

# POLITICS AND FESTIVALS: LITHUANIA'S SHROVE AND MIDSUMMER

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**Abstract:** As David I. Kertznar mentioned, ritual is important in all political systems, and pointed out the many ways ritual is employed in politics. In my article, based on personal fieldwork material, manuscripts, published and internet sources, I tried to analyze how the festivals like Shrove (Lith. *Užgavėnės*) and Midsummer (Lith. *Joninės, Rasos, Kupolės*) have been useful for pursuing political goals in Lithuania during different periods: the National Revival (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), the interwar period (1918–1940), Soviet Lithuania (1940–1941; 1944–1989), and modern independent Lithuania. Analysis of the two folk festivals shows that they can acquire a political reality and embody great power in performing various tasks: fighting for national revival or independence, fighting against Christianity, creating a new pagan religion, or forming an ethnic cultural space for emigrants. But each festival can embody different possibilities for acquiring this power depending on the time, the place, the festival's former content, and even historical memory.

**Keywords:** Lithuania, Lithuania Minor, history, politics, ritual year, Midsummer, Shrove

In 1989 and 2005 the present author conducted fieldwork among the Lithuanian population in the vicinity of Puńsk (North Poland). The analysis of the seasonal festivals there supports the statement that in modern society, traditions are no longer understood as customs which have been handed down and embraced from generation to generation. Lithuanian cultural symbols can be used to invent, modify, and even take over traditions, showing that the ethnic cultural level takes priority over the local one. Traditions can also be a significant source of power for controlling the younger generation and passing on the most important values of the parents and grandparents, i.e. Lithuanian consciousness.<sup>50</sup> This has prompted a rethinking of the meaning of festivals, placing the priority not on the investigation of their ritual structure or symbols, but on how they function in real life, or, in the words of William Sax, asking 'how the ritual might be instrumental, how they actually do things'.<sup>51</sup> The results of the investigation have encouraged a focusing on the political perspective of festivals through their analysis in the historical space.

According to David I. Kertznar, through participation in the rites, a citizen of the modern state identifies with the larger political forces that can only be seen in symbolic form. The importance of ritual is difficult to recognize. Ritual

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<sup>50</sup> ŠAKNYS 2009a. 95.

<sup>51</sup> SAX 2010. 5–6. cf. HELSLOOT 2011. 143.

is usually identified with religion and since modern Western societies have presumably separated political affairs from religious life, there is an assumption that rituals remain politically significant only in less “advanced” societies. Ritual is important in all political systems and this points out the many ways ritual is employed in politics.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned by Catherine Bell, most rituals appeal to tradition or custom in some way, and many are concerned to repeat historical precedents very closely. A ritual that evokes no connections with any tradition is apt to be found anomalous, inauthentic, or unsatisfying by most people.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, ritual as a medium of communication and interaction does not simply express or transmit values and messages, but actually creates situations.<sup>3</sup>

Festivals like Shrove (Lith. *Užgavėnės*) and Midsummer (Lith. *Joninės*, *Rasos*, *Kupolės*) have been useful for pursuing political goals in Lithuania during different periods: the National Revival (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), the interwar period (1918–1940), Soviet Lithuania (1940–1941; 1944–1989), and modern independent Lithuania. A comparison of these two folk festivals can show their possibilities in ‘creating a political reality’.

The main attribute of the Midsummer festival was a bonfire or a hub of a wheel. In the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century it was popular in Lithuania Minor, and also in North Lithuania. The Shrove celebration was particularly popular in Samogitia (*Žemaitija*, Western part of Lithuania). Till the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were preserved carnivals of masked male youth. Also it was the last day before Lent which went on for more than one and a half months, when dancing and meat and milk dishes were forbidden. These are the connections with religion.

