the struggle for recognition is dynamic: "fundamentally unstable and subject to ongoing reversal.”

Most of Rothberg's examples of multidirectional memory are drawn from literature and focus on dynamics between memories of slavery, the violence of the colonial order, memory of the Shoah, and current social tension in France between French Muslim immigrants and French Gauls. By tracking Caribbean and French literature, art, and film he highlights the exploration of hybridity and the sanctioning or punishment of boundary-crossing between different groups. He traces the exposure of writers and philosophers on the Shoah to the violence and protests around decolonization, and how that exposure functioned as trigger for their work on memory of the Shoah.

What is so compelling about Rothberg’s model in relation to Lithuanian memory is that it acknowledges the "messy middle." No one comes out clean and pure once the vectors of multidimensional memory are let loose. His model

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focuses upon and highlights the interconnections of both violence and compassion. And he ends the work with reflections on responsibility and action.

Rothberg draws on Richard Terdiman\textsuperscript{24} in his definition of memory as "the past made present". He emphasizes that memory is contemporary. Though certainly drawing on the past, memory "happens in the present". Equally, "memory is a form of work, working through, labor, or action." Claiming the act of imagination as crucial to acts of remembrance,\textsuperscript{25} Rothberg describes memory as "a set of practices and interventions."\textsuperscript{26} He distinguishes—though does not fully separate—memory, history, and representation. Memory "captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past."\textsuperscript{27} Within the contentious debates over the distinction between memory and history, Rothberg is clear in his position. He suggests that memory is distinct from history, and that the truths of memory are often in tension with the truths of history. Yet he suggests that there is truth in both: "truths that produce insight about individual and collective processes of meaning-making."\textsuperscript{28}

The model of multidirectional memory resonates with the work of space and place theorists. Arguing against competitive memory’s notions of the public sphere as "a pregiven, limited space in which already-established groups engage in a life-and-death struggle", multidirectional memory assumes the public sphere

\textsuperscript{25} Michael Rothberg, \textit{Multidirectional Memory}, 19.
\textsuperscript{27} Michael Rothberg, \textit{Multidirectional Memory}, 4.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, 14.
as, "a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others; both the subjects and the spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction." Sites of memory contribute to shaping, "what counts as the terrain of politics." In competitive memory the boundaries of memory follow the contours of group identity. By contrast, in multidirectional memory, "[m]emories are not owned by groups—nor are groups 'owned' by memories. Rather, the borders of memory and identity are jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant." Because of this very raggedness, memory carries a powerful, creative force; a capacity to, "build new worlds out of the materials of older ones."

While Rothberg claims that all memory is multiple or plural, he does not suggest that all articulations of memory are equal. Rather, memory, like space, is "agentic". Seeking to "complicate assumptions about what in memory is 'innocent' and what is 'disturbing,'" Rothberg focuses on the construction of memory. Yet his contention is not that memory is constructed ex nihilo. Rather, drawing on Freud (while also sometimes contradicting Freud's conclusions), Rothberg emphasizes that no memory carries intrinsic meaning within itself. Meaning is instead constructed within a "network of associations...powerful
social, political, and psychic forces articulate themselves in every act of remembrance.”

Specifically addressing the connection between memory and identity, Rothberg seeks to discriminate multidirectional memory from several common formulations. He rejects both the notion that all claims of identity are tainted, and the contrary idea that identities and memories are pure and authentic, contending instead that claims of memory and identity are necessary and inevitable. Yet he insists that memory is also messy and dynamic: "Our relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the present, but never straightforwardly and directly, and never without unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other.”

Rothberg looks to these messy, indirect, unexpected, and unwanted aspects of memory as a source of hope.

Rothberg’s work focuses on Post-World War II memory with the goal of fleshing out, "a form of comparative thinking that, like memory itself, is not afraid to traverse sacrosanct borders of ethnicity and era.” Following the dominant path of recent memory work, he sets the Shoah as his "paradigmatic object of concern.” Yet in contrast to those who focus primarily on the uniqueness of the Shoah, Rothberg describes the articulation of Shoah memory as evoked and shaped within the era of decolonization. He also argues that one effect of the emergence of memory of the Shoah on a "global scale" has been to ignite, contend with, and thus articulate other histories that both predate and follow the

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33 Ibid., 16.
34 Ibid., 5.
35 Ibid., 16.
36 Ibid., 6.
Shoah, particularly slavery, colonialism, the Algerian War of Independence, genocide in Bosnia in the late 1990’s, and in his brief epilogue, the Israeli/Palestinian controversy.

Thus, Rothberg’s dynamic of memory is truly multidirectional. His claim is not only that Shoah memory invites and ignites other forms of memory, but also that the emergence of holocaust memory is embedded within and even triggered by global rumblings and interventions toward decolonization: "far from being an arbitrary conjunction of two separate histories, this observation about the early postwar period contains an important insight into the dynamics of collective memory and the struggles over recognition and collective identity that continue to haunt contemporary, pluralistic societies."  

Although Rothberg prizes the ragged messiness of memory, he also attributes the "virulence" of much of the current discussion of race, genocide and memory to this same messiness. He focuses upon the actual lived intimacy that undergirds most of the contentious debates and vicious violence between memory traditions, with each party stridently claiming purity and absolute difference while their everyday lives of love, cruelty, power, indifference, and striving are actually far more intertwined and complex than the grand purity narrative they are defending.  

Rothberg critiques models of competitive memory based on exclusivity and exceptionality, but he does not claim that multidirectional memory is a cure-
all to violence and exclusion. Rather, he posits multidirectional memory as generative. In its very messiness, multidirectional memory creates space for possibility, and for sober honesty about responsibility and complicity. My argument is that the messiness of Vėlinės cemeteries may create such space as well. Not simply space within discourse, but tangible, material, sensory space that does not coerce or require, but may in fact invite, “sober honesty about responsibility and complicity.” If so, it is space that holds such promise and possibility precisely because it is space that welcomes honesty about death and suffering while also hosting practices that perform relationship and hope.

As I will explore further in this chapter and the next, in considering the possibility of Vėlinės cemeteries as bearers of multidirectional memory and hope, we must be realistic about the performances and privileging of power in those spaces. In particular, we must recognize the entanglement of the Christian church—or more broadly the Christian “religion”—in larger performances of violence and conquest that are deeply bound up with the very forces of colonial aggression and violence that played out on the soil of the bloodlands. The question then is whether theological performance within the space of Vėlinės cemeteries is capable of hospitality and welcome, or whether the performance is necessarily one of hegemonic control.

Naming Vėlinės cemeteries as significantly marked and constructed by the performance of the church does not distinguish their form and operation from other space. Again, all space is constructed: territorialized, deterritorialized,

39 Ibid., 11.
reterritorialized. The exploration of multidirectional memory is "an archaeology of the comparative imagination...an analysis of the ‘politics of framing...focused on the issues of who counts as a subject of justice, and what is the appropriate frame, the politics of framing comprises efforts to establish and consolidate, to contest and revise, the authoritative division of political space." Drawing on Freud’s notion of screen memory, Rothberg argues that screen memories and multidirectional memories are less "pathological" than they are "normal". In this normality, multidirectional and screen memory hold great gift and promise in their refusal to be confined to strict parameters set by "identity politics,

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40 See, Gilles DeLeuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus.
41 Ibid., 21. Citing, Nancy Fraser, “Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World,” New Left Review (November-December 2005): 69-88. Rothberg particularly highlights multidirectional memory’s capacity to expose the power differentials that tend to "cluster" around competitions over memory, to locate efforts at competitive memory within larger spirals of discourse, and to cut across and bind together diverse sites of memory, thus disengaging collective memory discourse from the one-to-one correlation connected with exclusive notions of cultural identity. In developing this notion of multidirectional memory Rothberg draws on Freud's notion of screen memory, suggesting that both screen memory and multidirectional memory open up communication with the past rather than closing them down. Contrary to some interpretations of Freud, Rothberg describes screen memory and multidirectional memory as productive: as opening rather than eliding--opening up communication with the past rather than covering it up or closing it down. "Memory is, as Freud recognized, primarily an associative process that works through displacement and substitution; it is fundamentally and structurally multidirectional, even though forces are always trying to shape it according to more or less rigid psychic or ideological parameters." Following Freud, Rothberg also suggests that ordinary, everyday memory can stand as a substitute for more disturbing or painful memories that it displaces, thus functioning as a form of forgetting that is "subject to recall." It is a "remapping of memory in which links between memories are formed and then redistributed between the conscious and the unconscious." Importantly, Rothberg also qualifies the analogy between individual and screen memory and collective and multidirectional memory. First and most obvious, screen memory is individual and biographical whereas multidirectional memory is largely historical and collective, though experienced by and within individuals and their biographical experiences. While acknowledging this distinction, he also draws on Maurice Halbwachs to suggest that all memory is simultaneously individual and collective. See, Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Second, and most importantly, Freud suggests that screen memory replaces the painful and traumatic with the ordinary and mundane. Rothberg, on the other hand, suggests something quite different in multidirectional memory, which juxtaposes different disturbing and traumatic memories and is thus disruptive to ordinary, everyday discourse and experience., Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory,11-15.
42 Ibid., 14.
instrumentalization, or zero-sum logics." Multidirectional memory "highlights the inevitable displacements and contingencies that mark all remembrance."43

“Triggers” are important in Rothberg’s work—events and practices that work to drive memories into public view and discourse, often unwittingly. These "triggers" are seldom planned or orchestrated. Rather, at first glance they may appear "irrelevant or even unseemly." Yet they echo forth to invite other memory performances, including contrary memory.44

In examining both individual and collective memory, Rothberg highlights dynamics of race in the complex evocations of multidirectional memory in art, literature, and film. Although he concludes with a brief discussion of memory in relation to current conflicts, the bulk of Rothberg’s book deals with the relationship between slavery, decolonization, and Shoah memory in Europe, Africa, and the Americas during the cold war period and immediately after. Memory discourse in Lithuania focuses on this same time period. The connection between current tensions in Lithuania and the dynamics of race and colonization explored by Rothberg may at first glance appear weak and questionable. Lithuania today is very white, if white includes not only light skinned Balts, Germans, Scandinavians, and Poles, but also Russians and

43 Ibid., 14-15. Within the displacement and substitution inherent in acts of remembrance, Rothberg glimpses opportunities to acknowledge conflicts underlying memory acts, while at the same time pushing beyond paradigms of uniqueness and purity toward new paradigms of relatedness.

