

Social Anthropology in Lithuania: Challenges, Resilience, and Particularity of the Discipline

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Abstract. The discipline of sociocultural anthropology has particular connotations in Central and Eastern Europe. German scholarly contributions played a major role in setting the academic agendas for its development in this European region. Herder's "recognition of the unique spirit of each people, conceived of as a separate organism, developing according to its own specific trajectory" made a synonym of the terms *nation* and *folk* (Hann 2007) and laid the ground for 'studying peoples', first of all in Germany, defined differently, as just peoples (*Völkerkunde*) and as those peoples who do belong to a nation as folk (*Volkskunde*). Such a division had a lasting effect on scholarship in Central and Eastern Europe during the era of nationalist mobilization, which followed the collapse of the region's empires in the nineteenth century and the Soviet bloc at the end of twentieth century.

The aim of this paper is to try to unpack the influence of the dominant discourses and national identity politics on the research and teaching strategies of the discipline of anthropology in Lithuania. It is a participant informed reflection on the development and professional practicing (by teaching and doing research) of this discipline in the course of the ongoing social and institutional changes in the country during the last three decades.

Keywords: discipline of sociocultural anthropology, Lithuania, Baltic States, Vytautas Magnus University, identity politics, Vilnius University.

Introduction

The post-communist change of the Baltic States reflected in the re-establishment of both the old and the new academic disciplines, such as sociocultural anthropology, which started to appear immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall and got on its way in the early 2000s.

I argue that sociocultural anthropology was almost unknown in the Soviet times when the niche of this people-studying discipline was occupied (at least in Lithuania) by physical or biological anthropology which is still represented in the public discourse as 'the proper' anthropology. Also, the field was occupied by the Soviet discipline called *etnografiya*.

Thus, social and cultural anthropology ‘arrived’ exactly during the time of change – in the early 1990s – as a novelty, and it was a rather political novelty which challenged ethnic nationalism and resisted methodological nationalism. Since the period of the ‘spring of nations’ at the end of the nineteenth century, and during the Singing Revolution of 1989–1990 Lithuanians as well as citizens of other countries in Central Eastern Europe were busy with the identity politics. The discipline of ethnology, understood in the Central-Eastern European sense as *Volkskunde*, or, in local terms, *tautotyra* (in the 1920s–1940s) and *etnokultūra* (since the late 1980s) fitted well with the public interest in creating a repository of national culture with material and symbolic goods that provided a semiotic ontology of the nation as a socio-political entity with its own history (Verdery 2007), or at least the folk cultural heritage reflecting historical political events and systems. In Lithuania, this ‘home-brewed’ ethnology is very different from the contemporary Anglo-Saxon or French meaning of the term. In Lithuania ethnology was serving the building of a national identity politics twice – once during the first Lithuanian independence period in the 1920s and 1930s, and secondly in the 1990s.

What was the development of this national ethnological discipline that occurred before the discipline of sociocultural anthropology ‘arrived’?

Tautotyra (National Ethnology) of the 1920–1930s

In Ernest Gellner’s terms, nationalism in Central Eastern Europe began in the nineteenth century with ‘cultural engineering’ and as a ‘salvage operation’, and the role of folklorists and ethnographers was instrumental, as he wrote:

“The interest of folklorists and ethnographers lay in the description, collection, study, preservation, and often exaltation of their national (peasant) cultures. This holds true particularly for the countries of the ‘third time zone’ of Europe, [where] nationalism began with ethnography, half descriptive, half **normative**, a kind of **salvage operation and cultural engineering** combined” (Gellner 1996, 115–6; emphasis mine)

Such a ‘salvage operation’ and cultural ‘engineering’ has been attributed to the nineteenth century’s ‘spring of nations’ period, but, in the case of Lithuania, it was also used in the 1918–1940 period, during the years of the first Lithuanian Republic, to build a ‘normative’ image of the traditional Lithuanian culture and heritage. It went through the shaping of *tautotyra* (the Lithuanian language

substitute for *Volkskunde*), which was predominantly descriptivist, and which aimed at documenting the ‘local/regional culture’ and using the cultural-historical paradigm in the analysis of the data.

Jonas Balys, the most prominent Lithuanian *Volkskunde* specialist of the period and later, after WWII, became a distinguished scholar of the Lithuanian diaspora in the U.S. He made a major step in developing *tautotyra* at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, then the capital of Lithuania. He was the founder of the Study Program and the Department of *Etnika* (*Etnikos katedra*) in 1934. By explaining the term *etnika*, he incorporated both German terms – *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde* – in the Study Program. He attempted to invent Lithuanian substitutes for the naming of this double disciplinarity:

“The very name [etnika] already shows that it is a science about the peoples (*tautamokslis*), – the part of *etnika* that studies ourselves and our closest neighbors is *tautotyra*. *Tautotyra* aspires to provide an accurate picture of the life of the European peoples.” (Balys 1934, 16)

He thought that the purpose of this double-headed scientific and humanistic program was “to understand the external and internal essence of every nation as inherited from its historical development...” (ibid.).