The main symbol of Shrove carnivals and Midsummer ritual fires in 1920–1940 covered about respectively 40 and 60 percent of Lithuania territory.<sup>4</sup> In our days, it was distributed almost all over Lithuanian territory (respectively 95.5 and 94 percent).<sup>5</sup>

The article is based on semi-structured interviews conducted during brief 1–15 day expeditions made in implementing a programme to create an atlas of Lithuanian customs, fieldwork the author conducted during 1989–1996 in attempting to ascertain the situation in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>6</sup> and fieldwork conducted during 2002–2009 on seasonal festivals during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century,<sup>7</sup> later focus falling on the situation in the city of Vilnius. During the fieldwork sessions, over 800 respondents of various ages were surveyed in Lithuania and in nearby Lithuanian communities in Latvia, Poland, and Belarus. Manuscripts, published sources, internet sources, and investigations were also used.

1 KERTZNER 1988. 1–2.

2 BELL 1997. 145.

3 BELL 1997. 137.

4 ŠAKNYS 2001. 51–78.

5 ŠAKNYS 2007. 107, 112; ŠAKNYS 2009. 99, 105; ŠAKNYS 2012. 125, 131.

6 ŠAKNYS 2001.

7 ŠAKNYS 2007, 2009, 2013.

## Festivals and the National Revival

Lithuania's National Revival, which began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was based on an idealisation of the past. The appearance of certain circumstances created a need to 'revive' the old 'Lithuanian', i.e. 'pagan', rituals and festivals. This was especially true in Evangelical Lutheran Lithuania Minor where Midsummer was already widely celebrated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A suitable festival location was selected, Rambynas Hill, where pagan rituals had once been conducted and a sacred fire tended.

Martynas Jankus and other Lithuania Minor public figures masterminded the revival of certain Lithuanian customs in 1884. Midsummer on Rambynas Hill was celebrated with a magnificent bonfire and an eloquent programme that included not only pagan priests and priestesses,<sup>8</sup> but also speeches that exhorted listeners to hold onto their national aspirations, to not allow their spirit to be broken, and to retain their Lithuanian identity.<sup>9</sup> The festival became a tradition. In 1896, the Lithuanian activists bought part of the hill. The formerly private land thus became an area devoted to Lithuanian public events. The purchase of the rest of the hill for Lithuanian needs was planned.<sup>10</sup>

The aim of the organisers of these festivals was for the Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor and Lithuania Major to be able to live in one independent state,<sup>11</sup> which was partially realised. After the 1923 Klaipėda Revolt, part of Lithuania Minor, i.e. the Klaipėda region, was annexed by the Republic of Lithuania.<sup>12</sup> Midsummer was especially useful for the Lithuanian government in integrating the Evangelical Lutheran region into Catholic Lithuania. Many Lithuanians from Lithuania Major used to come to Rambynas to gather around the Midsummer bonfire.<sup>13</sup> Politicians and public figures also participated in the festival and in 1928 a League of Nations delegation headed by Under-Secretary-General Sugimura, visited Rambynas on Midsummer. He even had to swear an oath (obviously in jest – Ž. Š.) to the Lithuanian pagan god, Perkūnas, to defend Lithuanian interests in respect to the Vilnius Region at the League of Nations.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, in the interwar period, Midsummer was chosen as a symbol of Lithuania's glorious past, a symbol able to unite the futures of Lithuania Minor and Lithuania Major. It also became one of the main festivals of the very

8 The priestesses (Lith. *Vaidilutės*) tended the eternal flame in pagan Lithuania.

9 ALŠĖNAS 1967. 112.

10 SODONIS – TOLEIKIENĖ 2005.

11 ALŠĖNAS 1967. 160.

12 Lithuania Minor (East Prussia) was conquered by the Teutonic Knights circa 1252 and almost 700 years later was annexed by Lithuania after the Klaipėda Revolt. Most of the population of Lithuania Minor was Lutheran, while Roman Catholicism prevailed in the rest of Lithuania (Lithuania Major) which was under Russian rule during 1795–1918.

13 ALŠĖNAS 1967. 112.

14 ALŠĖNAS 1967. 111. The Vilnius Region was occupied by Polish forces during 1920–1939.

popular and influential Young Lithuania organization<sup>15</sup> and the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union<sup>16</sup>. The leaders of these organizations wrote scripts for celebrating Midsummer in localities where the festival's traditions had been lost. The Midsummer traditions quickly spread all over Lithuania.