44 Rothberg offers multiple examples of this triggering, including the relationship between the French practice of torture in the Algerian War of Independence and the articulation of holocaust memory, as well as reverberations of multi-directional memory between holocaust memory and the history of black slavery in the Americas and the ways in which that lineage continued through forms of segregation during the cold war period and after. Current reverberations including the discussion of torture in the United States after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and continuing conflicts in Israel/Palestine.
Belorussians. The group most clearly treated as “other” in Lithuania at the moment is likely the Roma, a group that was also a target of Hitler’s genocidal efforts.

What is important to remember is that the power dynamics driving Europe’s colonizing moves to the west and south were at play for long years in the east as well, as was some of the same structuring of race and ethnicity. Yet everything is local and every truth is embedded in history and place. The epistemic structure of western thought is not the only force at work here, and strict “orientalism” binaries of east and west break down quickly in trying to understand the history and power dynamics of the bloodlands. In large part, Lithuania’s location between the aspirations toward power from the west and the push for domination from Russia in the east account for the suffering endured in this region over the last several centuries.

Any deep understanding of the competition and intermingling of those aspirations to power with the particular history of this region is far beyond the work of this dissertation and arguably only recently accessible as a site of research. But there is a larger point to be made. As with elsewhere in Europe, the construal of the Semite in notions of race and personhood was a critical

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45 Only in the past twenty years has information and archive in the Soviet Union become readily accessible to researchers outside the confines of that particular thought regime. This is not to say that there has been no work to date on this subject. There has, and a good place to start is Violeta Kelertas, ed., *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Significant for these questions as well is Jewish history, as well as the history of other groups who have been construed as “other” within the European and Russian imaginary. The literature on these groups within the European imaginary is extensive. Though I do not delve deeply into the complicated construction of “the Jew” in Europe and in Russia, my discussion does focus on the contentiousness of memory in relation to Jewish history. For Jewish history in Lithuania a good place to start is likely the recent volume in the Polin series: Šarunas Liekis, Anthony Polonsky, Chaeran Freeze, eds, *Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania Since 1772*. 
factor in the suffering as it unfolded in Lithuania. The pattern in Lithuania of describing these communities as distinct parts of the larger society at some points and as a much more threatening “other” at later points might provide a generative point of conversation and comparison with similar dynamics in other parts of the world. But the purpose in raising this is not to engage in that comparison. Rather, I wish to highlight the relevance to Lithuania of Rothberg’s insight that particular memory discourses and disagreements occur within a larger echo chamber of memory politics and power, all deeply connected to reigning epistemic, political regimes. At least one of the significant trajectories in relation to Lithuania was deeply theological: the undoing of Jesus’s Jewishness and the force of supercessionism that supplanted the white, western European as the chosen one of God and then ordered a hierarchy of salvation accordingly.

In raising this I am lifting up one of the larger driving forces behind the reality that, as in many other countries, the leaders of the church in Lithuania failed to speak out against the murder of Jewish Lithuanians, and doctrine and teaching of the church contributed to the construction of the Jew as a suspicious and dangerous “other.” What I am highlighting is the fact that the horrors in

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46 For a sophisticated and nuanced discussion of the shift in the designation “Semite” including and then between Jew and Arab and its implications for political power and violence see, Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). Lithuania has historic Muslim communities as well as once flourishing Jewish communities. It appears that the pattern played out in Lithuania as it did elsewhere in Europe of “the Jew” as a religious designation that became in reality a designation of race and ethnicity connected with political aspiration, whereas the “Muslim” in Lithuania was known as the “Tatar”. Ironically, though the “Tatar” was arguably more acculturated in Lithuania than was “the Jew”, as the imam I spoke with eloquently outlined, the religious marker of Muslim was not considered a threat until the recent “war on terror” was undertaken by the United States after the events of 9/11.

Lithuania participate in and express a much larger and longer theological remaking of the world and of the understanding of human “being’. Or in more traditional theological terms, a distortion and dis ordering of the *imago dei*.

To make matters even more complex—and therefore messier and more interesting from the vantage point of multidirectional memory—Soviet rhetoric highlighted this distortion. In promoting the Soviet Union as a Fatherland embracing a diverse brotherhood of federations, Soviet education and propaganda promoted its own embracing of all peoples "equally" (with Russia as the first among equals) in sharp contrast to western economic and political practices. Particularly, they emphasized enslavement of dark-skinned people as a foundation of the western economic engine. While the actual practice of the Soviets in relation to tolerance and equality was far different than their rhetoric, this formation in Soviet ideology by way of contrast with the west did include pieces of the true economic story of western capitalism that were frequently omitted, or at a minimum shrouded, in the story told in western educational curriculum. Engagement with the ideas of the Soviet Union by W.E.B. DuBois, Aimee Cesaire and other African American intellectuals is among the many complex vectors of knowledge and memory triggered by these differing forms of state propaganda, with each system highlighting some realities and obscuring others.

Rothberg’s book focuses on the response of W.E.B. DuBois who visited the site of the Warsaw ghetto and connected the experience of the Jew in Europe with the experience of slavery and the continuing life of Jim Crow in the
United States. Significantly, DuBois wrote about this experience in a periodical in the United States at a time when the Jewish community in the United States was seeking to integrate into the larger society and was reluctant to draw attention to the Shoah. The community that was talking about the Shoah, not only in the United States but in Europe, was the communist party. It was in their periodical *Jewish Life* that DuBois’s article appeared. It is messy. Very messy. While acknowledging the need to critique the failure of DuBois and others to grasp and condemn the dehumanizing realities of Stalinist rule, Rothberg argues that there is great benefit in looking to the reflections of someone whose life and experienced refused to allow him to construe the world through strict, cold-war binaries:

Although it is difficult to grasp today...communism provided one of the discursive spheres, both in the United States and elsewhere, in which the articulation of genocide and colonialism could first be attempted—and this long before the intellectual vogue for either Holocaust or postcolonial studies. To put it in other terms, a notion of the specificity of Nazi genocide emerged against a background of relative silencing and universalizing condemnation of atrocity precisely through its articulation in the kind of comparative framework that would later be stigmatized as relativizing the uniqueness of the Holocaust. That this emergence of Jewish specificity happened within a universalist movement that was simultaneously persecuting Soviet Jews in not only a cruel historical irony but another indication of the irreducible complexity of collective memory.48

The Soviet habit of truth telling about the foundations of capitalism at the same time that we in the United States and Western Europe were failing to acknowledge those foundations has other lingering effects as well. This Soviet emphasis on enslaved persons as a vital source of capital in the growth of western markets becomes obvious when Lithuanians describe the experience of

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friends and relatives who move to western Europe or the United States in search of jobs. As discussed in chapter one, it is not at all unusual to hear an emigrant Lithuanian's ascendancy from lower paid, manual work to higher paid clerical or service work described as a move from "black work" to "white work." Among older Lithuanians, a rural farmer in his early sixties startled me when he used a pejorative, U.S. slang signification for black skin as he sought to explain his experience of back-breaking labor during the transition from Soviet work on a collective farm to bare subsistence survival on his own small piece of land after independence: "We worked like n--ers!", he proclaimed. He selected this demeaning phrase in spite of the fact that he had most likely never met a black person, but it is the story of western market development and sustenance he had learned in the Soviet Union. Though this man is adamant that he prefers life in present day Lithuania to life in Soviet times, he was emphasizing to me that Lithuania's entry into western markets required a period of "dark-skinned" hard labor before the country was able to establish any form of stability and equality with white, western, European countries. This is another example of multidirectional memory's fascinating capacity to generate and highlight "unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other"49

Indeed, the vise around Lithuania throughout the modern era was squeezed on both sides by economic forces, nationalism, state building, and the cold war framing of the world that unfolded after World War II. In his exploration

49 Ibid., 58. Rothberg develops at length the trajectory of these forms of ideas and constructions. While he highlights the work of DuBois, he works extensively with Hannah Arendt, Aimé Césaire, and others.
of the work of Aimé Césaire and DuBois, Rothberg highlights the spatiality of colonialism and the reality that racial thinking and violence arise with the production of biopolitical space. This is not a universalizing claim that suggests that what happens in the Baltics is the same as what unfolds in the Americas, Africa, or Southeast Asia. The particularities of place remain critical. The point he is making is the complex truth that nothing exists in isolation, and that within both the Soviet revolution and the western "master narrative of capital accumulation", grand narratives of progress operated at a horrific cost of death, suffering, and trauma. Yet the trauma was not shared uniformly by all. Not all flesh mattered—or suffered—in the same way.

The question at the heart of Rothberg's book is the question of "what it would mean for traumatic histories finally to receive a just burial." He argues that both history and memory need to act as agents of displacement in order to further this form of justice. In that work of displacement the "productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance" in their multidirectionality is critical as a contrast to "an understanding of memory as involved in a competition over scarce public resources." His argument is less aspirational than it is descriptive and diagnostic, less “this is the way it should be”, and more “this is the way things are.” "[W]e cannot stem the structural multidirectionality of memory... Memories are mobile; histories are implicated in each other."  