Balys was a typical practitioner of Central-North European *Volkskunde*. In 1932, he defended his PhD at the University of Vienna under the supervision of Father Wilhelm Schmidt, one of the founders of the *Kulturgeschichte* school in anthropology. He tried to set a new epistemological standard for Lithuanian *ethnology* by criticizing evolutionism and promoting a cultural-historical perspective with a strong positivistic stance: “As there are no ‘iron laws’ in the spiritual sphere (nor are they absolute in the technical sphere), we therefore have to ... first, collect facts, then evaluating them critically and only then making conclusions” (ibid.). The polemics in between the epistemologies of evolutionism and cultural-historicism could be considered as a symptom of the scientific maturity of the discipline, although ‘salvage ethnography’ still was the main feature of the period dominated by descriptivism and museology.

Soviet *etnografiya* as epistemology of historical materialism

The term *etnografiya* itself has produced a labeling effect, as post-communist Russian anthropologists Bondarenko and Korotayev pointed out:

“The very fact that the discipline was invariably called ‘*etnografiya*’ (ethnography) produced a ‘labeling effect’. Indeed, it was mostly ethnography in its pristine sense – i.e., ‘description of the peoples’ – rather than sociocultural anthropology. Most ethnographers mainly studied topics related to material culture such as (ethnic) housing, food, clothing etc.” (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2003, 235)

The officially accepted methodological framework for social science was historical materialism, based first of all on the Morgan-Marx schema of evolutionism.

The Soviet *etnografiya* was defined as a “sub-field of history which studies peculiarities of development of the material, social and spiritual culture of the peoples” (Vyšniauskaitė 1964, 9). As Bondarenko and Korotayev note, “description of the peoples was focal and it aimed at ‘establishing patterns of historic cultural evolution’” (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2003, 235). Since the 1980s, the Soviet *etnografiya* found itself under the spell of positivist empiricism and eventually became heavily grounded in the ‘Theory of Ethnos’ of the Soviet ethnographer Yulian Bromley who was extremely influential throughout the 1980s. Here, studies of peoples were seen through the category of *ethnos* as a major systemic marker to deal with humanity by making ethnic categorization, even approaching whole nations as entities of *ethnos* (Bromley 1987; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2003).

Thus, *ethnos* referred to *narod* (people), and it was back to Herder equalizing a *nation* with a *folk*, whereas here it involved the equalization of tribes, nationalities and nations under one and the same label *ethnos*.

Post-Soviet epistemology of ethnic culture – ethnicization of the discipline

Ethnicization of the discipline of ethnology occurred in the late 1980s through the categorization of ‘culture’, through ‘nativist’ essentialization of one’s ‘own culture’ when the politics of *ethnic culture* became part of ethnic nationalism and irredentism which took shape during the years of *Perestroika*, and especially during and after the *Singing Revolution*. At that time, the categories of ‘folk culture’ and ‘tradition’ in the epistemology of ‘home-brewed’ ethnology were extensively profiled through the episteme of *ethnicity*. This episteme was appropriate to use because of the popularity of Bromley’s aforementioned definition and the

extrapolation of *ethnos* which suited well for multiple application of the term. It worked well for both assimilationist politics of the Soviet State as well as for the nationalist ideology of the stateless (existing as part of the Soviet State) populations, such as Lithuania, aiming to regain their nation-state.

In the late 1980s, there was an upheaval of nationalist ideologies resisting the communist ideology of assimilation known as Brezhnev's ideology of the 'fusion of nations' (*sblizenije-slijanije*) into one – the Soviet nation-state. Resistance against such 'melting-pot politics' paved the way for the essentialization of the term 'ethnicity' as an episteme in a slightly different way from that of Bromley. It was back to Balys, when, in the late 1980s, the category of *ethnic culture* was introduced by the leading folklorist of the period, Norbertas Vėlius. It was defined as a synonym of the term 'folk culture' or 'traditional culture', which meant a substantial part of the Lithuanian national culture. It was a step back to *Vokskunde* and the classic Herderian understanding of nation as folk, and politically it fitted well the stateless situation of the Lithuanian culture during the communist period.