Shrove acquired a political content later. In 1936 it was celebrated for the first time in Kaunas, the temporary capital of Lithuania. Students sought to organise a Samogitian (West Lithuanian)-style costume parade to accent another political problem. One of this festival's main participants was an untraditional (unknown in the folk tradition) personage, 'Kiaulinskas' the Pig. In this fashion, the revellers voiced the political bacon export problem that had arisen at that time in Lithuania.<sup>17</sup>

## Festivals and the Soviet Regime

In 1939, Klaipėda was annexed by Germany and in 1940 the rest of Lithuania by the USSR. After the 1941–1944 German occupation, Lithuania again became part of the USSR, armed resistance against the Soviet occupiers ending in 1953. During the first years of the Soviet occupation traditional festivals were banned. The Soviet era view of traditional seasonal festivals is illustrated by a story told by Juozas Mickevičius:

On Shrove Tuesday evening in around 1950, several pupils came over to the home of another pupil, Petronėlė. The secondary school *komsorgas*<sup>18</sup> learned about them eating pancakes<sup>19</sup> and reported them to the headmaster, who reported it at a Teachers' Council meeting... The behaviour mark of the pancake makers was reduced to three [out of five] for defending themselves and not admitting their error. The hair of the other participants was cut short and they had to dance every Saturday evening throughout Lent.<sup>20</sup>

Even in ideological literature, it was recognised that socialist traditions had been created at times out of thin air or borrowed from other lands or localities. Such festivals failed because they were in no way connected with the local inhabitants' customs. Therefore 'it was necessary to adapt them to the old traditions, nurturing new ones from the old ones without reviving the old customs and giving some of the old forms a new socialist content'.<sup>21</sup>

15 Lith. *Lietuvių tautiško jaunimo sąjunga „Jaunoji Lietuva“* (1927–1932), *Lietuvių tautinės jaunųjų sąjunga „Jaunoji Lietuva“* (1932–1940).

16 Lith. *Lietuvos Šaulių Sąjunga*

17 ŠAKNYS 2012. 92–93.

18 A *komsorg* was a Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) organiser – local leader.

19 Pancakes are traditional Shrove fare in Lithuania.

20 MICKEVIČIUS 2008. 399.

21 PEČIŪRA 1974. 79.

After armed Lithuanian resistance weakened, a period of cultural resistance began, including the first signs of a revival of the ethnic culture.<sup>22</sup> After the student demonstrations organised in Kaunas during All Soul's Day in 1956, the leaders of the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL), afraid that the Hungarian scenarios, in which the Church played an important role, would be repeated in Lithuania, took the initiative to strengthen atheist propaganda, without waiting for a sign from Moscow.<sup>23</sup>

An attempt was made to not only strengthen the traditions of Soviet festivals like the first of May and the annual commemoration of the October Revolution, but also to create some sort of substitute for some of the old festivals, 'erasing' their Christian elements and using some so-called folk traditions. The clearest example is the legalisation of the Midsummer festival. In 1957 the CPL Central Committee, by special decree, approved the initiative of the Pagėgiai District Partkom to organise a Midsummer festival on Rambynas Hill. After this event, at which, it is said, about 30,000 people gathered, was successful, the next year plans were made to celebrate Midsummer throughout Lithuania.<sup>24</sup> The Midsummer festival on Rambynas Hill attained a special scale in 1960 with the commemoration of the twenty year anniversary of the founding of the Lithuanian SSR. The propaganda publication, 'Traditions of a New Life' writes:

Old Rambynas was decorated in an especially beautiful manner in 1960. A sign with the words 'Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic – 20 years' was raised high above the hilltop. The main stage was awash in the silk of Soviet flags while a multitude of slogans and posters twinkled... The hymns of the Soviet Union and Soviet Lithuania resounded majestically... the cantata 'Klestėk tarybų Lietuva' ['Prosper, Soviet Lithuania'], the song 'Komunistų partijai šlovė' ['Glory to the Communist Party'], etc. rang out powerfully... Now that the working people in Lithuania are the masters of their own lives, Midsummer has become a truly popular mass festival.<sup>25</sup>