Relying on the work of Alain Badiou, Rothberg describes the ethical subject as "emerging out of the investigation of gaps in the present," and

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50 Ibid., 273.
51 Ibid., 313.
therefore possessing a subjectivity that cannot be presupposed prior to the investigation of those gaps.\textsuperscript{52} He suggests that the goal of memory should be to sift and struggle through the complexities of both memory and history to "seek not the endless uncovering of more and more layers of history, but an engagement with the fundamental situations that produce violence." His vision is that "fidelity to the catastrophic event" will lead to "transformation of the situation that served as the incubator of that catastrophe." Yet Rothberg also acknowledges that when the catastrophes are multiple and entangled with one another, as they are in Lithuania, accomplishing this vision is more difficult. But it is "no less urgent."\textsuperscript{53}

Multidirectional memory propels us toward such an engagement precisely because it resists grand narratives of social unification based on ethnic purity, and plunges us instead into encounter with the painful realities of intimacy, complicity, courage, collusion, and terror: "The work of memory proceeds from the present when an individual is contingently 'caught' in the contradictions of his or her situation and propelled into a search for the past, thus becoming a subject of fidelity and an agent of memory."\textsuperscript{54} Multidirectional memory invites this searching, always resisting absolute and uniform imposition of meaning and truth on contentious sites of memory, and encouraging instead a rewriting of grand narratives of unity. These histories of violence and conflict are performed in

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 308.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 272.
public spaces, but they emanate from families as well, "marked by historical difference...the violence to be overcome is internal to communities."  

Postmemory explores the relationship between the lives of children and the traumatic events experienced by their parents. Postmemory is a specific aspect of memory's multidirectionality. Because of the necessary belatedness and mediation of postmemory it occurs generations after the traumatic event and is not an immediate experience of trauma but instead an experience mediated through others. Children are the bond that links past and present, the "causal nexus within which to think justice." Children embody links of complicity across generations and thus evoke indirect forms of responsibility. It is Rothberg's contention that in any complex history of national suffering and national shame, this indirect responsibility encompasses the vast majority of citizens both within and across generations. Rothberg distinguishes this responsibility from juridical notions of indictment under law, suggesting that this indirect responsibility implies "ethical strictures and forms of fidelity that may exceed the law and thus more radically bring into question the state or situation they address." He glimpses the hope and promise of multidirectional memory within this nexus of justice.

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56 Ibid., 271. Drawing upon Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). Hirsch connects postmemory with trauma, when she writes, "...it reflects an uneasy oscillation between community and rupture. And yet postmemory is not a movement, method, or idea; I see it, rather, as a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience...a consequence of traumatic recall...at a generational remove."
57 Ibid., 295.
58 Ibid., 295.
The New Generation

The lives and histories of Jurgita and Bartvilas offer revealing glimpses into the operation of postmemory in Lithuania. Jurgita was a child at the time of independence. She remembers spending afternoons standing in line with her grandmother after they received word from neighbors that a certain store had meat, flour, or champagne available for purchase. These were not times of drudgery for her but instead an experience of community as she listened to her grandmother gossip with neighbors and learned the news about town. Her grandmother's death still stings like a knife, even though it has been almost a decade. "She was in some ways more my mother than my own mother. She spent so much time with me when I was a child... In many senses she raised me." Jurgita's mother, the director of a rural school, is a lively, energetic woman. She is also an entrepreneur. Jurgita's father is an engineer who worked in a cement factory during Soviet times. He recalls graduating from school, being assigned to the factory in his wife's hometown, and soon realizing that according to the Soviet pay scale he would be paid less than his father-in-law who worked as a laborer. He found this discouraging. Throughout his career at the factory it remained true that the worker was favored over the educated person.

Both of Jurgita’s parents were members of the Communist party, but they were also entrepreneurs who developed side businesses to support their young family. They gathered animal furs in Lithuania and sewed them into hats. They then made "tourist" visits to Soviet Russia in order to sell their hats to people on trains and in markets. It was a risky business. "I remember my mother being
scared...frightened she would be caught. But she was determined to make a better life for us—for her family." In the years since independence Jurgita's family has prospered, with her parents using money they saved over the years to purchase flats in Vilnius for their daughters. Each found their way into public leadership in their communities.

Jurgita's mother was an only child, doted upon by parents and grandparents alike. She emphasizes holocaust education in the school where she is Director. Her eyes and mind wander off to another place when she describes a photograph of herself as a young child, sitting on a stone in a park: "I realize now that the stone I am sitting on is the gravestone of a Jewish person in this community who died many years ago. Those stones were removed and that area is now a park. It haunts me."

Jurgita herself has a particular interest in the history of the Shoah. She dreams of going to Israel, but her husband refuses to consider such a trip out of concern for her safety and for their responsibilities to their young children. But Jurgita has traveled to many other interesting places through her work and study. When I ask her about her own interest in this history she attributes it to an international exchange program in Spain during the early years of independence: "The first day I met a woman from another country who became my very good friend. When I said to her that I am Lithuanian she said, 'Oh...Lithuania!! You are the people who killed so many Jews.' I was surprised that something like this happened in my country and I did not know.'" Jurgita then set about exploring the history of the Shoah, and it led to her participation in Holocaust education.
programs both locally and internationally. She is well versed in scholarship about the holocaust in Lithuania and familiar with the personalities who participate in academic discussions and debates. Among her group of friends she receives questions about and even challenges to her interest in the Holocaust.

I have known Jurgita for several years and was guided by her ideas and wisdom as I sought to understand Lithuania’s complicated history and contentious present. Therefore, her interest in holocaust education was well known to me when I visited her parents' home and met with each of them individually to talk about vélinės. Yet something entirely new opened up that day. When the interviews were complete and the tape recorder was finally turned off, Jurgita and I spent some time out in her mother's summer garden. Jurgita leaned across the table and whispered, "I need to tell you something I have told only one other person...a story about my family." She then described a visit to a cemetery in the north of the country, and to the home of the grandmother who is still living but who she rarely sees--her father's mother:

I do not know why but she just started telling me a story--only me--about my grandfather. She said that when he was a young boy--just 14--and living on the collective farm, the officials came and told him that he needed to bring a wagon and horses into town and to pick up a certain family and bring them to the woods--a Jewish family. He followed their orders and after the family went into the woods he heard gunshots. He was scared and ran away. I did not know this grandfather. He died when my father was a young man. But you see...now I understand why I have felt so drawn to be part of this Holocaust work...to understand this history. I am part of what happened here. It is a piece of me. What can I do? How can I tell people these things?

Bartvilas discovered his family's complex story over time. His mother's family moved to Lithuania from Russia where his grandmother was born. After
the trauma of losing family members in the midst of great social turmoil,

Barvilas’s grandmother obtained false identity papers and moved to another part of the country where she was pressed into service during the early years of the Soviet regime. She worked processing individuals for deportation to Gulag camps, to exile in Siberia, or to other grim fates, sending individuals off to experience the kind of terror and death that she had so recently experienced in her own family. Eventually, she met Bartvilas's grandfather who then came to Lithuania as a KGB officer.

Bartvilas’s mother grew up seeking to distance herself from her Russian family history and all the painful secrets. She met and married Bartvilas's father, a Baltic Lithuanian who grew up on a farm in northern Lithuania. Though Bartvilas’s father experienced loss and economic hardship as a child, as he grew older he found his way to education and employment in the capital city. The marriage between Bartvilas's parents ended fairly quickly, leaving Bartvilas moving between his father's new family and his mother who eventually met an American man and moved to the U.S.: "There I was, this young child without one clear home, feeling this past full of suffering and pain—including the suffering of other people in which my family participated. I felt it, but I did not understand or know how to ask questions to discover the truth and to talk about this past”.

Bartvilas’s eyes fill with tears as he talks about his grandmother,

I think of my grandmother and all those horrible secrets. How alone she must have felt. This country's history is my history. It is not simple. There is much to account for. Much to heal and to understand. In many ways, my life has been a journey to ask questions and understand this pain and my part in it.
Bartvilas is frustrated with what he experiences an unwillingness to take responsibility in his country—a fixation with victimization, and the perpetuation of a myth of Lithuanian purity and goodness, when in fact the true story in so many families is, like in his, filled with loss, suffering, confusion, complicity, and a mixture of languages and ethnicities. He feels particularly strongly about the complicity of Lithuanians in the death of their Jewish Neighbors in 1941: "In all of this, they are the group that clearly were the victims...an entire community of people, marched off and shot only because of their ethnicity. Above all else, we must express our sorrow and apologies for this atrocity." What is sad and confusing for him is the response he often receives when he expresses these feelings: the suggestion that the only reason he is concerned is because he is Jewish. "As far as I know my family's history, I am not Jewish. But who knows. I do not know all of my family history. Who really knows their full family history among all this pain and disruption? But why should this be what matters? They were human beings."

Bartvilas used to try to convince people that his depth of feeling about these matters was for different reasons, but he no longer makes such efforts: "What makes me sad—and angry—is that Lithuanians think the only reason I care that this happened here and feel that we need to come to truth is because they think I am Jewish. That is the problem: we see each other through these false identities, instead of seeing one another as people. His wish is for the people of his country to accept one another on the common ground of humanity in all its flawed reality: "I'm okay/you're okay. That is what we need. How do we
deal with this trauma and heal if we can not speak the truth...take responsibility for what has happened...for our painful history and the suffering that has shaped all of us...acknowledge not only what we have done, but also what has been done to us?"

Both Jurgita and Bartvilas struggle with the question of how to understand, honor, discuss, atone, and bring healing to this complex familial and national sorrow and memory. Or, to use language offered by Rothberg, how to "cover over the dead, to reinstate the possibility of mourning". They live in the ethical space "emerging out of the investigation of gaps in the present", and therefore possessing a subjectivity that cannot be presupposed prior to the investigation of those gaps.". They are "contingently caught" in a felt complicity that is not of their own making, but nonetheless shapes the contours of their lives.

Of late, I have become increasingly aware of my own complicity through acts by my government, acts that may one day serve as a trigger for new forms of multidirectional memory in Lithuania. There is strong evidence that in the years 2003-2006 the United States established a secret detention site on Lithuanian soil, just outside of the capital Vilnius. This time period was when Lithuania was working hard to engage more deeply with western markets and to

59 Ibid., 296.  
60 Ibid., 272. Quoting Badiou.  
be accepted into NATO as a means of protection and defense against future aggression or occupation. In addition to the secret detention site, there are numerous documented flights of CIA operated aircraft into and out of the airport in Vilnius. In 2006 the facility outside of Vilnius was closed after its location was made public by neighbors and news agencies. Throughout the controversy the United States government has refused to present documents or evidence and has maintained a stance of "no comment." Initially the Lithuanian government denied the existence of a detention facility. As the evidence mounted the government eventually did concede that there was a detention site, but responded "no comment" on whether any detainees were ever held at the site. In spite of new and mounting evidence as well as pressure from European institutions such as the EU and the Council of Europe, the Lithuanian government is thus far refusing to open further investigations of the allegations.