Thus, the term 'Lithuanian ethnic culture' very soon became vogue as a new label for branding the idea of 'core nationhood'. It started to be used instead of 'traditional culture', and hinted at the 'spiritual culture', i.e. beliefs, mythology, rituals, folk art monuments, etc. that was neglected by the Soviet regime's *etnografiya* which predominantly devoted attention to the 'material' culture. As a result, due to this term, Lithuania became portrayed as a nation rooted in the ancient Lithuanian mythology, rituals, symbols, and traditions, and became singled out as 'genuine ethnic'.

Such ethnicization became legitimized after ten years when the 'Law on the Principles of State Protection of Ethnic Culture' (1999) was issued and *ethnic culture* institutions were springing up throughout the country. In this Law, the heritage culture of the ethnic majority was voiced and singled out at the expense of the silenced 'ethnic cultures' of the ethnic minorities. Here, the 'ethnic culture' was seen as both inherited in the sense of being "passed from generation to generation" as well as a living body that is continually changing by being "constantly renewed" (*ibid.*). Thus, the term 'culture' is portrayed as a set of ethno-national "cultural properties, created by the entire nation (*ethnos*)" (*ibid.*). Such categorization of nativism left no room in Lithuania for the minority cultures – such as Polish, Russian, or Jewish (Yiddish) – to prove themselves as 'unique' and ethnographically rooted. Through this judicial act, the notion of *ethnic culture* (used in the singular form only) became a model for the normative and politically framed culture (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Fox and King 2002);

and, consequently, the understanding of ‘tradition’, ‘heritage’, and even ‘national culture’ was part of it. So, the term *ethnic culture* produced methodological tensions giving way to methodological nationalism. It was backed up by national identity politics and became a label for anything but foreign culture. So, in the early 1990s, it was a challenge to confront the *Lithuanian ethnic culture*, portrayed as the *marked* culture as denoted by reification (Appadurai 1996). Another challenge was to teach an *Introduction to anthropology* (at the time, I was teaching it at Vilnius University) with its comparative and constructivist perspectives on cultures and to insist on Fredrik Barth’s conceptualization of ethnicity.

So, the ‘arrival’ of sociocultural anthropology was some sort of political challenge in Lithuania; it involved change from its ethnonationalist stance of the 1990s to opening-up to globalization and cosmopolitanism. It was an epistemological challenge as anthropology stood in opposition to the ‘Lithuanian disciplines’, such as ethnology (*ethnic culture studies*) or history.

Three attempts to establish the discipline of anthropology in Lithuania

Sociocultural anthropology as a discipline appeared in Lithuania through the post-socialist change in the late 1980s – early 1990s and brought studies of the global human condition in the comparative perspective. It was “untouched by Marxism or nationalism” (Buchowski 2004, 10), and it provided epistemology beyond methodological nationalism. It was also part of the Westernization of academia.

The Singing Revolution in the Baltics was an opening to the West. In higher education, this meant primarily the appearance of ‘new’ fields, which had been ‘unknown’ in the Soviet period, such as political science, religious studies, etc. Socio-cultural anthropology was one of those ‘new fields’ brought by the Lithuanian diaspora from North America where the main wave of refugees from the Baltic States, who had fled communism, moved in the late 1940s. They were now expected to return from the diaspora in a philanthropic spirit for “missionary work for independent Lithuania” by bringing social remittances (Čiubrinskas et al. 2023). Part of their missionary work was the founding of new academic programs and departments.

Anthropology was one of these, but it took more than a dozen of years to succeed. There were three attempts of its establishment, the first one was in 1989–1992 in Kaunas, the second trial followed in Vilnius in the mid-1990s to the early

2000s, whereas the third attempt was made in Kaunas again, thus eventually launching the Master's study program in Social Anthropology in 2004.

a) Beginnings of anthropology in Kaunas 1989–1992

In 1989, months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the relaunch of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) took place in Kaunas. The university had been closed in the early 1950s due to the Stalinist regime and was re-opened as a Western-type university with the support of the Lithuanian diaspora. Here, along with the other fields of study which were largely unknown in Soviet times (e.g., political science, theology, sociology, etc.), the discipline of anthropology appeared. The Department of Anthropology was founded in Kaunas immediately after the re-establishment of VMU. It was based on the American four-field anthropology and led by Lithuanian-American professors only. The emphasis was on teaching in English and on *Artes Liberales* as well as on a flexible system designed to accommodate visiting faculty professors (Vastokas 2005).

Professor Liucija Baskauskas (PhD from University of California, Los Angeles, *UCLA*) was the founder and head of the first anthropological department in the country (Čiubrinskas 2005). She, along with three other anthropologists of Lithuanian background, started to give lectures on cultural anthropology including an integrated (four-field anthropology) introductory course (Vastokas 2005). The field of anthropology at the 'diaspora University' was greatly appreciated by students, and even attracted students from Latvia. Aivita Putniņa (University of Latvia) and Klāvs Sedlenieks (Riga Stradiņš University) – who are now leading anthropologists in Latvia – were studying anthropology at VMU at that time.

