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**WHO DEFINES WHOM? AND WHO ANSWERS THE CURSED
QUESTIONS?
A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY ISSUES IN PRESENT
DAY LITHUANIA.
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Abstract

The article dissects critically the most complex, intimate and deeply felt issues in contemporary Lithuanian identity. In the process, and working through a detailed analysis of the arguments presented by some of Lithuania's most influential and thoughtful voices, the author develops a sophisticated discussion of the place of the intellectual in the country today.

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WHO DEFINES WHOM? AND WHO ANSWERS THE CURSED QUESTIONS?

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY ISSUES IN PRESENT DAY

LITHUANIA.

by

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Who Are These Lithuanians? Are They Tolerant?

Who are Lithuanians? In the second half of the nineteenth century, it was not hard to answer this question. Lithuanians were not Poles, and, certainly, were not Russians. Yet this was far from a sufficient grounding for the newly found historical actor that claimed to be a legitimate heir to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a huge multilingual state whose territory stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

As Czesław Miłosz once wittily pointed out, modern Lithuania emerged out of philology and language. In fact, it could be asserted that a bunch of neo-romantic literati were instrumental in providing Lithuania with a new pattern for collective identity, self-comprehension, and historical narrative. In a way, Lithuania was rediscovered through moral and historical imaginations, by inventing traditions, by setting up a historical memory to forge a gallery of political and historical heroes, and by fuelling collective sentiment.

For instance, Vytautas Magnus, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, who symbolizes the

political power, might, and prestige of the medieval state of Lithuania, also comes as a reminder of Lithuanian religious tolerance. Vytautas Magnus invited Europe's Jews to Lithuania and granted them privileges for commerce and trade. In any case, the fact is that Vytautas Magnus joined the gallery of Lithuanian historical heroes as late as the second half of the nineteenth century – the hero was needed and, therefore, was forged in a typically nationalistic setting.

However, some liberal-minded Lithuanian humanists and public intellectuals tend to underline that it would be naïve now to expect to be able to build a resilient and viable identity on the grounds of celebrating the size of the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or its military successes and conquests. In Lithuanian popular culture, it is quite safe to assume that a passion for basketball is exactly what Lithuania is all about. Yet Lithuanian public intellectuals increasingly emphasize that collective Lithuanian identity would greatly benefit from the inclusion of great Lithuanian Jews into the intellectual and cultural histories of the country. In fact, many internationally eminent Jews lived in or were from Lithuania, among them the philosophers Emmanuel Lévinas and Aron Gurwitsch, the painters Chaïm Soutine (a close friend of Amedeo Modigliani in Paris) and Neemija Arbitblatas, the sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, the violinist Jascha Heifetz, and the art critic Bernard Berenson (one of the most sophisticated twentieth-century students of the Italian Renaissance).

Some historians recently went so far as to suggest that it makes much more sense to be identified in the West as someone from the country of Czesław Miłosz or Emmanuel Lévinas, rather than from the country that celebrates its pagan past and medieval heroes, rejoices in basketball, and searches for the geographical center of

Europe in the middle of nowhere.

It is obvious that tolerance is more than a fact of Lithuanian history – it is a myth and a significant part of modern Lithuanian identity. The Lithuanian intelligentsia cherishes and proudly underscores the tradition of religious toleration and authentic multiculturalism that dates back to Renaissance and Baroque Lithuania, once a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious state.

Although the analysis of online chats and numerous anonymous comments on the Holocaust, Jews, Gypsies (Roma), Russians, or gays, would certainly bring us to the conclusion that Lithuanians are an extremely xenophobic, antisemitic, and homophobic nation – which is a sociologically accurate and well substantiated statement, rather than merely a speculative assertion – when it comes to the concept and term ‘tolerance’, very few would refrain from praising up to the skies the supposedly time-honored tradition and political practice of toleration in Lithuania. In any case, it suffices to take a closer look at the public debates on tolerance in Lithuania to realize that most discussants obviously have something different in mind when they talk about the political and moral principle of tolerance as well as the practical issues surrounding toleration.