Legal action concerning the CIA’s “extraordinary rendition” program is making its way through court systems throughout Europe, including the courts of Lithuania and the European Court of Human Rights. In the recent El-Masri case, the European Court of Human Rights considered actions taken against a man who was a citizen of Germany but was snatched on a trip from Macedonia and disappeared for several months into a hellish ordeal of interrogation and torture. The court found Macedonia in violation of the European Convention of Human Rights because they were working with the US government on the extraordinary
rendition program. They declared that program to be "anathema to the rule of law."62

I was in Lithuania when the news of this alleged CIA activity became public. The open question of our country’s involvement in imprisoning individuals without any form of due process and allegedly subjecting them to interrogation techniques that violate international standards of human rights is chilling. Countries who have been traditional allies have participated in harsh and pointed critique of this program, pointing out that it violates basic principles of human rights.63 The specter of our country's involvement in kidnapping and torturing people’s bodies anywhere is horrifying. Having spent the past few years hearing stories of and witnessing the continuing wounds inflicted by occupying forces in Lithuania who felt no accountability to the rule of law, it horrifies me to think about my own government snatching human beings and subjecting their bodies and minds to captivity without benefit of due process anywhere, and particularly in this country where we have joined other western powers in promoting our system of democracy as being respectful of the rights of human beings and radically different than the Soviet state. In fact, imagining my country engaged in that

62 ECtHR, El-Masri v. the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, no. 39630/09, 13 December 2012. By contrast, our courts have dismissed or refused to hear actions brought by El-Masri: "In 2006 Khaled El-Masri filed suit against the CIA for his arrest, extraordinary rendition and torture before the US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. The case was dismissed at District Court and again by the Appeals Court for the Fourth Circuit on the grounds of the government's claiming the privilege of state secrets. In 2007, the US Supreme court the Supreme Court denied the petition for review." See, notes from presentation, Henrikas Mickevičius, Executive Director, Human Rights Monitoring Institute, "U.S. RENDITION PRACTICES BEFORE THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS", Public Lecture, Duke University School of Law, February 26, 2013.

63 "...in 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued a report which, inter alia, states: 'The United States of America has introduced new legal concepts, such as “enemy combatant” and “rendition”, which were previously unheard of in international law and stand contrary to the basic legal principles that prevail on [the European] continent". Ibid., Mickevičius.
activity in this country that is so deeply scarred by earlier degradations of human life makes me want to vomit. Whether torture and other atrocities occurred on Lithuanian soil or whether we simply used that tiny country as a pawn and flew our airplanes to countries where more horrific forms of “interrogation” are permitted, the whole specter raises real questions about our fundamental commitments. It is another reminder of our historic failure to live up to our own basic commitments to principle and law here in the United States, beginning with our treatment of native Americans and participation in human slavery in a land founded on the principles of "liberty and justice for all."64

More chilling still, as I have followed the information about these allegations in Lithuania and traced the timeline of events, I have realized that I likely ate with, joked with, and even knelt at the altar rail beside some of the people who were in Lithuania to build and maintain the detention facility and to arrange for the safe passage of flights through the airport. They were people I enjoyed getting to know as ex pat communities in Lithuania as in most places

64 In his presentation at Duke Law School Mr. Mickevičius said that these practices by are government are causing increasing tension with our traditional allies in Europe. " In 2012, in a report calling on EU Member States to sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the European Parliament urged the United States to investigate fully, and secure accountability for, any abuses it has practiced to ensure that relevant domestic and international law is applied fully with a view to ending legal black holes, to end military trials, to apply criminal law fully to terrorist suspects and to restore review of detention, habeas corpus, due process, freedom from torture and non-discrimination between foreign and US citizens.

The European Parliament has also expressed continued concerns regarding the obstacles encountered by national parliamentary and judicial investigations into some Member States’ involvement in the CIA program. This concern was triggered by the continuing refusal of the United States government to share any requested information to assist in attempted investigations.

There were calls for revised EU regulations governing foreign intelligence services operating in Europe and demands that agreements with US military bases be changed to include “human rights clauses”. Finally, let me remind you that last year the Supreme Court of Italy upheld the convictions in absentia of twenty-two CIA agents accused of abducting in 2003 in Milan the Muslim cleric Abu Omar, as part of the extraordinary rendition and secret detention program. They are fugitives from justice now, at least within the European Union."
tend to bring together a rich and interesting mix of individuals who blow like tumbleweeds in and out of the country.

I frankly don’t know what to do with all that. It is profoundly confusing. This action by my government is for me a deep betrayal not only of principles and commitments I understand to be fundamental to who we claim to be as a nation, but also of basic forms of human relationship—an outsourcing of torture as it increasingly labeled. More than that, it feels like an utterly despicable exploitation of and betrayal of relationship with a country and people about whom I have come to care very deeply. I do not know if the government of Lithuania and our own government will finally relent and open their records and files for the transparency that is needed and deserved. Equally, I do not know if the people allegedly subjected to these horrors will ever experience due process and recompense. I hope they will. I also hope that some form of courage in relation to this more recent memory serves as a trigger for more honest, multidirectional memory of confusion, complicity, brutalized bodies and tortured minds in years past…both in Lithuania and in my own country, the United States.

Rothberg suggests that the only way forward is through this entanglement. It is not possible to endlessly ignore history, nor to silence it or quietly and gently navigate around its sharp edges. Jurgita, Bartviles, and many others crave something that is sorely lacking in Lithuania, and something I fear is increasingly lacking in my own country as well: a safe, open public space for these explorations of memory. An fascinating question is whether Vėlinės cemeteries might invite, or at the least gesture toward, such a space.
For Rothberg, lived sites of remembrance are crucial, yet they are crucial not as some imagined form of blank, open space, but as LeFebvre's social space, DeCerteau's tactical space, DeLeuze's territorialized and deterritorialized rhizomatic space, and feminist geographer Doreen Massey's relational, fluid place. What are needed are lived sites of remembrance that invite and afford "the transformation of multiple histories of violence into a potentially peaceful future through the agency of a just and relational remembrance."65

Rothberg does not pretend that all people have suffered equally or that the material differences between forms of suffering and loss are unimportant: "if the contest of memories cannot be reduced to a battle over real estate, that does not mean that real estate and all it implies about symbolic, political, and economic power do not matter…the possession of real estate can be one of the stakes in the contest of memories."66 He is fairly circumspect in his assessment of the helpfulness of the multidirectional model in addressing the questions of justice connected with redistribution of material resources, and realistic about the importance of material realities. But he suggests that multidirectional memory does offers possibility for engaging some of the underlying imaginative, relational and epistemological constraints that require recognition if healing or justice is to occur, particularly questions of recognition and representation. "[Q]uestions about recognition and representation are crucial for establishing and contesting

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what form justice will take, who gets to count as a subject of justice, and how or under what jurisdiction justice will be adjudicated."\textsuperscript{67}

Lithuania is rife with examples of contestations over shared sites of memory. These sites involve contestation over not only who rightfully owns or controls the sites, but also what is to be remembered there, and whether those who are remembered are to be celebrated or condemned. In Lithuania as elsewhere, questions of possession and compensation are addressed in a juridical mode through court and legislature. Questions of what is remembered play out through government too, but not exclusively or most influentially. Rather, other forums for memory such as the media, family, church, school, and friendship exert equal or more powerful force in the formation of memory. The question is then whether we can imagine hope within these memory wars, and what might be the requirements and price for that hope?

Both at the porous edges and in the midst of the messiness of family relationships, complicit history, and shared loss, the candles in Lithuanian cemeteries may glimmer with the hope Rothberg suggests: "While memory wars...can provoke despair at the reduction of politics to crude stereotypes and name calling, the uncomfortable proximity of memories is also the cauldron out of which new visions of solidarity and justice must emerge."\textsuperscript{68} Here again, the dihlijzian reality of these cemetery spaces frame possibility. The requirement of decorum, the power to mark and honor liminality, the permeable threshold between public and private, and the expectation that even for a few moments,

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 310.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 313
"everything else can be set aside", vest these spaces with a capacity to perform what may be too raw to properly speak, acknowledge, or justly heal at this early stage in Lithuania's fresh history as a new nation: "The unspeakable acknowledgement that 'enemy' peoples share a common, if unequal, history is the utopian moment underlying the ideology of competitive victimization."\(^{69}\)

Multidirectional memory suggests great promise for the exploration of the messiness of Lithuanian memory because lines of identity in multidirectional memory do not need to remain clean and clear. Complicity is shared by all. The hope that is on offer is born of interconnection: interconnection between people and interconnection between political bodies. The \textit{dihlis}-ian space of the \textit{Vėlinės} cemetery is a locus for multidirectional memory, and perhaps a locus for hope as well.

It remains a question where that hope leads, the form of response required, and whether and how a space marked so deeply by Christian practices can be a safe place for such holy and also plural work. In confrontation with death and the question of what lingers beyond and in practices of reunion and remembrance, \textit{Vėlinės} cemeteries rupture and defy a settled and linear time-space continuum. The questions to which I turn now are how the theology and practice of the church can help propel these spaces toward new possibilities, daring to "traverse the sacrosanct borders of ethnicity and era,"\(^{70}\) and whether \textit{Vėlinės} cemeteries might do this already.