In 1992, the Department of Anthropology was about to launch a study program in anthropology but, before it was fully established, after two years of effort, the department "was re-structured and integrated" (Apanavičius 2009). It became annexed into the newly-formed, but actually old-fashioned, *Volkskunde* type department of Ethnology and Folklore Studies. It was a step towards conformity with the predominantly 'ethno-nationalist' politics of education of the early 1990s. A renowned academic of the field commented on the decision, suggesting that:

"We don't need to be taught about Africa: there is an urgent need to learn about our traditions instead. Even more so, we should learn more about our traditions because they are dying and the former, Soviet, regime was not in favor of studying those." (Sauka 1999)

It shows how socio-cultural anthropology in Lithuania was perceived as a foreign “product of Westernization.” Some academic authorities called anthropology “an American concoction” (Vastokas 2005).

b) Anthropology in Vilnius (1992–2003) and Scandinavian cooperation

The second attempt to institutionalize anthropology was at Vilnius University in 1992–2003. As early as in 1992, the first introductory module of sociocultural anthropology (taught by the author) was introduced into the curriculum of History studies. In 1992–1996, due to the author’s postdoctoral fellowships at Oslo, Lund and Copenhagen universities, contacts and cooperation with the Scandinavian anthropological schools were established. This provided a necessary platform for academic networking and cooperation with Scandinavian, and, later, with the Baltic colleagues representing Latvia and Estonia.

A remarkable example was the first Nordic-Baltic School of Anthropology for research students organized in 1996 by Melcher Ekströmer (Lund University), Åke Norborg (Copenhagen University) and the author. It was titled *Cultural Identity in Historical and Social Context*. It brought half a dozen doctoral students from each of the two Scandinavian universities eager to learn about the Baltics. The school also had a first-hand acquaintance with a previously barely known field – sociocultural anthropology – for two dozen Lithuanian doctoral students, mainly from the fields of ethnology, history, and political science. Lectures, seminars, and workshops given by the Scandinavian professors made a considerable impact. Some participants even rewrote the final drafts of their PhD theses (Čiubrinskas 2015; Čepaitienė 2016).

Cooperation further grew in the academic year 2000–2001 when Åke Norborg, Fin Nielsen (both from Copenhagen University), Steven Sampson (Lund University), Melcher Ekströmer (Lund University), Jonathan Friedman (Lund University) and the author established a mini network between Copenhagen, Lund, and Vilnius. Its activities included exchange of teachers and students. In 2001, credit courses for Vilnius University graduate students were given by the visiting professors Jonathan Friedman and Steven Sampson. At the same time, two groups of Scandinavian students, one from Copenhagen, and another from Lund, were joined by Lithuanian students for exploratory fieldwork training in Marcinkonys (in Dzūkija National Park) in Southeastern Lithuania, and in Vilnius (led by Melcher Ekströmer and the author). Later, ten students and two teachers from Vilnius visited Lund and Copenhagen. They gave workshops and presented the beginnings of their first anthropological research. The strengthening of cooperation with Lund and Copenhagen enabled two of

Lithuanian graduate students to enroll into the social anthropology graduate program at Lund University, where one of them – Kristina Šliavaitė – did her PhD studies under supervision of Steven Sampson. International teaching, including distance learning courses were given for Copenhagen and Vilnius students; these courses were also on their way to becoming established on a permanent basis. During the 2002 fall semester, an online course on the *Anthropology of Postsocialism* was taught by Fin Nielsen and Kristina Šliavaitė.

The cooperation with the Scandinavian anthropology schools made a crucial impact on curriculum development. As a result, the number of courses in anthropology at Vilnius University was growing. It became a highly attractive curricula addition for students in history. At that time (since 1993), anthropology was taught at the newly established Department of Theory of History and Cultural History. Eventually, this led to launching the BA Program in Cultural History and Anthropology in 2001. This study program was in the field of history, but the number of anthropology courses gradually increased up to six, and the profile in anthropology thus became suitable to provide, in American terms, a minor degree in Anthropology. There was hope that – one day – anthropology would separate from history. At the time, there were five faculty members representing anthropology – two Lithuanian diaspora professors who had switched from Kaunas: cultural anthropologist Romas Vaštokas (PhD from Trent University, Canada) and archeologist Raymond Sidrys (PhD from University of California, Los Angeles, *UCLA*), the author of this paper, and two graduates from Lund University: Aušra Simoniukštytė (MA degree) and Kristina Šliavaitė (PhD). Moreover, it was hoped that an informal research unit – the Center for Social Anthropology and Ethnology – which, since 1995, started developing the first collection of anthropological books in the country (donated mainly by the Scandinavian and British colleagues) would become a platform for research projects.