My experience as the host of a Lithuanian TV program for political and cultural debate, ‘*Be pykčio*’ [Without Anger], suggests that tolerance is frequently associated by people with civility and respect for an opponent’s opinion. The ability to form a bridge with conflicting opinions is widely regarded as a critically important trait of a tolerant statesman or public intellectual.

The hypothesis would be that Lithuania, as a divided nation on many points (as sociological polls indicate) where a large sector of society leans toward the former Soviet

Union, while members of the younger generation do not speak Russian anymore and are out of touch with the country's Soviet past, is simply tired of political clashes and scandals that tend to become commonplace in social life.¹ On the other hand, in a country where traditions of public debate and respectful, albeit politically charged, exchanges are quite weak, even a peaceful discussion that avoids personal attacks or ideological stigmas, signifies the highest degree of tolerance.

Intellectuals: roles and identities

What is the role of intellectuals in the nation- or community-building process? Some scholars of nationalism suggest that intellectuals invent traditions, work out interpretive frameworks for collective identity and self-comprehension, establish collective identities, forge political and moral vocabularies, and even shape their respective nations. At the same time, dissenting intellectuals may challenge their nations by offering an alternative vision or critique of their societies and cultures.²

In the early 1990s, some Lithuanian intellectuals were quite optimistic about their role in society. For instance, Ričardas Gavelis, a recently deceased Lithuanian writer, who might well be described as a caustic public intellectual and libertarian-minded critic of society

¹It is indeed telling that in a December 2004 sociological poll, 34% of respondents characterized 1990–2004 as the most unfortunate period in Lithuania's entire history. Only 30% reserved this honor for the Soviet period, and even less – 23% – for the period under tsarist Russia (1795–1915). Lithuania today has the highest suicide rate in the world – an alarming fact that sheds new light on the extent of social depression, alienation and despair in society. Moreover, growing emigration has deprived the country of many young and highly qualified people – nearly 300,000 have left Lithuania over the past ten years, settling in the USA, Great Britain, Ireland, and other western European states. For more on these data provided by the market analysis and research group 'Rait,' see <http://www.rait.lt/>.

² For more on the roles of intellectuals in the nation-building process, in inventing traditions, and in providing a blueprint for a viable social and moral order of society, viewing them in East-Central European perspective, see Leonidas Donskis, *The End of Ideology and Utopia: Moral Imagination and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000). A valuable contribution on intellectuals, liberal nationalism, tolerance, and identity politics in Central Europe is Stefan Auer, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Europe* London & New York: Routledge. 2004.

and culture, responding to the journal *Metmenys* 1993 questionnaire, wrote about the role of what he termed the free intellectual in the following way:

‘I nevertheless have some hope. It is precisely thanks to the fact that Lithuania dropped out of the general development [of Western culture] that we have managed to preserve a now almost extinct species – the free intellectual. Such creatures are virtually extinct in Europe, and even more so in America. There the intellectual is almost always part of some kind of academic circle. And that means that he unavoidably becomes a member of the state hierarchy, even if he teaches at a private university. Whether they like it or not, they must accommodate the rules of the academic career, of the narrow world of academia, of a narrow context of specialized reference. The era of the free intellectual – of the kind that Russell and Sartre were – has long passed in the world.... In Lithuania, for now, the true intellectual is free whether he wants it or not, because there is basically no influential academic world. For that reason, individual intellectuals have a greater influence on overall cultural development than anywhere else.... I would consider this to be a positive thing. In times of change and confusion free intellectuals are more useful than inflexible academic structures. Individuals are more flexible, more inclined to take risks, are not afraid to lose their academic positions or authority. It is my hope that free intellectuals will be the ones to launch the process of synchronizing Lithuanian and world culture.’³

Yet quite different positions were also expressed regarding the social role of the intellectual. Donatas Sauka, a conservative literary scholar, wrote, as early as 1995, that Lithuanian intellectuals had forgotten their mission to preserve cultural traditions and to defend the nation, offering instead the exhausted paradigm of building and defending the