This festival was also solemnly celebrated in Kaunas, where the 'founder of Kaunas, the legendary Duke Kūnas, met with the "Soviet today" and handed a torch to a hero of socialist labour'.<sup>26</sup>

The fifth plenum of the CPL Central Committee, which was held in early 1963, again focused on atheistic work issues in the Soviet republic. Its decree states that 'Civil traditions and customs must everywhere push out religious rites and help to reduce the church's influence.' According to P. Pečiūra, the implementation of this decree greatly revived the promotion and organisation of new traditions. The Ministry of Culture's Scientific Method Office<sup>27</sup> prepared an espe-

22 TRINKŪNAS 2003. 147.

23 STREIKUS 2004. 92.

24 STREIKUS 2004. 95–96.

25 ČERNECKIS 1961. 24–26.

26 ČERNECKIS 1961. 27.

27 Lith. Kultūros ministerijos mokslinis metodinis kabinetas

cially large quantity of methodical material for the district cultural sections. This summarised almost all of the more important civil and family festivals, which had arisen in Soviet Lithuania.<sup>28</sup>

The next step in seeking to control festivals was the Folk Tradition Council<sup>29</sup>, which was founded in 1968 and had to 'guide traditions using a scientific basis'.<sup>30</sup> This aim was achieved in part but was unable to upstage the initiatives of the academic youth since the regional ethnocultural movement that arose in the 1960s was clearly not governed by communist structures.<sup>31</sup>

Midsummer was celebrated in a pagan manner under the name of the Rasa festival. In 1967, in an effort to avoid the attention of the Soviet authorities, the first festival was organised in Lithuania's old capital, Kernavė, by the Society of the Friends of India, which had been founded in Vilnius and included some of the Vilnius University philology professors and students.<sup>32</sup> The festival should in reality be connected with the Ramuva Club of Vilnius regional ethnographers,<sup>33</sup> which was founded only in 1969. Three festivals (in 1967, 1968, and 1969) were held semi-legally. In 1969 the supreme governing institutions banned the festival. In 1970 the Rasa festival participants in Kernavė had already begun to be chased away under the guise that the festival could not be held on the Reserve's grounds. In KGB documents, the Rasa festival at Kernavė began to be called a 'nationalistic rally' and the festival's organisation equatable to anti-Soviet activity.<sup>34</sup> But despite all of the obstacles, bans, and persecutions, the Rasa festival was celebrated in Kernavė and other Lithuanian cities. A location at the boundaries of several administrative districts was frequently chosen in organising the festival. It was also organised by Žygeiviai [Backpackers], a Lithuanian university tourist club.<sup>35</sup>

This festival has recently been evaluated diversely. According to Egidija Ramanauskaitė, the festival organised in Kernavė in 1967 was an eloquent expression of ethnic identity, which was perceived by its organisers as a symbol marking 'Lithuania's new existence'.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, in the opinion of Arūnas Streikus, the Soviet authorities tolerated the nurturing of some national traditions to a certain extent since this could somewhat improve their poor authority. At the same time they strove to clearly demarcate the sterilised national identity from the Christian traditions or even to contrast them.<sup>37</sup>

The celebration of Shrove spread in a similar manner. During 1957–1958 Shrove began to be revived. Several articles were ordered in the periodic press on this occasion. A joint session of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Leninist

28 PEČIŪRA 1974. 79–80.

29 Lith. *Respublikinė liaudies tradicijų taryba*

30 PEČIŪRA 1974. 81–82.

31 TRINKŪNAS 2003. 147.

32 TRINKŪNAS 2003. 139.

33 Lith. *Vilniaus kraštotyrininkų Ramuvos klubas*

34 VAIŠKŪNAS 2007.

35 ŠIDIŠKIS 2008. 58.