Unfortunately, in 2002, the staff teaching anthropology was accused by the Dean of the Faculty of History of ‘competing’ with the field of history by attracting an increasing number of students who were demanding more anthropology classes. In opposition to that accusation, the anthropology teachers emphasized the benefits of broadening international cooperation in the field of anthropology studies. I used to personally introduce all the visiting professors in anthropology to the Dean, but he was always reluctant to meet them because his English was not very good and he could not fully communicate with them. Eventually, the Dean’s response became xenophobic; once he told me: “What’s the use of those foreigners?! They are just bringing sand on their shoes to my office.”

Although the anthropology classes were extremely popular and attracted some excellent students, the Dean of the Faculty of History decided to dramatically reduce the number of courses in anthropology. If, in 1998–2002, the number of anthropology courses varied from four to eight, in 2003, the discipline was reduced to a minimum and left with a single one – the introductory course. In fact, the discipline was eliminated, and the Anthropology Center was closed down. This serves as a second example of the ‘manipulation’ and power games that are part of academic politics, particularly in favoring established disciplines over new ones. At VMU, there was ethnology, a field which is important for the rebuilding of the nation-state and its national culture politics leaving no room for incorporating anthropology. At Vilnius University, the nationally powerful discipline of history rejected the idea of becoming a hybrid anthro-history program.

c) Anthropology back to Kaunas: Master’s study program at VMU since 2004

A crucial point in regaining and expanding the field occurred in 2003 when the first Baltic Anthropology conference was organized in Vilnius, which was appropriately titled *Defining Ourselves: Establishing Anthropology in the Baltic States*. Participants were coming from nine countries, including the keynote speakers Jonathan Friedman (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), Chris Hann (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology), Finn Sivert Nielsen (University of Copenhagen) and Steven Sampson (Lund University). Twenty-seven papers were presented in total (Ivanauskas 2006, 141). At the concluding Roundtable, all the participants of the conference urged for the establishment of anthropology studies in the Baltic States by suggesting that Lithuania take the lead. Jolanta Kuznecovienė, representative of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, and Chair of the Department of Sociology, invited the program of anthropology to be established at VMU within the Department of Sociology.

The Master’s Program in Social Anthropology was designed and initiated at VMU with three members of the teaching staff: Kristina Šliavaitė, Romas Vaštokas, and the author of this paper. All three of them moved to VMU from Vilnius University. Later, they were joined by two visiting professors: Victor de Munck (State University of New York) and Ingo Schröder (University of Marburg, Germany).

The Program was developed by Romas Vaštokas and the author of this paper with support from sociologist Jolanta Kuznecovienė. It drew upon the elaboration of anthropology – the way it had been implemented in Vilnius – and was also based on ideas provided by our Scandinavian colleagues (Jonathan Friedman,

Finn Sivert Nielsen, and Steven Sampson) and some other colleagues, namely, participants of the Nordic-Baltic Anthropology Network group meeting held in December 2003 at the University of Latvia in Riga. Important contribution to the design of the program came from the author's Fulbright fellowship at Southern Illinois University in 2002–2003. Jonathan Hill, Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University willingly shared his experience regarding the design of the new program.

Thematic focus of the program was given to transnational mobility, along with cultural practices of inclusion and exclusion, and the transformation of the state. The anthropology of post-socialism, with a regional emphasis on Central Eastern Europe stood as a prime example of the transformation of the states. It seemed important to study the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall on the states and societies of the region as they were undergoing rapid social change from socialism to post-socialism. Eventually, these changes led to ethnic nationalism, neoliberalism and austerity.

In the spring of 2004, the Senate of Vytautas Magnus University and the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Lithuania approved the program. The first year of the program enrolment was extremely promising as there were 98 applicants for 10 vacancies.

In 2009, the Program received international recognition through its American partnership. Due to its close academic partnership with the Department of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University, the Program students are given the opportunity to enroll in the Southern Illinois University (SIU) Certificate study program of *Intercultural Understanding*. This study option offers an opportunity for the program students to attain the *Certificate in Intercultural Understanding* (Southern Illinois University, USA) by completing the 18 ECTS credit Module of Study. Students are required to take three courses given by the visiting professors from SIU at VMU campus as part of their degree studies. The SIU Certificate is issued alongside their VMU Master's Diploma.

