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# Foreword

The world today is faced with economic crises, a warming climate, ecological disasters, depleting natural resources, wars, and is in persistent need of stability and cohesion based on shared values. Such issues as social *memory*, cultural *tradition* and ethno-national *identity* are often put forward as critical for understanding these problems. They also appear on the permanent agenda of *Lithuanian Ethnology* and seem to be quite well explored.

Unfortunately, anthropological or ethnological analysis of *memory, tradition and identity* does not provide an adequate formula for challenging the forces of destruction, poverty, exclusion, and compartmentalization. Furthermore, from the anthropological perspective, bonds of solidarity are addressed as extremely complex and their own 'stability' is no less challenged and contested. The *memory, tradition, and identity* framework of any contemporaneous group is framed in global processes of uncertainty and change, as well as of fragmentation and has to be explored by scrutinizing particular cases.

The present volume of *Lithuanian Ethnology* is just so focused, and actual patterns of construction and reconstruction of *memory, tradition, and identity* are seen in comparative perspective and as trajectories of symbolic and political empowerment.

Illustrative of this point is the first article in the issue. Written by Christian Giordano, Head of the Department of Social Anthropology at Fribourg University, it deals with 'disputed historical memories in East Europe and Southeast Asia'. By comparing historical memory sites in the Balkans and the Baltics, on the one hand, and South-East Asia on the other, he explores the contested nature of historical territories as well as places and objects of memory. In this regard 'politics of symbols' and 'social practices of domination' are critical and resulting in 'antagonistic memories'. Thus, social memory in general, and historical monuments in particular, are resources of symbolic domination and symbolic capital. Moreover, as emphasized by the author himself, politics of reconciliation, which is especially popular in the Eastern Europe, does not necessarily make shared memories but rather "imply the mutual recognition of the legitimacy of other's historical memory". It actually freezes 'antagonistic memories' as 'dangerous weapons of discrimination'.

The focus on social *memory*, from the perspective of national identity, is pursued by Irena Šutinienė, from the Social Research Institute in Vilnius. In her article "Social memory and contemporary Lithuanian identity" she suggests the term 'emotional glue' as a kind of national identity framework and argues that neither the collective memory of the past itself, nor the related myths

produce it. Rather, in disregard of 'what has to be memorized', individual symbols and images of the past are created from a common past that has been deconstructed and de-sacralised.

The issue of *identity*, inscription, and its documentalization, is discussed by Darius Daukšas, at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU). In his article "Identity inscribed in the passport" he explores the case of the Polish minority in Eastern Lithuania. Identity politics of this minority rests on inscription of their (Polish) ethnicity in the passport as well as in 'belonging to the (Soviet) past'. It is stressed that the politics of documentalization of the soviet and post-soviet institutions is enacted in everyday life and plays the role of 'inherited ethnic identity'. Politics of institutional 'systematization' is also conspicuously expressed in the national censuses. To my mind, such politics of compartmentalization is a good example of politics of ethnification well described by Jonathan Friedman and Thomas Hylland Eriksen.

The article by Žilvytis Šaknys, ethnologist at the Lithuanian Institute of History, and his colleague Daiva Lapinskaitė (VMU), also addresses minority identity, in this case the Karaims of Lithuania. It is an account of a diasporic community during the last half century. It concludes that the Karaim identity has altered through the period, but only in terms of cultural repertoire change. Resources of minority 'symbolic power' (the town of Trakai as the spiritual center) have been retained and kept and have withstood identity assimilation.

The issue of *tradition* is addressed by the Dutch ethnologist John Helsloot who looks at a Western modern ritual: Valentine's Day in the Netherlands. The author provides a well documented overview and analysis of the vibrant path of the Dutch 'invention of Valentine's Day'. Since its inception in the 1950s, the custom, "perceived as artificial and commercial", is gaining recognition as a postmodern and individualist utilization of the past, as a way to "take a distance towards tradition and consider it a matter of personal choice or mood".

Two remaining articles in the volume are of a different nature. The one, written by Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė and Irma Šidiškienė, both from the Department of Ethnology, the leading ethnological research center in the country, is on method and reflects extensive experience of ethnographic fieldwork of the authors. They present a novel version of conducting ethnographic semi-structured interviews by applying the techniques of simultaneous interviewing by two researchers.

Valdemaras Klumbys, with the History department at Vilnius University, in his contribution "Lithuanian cultural elite during the Soviet period" describes the public face of the Lithuanian intelligentsia who walked a tight-rope between resistance and conformity to the regime. He concludes that part of the Lithuanian elite, while acting in conformity with the regime, managed to create



‘informal discursive social space’ which was used to construct an alternative to Soviet ideology.

The *Book Review* section of the volume, as usual, contains contributions on recent publications. The first one is of particular relevance to the discipline of anthropology in the country. Kristina Šliavaitė’s book *From Pioneers to Target Group*, is addressed in considerable detail by the Lithuanian-American anthropologist Neringa Klumbytė. Šliavaitė’s text, an outstanding contribution to post-communist anthropology is based on her doctoral thesis, supervised by Steven Sampson at Lund University. Šliavaitė is the first of the younger generation anthropologists of this country to start her professional carrier in Lithuania.

In sum, I hope that the materials included in this volume of the *Lithuanian Ethnology* will be of use to readers, will provoke a response and shed some light on the increasing disembeddedness of the human condition as we all face the global ecological, economic and political challenges.

Vytis Čiubrinskas