36 RAMANAUSKAITĖ 2004. 55–56.

37 STREIKUS 2002. 258.

Young Communist League (Komsomol) and the House of Folk Creation<sup>38</sup> agreed to modernise and unify the Shrove festival. It was decided to celebrate it in early March (during Lent) under the name 'Winter festival', 'Winter sports festival', or 'Art festival', mask sketches were ordered, and a song was composed. According to ethnologist Juozas Kudirka, almost every part of them was scripted: the horse races, the Russian fairy tale characters (Old Man Frost, Snowflake), the shish kebabs, and the special attention given collective farm chairmen and other local political figures.<sup>39</sup> A satirical priest and even a group of small Africans as a symbol of international friendship were also included in the procession.<sup>40</sup> Thus, in the words of V. Černeckis, a socialist content was created for the customs at the Winter Festival.<sup>41</sup>

In 1977 the Open Air Museum of Lithuania in Rumšiškės began to promote and support the festival to drive out winter. In 1980 a fixed festival date, the last Saturday of February, was set (causing the festival to usually be celebrated during Lent). The festival used to attract thousands of spectators and tens of folklore ensembles. Although the festival at Rumšiškės levelled the festival's regional differences, nevertheless, according to J. Kudirka, the festival encouraged people to see customs as something valuable.<sup>42</sup>

Celebrating the festival during Lent provided a good opportunity to fight religiousness, the festive mood and the dances allowing religious youth to break away from the religious restrictions. But Midsummer and Shrove did not become equally popular.

In 1982, ethnologist Pranė Dundulienė stated that the festival to drive out winter, which replaced Shrove, attained a wide popularity, e.g. an event organised by ordinary secondary school teachers drawing not only city residents but also villagers, and sometimes even people from further away. On the other hand 'Midsummer has so far not become a popular mass festival as it is celebrated at only some places in Lithuania'.<sup>43</sup>

## Festivals at the Turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

After the restoration of an independent Lithuania, Shrove was organised in the majority of the cases in accordance with the Soviet scripts and became a general Lithuanian festival. Only in some remote corners of Samogitia did the Shrove costume parade remain a living tradition.<sup>44</sup> The tradition has become institutionalised in the rest of Lithuania where, in many cases, the members of a local folklore

38 Lith. *Respublikiniai liaudies kūrybos namai*

39 KUDIRKA 1992. 4.

40 SKRODENIS 2010. 37.

41 ČERNECKIS 1961. 11.

42 KUDIRKA 1992. 4.

43 DUNDULIENĖ 1982. 335–336.

44 MARCINKEVIČIENĖ 2001. 690; OLECHNOVIČIENĖ 2008. 121.



society, the employees of a regional cultural institution, or a school organises the costume parade. The social demographic changes that occurred in the society in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century destroyed the festival's regional identity that existed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and gave Shrove the features of a unified national festival.<sup>45</sup> Traditionally the largest celebrations of Shrove occur at the Open Air Museum of Lithuania in Rumšiškės and Žemaitija National Park in Plateliai. In Rumšiškės this festival is organised on Sundays (in 2013 on Saturday), allowing people to celebrate Shrove more than once (on Tuesday and on Saturday or Sunday) at different places. Shrove is celebrated on Tuesday and is often called a 'semi-holiday' or even a 'non-holiday'.<sup>46</sup> In a similar manner Midsummer was moved to the weekend, but after this festival was declared a non-work day, there was no longer any need for this.

During Sąjūdis and first years of independence, the Midsummer festival spread throughout Lithuania. During the first years of independence, according to the assertion of cultural worker Danutė Skersytė, there was a tendency to distinguish two festivals: Rasa and Midsummer. Rasa was celebrated by those into (pagan – Ž.Š.) customs, Midsummer by those wanting to gather together, light a bonfire, and have a good time.<sup>47</sup> Recently Midsummer has been celebrated in accordance with both 'pagan' (Rasa, Kupolė) and 'Christian' (Joninė) traditions, usually on the basis of mixed scripts and the use of several names (Joninė, Rasa, Kupolė) and a bonfire to symbolise it. It was long sought to have Midsummer declared a non-working day, but in vain until influential breweries finally joined the fight, a summer festival being very useful for their commercial goals. According to A. Vaitkevičius, elements of consumer or popular culture: e.g. crafts fairs, vendor stands, are always found in the structure of a modern mass urban festival. A popular music concert is usually organised to attract young people.<sup>48</sup>

Unlike in the Soviet era, this festival is celebrated in all of the cities and even in the bigger villages. In North Lithuania the custom of individual bonfires for a group of young people, a family, or neighbours still survives.<sup>49</sup> In bigger communities it is organized by cultural or educational workers or local government representatives. Midsummer is also celebrated at Kernavė. After an interval, it was also revived at Rambynas. For example, in 2006 in the Rambynas tradition, the Midsummer festival included choirs, folklore groups, and performances and the organisers encouraged the celebrants to come fully or partially dressed in folk costumes.