Since the year 2006 – which was the first year of the matriculation from this program – a number of graduates enrolled in doctoral study programs in Lithuania and abroad. Four of them have already defended their PhDs in Anthropology from the Queen's College in Belfast (Renatas Berniūnas), Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh (Vitalija Stepušaitytė), University of Birmingham (Eugenijus Liutkevičius), and Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany (Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin). Three more students are doing their doctoral studies at the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich, the City University of New York, and the University of Tartu.

For several years, the strategic focus of the anthropological research conducted in Lithuania was on political anthropology and post-socialism studies. Here, the research is mainly carried out in the form of doctoral dissertation projects by conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Lithuania and in other post-socialist countries. In the period from 1997 to 2017, eight doctoral dissertations in anthropology, based on fieldwork in Lithuania, were defended by Kristina Šliavaitė (Lund University, Sweden), Neringa Klumbytė (University of Pittsburgh, USA), Pernille Hohnen (Copenhagen University, Denmark), Asta Vonderau (Humboldt University, Berlin), Ida Harboe Knudsen (Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany), Gediminas Lankauskas (University of Toronto, Canada), Rima Praspaliauskienė (University of California at Davis, USA), and Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin (Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany).

Center for Social Anthropology at VMU

The Center for Social Anthropology (CSA), an anthropological research unit established at VMU in 2005, has been unique in this field in the country since that time. From the very beginning, it has been building an anthropological library, running interdisciplinary research projects, conducting a series of research seminars, and affiliating with visiting doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows. In 2009–2019 three doctoral students came on a Fulbright program from the US, and there were two visitors from the UK and India.

In 2005, the second Baltic Anthropology conference was organized at Klaipeda University in collaboration with CSA. Thirty-one papers were presented by scholars coming from ten countries. The keynote presentations were given by Thomas Schippers (CNRS, Aix-en-Provence), Reginald Byron (University of Wales), Mairead Nic Craith (University of Ulster), Ullrich Kockel (University of West England) (Minnich 2006; Pocyte and Sliužinskas 2006). In 2009, the third Baltic Anthropology conference also took place at Klaipeda University. It involved twenty-eight scholars representing twelve countries. The keynote presenters included Thomas Hylland Eriksen (Oslo University), Laura Assmuth (Helsinki University) and Christian Giordano (University of Fribourg) (Sliužinskas 2010). Since 2006, anthropological research at CSA has been carried out in two main directions. First, by exploring ‘anthropology at home’ from the perspective of identity politics, (trans)nationalism, and the anthropology of post-socialism.

Secondly, diaspora and migration studies have been implemented, which mainly focus on Central East European (re)migration to North America and Western Europe as well as on the (re)migration patterns in Punjab, India.

During the period of 2007–2009, research was focused on identifying models of belonging among East European labor migrants in response to assimilation and identity politics in the host countries: UK, Ireland, Norway, Spain, and the USA (Čiubrinskas 2011).

Another project conducted from 2012–2014 investigated the impact of globalization and transnationalism as marked processes of fragmentation of the state in reshaping the national loyalties of belonging of ethnic minorities (Russians in Lithuania), borderlands (the Polish population in Lithuania) and diaspora (Lithuanians in London and Chicago) (Čiubrinskas et al. 2014). All three cases were taken as a point of departure to understand the process of de-territorialization, state and trans-state relations, as well as the fragmentation of national belonging. Ethnic minority research focuses on Russians in the cities of the country having sizable Russian populations, and it unfolds regarding the issue of civic and ethnic belonging to the national narrative. The border area case of research covers the Lithuanian minority residing close to the Polish-Lithuanian border and the Polish minority in Vilnius area, which is supposed to be a historical border area of these two countries. This case focused on the problem of non-territorial loyalties in terms of the kin-state, etc. The third case explores transnational Lithuanians in global cities, such as London and Chicago, and aims to understand their ways of adherence to ethnicity, nation-state(s), and/or cosmopolitan sentiment and difference making.

Since 2020, two research projects have been conducted in migration and memory studies. One project is focused on re-emigration and social remittances by exploring the cases of Croatia, Poland, and Lithuania in a comparative perspective (Čiubrinskas et al. 2023), whereas the other project focuses on the social memory studies of forced migration-derived diasporas in Kazakhstan and Trans-Volga, Russia (Ciubrinskas 2023).

In line with the research direction in 2009–2016, six doctoral research projects were hosted at the Center based on ethnographic fieldwork by exploring the patterns of East European labor migration in Northern Ireland (Neringa Liubinienė), Norway (Darius Daukšas), the USA (Ieva Kripienė); and also on Asian-African refugees in Lithuania and Latvia from the anthropology of medicine perspective (Daiva Bartušienė), and on caste discrimination (Dalits) and social movements in India (Kristina Garalytė). All the six dissertations used an anthropological perspective, but they were defended in the field of sociology

(at VMU) as anthropology was (and still is) not recognized in Lithuania as a separate discipline for doctoral studies.