\(^{69}\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^{70}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 17.
Chapter 9: Hope
Chapter 9: Hope

There is a great connection, because you know…we simply have no choice. If for example America has for two hundred years no war. We have wars here once, twice, even more times in one hundred years. Lithuania lost independence in 1795. The Russian army was like war. Then 1863, the first [peasant] rebellion was also violently repressed. Next the rebellion 1864, then World War I, then World War II, then the partisan war until approximately 1956. And also the post-war period with Siberia and concentration camps. So our history is full of such bad and sad events. Tragic events. And Vėlinės and people…they still live and they still exist…they still continue to live. And Vėlinės makes more, how to say, makes existential meaning to their lives here, to their being here. Now we are here. Our life can be peaceful and quiet. There can also be some bad things in our lives. But the end is here. At this end is this grave where we visit now. But on this grave is light. There is light. There is hope that everything is in the hands of God. And our destiny is in the hands of God…our bad days, our good days. And when everything goes to the end we have light. At the end we have God’s light. And the light of the eternity—of eternal light.¹

Introduction

Cemeteries are scattered throughout the landscape in Lithuania. During Vėlinės they are on fire. Or more accurately, most are on fire. Perhaps then, their pervasive presence—their scattered, ordinary, material, settled reality—is their greatest power. They are places that matter. Mary McClintock-Fulkerson claims that we need to attend to “the worldly way that God is among us” as we seek to do the work of theology. Suggesting that “[t]he zeal to find good news can slip easily into the desire to smooth out the tangle called ‘community’, rendering it amenable to the correct theological categories,” McClintock-Fulkerson asks us to consider not so much how a place/situation is or is not an

¹ Klebonas Tomas, male, early fifties.
application of correct theological teaching or doctrine, but rather how is this place Emmanuel—"God with us"?²

This is the question that drew me toward Vélinès. How is "God with us" in the pain, suffering, and loss so endemic to this region in recent years? More specifically, how is "God with us" in these Vélinès cemeteries? My conclusion is that it's messy. Very, very messy. And perhaps that is the place to begin and to end: God is with us in the mess, the very mess of our lives.

Vélinès cemeteries are a fascinating setting for this question of Emmanuel. As both space and place, Vélinès cemeteries refuse to conform to a single hegemonic narrative, be it political, religious, or familial. The ubiquity, abundance, and ordinariness of these spaces are at the heart of why they matter. Their power and effect are less hierarchical than they are dispersed and ever-evolving. Sprinkled across disparate locations, yet in a vital sense at one and foundational in form and practice, the dihliz-ian space of the Vélinès cemetery hosts the work of sorrow, loss, trauma, healing, hope, love, community, sustenance, and survival, even as is simultaneously inscribes frameworks of strategy and power for dominant social institutions.

Vélinès cemeteries are rhizomatic.³ They are distinct entities, yet interconnected and mutually morphing and growing. Aspen groves are rhizomes.

² Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church (New York: Oxford University Church, 2007), 6.
³ See, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 89. With some tweaking of their theories, Vélinès cemeteries can be imagined as examples of assemblage. All materiality—including space—functions as assemblage under Deleuze's formulation. Critical for the notion of the assemblage is the idea that although the assemblage may appear to be constant in form, it is in fact always in process of change both within and without; he material forces, passions, and affect that constitute the assemblage effect a reality that is never exactly the same from one moment to the next. The tweaking that is required of
So are clumps of tulips, lilies, relentlessly and aggressively sturdy bamboo, bee hives, and sundry other living organisms. Of one, yet particular; fluid and ever shifting; materially constant and in flux; altered by and also altering anything they touch; difficult to destroy. The last thing I want to do is try to clean up or mask this messiness. That would be impossible. More importantly, it would be destructive. At the same time, it seems important to delve into the interconnectedness of these scattered spaces and to ask about the importance of their settled and dynamic presence.

Deleuze’s and Guattari’s formulation emanates from the fact that they can only imagine religious structures as territorializing—always moving toward stability, power, and control. For instance, there seems to be no room in his construct for the God of Jeremiah who both plucks up and plants—or in Deleuzian-speak territorializes, deterritorializes, and reterritorializes. See, Jeremiah 1:10 (New Revised Standard Version). Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that such a God might exist [or at least a structure to invoke that God], but only in the form of material, affect, and passion that move toward self-securing control and manipulation rather than toward a force of life, freedom, and creativity—every territorializing and never de- or re-territorializing. That vision of God and God’s action [or action in the name of God] is certainly evident in aspects of Vėlinės cemeteries and rituals, but there is more. These spaces also are shaped by and express deterritorialization—a force which dissolves and re-forms. Though Deleuze could join others in attributing those free and creative aspects of that deterritorialization to some form of false consciousness, it would be a profoundly territorializing act to do so, and therefore contrary to his own claims. Nonetheless, Deleuze’s image is fruitful. He describes the functioning of assemblage as rhizomatic. See, DeLeuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 10-11. Rhizomes are inherently relational. They are “anti-genealogy, resisting specific, predictable, linear cause and effect relationships, since matter, desire, and affect are continually functioning within and without a rhizome to shape the rhizome itself. This constitution by connection and relationship is not determined by hierarchical order but instead builds, shifts, and continues through connections between disparate elements. A honey comb or a tangled and extended web of bulbous plants that reproduce in new forms are two nice images for the rhizome. DeLeuze contrasts this with a tree that sets down clear roots and grows upward. This connectivity has the capacity to shift and even to upend and destroy settled knowledge and power systems. An important characteristic of rhizomes is that they are difficult to destroy because they do not have a singular root. Instead, they morph, change, and extend into new forms. It is important not to sentimentalize Deleuze’s focus on rhizomes, though. They are not always constructive or life-giving. In important senses, cancer is rhizomatic, as are war and crime. This rhizomatic process of assemblage is a particularly fruitful image for Vėlinės cemeteries because it highlights the effects of relationality, constant change, and morphing but enduring form: a body of continuity which is nonetheless constantly shifting in response to flows of power, desire, and relationship. Whether focusing on the complex political history of Lithuania, the structuring and refracting practices of the church, the interwoven dynamics of family, the grueling realities of poverty and economics, or the disciplinary gaze of the state, it is useful to think of the dynamics of Deleuze’s rhizomatic assemblage. See also, DeLanda, A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity.
In this final chapter I give witness to where I glimpse the glimmers of God in the midst of liminal, dihliz-ian, Vėlinės cemeteries. The chapter has three parts. I begin by framing Vėlinės practices in relation to two different spatial settings: the space of the church in Lithuania and the space of global conquest. In so doing I give witness to two of the many ways God is present in Vėlinės cemeteries; present even in the form of absence. For my reflection on the integrity of the church’s own Vėlinės practices and their setting in the context of Lithuania I turn to womanist Roman Catholic theologian Shawn Copeland to outline one possible theological frame for these practices. As I step back to consider these dihliz-ian Vėlinės cemeteries from a global perspective I place the experience in Lithuania within a larger tectonics of power, emphasizing that the most potent gift of Vėlinės cemeteries is their grounded, dihliz-ian structure of hospitality, a structure that offers the dignity of order and thus allows the safety of truth in the face of death—a provision of pagarba that enables and invites ramybė. Finally, I draw from work on ritual and ambiguity to trace a trajectory of hope within these dihliz-ian Saturday spaces, describing Vėlinės cemeteries as places that refuse to elide truth yet at the same time admit and involve people with contrary views and experiences of the world. Even as Vėlinės cemeteries acknowledge the costliness of death-bound existence, they quietly offer a vision and experience of peace as well.

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4 I do not suggest this is the only theological frame for these practices; far from it. God’s movement can never be domesticated and stuffed into a particular box. Rather, theological interpretation is open-ended and generative. See Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament Theology: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997); Walter Brueggemann, Texts Under Negotiation (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
The connective tissue between these two spatial frames is the immanence of death. Not just death, but violent death. This violence is not a matter of individual wounding, though it performs in concrete, compelling, and often excruciating individual form. Rather, this violence is “the political deployment of the threat of death,” an operation of power that renders persons as death-bound subjects—human beings “formed, from infancy on, by the imminent and ubiquitous threat of death.”

In wrestling with modes of life in the face of death, literary critic Hortense Spillers pushes Orlando Patterson’s description of slavery and social death toward a harsher reality. She proposes a distinction between “body” as “liberated” and “flesh” as “captive” subject-positions. Abdul R. JanMohamed demands an even starker category. He explores the work of Richard Wright and requires us to consider bodies as killed flesh—flesh rendered as meat:

“Flesh”, I would contend, is not quite the zero degree of ‘social conceptualization’ or subjectivity in that it is defined as readily killable.

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6 Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”, *Black White and In Color*, 206-207. In speaking of the African American experience in the United States Spillers writes, “In that sense, before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh.’ That zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies…we regard this human and social irreparable as high crimes against the flesh.” Spillers describes flesh as “the concentration of ‘ethnicity.’” In relation to the Nazi murder of the Jewish and Roma population in Lithuania this flesh as “ethnicity” is clearly apt. Whether the ethnic overdetermination and encapsulation applies in relation to the Soviet violence in Lithuania is a matter of debate. Some believe that the Soviet apparatus did treat the inhabitants of the bloodlands as an ethnic “other” who was expendable. Others explain the violence solely along class and political lines, while acknowledging particular ethnic purges during the Soviet period. I have heard both these characterizations in conversations in Lithuania and with individuals in Baltic diasporic groups in the United States. I am not familiar enough with the literature, the policy history and statements of the USSR, or the overall debate to form an opinion on that issue. But by referencing Hortense’s “flesh” I am making a more general point about the treatment of human bodies and human beings—whether ethnically or ideologically overdetermined.
However, we must remember that, when one kills flesh, it is transformed, it dies and becomes meat; meat, one can say, is insensate flesh. And, to the extent that meat rather than flesh is the absolute zero degree of subjectivity, my extension of Spillers’s formulation allows us to define the zone inhabited by ‘bare life’ or the death-bound subject as that between flesh and meat. Viewed from within the subjectivity trapped in this zone, one needs to stress that bare life always exists as ‘flesh’ that is readily and easily convertible to ‘meat’ and that it is precisely this convertability, what we might call ‘negative latency,’ between the two that constituted ‘bare life.’

Vėlinės Practices in Relation to the Church: A Theological Frame

Abdul JanMohamed proposes the writing of Richard Wright in the Jim Crow south in the United States as an example of artistry that refuses this death-bound subjectivity. The form of this refusal is a turning in on itself that binds negatively to the powers that deploy the threat of death in exploiting “bare life” (or life as flesh), and binds positively to the possibility of actual death. This is not a death wish that is a wish for suffering. Rather, it is a binding to death that refuses social death/bare life/flesh.