The question arises as to what is the political mission of these festivals. After the restoration of independence, Lithuanians no longer had the need to fight against an occupying power or religion or to promote atheism or a Communist society. Intensive globalisation, integration into the European Union, and

45 VAITKEVIČIUS 2010. 27–29.

46 ŠAKNYS 2009. 72; ŠAKNYS 2012. 89.

47 SKERSYTĖ 1991. 4–5.

48 VAITKEVIČIUS 2009. 37.

49 ŠAKNYS 2007. 84.



massive emigration have prompted support for ethnic consciousness. In 2002 a state document for a long-term development strategy envisaged the threat that 'the ethnic culture's living tradition is increasingly being negatively impacted by the phenomena of accelerating globalisation and the declining ability of tradition to compete with commercial mass culture. The basis for the spread of a living tradition, i.e. a national consciousness, becomes steadily weaker in the absence of the necessary means of teaching the ethnic culture, nurturing its values, and preserving the national consciousness' (Valstybės ilgalaikės ...).

On 21 September 1999 Lithuania enacted the Law on the Principles of State Protection of Ethnic Culture, which states that the state shall encourage and support the revival and popularisation of seasonal festivals, crafts, sports, games, and other ethnic culture related activities. (Etninės kultūros valstybinės...). The work of implementing the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which began in 2004, focused attention on customs. On 28 June 2010, the 2010–2014 state programme for the development of ethnic culture was approved. Its aim is to create preconditions for safeguarding ethnic cultural values. One objective is to create conditions for the spread of ethnic culture, the preservation of the living tradition, and its gradual spread in the regions, another to support the expression of Lithuanian ethnic culture in ethnic Lithuanian lands and in Lithuanian communities abroad (Etninės kultūros plėtros...). These demonstrate the aspiration of maintaining Lithuanian ethnic identity not only in Lithuania but also abroad. Seasonal festivals should also be useful for this, even though they have almost nothing in common with the living Lithuanian tradition either in today's Lithuania or beyond its borders.

## Festivals in the Emigrant Community

Jolanta Kuznecovienė, in analysing the expression of ethnic identity by Lithuanian emigrants in Ireland, the UK, Spain, and Norway, uses the concept of 'ethnic cultural space', which is connected with changes in the conception of a culture's deterritorialisation, location, and space, changes that have been caused by the globalisation processes. The code of social interaction, characteristic of the country of origin, and the symbols, which are used as the main sources for the creation and maintenance of the Lithuanian identity, are (re)constructed in space.<sup>50</sup> Festivals also have an important meaning in the formation of the deterritorialised cultural space. According to Neringa Liubinienė, among emigrants, general ethnic festivals perform a collective ritual function and help to preserve their identity and to strengthen or revive their connectedness to one country or another and the community, but they can also mark a difference from the society of the country of residence and emphasise the otherness of the immigrants, while also showing that

<sup>50</sup> KUZNECOVIENĖ 2012. 89–104.

the immigrants are far from the customs and traditions of their native land.<sup>51</sup> The Shrove festival marks a declaration of being Lithuanian. The Soviet-style Shrove festival began to spread among the Lithuanian population in Northeast Poland in the 1970s<sup>52</sup> and after 1990 in Southeast Latvia.<sup>53</sup> After Lithuania regained its independence in 1990 and especially after it joined the European Union, many of its inhabitants emigrated to economically stronger countries. This festival, which had spread during the Soviet occupation, began to spread rapidly in the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Spain, the US, etc. The geographical incidence of the Lithuanian Midsummer festival is similar.