³ Ričardis Gavelis, ‘Kultūrinė situacija: Vakarai ir Lietuva: I’ [The Cultural Situation: the West and Lithuania: I], *Metmenys* [Patterns] 64 (1993), pp. 80–81.

nation against those who tarnished its image and international reputation. Small wonder, then, that Sauka also warned that ‘the liberals of the younger generation and their older colleagues among émigrés’ threatened the injured nation. Who Sauka had in mind as ‘the liberals of the younger generation’ was the author of these remarks, while ‘their older colleagues among émigrés’ was my mentor and friend Vytautas Kavolis (1930–1996), an eminent émigré sociologist who authored internationally acclaimed books on the sociology of culture, the sociology of fine arts, and civilization theory, and who also penned a number of critical studies and essays on Lithuanian politics and culture.⁴

Sauka put it thus:

‘Who, then, defends society’s conservative opinions – who speaks in the name of the injured nation, who expresses its historical insults, who mythologizes its rural moral reputation? Who, really? What is the point of trying out the sharpness of one’s arrows when attacking a monster created by one’s own imagination; but please give us a true picture of its traits, give us its first and last names! The liberals of the younger generation and their older colleagues among émigrés, who often hold condemnatory trials, do not have a concrete target which could embody the essence of such an ideology. And the target of their polemic is not too fresh – but faded ideas and moral directives, statements by the current leaders of the nation that were expressed during the euphoria of the Rebirth period.’⁵

Here we have two opposing concepts of intellectuals – whereas Gavelis suggests a concept of which depicts intellectuals as critics of the establishment, society and culture, Sauka takes them as defenders of the nation’s pride and prejudice. What really lurks

⁴ For more on Vytautas Kavolis, his ideas, views, and works, see Leonidas Donskis, *Identity and Freedom: Mapping Nationalism and Social Criticism in Twentieth-Century Lithuania*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002.

⁵ Donatas Sauka, ‘Ideologija, kultūra ir absurdo karuselė’ [Ideology, Culture, and the Carousel of Absurdity], *Metai* [The Years] 10 (1995), p. 123.

behind the critique of society and culture offered by intellectuals – loyalty or dissent? Faithfulness or betrayal?

Last but not least, what is the real *raison d'être* of modern intellectuals? Personification of conscience? Dedication to the nation and its historical injuries and moral traumas? Advocacy of individual reason and conscience? Social and cultural criticism? The politics of loyalty or the politics of dissent? Work for the sake of a sustainable society? The preservation of historical memory? The defense of the nation from the attacks of liberals? Struggle against cosmopolitanism?

The essence of the populist struggle against cosmopolitanism is perfectly expressed by Romualdas Ozolas, a nationalist known for his skepticism toward the EU and especially Lithuania's membership of it: 'I am a nationalist. Nationalism is the sole source of my strength. Each, according to the level of his stupidity, is free to decide what that means.' The following maxim is a unique pearl of nationalistic wisdom: 'The cosmopolitan cannot be moral. The cosmopolitan is a-subjective; for that reason, he is incapable of imperative self-questioning.'⁶

The nature of this kind of ghost-chasing is very well expressed in an introductory passage published in an issue of the journal of cultural resistance *[laisvę]* [To Freedom]:

'A spiritual gap is growing between the sincere Lithuanian intellectual, for whom Lithuanian-ness, Lithuanian culture and the nation's interests are of the first order, and that new creature – probably a product of the Soviet period – the super-cultural-activist-intellectual, who, supposedly in the name of Western culture, offers obscene trash to television programs, books and theater festivals of a questionable nature. Unfortunately, together with these self-named intellectuals

⁶ Romualdas Ozolas, 'Įžvalgos: filosofo užrašai' [Insights: A Philosopher's Diary], *Varpai* [The Bells], 10 (1996), p. 211.