Baltic Anthropology Graduate School

The most remarkable attempt aiming to establish doctoral studies in anthropology was undertaken in 2014–2018 due to systematic cooperation among the anthropologists of the Baltic States since the late 1990s. Funded by the *Wenner-Gren Foundation*, a joint doctoral program in social anthropology has been under development by the five universities in the Baltic States running MA study programs in anthropology and ethnology. Framed as the Baltic Anthropology Graduate School (BAGs), which, besides VMU, included the University of Latvia, Riga Stradiņš University, Tallinn University and Tartu University in cooperation with Manchester University, Southern Illinois University and Copenhagen University, it became involved in the framework of two-to-three day sessions or ‘schools’ organized at each of the partner universities. In 2015, BAGs began as a winter school in Tallinn, with Riga soon following, and, finally, in the fall of 2017, it came to VMU in Kaunas. Here, it was attended by more than a dozen PhD students who shared their research experiences in using the anthropological approach and fieldwork methodology. Lectures and seminars were given by speakers from the institutions cooperating with BAGs – Jonathan Hill (Southern Illinois University), Jeanette Edwards (Manchester University), Robin Cohen (University of Oxford), Christian Giordano (University of Fribourg), and Steven Sampson (Lund University). BAGs schools as well as workshops provided a significant impact on the graduate students of anthropology in Kaunas, with some even enrolling in doctoral studies at Baltic universities, e.g. Daina Pupkevičiūtė at Tartu University.

Despite continuous efforts with the PhD program eventually getting fully prepared in 2018, it did not go into full operation due to it being neither approved nor recognized by the higher education authorities of all the three Baltic States. Another aspect of the significant differences in the accommodation of PhD studies in all the three Baltic states has been the non-recognition of the field of anthropology as a separate field for doctoral studies.

Current situation of the field

After fairly successful institutionalization of anthropology at VMU in 2004, currently, six anthropologists are employed there to serve the Master's program in Social Anthropology and the BA program in Sociology and Anthropology. The field is slowly gaining in terms of specialists and academic popularity around the country as well. First, it is noticeable by the growing number of newly created PhDs returning to the country after defending their theses abroad. Since 2005, there have been at least thirteen PhD dissertations defended in the field of anthropology at Western universities by university graduates of the Lithuanian background. Five of them have returned to Lithuania and are teaching and doing research at VMU and/or at VU.

The fields of engagement where the dissertations of Lithuanian anthropologists have recently been defended are: anthropology of religion: Donatas Brandišauskas (University of Aberdeen), Kristina Jonutyte (Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology), Eugenijus Liutkevičius (University of Birmingham), Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin (Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg); cognitive and psychological anthropology: Renatas Berniūnas (Queen's University, Belfast); anthropology of migration and refugee studies: Ieva Jusionytė (Brandeis University), Vitalija Stepušaitytė (Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh); indigenous studies: Jurgita Sالتanavičiūtė (University of Oklahoma); anthropology of post-socialism: Kristina Šliavaitė (Lund University), Neringa Klumbytė (University of Pittsburgh), Asta Vonderau (Humboldt University, Berlin), Gediminas Lankauskas (University of Toronto), Rima Praspaliauskienė (University of California, Davis).

The academic popularity of anthropology has been growing. In 2015, the BA study program in Sociology titled *Sociology and Anthropology* was developed at VMU in close cooperation with the already implemented Master's programs in Social Anthropology and in Applied Sociology. It offers six to seven obligatory courses in social anthropology, and could almost be seen as a double degree program or as a program providing a Minor Degree in Anthropology in addition to a Major in Sociology.

In comparison to that, the aforementioned BA Program in Cultural History and Anthropology, launched at VU in 2001 in the field of history studies, was similar in shape (offering four to six courses in anthropology), but it lasted for only two years. Since 2003, this study program has served a clear example of opportunism as it continues to use the label of 'anthropology' by offering only one or two introductory courses in social anthropology by attempting to attract new students to increase enrollment in the field of history studies.

The label of ‘anthropology’ is fashionable elsewhere in Lithuania as well. According to Slovenian anthropologist Vesna Godina who did research on the development and politics of the discipline of anthropology in Central Eastern Europe and Balkans, the most common way to add the label of ‘anthropology’ in this European region is to add this label to the name of any *Volkskundian* institution. In the era of post-socialism, quite a few East/Central European ethnological (former ethnographic) institutions changed their names into *ethnology and cultural anthropology* (Godina 2002, 13). This practice is marked with the tendency to equate the ‘reclassified’ ethnology with anthropology. It also happened in 2016 at the Lithuanian Institute of History, where the Department of Ethnology was renamed into the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology.