Lithuanian festivals can be a uniting force in small communities. In 1986 a Lithuanian community was founded in Hungary. It has consistently included roughly 40 Lithuanian families, but draws Lithuanians living briefly or studying in Hungary, the Lithuanian embassy staff, and their families into its activities. As is shown on their website, the members' main aim is to organise the Lithuanians living in that country, help them to maintain ties with Lithuania, and popularise Lithuania's name, culture, and customs in Hungary. The Lithuanian Hungarians get together five to six times a year with the main aims of maintaining the ties amongst them, celebrating Lithuanian festivals together, sharing news about Lithuania, and disseminating information about Lithuania in Hungary. Their website shows that even a Lithuanian Ukrainian connected with Hungary only through marriage can take an interest in the festivals they celebrate:

Hi. I have been living in Ukraine's Transcarpatia or Zakarpattia Oblast for ten years now. It is a 350 km trip to Budapest. I married a Ukrainian woman of Hungarian origin and our younger daughter is seven and has Lithuanian citizenship. Please tell me when and where the Lithuanian Hungarian community is planning to meet and celebrate festivals. (Vengrijos lietuvų bendruomenė)

Judging from the reports of the Lithuanian Hungarian community, the celebration of Lithuanian Shrove and Midsummer occupies an important place. For example, in 2009 Shrove was celebrated in the courtyard of the Lithuanian embassy while the Midsummer festival held in the town of Kecskemét attracted not only Lithuanian Hungarians but also their Hungarian friends. The chairman of the Lithuanian Austrian community came with her husband and several other Lithuanian families living in Austria. The report shows that the festival on 27 June 2009 was celebrated in 'Lithuanian style':

The festival was conducted in true Lithuanian style: Jonė, a John namesake, was adorned with an oak wreath and the Lithuanians had a taste of nostalgic dishes: cold beetroot soup, rye bread, cheese, and *Baumkuchen* (tree

51 LIUBINIENĖ 2011. 155.

52 ŠAKNYS 2010. 163–165.

53 ŠAKNYS 2005. 139.

cake). After dark the men cooked shish kebabs over the bonfire while the women and children plaited wreaths of various coloured flowers. An open-air garden concert by a guest from Lithuania, Gediminas Storpīrštis, left them with pleasant memories. Later, the Lithuanians lit the candles on the wreaths and sang folksongs. (Vengrijos lietuvų bendruomenė... 2009 m. Ataskaita)

Without going further into a festival's authenticity, it is possible to state that a festival, which is celebrated at a slightly different time of the year but encompasses some traditional Lithuanian Midsummer elements, can be charming for even Lithuanians living abroad and people with ties of kinship to Lithuania and can become a short-term Lithuanian cultural space that is able to create long-term feelings of ethnic identity.

It is impossible to state unambiguously which festival, Shrove or Midsummer, is more important. Lithuanians living in Greece and the United States gave different answers to this question on a social site. Midsummer had greater significance in the US, while in the sparse Lithuanian community in Greece, Midsummer is a time when many Lithuanians are working in resort hotels and have no time for celebrating. Thus they elect to celebrate Shrove.

In analysing the internet pages, it can be seen that the main festival symbols, the Midsummer bonfire and costumed Shrove celebrants, are not always perceived as essential in the Lithuanian communities abroad (unlike in Lithuania itself). A minor festival symbol, e.g. a Shrove pancake or Midsummer beer and cheese are also enough to epitomise a Lithuanian festival abroad. The important thing is to be together in a Lithuanian atmosphere.

## Conclusions

For these conclusions I shall once again quote David Kertznar. In his words, ritual is important in all political systems and he points out the many ways ritual is employed in politics. The analysis of the two Lithuanian folk festivals (Shrove and Midsummer) shows that they can acquire a political reality and embody great power in performing various tasks: fighting for national revival or independence, fighting against Christianity, creating a new pagan religion, or forming an ethnic cultural space for emigrants. But each festival can embody different possibilities for acquiring this power depending on the time, the place, the festival's former content, and even historical memory.

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