comes another threat to the Lithuanian nation – cosmopolitanism.⁷

Interestingly enough, one thing that has long been taken for granted in Lithuania – the idea that the real intellectual is a dedicated educator, builder, and shaper of the nation, rather than public thinker or social and cultural critic – underwent considerable change and was called into question over the past ten years. If very few have critically questioned the idea that the intellectual is or at least ought to be instrumental in the nation-building process, things started changing around 1995 when mainstream Lithuanian nationalism was challenged by a new approach, which brought about the concept of civil society instead of the people or the nation. This is to say, some Lithuanian intellectuals began increasingly associating themselves with civil society, the community-building process, and the public domain. The tendency was extremely timely and important, given the deterioration of social links and networks, anomie, and the social atomization of Lithuanian society. The Lithuanian philosopher Arvydas Šliogeris anticipated and aptly described this shift, calling into question Gavelis's enthusiasm for individual intellectuals, and placing more emphasis on community-building instead of personal emancipation. Despite some undertones of *Kulturpessimismus*, that is, a sort of extremely harsh and exaggerated critique of Lithuanian public life, Šliogeris's standpoint sheds new light on the critical importance of public debate for society under transition. According to Šliogeris:

‘Several years of independence have proven our inability to *rationaly* order our present, our lack of common sense, and even any sense. What can that pitiful of active and thinking people – still capable of seeing the world clearly, simply, with

⁷ *Į laisvę* [To Freedom], No. 121 (158) (September 1995), p. 2.

a sober and cold eye – accomplish? Some such individuals exist, but they are powerless, because the parade is being led by the *mobile vulgus* and its idols. Is there any hope? Yes, there is, but that hope is hazy and cannot be transformed into a technical project, because in its deepest essence it is non-technical, anti-technical. My hope is all tied to the spontaneous emergence of small communities in which organic future forms of communal existence can begin to grow. However, these new forms of community can only develop somewhere beyond the boundaries of existing “organized” forms of (political, religious, economic, educational) life. The instigators of these communities must say a determined *No* to all, absolutely all, currently dominating structures of public and private life, because those structures are in fact dead and continue to exist only from habit. Democracy, freedom, prosperity, spirituality, truth, conscience, Christianity, culture, tradition – all of this has turned into ideological chatter and self-deception. If “values” and forms of existence remain as they are, it is no longer possible to breath life back into these things. Why do I speak about the creation of new types of communities? For, after all, here remains the danger that such a newly created community will be nothing but a herd of slaves and schizophrenics ruled by paranoid and cynical Rasputins. There are already more than enough such sects in today’s world. The formation of authentic communities involves enormous risk. But there is no other option, because individuals are ultimately helpless.’⁸

It is widely and rightly assumed that loyalty and betrayal are among the key concepts of the ethic of nationalism. The marriage of state and culture, which seems the essence of the congruence between a political power structure and collective identity, usually offers a simple explanation of loyalty and dissent. Within such an interpretative framework of nationalism, loyalty is seen as a kind of once-and-for-all commitment of

⁸ Arvydas Šliogeris, *Konservatoriaus išpažintys: 1988–1994 metų tekstai* [The Conservative’s Confessions: Texts of the Years of 1988–1994] Vilnius: Pradai [The Beginnings]. 1995. pp. 22–23.

the individual to his or her nation and its historical-cultural substance, whereas betrayal is identified as a failure to commit him- or herself to a common cause or as a diversion from the object of political loyalty and cultural/linguistic fidelity. However, yawning gaps exist between different patterns of nationalism.

For conservative or radical nationalists, even the social and cultural critique of one's people and state can be regarded as nothing more and nothing less than treason, whilst for their liberal counterparts it is precisely what constitutes political awareness, civic virtue, and a conscious dedication to the people, culture, and state. Upon closer inspection, it appears that the concepts of loyalty, dissent, and betrayal can be instrumental in mapping the liberal and democratic facet of nationalism.