Though there is clearly very fruitful work to be done in thinking comparatively between the work of Richard Wright and the experience in Lithuania, I am not proposing to do that work here. Instead, I wish to argue something much more basic: that within the larger narrative of Christian liturgy, embodied Vėlinės practices in the dihliz-ian space of cemeteries are themselves

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8 Ibid., 291.
9 Though fruitful, this thinking through is immensely complex because of significant variances in historical situation and difference in the experience of violence and threat among Lithuanians. Those who were enslaved in the Black Atlantic were kidnapped from Africa and uniformly experienced cataclysmic life rupture even before the tortures of the Middle passage and the experience of the other shore that lay before them. I would suggest the greater uniformity of experience and terror is relevant in Wright’s work, even though Wright lives several generations after the end of the actual slave trade.
a form of art that binds negatively to the powers that deploy death to exploit bare life/flesh, and that binds positively to death as defined and experienced against an eschatological horizon. Again, this is not a wish for death or suffering. It is instead a refusal to define identity or value according to the metrics of death-bound subjectivity. Vėlėnės practices perform an artistry of the senses, an artistry that refuses death-bound-subjectivity. They perform this artistry in the last place those who deploy the political threat of death might think of: subject to the imperial look and within the performance of political power of the state within dihliz-ian cemeteries.

Spillers’s and JanMohamed’s language resonates with the Lithuanian experience. Bodies of partisans shot in the woods and dumped in the town square are rendered as meat. Bodies of Jewish Lithuanians stripped naked and shot over open pits they were first forced to dig for themselves are rendered as meat. So too, political prisoners worked and tortured to death in the gulag and

10 For seven years Linda Brent molded her body to the cramped space of an attic garrett in the southern United States in order to escape the degradations of slavery. Katherine McKittrick theorizes this garrett as a space of contestation and struggle; Brent hid in “the last place they thought of.” Katherine McKittrick, Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). The garret locates Brent within “the irrational workings of slavery as a witness, participant, fugitive.” (42) From this position she can observe the enduring vicissitudes of slavery as they take their toll on other slaves—including her own children. McKittrick extends this reflection on “the last place they thought of” to include the space between a black woman’s legs, and the rape and commodification of black women’s bodies. Here McKittrick is describing a hidden space. This space is located in a vastly different social and cultural situation than the Vėlėnės cemeteries of Soviet Lithuania with their bright spotlights and formal parades. Yet considered in relation to the large geopolitical contestations that marked and scarred both the people who were subjected to the Atlantic slave trade and the people in the bloodlands caught within the global contestations of power over the last two centuries, McKittrick’s insights bear consideration in relation to the countervisual, resistant practice of lighting candles of memory and hope on the graves of beloved dead beneath the glaring lights of the imperial gaze. These are both resistant practices from margins or boundary areas: “...this different sense of place has been cast as a politicized location—peripheral standpoints, special vantage points, margins—through which the violence, the bodily histories, and the limitations of traditional geographic arrangements are mapped. I have recast it as ‘the last place they thought of’; geographies of black femininity that are not necessarily marginal, but are central to how we know and understand space and place.”, 10.
then frozen and stacked on the Siberian tundra, or bodies passed out of box cars at the Lithuanian border and stuffed into waiting carts.

Flesh is those who witness or remember these things—those for whom meat serves as a reminder that thought they are flesh, they are, "easily convertible to meat." This is the death-bound subject. Yet death-bound subjectivity reaches further and in more nuanced form. A subtle yet pervasive experience of flesh emerges in children who are raised in homes haunted by fleshly existence; disciplined, quieted, groomed into flesh, yet "protected" from—while also shaped by—the looming threat of conversion to meat. This too is death-bound subjectivity—a mode of life where the threat of death lingers, and the range of choice and possibility is delimited and defined by that threat. Bodies kidnapped in another country, shackled, blindfolded, tranquilized, and spirited through Lithuanian airports toward places of torture in distant parts of the world or interrogated at CIA black sites on Lithuanian soil are “high value” detainee flesh dangled over the precipice of meat—a stark example of the political deployment of the threat of death in order to extract and then consume the “high value” of their flesh.

What then is the faithful response of the church to the political deployment of the threat of death? What does the gospel claim in the face of death bound existence? It is possible to understand the Vėlinės practices of the church as a refusal of death-bound existence. Not a denial, but a refusal. Vėlinės cemeteries are powerful in their demand that we take death seriously. Death seeps into life in these dihliz-ian Vėlinės spaces, but life seeps into death as well.

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11 Abdul R. JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound Subject*, 10
From the perspective of the church, Vėlinės cemeteries do acknowledge the awful power of death. But death is a penultimate limitation rather than an ultimate claim and boundary. The ultimate claim is a form of relationship that pierces the boundary of death: the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. The militancy of that claim is embedded in the Christian doctrine of the *imago dei*--a commitment to the belief that all people are created in the image of God, and thus an absolute refusal of the notion that any person is meat; *any* person.

The Christian crusades, the inquisition, complicity in and support of the institution of slavery, and Christian theological construction of race and genocide demonstrate all too well that the church again and again and again has fallen short of the demand to rest our lives on the promise of God proclaimed in the *imago dei*: the gospel truth that all people are created in the image of God. *All* people. Yet this remains God’s claim whether or not humanity faithfully lives that claim or performs that promise, and God’s claim is the ground of refusal of death bound existence.

As a response to historic and heretical performances of the church, Catholic theologian Shawn Copeland suggests that we turn to the “dangerous memories”\(^\text{12}\) of Jesus that remind us of “what enfleshing freedom means.”\(^\text{13}\) Copeland’s “enfleshing” is in essence a restoration of person from “flesh” to *imago dei*: to a being created in the image of God. Highlighting the rendering of

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\(^{13}\) M. Shawn Copeland, Enfleshing Freedom, 23-53.
black, female bodies as object—or in Spillers’s terms flesh—Copeland suggests that freedom for objectified and exploited people is,

...linked inextricably and literally to the body... Freedom from enslavement was freedom for healing, for effecting psychic healing and growth. Freedom from enslavement was freedom for proper self-love, for loving black flesh, for loving black bodies. Slavery sought to desecrate and deform black bodies; freedom resacralized those bodies.¹⁴

Vėlinės practices resacralize bodies as well. These practices sacralize dead bodies through prayer and remembrance, and they sacralize the living bodies that tend to the dead through relationship and memory. When these relationships are placed within the larger arc of relationship set out by Christian liturgy and the Christian liturgical year, Vėlinės practices pierce then/now binaries of space and time and place the bodies of the dead in eschatological time, where it is possible to hope and pray for one another within a relationship grounded in the mercy of God. The pagarba and ramybė of Vėlinės refuse the notion that dead bodies are meat and that live bodies are flesh alone. As Mykolas states so well, "without pagarba we become empty people...like machines."

Yet the deep healing sought by living bodies on behalf of dead bodies requires the sober honesty of Saturday spaces. It is a healing that demands acknowledgement of the excruciating realities of death-bound existence.

Speaking of the bodies of enslaved black women, Copeland writes,

The black woman had to cope with body memories of vulnerability, psychic and physical pain, in order to come to grips with internalized repercussions of violence and abuse. The damage done to the enslaved people’s capacity for human flourishing can never be ignored; not every

¹⁴ Ibid., 50-51.
black woman or man survived in “lofty transcendence over racist adversity.”¹⁵

Copeland suggests that this healing is possible only through solidarity as a “moral and ethical task,” a solidarity which begins with “anamnesis—the intentional remembering of the dead, exploited despised victims of history”.

This intentional remembering of the dead is never Pollyanna or romanticized. Rather, “intentional recovery and engagement of the histories of suffering are fraught with ambiguity and paradox. …Our recognition and regard for the victims of history and our shouldering responsibility for that history form the moral basis of solidarity.”¹⁶ This shouldering of responsibility is resonant with Rothberg’s call for the covering over of the dead and reinstatement of the possibility of mourning.

The complexities of life in Lithuania in the last 100 year attest to the fact that the history of suffering is indeed fraught with ambiguity and paradox. Victim and victimizer, accuser and accused, exploiter and exploited dwell within the same nation, the same state, the same family, and even the same individual.

Within Christian practices of remembrance another force enters the dynamics of multidirectional memory: the memory of God embracing the world in and through Jesus Christ and continually blowing upon and scattering that world through the power of the Holy Spirit. The question is what memory demands of us when we are claimed by this dangerous memory of God made known to us Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Copeland claims that joining with the

¹⁶ Ibid., 100.
mystical body of Christ requires us to take “intentional, intelligent, practical steps against the socially or technically avoidable sufferings of others”. This work cannot be done alone. It requires Christian community that anticipates and performs God’s promised “eschatological healing and building up ‘of the body of broken bones.’” Though enacted in concrete, fleshly time, this healing requires a dimension of transcendence: “To think of our human being in the world as the mystical body of Christ retunes our being to the eschatological at the core of the concrete, reminds us of our inalienable relation to one another in God, and steadies our efforts on that absolute future that only God can give.”

In Lithuania today the “eschatological at the core of the concrete” includes the woman tortured in a KGB prison, the man who sees his interrogator celebrated on television for great success in business following independence, the young woman who discovers that her grandfather collaborated with the Nazis to murder Jewish neighbors, Jewish Lithuanians haunted by memories of the murder of their families, the older woman who fears to tell her story because the new patriotism may condemn her for her father’s participation in the communist party, the sister who continues to weep because she has no idea where her partisan brother is buried. It includes not only the remains of past violence; it contains the present as well—the Muslim man bound, shackled, and flown through Vilnius’s airport with the permission of the Lithuanian government, or secreted to a black site on the outskirts of town to be held and interrogated without due process or trial; the Roma families shut out from work opportunities

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{17} Ibid., 101. \\
\footnote{18} Ibid., 103.
\end{footnotes}
and pushed to the edges of town, then moved again when the city decides to
develop new retail space; the young women moving west to find economic
opportunity only to discover that the new job that was promised is actually an
enticement to sexual servitude. The question facing the church in Lithuania and
everywhere is how the solidarity that pierces time and space with pagarba for the
dead makes demands on pagarba for the living and vulnerable as well. In other
words, how does the church perform the practices of Vėlinės as practices of
resistance to death-bound subjectivity, and not practices of denial.