According to Godina and many other researchers investigating the development of anthropology in Central Eastern Europe (Geana 2002; Skalniak 2002; Buchowski 2004; Hann, Sarkany, and Skalniak 2005; Hann 2007) anthropology has become not only fashionable along with other trends of Western scholarship, but it was also a profitable “brand” as its use enhances the prestige of grant applications and expands the possibility for funding research projects. Thus, folklorists, along with ethnographers, gave up their identities overnight, and started calling themselves ‘anthropologists’ (Godina 2002, 13). One can now find anthropologists at such Lithuanian institutions as the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore and other institutions, where doctoral programs in the field of ethnology are operating.

Anthropological research in Lithuania is in close interdisciplinary cooperation with representatives from the field of sociology. A good example is the field of ethnic studies developed at the Institute of Ethnic Studies of the Lithuanian Center for Social Sciences. Its research profile mainly focuses on ethnic minorities in Lithuania and borderland areas. During the period of 2003–2015, an interdisciplinary journal *Ethnicity Studies* was issued there, and, for most of the period, its editor-in-chief was Vita Petrušauskaitė, a VMU graduate in Social anthropology and a PhD in Sociology.

One way that interdisciplinary cooperation of anthropology has been successful is in the field of ethnology by publishing the interdisciplinary journal *Lithuanian Ethnology: Studies in Social Anthropology and Ethnology*. Founded in 2001 by the author and colleagues from the Lithuanian Institute of History – Auksuolė Čepaitienė and Žilvytis Šaknys – it is an example of bridging these two fields. It is a two-in-one Lithuanian journal that embraces both disciplines, and the editorial board involves internationally acclaimed anthropologists including Jonathan Friedman (University of California, San Diego), Chris

Hann (Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology), Jonathan Hill (Southern Illinois University) as well as ethnologists, to name a few: Orvar Löfgren (Lund University) and Ullrich Kockel (Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh).

Recently, a promising trend of anthropology development in Lithuania has been observed in VU in the field of Asian studies. Since 2018, due to the new leader Kristina Garalytė (PhD from Vytautas Magnus University) and two new professorship positions, taken by Victor de Munck and Donatas Brandišauskas, the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies (IATS) of VU has become the main place for anthropology at Vilnius University. In its study and research programs, the Institute is focusing on social anthropology more and more, the most prominent area for fieldwork is in Asia. Currently, five anthropologists are teaching anthropology courses at VU and the number of anthropology courses has been growing. Since 2020, IATS has provided five positions for postdoctoral fellowship holders doing research in anthropology of religion (Kristina Jonutyte and Eugenijus Liutkevičius), migration (Vladas Bartochevis), love, family, and gender relations (Hyunhee Lee), performative traditions (Kristina Dolinina).

Despite the evident success in the institutionalization of the field of anthropology at VMU almost twenty years ago, the recently growing interest in anthropology at VU, and a dozen anthropologists currently teaching anthropology courses at both universities, there is still a lack of confidence in sociocultural anthropology as a discipline within the Lithuanian academia. Moreover, public understanding of the present-day social problems in Lithuania relies, to a large extent, on sources which have not examined these problems at the grass-roots level. Sociological surveys are still predominant in the field as well as in the public commentaries on major social problems. Anthropologists, despite their powerful analytical instruments of fieldwork, holism, and global comparison, are not prominently visible.

Nevertheless, the most optimistic news is that two new anthropological establishments have entered the Lithuanian public sphere. The first of these is the NGO *Anthropos*, which is engaged in applied anthropology. It was founded in 2019 by Kornelija Čepytė, Indra Lukošienė and Ugnė Starkutė (all VMU graduates in Social Anthropology). The second one is the *Lithuanian Anthropological Association*, initiated by Kristina Jonutyte and founded in 2021. *Anthropos* focuses its attention on the problems with methodological nationalism which is fairly noticeable in K-12 education programs. Workshops on urgent issues of public interest have been initiated (see the website of *Anthropos* at <https://anthropos.lt/>). In 2021, Jonutyte and Starkutė released their review on the Lithuanian National Museum of Art exhibition *Indigenous Stories* with criticism

of the usage of ‘indigeneity’ and ‘colonialism’ as thematic descriptions that were used to refer to the traditional Lithuanian folk culture (Jonutytė and Starkutė 2021). Also, recently, the Lithuanian National Radio program *Klasika* released a series of interviews with Lithuanian anthropologists conducted by Jonutytė (Jonutytė 2022). All in all, it gives strong hope for a promising future of the field as it is gaining public visibility.

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