Loyalty, dissent, and betrayal are political and moral categories. It is impossible to analyze them without touching upon crucial issues of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as political culture, liberal democracy, poverty, hatred, populism, manipulative exchanges and deliberate political manipulations, social criticism, and political commitment. The analysis of the aforementioned phenomena may reveal what it means to live in a changing society where all these things increasingly tend to become the nexus of social and political existence. History, sociocultural dynamics, and the dialectic of identities can be properly understood only where the acceleration of the speed of change reaches its climax, and where social change becomes faster than history.

Choosing between Juozas Girnius and Czesław Miłosz

The Lithuanian philosopher Juozas Girnius (1915–1994) may well be regarded as the founding father of conservative Lithuanian nationalism, if not the patron saint of

Lithuanian conservatism. Having defended his Ph.D. in Montreal, Canada, and spent much of his life in the U. S., Girnius remained focused on Lithuanian life and culture in exile urging émigrés to do their utmost to preserve Lithuanian-ness which he perceived in terms of an historically formed and linguistically sustained Lithuanian identity. A cult figure among conservative émigrés and a cultural hero for the Roman Catholic intelligentsia in Lithuania, Girnius had long represented (and, in a way, continues to do so) a mainstream version of Lithuanian nationalism, identity politics, and the understanding of modern Lithuanian history.⁹

Girnius's fundamental concept, which provides the basis for his work, *Tauta ir tautinė ištikimybė* [The Nation and National Faithfulness], and is also central to his pivotal questions in ethics and the philosophy of history, is faithfulness. In essence, this means loyalty, even though it covers some socially and morally intimate nuances of meaning, which we would not find in a judicially cold and clear political definition of loyalty.

But how to separate loyalty to one's country and nation from loyalty to more universal values – religious and moral ones first and foremost? How not to forget that, as Tomas Venclova, an eminent Lithuanian émigré poet and scholar who teaches literature at Yale, has observed, for Christians it is proper to leave the capital letter only for God, but for liberals – to Conscience, rather than writing Nation with a capital letter?¹⁰ How to

⁹ For more on Juozas Girnius, his role in modern Lithuanian culture, his controversial wartime writings, and his ideological debates with other émigré thinkers and writers, see Leonidas Donskis, *Loyalty, Dissent, and Betrayal: Modern Lithuania and East-Central European Moral Imagination*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi. 2005.

¹⁰ See: Tomas Venclova, *Vilties formos: eseistika ir publicistika* [Forms of Hope: Essays and Reviews]. Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla [Lithuanian Writers Union Press]. 1991. pp. 250–251.

separate faithfulness to our nation from faithfulness to a particular individual (without regard for his or her nationality, or faith), and, simply, to humaneness?

It is precisely these questions that Antanas Maceina (1908–1987), another noted Lithuanian philosopher in exile, and a cult figure for cultural conservatives, reminds Girnius of in his letter. Discussing Girnius's book, *The Nation and National Faithfulness*, he emphasizes:

‘However, this work is also characteristic of Girnius as a thinker, since it reveals very clear characteristics of his thought: suffering as a motive for philosophizing; passion as a motor for enunciation and inclination toward ethics; by the same token, however, the aforementioned danger of illuminating relative values in an absolute light. Two thirds of this book are of a moral nature – devoted to national faithfulness, fusing it together with human faithfulness. However, it is namely at this point that the question arises: *What is a measure to what – human faithfulness to the national or national faithfulness to the human?* It seems that it is possible to remain faithful nationality-wise, without being faithful to the human. However, what value does this nationality-faithfulness have without a human faithfulness? On what side should our resolution stand in case of a conflict between national and human values? In the state of exile such conflict is quite frequent. What does the origin of human primacy look like in the light of this national faithfulness? These are the questions that inevitably rise while reading Girnius's work and reflecting upon his passionate warning: “Our nation, is among all other nations, the only one with which we are contingent by fate so inseparably that faithfulness to it is faithfulness to ourselves, and its abandonment is a betrayal of ourselves.”¹¹

¹¹ Antanas Maceina, ‘Laiškas *Aidai* redaktoriui Juozui Girniui (50-ties metų amžiaus sukakties proga)’ [A Letter to the Editor of *Aidai*, Juozas Girnius (On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary)], *Aidai* [Echoes], 10 (1965), p. 448.