African-American spirituals are also an art form that refused death-bound
subjectivity. James Cone describes the spirituals as, “the attempt of black
people to define their present history in the light of their promised future and not
according to their past miseries.”19 Though articulate in the imagery and
language of eschatological vision, the spirituals sing of earthly place and practice
as well as time and space beyond that renders more truthful visions of their
identity as children of God. Cone offers “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” as an
example of this tradition of spirituals: “When black slaves sang ‘I looked over
Jordan and what did I see, Coming for to carry me home,” they were looking over
the Ohio River. ‘The band of angels was Harriet or another conductor coming for
him; and “home” was a haven in the free states or Canada.”20

Yet Cone suggests that the most powerful function of the vision of heaven
might not be either a hope after death or a material map and marker of physical
freedom. With the hope of freedom a physical impossibility for many,

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they found it necessary to develop a style of freedom that included but did not depend upon historical possibilities...For black slaves, who were condemned to carve out their existence in captivity, heaven meant that the eternal God had made a decision about their humanity that could not be destroyed by white masters. ...The idea of heaven provided ways for black people to affirm their humanity when other people were attempting to define them as non-persons."

This is the promise of imago dei. Cone describes this alternate vision as the transcendent present: “actively living as if the future were already present in their community”, an in-breaking of “God’s future” into the slaves’ historic present. The result, he believes, is a present discontentment; a need to be “on the move”; and ultimately, resistance to slavery.

Vėlinės practices carry political resistance as well. Seventy-five year old Juozas describes the power of students gathering in a Vilnius cemetery to light candles during the frightening years of Stalin: "We did not go there intending to protest, we just got swept up into it and started to sing." The deepest movement of Vėlinės practices is subtle and relational. In the words of Henrika:

Are you there because of the bones? No. You are there because of the sense that there is a possibility—like even in memory, if you define memory broadly as making present that which is in the past, there is already an acknowledgement that there is a possibility of a reality beyond the material world. So that is why I think Vėlinės is so important is that it affirms and acknowledges the sense that people have that the material world is not “it.”

This affirmation is not a denial or shunning of the material reality of this world, nor of the significance of a cemetery space that holds the remains of a person you love. Rather, this is a refusal of the limits set by death-bound
subjectivity. It is a refusal grounded in relationship, relationship that pierces the constraints of both place and time in the dihliz-ian threshold space of Vėlinės cemeteries.

There is hope here, but it is not the sound of trumpets and triumphal resurrection. It is much closer to the beckoning strains of a solo saxophone. It is the music of Saturday spaces:

\[
\text{Swing low, sweet chariot} \\
\text{Comin’ for to carry me home;}
\]

“For me it is very good this day to go to the cemetery. I don’t like to go on other days, but on this day it is different. The dead people come in to meet us.”

\[
\text{Swing low, sweet chariot,} \\
\text{Comin’ for to carry me home.}
\]

“All the beautiful memories come back at that moment and also if you are a person of faith there appears hope. Hope that not everything has ended. That at the end of my days we will meet again. How it is going to happen my mind is not able to know. We listen to what Christ has said he promised—that we will meet again.”

\[
\text{I looked over Jordan,} \\
\text{And WHAT did I see} \\
\text{Comin’ for to carry me home,}
\]

“My mother is older and she is losing her memory, but sometimes when I visit with her she will reach out her hands and say, ‘Take me to momma, I want to see momma.’ Almost as if she is a little child. She is asking me to take her to the cemetery to see her mom. When she dies, that is where I will visit with her, as I now visit my dad.”

\[
\text{A band of angels comin’ after me,} \\
\text{Comin’ for to carry me home.}
\]

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25 Tarvilė, female, age 32
26 Klebonas Zigmantas, male, age 54.
27 Ignas, male, age 54.
“…because we have the tradition to follow the saints. You know on the road, the signs that show us how to go? Saints are like directions on the road. They show us how to get to the next place.”

*Swing low, sweet chariot  
Comin’ for to carry me home*

“This is a little bit mystic. So you know, we think that they see us and they are thankful that we remember them.”

*Swing low, sweet chariot  
Comin’ for to carry me home*

Yes. It is important. It is very important. But I can not tell you why. Because I feel such love when I am there. I remember. And I am grateful. Grateful for them and for life. I hope that if we feel and know and remember that love, we might live with greater humanity. Treat one another with more love. I always anticipate going there.

*If you get there before I do,  
Comin’ for to carry me home,*

“Usually I look at the stars and think which one is my daughter, and which is my mom, and which is my dad. I go to the cemetery alone with my husband when it is dark. So there is nobody left. It is all candles and you can see the stars as well. We remember her. We remember our daughter. And we remember all the families who have lost their children.”

*Tell all my friends I’m comin’ too  
Comin’ for to carry me home.*

“It is about saying hello and saying good bye. At Vėlinės we go to say ‘hello’ to our relatives and friends; to tuck them in for the winter. Soon the snow will fall and we can not get to some of the cemeteries and graves so we say good bye too, for the winter. Then on mother’s day it is spring. We come back and say, ‘hello’!”

**Vėlinės in Global Perspective**

28 Robertas, male, age 34.  
29 Nojus, male, age 79.  
30 Ugnė, female, age 74  
31 Salvija, female, age 48.  
32 Tadė, age 48, female.
The wending together of the local, the global, and the transcendent in Vėlinės cemeteries resonates with antecedents of Vėlinės practices in the Roman Catholic cult of the saints. The connection with specific place is vitally important. It is not only the appeal to the transcendent that matters in Vėlinės cemeteries, it is equally—or perhaps more so—the significance of immanence at play in this practice. Or to use the appropriate Christian theological term: the *incarnational* reality. In Christian terms, this is a material presence in this cemetery home as indicative of a promised gathering with loved ones and presence in another home: a home that is hoped for, doubted, celebrated, ridiculed, wondered about, even rejected. Yet a real and transcendent space moving amongst, superimposing upon, and even colliding with embodied practices that create place within this shared terrain.

Yet these are not exclusively Christian spaces. The *dihliz*-ian capacity of these spaces to welcome multiplicity while also maintaining particular expectations and decorum may in fact be an invitation to healing: healing from trauma; healing of trust and relationship; and perhaps even more broadly than Lithuania—the of the Christian imaginary.

Willie Jennings ties the distortion of the Christian imaginary, and thus the distortion of the performance of Christianity, to the entwinement of Christian theology with the initiation of European colonizing practices in the fifteenth century. At the heart of this distortion is a theological displacement of the Jew
and replacement by the Gentile, European, white, western male. This theological displacement operates quite literally. It is a displacement of people from ground, space, and place as the organizer and facilitator of identity. The crusading and colonizing practices of conquest and slavery were (and often still are) underwritten and sacralized by the church.

The vision and faith driving the unfolding of modern western cartography assumed that a place did not exist until it was “found” and mapped by colonizing explorers, and that the maps that the colonizers drew established the reality and existence of a place and of the people who lived there. This enabled the colonizer to treat the land and the people as if they were not in fact people living in a space that belonged or mattered to human beings. This tendency to construe the world as relative to one’s own experience and position is not unique to western modernity. However, in western colonizing efforts this “mapping” of reality was particularly effective because it was imposed with force and was then adopted and internalized as reality by those who were colonized and mapped.

This mapping took a particularly insidious form when it was forged with Christian theology to create scales of humanity with white European males placed at the top and all other humanity scaled beneath: non-Europeans of light skin and women beneath the white European male; all people of color at the

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While applying these theo-politically formed scales of humanity, church and crown joined forces to conquer the world in the name of Jesus Christ, claiming acts of aggression and acquisition as justified conquest within the church’s call to discipline and “civilize” people into Christian forms of salvation.

Thinking Jennings’ argument alongside Lithuania is tricky, as the Christian church managed to press conversion upon Lithuania less than a century before the church then blessed ships launched for conquest in the west. It is also tricky because the attachment to soil and place as source of identity—along with an attendant romantic idealization of folklore and practices—underlies some of the most frightening violence in the twentieth century, the violence in Lithuania being one horrific example. However, Jennings’s attention to place and displacement within the Christian imaginary and performance is indeed deeply significant here. The distorted imaginary that authorized the crusades is also the imaginary that eventually led to Lithuania’s forced conversion and the imaginary that structured human beings into a hierarchy and thus justified slavery as a "civilizing" institution and underwrote modern racial identity. This is a fruitful place for theological reflection on Vėlinės cemeteries because all of these modern

operations of power, hierarchy, and conquest participated in the creation of the bloodlands.\(^{39}\)

\[\text{Vėlinės cemeteries are a threshold, liminal space between public and private, occupier and occupied, church and world, and eastern/Soviet and western/neoliberal economies and histories. These dihliz-ian spaces perform their own form of wisdom; they are “agentic”.}\(^{40}\) In performing this wisdom, Vėlinės cemeteries assert themselves within recent history, but they also draw upon patterns of identity and response crafted centuries before this region was mapped by Christian Europe. The inflections of these patterns remain in some of the “common sense” practices and wisdom through which Lithuanians defines, tailor, and even resist the church’s teaching and instruction about these practices.

People who are mapped by others maintain alternate constructs of reality both in the recesses of their memories and in their living practices, even when those images and ideas are suppressed by the colonizers and material traces are all but destroyed.\(^{41}\) These alternate constructs serve as a resistant knowledge and as the foundation for differing and generative forms of life. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, Vėlinės practices carry such alternate imagining even when they also carry forms of regnant power. In many

\(^{39}\) Jennings also addresses the Volk movement as a distortion, but given the frequency of reference to pagan practice and folklore in discussions of Vėlinės I feel it necessary to foreground this danger in my discussion of alternate knowledge patterns. As mentioned earlier, it is indeed at the heart of some of the more ardent positions of “blood and soil” nationalists in Lithuania today.