Of course, it is not hard to understand the brooding anxiety in this work by Girnius. The loss of nationality and the uprooting of the human being is always a dramatic process, albeit it can be a quiet one that is not always perceived and reflected on by those who are being uprooted. It erases a part of human identity and also the possibility of self-realization. On the other hand, as a Lithuanian, I am also connected to one global community, in its special way concentrating and experiencing the whole world and its drama – after all, a nation, as Girnius insightfully noted, is such a global community. Nevertheless, the loss of each little island or monad of identity when one's nation faces danger and captivity becomes a dramatic and painful process.

Perhaps I would very much like to be British, Japanese, Chinese, or Jewish, but the road to these identities is an insurmountably difficult one – an illusion remains that language, faith or social ritual will open the gates, but in reality a part of our identity is inherited, and a part is acquired during early socialization and participation in social ritual. Thus, our attempts to imitate or improvise other identities may deserve a curious glance or some derisive remarks, but no more than that.

Those who have lived in foreign countries know very well how comic all the talk is about so-called sociocultural symmetry between life in our society and culture, and a foreign environment, which is purportedly guaranteed by contemporary transnationalism, thanks to the English language, the market, liberal democracy, and equal opportunities. No matter the degree of success of a single individual's assimilation and professional career in a foreign country, such talk is naïve and resembles simple self-deception. Within the sphere of our culture and the cultivation of our identity, there have never been and there are no absolutely open societies. As Zygmunt Bauman has reminded us, in

modern society there exists, instead, a balance or an imbalance of heterophilia and heterophobia, though an absolute majority of society's members dream quietly about a community of similitude, for the sake of safety, where they would be surrounded by those similar to them, and where the necessity for delving into the lives of those who look and think differently would disappear.

This was well understood not only by Girnius, but by Maceina too, who in one of his later books, *Asmuo ir istorija* (The Individual and History), had developed themes very similar to Girnius's: the birth of philosophy not out of wonder, but from suffering and moral dilemmas – personal and national, the preservation of personal identity in history. In doing so, he treated history itself as an ongoing loss of consciousness, identity and cultural layers, as well as the attempt to resist this.¹² Not only Girnius, but Maceina himself can be compared to a philosopher who takes on Jeremiah's mission in order to be able to remind his nation of the need for faithfulness to its uniqueness, history, and faith – this is for consciousness and the structure of self-perception that we call a nation. (Maceina had compared Girnius with this Jewish prophet, who in his letter to the Jews, then exiled and in captivity in Babylon, reminds them not to worship foreign gods, and to remain faithful to themselves.)

But at this point a complex question opens up. Modern identity is inevitably not only inherited, but more frequently consciously and freely constructed. And in this there is no sin. Not because this would be a sort of frivolous and irresponsible attitude toward one's collective identity, culture, or surroundings, but only because in our world there are no more road signs. As Bauman has observed, we all inevitably are becoming more or

¹² For more on this issue, see: Antanas Maceina, *Asmuo ir istorija* [The Individual and History] Chicago, Ill.: Ateitis [The Future]. 1981.

less responsible for our identity, which, in our era, has gone from being an inheritable and learnable phenomenon to becoming a matter of choice and individual responsibility, and even an achievement to be proud of. The modern project did not liberate us from identity – on the contrary, it is becoming even more important and relevant than it was before. But the modern project, unfortunately, empowers us, or perhaps condemns us, to take care of it ourselves, not infrequently in a dramatic manner. As Zygmunt Bauman points out,

‘The modern project promised to free the individual from inherited identity. Yet it did not take a stand against identity as such, against having identity, against having a solid, resilient and immutable identity. It only transformed the identity from a matter of ascription into one of achievement, thus making it an individual task and the individual’s responsibility.’¹³

The author of this essay might well raise one of the cursed questions of modernity over and over again – namely, who am I? In fact, who is the son of a Holocaust survivor whose father was a Jew, yet whose mother happens to be half-Jewish and half-Polish? According to Israeli laws, this writer would not be identified as a Jew – instead, he would pass for a Lithuanian with some Jewish connection. At the same time, the vast majority of Lithuanians regard me as a Jew, although I speak Lithuanian as my native language and even was educated as philologist majoring in the Lithuanian language and literature (only then I turned to study of philosophy). Suffice it to say that I chose to be a Jew in the moral sense – I am Lithuanian, yet I find myself Jewish whenever and wherever I encounter antisemitism, no matter in what guise it walks.

¹³ See Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Making and Unmaking of Strangers,’ in Sandro Fridlizius and Abby Peterson, eds., *Stranger or Guest? Racism and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe.* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International. 1996. p. 62.

As a half-breed, I realize better than anybody else that established identities tend to be empty or tend to fall apart as a house of cards when confronted by what I would describe as being on the boundary of two or even several cultures and patterns of self-comprehension. Nobody will ever be able to define me, and only I, myself, can assume responsibility for my identity and handle it – this is precisely where the essence of my personal autonomy, freedom, vulnerability, and curse, if you will, lies. Here Girnius remains strict and sanctimonious:

‘No matter how denationalization proceeds, it is always marked by the signs of *guilt* and *shame*. Just as each fault is shameful, so is denationalization. It is no coincidence that denationalization starts with the ending of relationships, by closing off ones who are close, in other words, it starts with a sort of hiding that is typical of shame. *There is no such a thing as honorable denationalization*. We can well see it in those who have been denationalized first. While the noblest idealists enter the battles of freedom, the pioneers of denationalization are the feeble ones.... Denationalization does not require spiritual greatness. On the contrary, the more spiritually feeble is a man, the more inclined he is to become denationalized. For one, there is nothing sacred for him that is not beneficial. Second, it seems to him that denationalization by identifying with “everyone,” with his “surroundings,” offers the seeming ability to hide his inner feebleness. Denationalization does not demand anything. But resistance to the factors underlying denationalization requires true spiritual and moral greatness. *Anyone can become denationalized. But he, who is of strong spirit, can resist becoming denationalized.*’¹⁴

Girnius’s *The Nation and National Faithfulness* is a profound and multidimensional work that resists being reduced to several aspects. It has some deep

¹⁴ Juozas Girnius, *Tauta ir tautinė ištikimybė* [The Nation and National Faithfulness]. Chicago, Ill.: Į Laisvę fondas lietuviškai kultūrai ugdyti. Leidinys Vol. 2 [The Foundation to Support Lithuanian Culture, ‘To Freedom’ Vol. 2]. 1961. pp. 154–155.

insights into the structure of the linking dialogue between the individual and his/her community, sociability, the relationship between a society and a community, the inseparability of thought and action in social life, the insufficiency of a single individual and development of his/her powers of association – all of it not only resounds in the thoughts of thinkers of dialogue-based personalism (such as those of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Lévinas), but is still relevant for the atomized, fragmented, and anonymous society of contemporary Lithuania.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there remain in it some questions worthy of serious debate. *The Nation and National Faithfulness*, the work that has become a handbook of exile, does not answer those questions.

Is assimilation into another society, which involves acquiring an accent in due course, and possibly even losing a native language, such a tragedy and a sin if a human being, despite it all, preserves deep links with the homeland, remains interested in its culture and is empathetically open in his/her soul and mind to the country's contemporary reality, and even supports it politically and morally?

In what way is a human being better when he or she mechanically learns his/her parents' language, though is formed by another culture: and in his or her thoughts and lifestyle remains fundamentally foreign to the country and culture of his or her parents?

Is not more important to preserve one's native language and national identity, at the same time participating in the life and culture of the country in which we are living?

Can it really be that an ascetic cultivation of national community values that completely ignore the country in which one lives is the best way to preserve one's culture, or one's intellectual, critical, and creative strength?

¹⁵ Ibid p. 17–25.