\(^{41}\) Mignolo’s work focuses on the Amerindians.
ways, they map de-colonial epistemologies and ways of life, even as they are overlaid and intertwined with the cartography of colonial power.⁴²

Vincent Brown describes the burial and memory practices of enslaved black Jamaicans and white slave owners in the 17th and 18th century. He notes the strong resistance of enslaved people when slave owners tried to move them from their living places and gardens. While acknowledging that this was in part due to the very human need to feel some form of continuity and control, Brown suggests that another deep and compelling need fueled their resistance: their beloved dead were buried beneath their houses and in their gardens, and the garden and home burial practices and rituals of remembrance were connected to practices in the African homes from which they had been torn by slave traders. This reluctance to move,

...highlighted the reverence in which the enslaved held burial places, which demarcated both social and spiritual space. ...Tombs and burial plots marked out more than claims to real estate. Such sites also mapped the spiritual terrain, helping the enslaved to navigate a treacherously haunted landscape.⁴³

Here, displaced people who had been violently torn from connection to land, family, and place, worked to emplace their lives through practices with and among their beloved dead. Brown suggests that we look to Jamaica to read politics and history “through the social and cultural history of death”, and thus obtain a sobering new glimpse of forces of violence and inequality that might be

shaping the Americas today. It may be that Vėlinės cemeteries in Lithuania offer Christian theology a similar sobering and reordering glimpse.

One of the most painful and difficult challenges facing Lithuania today is the searing task of parsing out the complexity of violence and death that unfolded there, and the degree to which that violence participated in a form of ethnic categorization and scaling of human beings according to a constructed and deformed matrix of value. The distorted Christian imaginary at the heart of modern racialization and scales of worth is the same project that eventually led to the horrors of the Nazi regime. Without question, Vėlinės spaces are framed by and inscribed with Christian practices and traditions. Significant though, while these Christian practices and traditions may provide a sort of scaffolding within Vėlinės cemeteries, they do not determine or control these dihliz-ian spaces. Christian practice here is a practice of presence rather than conquest. The permeable boundaries admit all who come. Some may know the dance steps better than others, but generally no one is excluded.

If we think of the devastation of the bloodlands as a very real expression of the modern project of colonial conquest taken to its ultimate state of madness, perhaps the greatest hope and gift in these cemeteries is this commodious opportunity for hospitality. It is an opportunity for the Christian performance to be an anti-performance that runs in a contrary direction to crusading conquest, functioning instead as a presence that claims and celebrates Holy incarnation while also relinquishing control. This form of presence is not without risk, and it

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44 For another interesting perspective on Hitler’s focus on Jews and the larger projects of modern racialization see, Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. 
is certainly subject to deep distortion. But given the historical realities of suffering and occupation in this part of the world, such presence might indeed function as a deep form of faithfulness: an instantiation of “God with us” in the form of welcome and hospitality rather than aggression and control.

This is an elusive incarnation, one that can not be domesticated, captured, or controlled. Perhaps the greatest power of this incarnation is that it admits death. It dwells in Saturday spaces. James Cone also suggests the blues musical tradition as a Saturday space:

...not all blacks could accept the divine promises of the Bible as a satisfactory answer to the contradictions of black existence. They refused to adopt a God-centered perspective as the solution to the problem of black suffering. Instead, they sang, "Got the blues, and too dam' mean to cry." ...The blues are about black life and the sheer earth and gut capacity to survive in an extreme situation of oppression.45

In a tone similar to that of Lithuanians who accuse themselves and their fellow Lithuanians of relishing sadness and wishing to hang onto grief and despair, some critics portray the blues as a concession to oppression—a willingness to live in despair and hopelessness. Cone refutes this interpretation: "The blues are that mood which owes its origins to powerlessness in the face of trouble. ...The despair is real, not imagined." Yet, "[t]he blues are a lived experience, an encounter with the contradictions of American society but a refusal to be conquered by it. They are despair only in the sense that there is no attempt to cover up reality."46

In a sense, the blues then, are the song of the Lithuanian who goes to the cemetery only to remember, and not to pray. It is the music of the one who lights

a candle for the sake of beauty, but not of Christian hope. "The blues ground black hope firmly in history and do not plead for life after death. Even in death, there is no retreat from the willingness to accept the consequences of life." This too is the refusal of death-bound subjectivity. "The better day is not naive optimism. It is simply the will to be." Aurelija, the 37 year old physician, dismisses the idea that the Lithuanian capacity to endure has any connection at all with Vėlinės: "We survive because we have to. What other choice is there. You just go on."

Rituals of Saturday Space as Rituals of Peace

In the book Ritual and Its Consequences, four authors interrogate the notion of sincerity they find prevalent in the modern era and particularly in protestant theology. They also explore the re-emergence of a fascination with ritual, and suggest that the hunger for ritual among us may be a means to reduce violence and to accept the fragmentation and discontinuity that characterizes human existence. Rejecting notions of “tradition” and “modernity” that claim that “traditional” societies are governed by ritual while modern societies value individual autonomy, the authors argue that much current ritual theory grows from a post-Reformation focus on sincerity that casts ritual either negatively as an “authoritarian, unquestionable, irrational set of constraints on the individual,” or positively—in a Geertz-ian mode—as requiring a belief framework as

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scaffolding beneath, "...as no more than an outward enactment of inner states of belief."\(^{48}\)

As an alternative, the authors claim ritual as the creation of a subjunctive “as if” world. But this “as if” world is not a “coherent worldview”. Rather, …these texts on ritual assume a world that is fragmented and broken. The subjunctive world of ritual resides in inherent tension with such a broken world, and such a subjunctive world is at least implicitly understood to be limited and temporary. Ritual, then, involves the endless work of building, refining, and rebuilding webs of relationships in an otherwise fragmented world. The work of ritual ceaselessly builds a world that, for brief moments, creates pockets of order, pockets of joy, pockets of inspiration. There is indeed autonomy in such a world, but it is an autonomy that recognizes the limited and fragmented world in which we always act.\(^{49}\)

Crucial for the authors is the reality that ritual is to some extent happening all the time, in the most ordinary and mundane aspects of our lives where we endlessly inhabit varying and often conflicting reality worlds and relationships, ever playing on the boundaries between them. Thus, ritual “allows us to face the unavoidable ambiguities and ambivalences of our existence.” The opposite of ritual is then not autonomy, because we act with agency within and through ritual. The opposite of ritual is sincerity,

In the view of the authors, the modern period is an era when sincerity has reigned and been granted supreme institutional and cultural emphasis. They see in current movements toward fundamentalism, "the failure of our existing cultural resources to deal with ambiguity, ambivalences, and the gentle play of boundaries that require both their existence and their transcendence. All too

\(^{48}\) Ibid. 180.

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
often the modern world has absolutized boundaries.\textsuperscript{50} To their mind, this absolutizing occurs both through the construction of unassailable identities around race, ethnicity, religious identity, and citizenship, and through “the destruction of particularism and the denial of all constitutive differences between people and communities.”

Imagining ritual in relation to boundaries in this way is extremely helpful in understanding the power and hope of Vėlinės cemeteries. As in the model of multidirectional model, neither the construction of unassailable identities nor the destruction of particularism will do here, because neither option: addresses the deep human need for boundaries, but also for their existence as negotiable entities, more akin to the walls of a living cell than to those of an impregnable fortress. We are constituted on our boundaries, that is to say, constituted on a plane we do not totally control, one that is always open to the other, to the stranger, to what is different and unknown and beyond the controlling power of the center. This is what makes boundaries dangerous. Rather than trying to eliminate boundaries or to make them into unbreachable walls—the two approaches that so typified the twentieth century—ritual continually renegotiates boundaries, living with their instability and labile nature. Only by paying closer attention to the play of ritual—to its formal elements, even when those formal rhythms may overwhelm claims of content—can we find the way to negotiate the emergent demands of our contemporary world.\textsuperscript{51}

As Lithuania reckons with the past and negotiates the years ahead, the question of boundaries loom large in multiple dimensions. Perhaps here we find the greatest gift of Vėlinės cemeteries: Saturday spaces with porous boundaries; \textit{dihliz}-ian spaces allowing interface between multiple subjects within predictable but hospitable standards of decorum. These are Christ inflected spaces, but they are not spaces controlled by Christianity. The question then, is whether and how

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. 10.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. 11.
these Christian rituals of memory might welcome the truth that Vėlinės has indeed overflowed the banks of the church. There is opportunity to water parched ground here. The question is whether these Christ-inflected Saturday spaces offer boundaries of ragged welcome into the body of the One who welcomes us as other, thereby crushing a need to find a dangerous other among us, or whether these dihliz-ian spaces instead lead Lithuanians to seek the security of control, and to deny and fear the stranger in our midst. Ragged welcome might beckon an alternate performance of a deeply broken Christian imaginary. The security of control invites yet more participation in “the political deployment of the threat of death”.52

52 Abdul R. JanMohamed, The Death-Bound Subject: Richard Wright’s Archaeology of Death, 44.
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Biography

Denise Thorpe is the mother of two strong and wise daughters who were born in Lithuania. She is also married to a man whose grandfather emigrated to the United States from Lithuania, but Denise is not Lithuanian herself. Denise’s family roots are on the other side of the Baltic from Lithuania: all of her grandparents emigrated to the United States from Sweden—except of course for the one outlier who was Norwegian.

Denise’s doctoral work has been in the area of practical theology with a secondary emphasis on worship and preaching. She received the ThD degree at Duke University in May, 2013. Denise is ordained in the Presbyterian Church, USA. Prior to returning to graduate school she served as a pastor in Raleigh, North Carolina. She grew up in the Evangelical Covenant Church, attended North Park University (then College), and received her MDiv degree from Yale University. After divinity school Denise trained as a lawyer at Duke University and practiced law in Denver, Colorado before returning to parish work in North Carolina. Surprising though it may be, she finds the law and theology combination to be helpful in myriad ways.