Is active participation in international academic culture in any way sinful? Can it be sinful to enter the intellectual territory of the largest European languages that opens up a true dialogue as well as the possibility for an understanding of one's self and culture?

On the other hand, should we consider the greatest value to be the preservation of one's native language even in the case when the person using the language provokes feelings of shame in us, as representatives of the same language and culture, due to his/her views and rhetoric? If this person has committed a crime against humanity and, in this way, demeaned his/her nation as a collective individual, as a historical actor, and, to use Johan Gottfried von Herder's and Peter Chaadayev's concept, a moral entity?

Why should a human being who has preserved his or her Lithuanian language, but rejected the values of Western civilization and chosen modern barbarity, be in any way more valuable than the one who does not speak the native language of the parents and the grandparents, but is intensively seeking a link between Lithuanian and other modern forms of sensitivity and his/her inner self and the world? Should we feel betrayed and ashamed because Alphonso Lingis, an American philosopher of Lithuanian descent, does not write in Lithuanian?

Was Czesław Miłosz any less important to us because he did not speak and write in Lithuanian? Unfortunately, these are not rhetorical questions. If we hold intellectual and moral sensitivity as being less important than knowing the native language for the basis of what a Lithuanian is, then we will never be able to return Miłosz, Lingis, or the Litvaks to our culture.

National faithfulness can find expression not only by an unconditional loyalty to our community and a defense of its historic and contemporary reputation, but also via

dissent from the dominant tendencies in our society and culture, which contradict or even reject universally accepted moral norms, codes of behavior, manners of expression, and even entire trajectories of consciousness. Faithfulness to humanism or to any other moral culture that defends human dignity, respect for human life, and the principle of the incomparable value of an individual and his or her culture, in the end, also means moral faithfulness to our nation, community, and culture.

Dissent from the deformations of one's culture, which today are felt by others but which tomorrow we will inevitably experience ourselves or will be experienced by other generations, just as vociferous protest against one's country's amoral politics, is a higher form of faithfulness to one's country. In that it connects the moral commitment to humankind with a trust in our society and culture, which is held as being able to maintain universally humane norms.

Otherwise, the xenophobes, who rail against Jews, Poles, or Russians, and cynics, who apply double standards to their 'own kind' as opposed to their ideological opponents or minorities, who are ready at any moment to betray their state or to strive for power and prestige at the expense of their society's civic solidarity or their country's wellbeing and international reputation (what we have been witnessing in today's Lithuania), may appear to be somehow more true 'homeland types,' than those Jews, Poles, or Russians, who are loyal to Lithuania and are, to the depths of their souls, attached to the landscape and mainstream culture of Lithuania.

Just as the unconditional defense of one's self and one's people from criticism of foreigners can seem to us nobler than criticism of our society and culture, disagreeing with what is considered to be a threat to our own moral character and our person,

regardless of what kind(s) of mask(s) of devotion to Lithuania camouflage those deformations. It is precisely from this perspective that Girnius today strikes us as especially conservative and out of date.

Contemporary society's human identity is multidimensional and pierces at least several layers of cultural and social experience. It is not for nothing that Vytautas Kavolis wrote so much about the postmodern identity (but by no means did he hold postmodernism to be identical with anonymous fashions, relativistic codes of moral culture, new cultural taboos, cult representatives and movements—instead, he treated postmodernism first of all as an attempt to bridge what was cleaved off by modernity, joining modernism and antimodernism in our consciousness and culture).

Kavolis understood the postmodern identity as a link of multidimensional layers that inter-communicated, and perhaps even as an intensive polylogue among them – as a Czesław Miłosz-type devotion to one's culture, but, at the same time, preserving empathy and open-mindedness to other societies and cultures.¹⁶

For Lithuania in the twenty-first century, Miłosz's model of identity will truly be important, not Girnius's.

¹⁶ For more on this, see: Vytautas Kavolis, 'Nationalism, Modernization, and the Polylogue of Civilizations,' *Comparative Civilizations Review* 25 (1991) p. 136.

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