

Precarious Sexualities, Alternative Intimacies in Postsocialist Lithuania

ARTŪRAS TEREŠKINAS

Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas

Abstract. *While sexual and gender self-determination became an inseparable part of the official state policies in the Western world, the opposite process of the retraditionalization of gender and sexual norms occurred in Lithuania during the last decade. It is comprised of an ineffective partnership law for either heterosexual or same-sex couples, the enactment of the discriminatory Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information (the last version approved in 2011), the refusal to implement sex reassignment law and to ratify the Istanbul Convention and continuous attempts to prohibit abortions by the current Parliament of Lithuania. Neoconservative NGOs such as the “Institute of Free Society” and “Lithuanian Association of Human Rights” disseminating everyday sexism, homophobia and transphobia have also been popping up recently. The current Parliament discussions on sexual addictions and prohibitions of advertising of sexual commodities such as condoms or sex toys also point to intensifying attempts to regulate sexual market. In this context of state and institutional regulation of sexuality, this article focuses on alternative intimacies and sexual practices from a bottom-up perspective. In describing alternative intimacies, I use the term “precarious” to emphasize a necessary relation between sexual and gender norms and the historically shaped distribution of vulnerability across LGBTQ+ sexualities and bodies. By analyzing my own sociological novel *Endless Summer: A Memoir of Love and Sex* (2017) that contains a specific postsocialist sexual ethnography, I not only examine the ways in which Lithuania’s socio-economic and political institutions produce unequal conditions for different intimate behaviors but also detail how vulnerable communities create possibilities of love and sex amidst the toxic political waste of failed sexual revolution.*

Keywords: *sexuality, LGBTQ+ sexualities, alternative intimacies, postsocialist sexual ethnography, Lithuania.*

Introduction

I will start with three stories in some way related to sex, sexuality and human rights¹. The first one concerns the 2016 Baltic Pride Parade. In their

1 The first version of the article was presented at a conference “Postsocialist Revolutions of Intimacy: Sexuality, Rights and Backlash” on October 1-2, 2018, at the Center for Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University. I would like to thank Yulia Gradska for her kind invitation to this conference.

manifesto, a coalition of Lithuanian religious and intellectual leaders, including heroes of the anti-communist resistance, publicly condemned it. The manifesto argued that not only Soviet Russia but also Western countries were the training ground for the “sexual revolution.” According to these intellectuals, in the 1960s, Western countries also began to experience “sexual revolution” based on the communist ideas that survived to this day. In their view, many leaders and high officials of the EU institutions were obsessed with this idea and wanted to export the “sexual revolution” to the new EU members in Central and Eastern Europe (Lithuanian intellectuals issue manifesto 2016). In a rather bizarre way, the manifesto associated sexual revolution and LGBTQ+ rights movement with both the communist ideology and EU institutions.

The second incident tells the story of a lecture on religion at a local Lithuanian school in 2017. A teenager shared teacher’s PowerPoint presentation on her Facebook profile. In this presentation, the teacher argued that almost every person that had ever been convicted of homicide and cannibalism was gay. The teacher also concocted an image of Soviet symbols in the middle of rainbow flag (Dombrovskytė 2017). Once again, homosexuality was inseparable from Communism and, in this case, cannibalism.

The third most recent story is related to a sexualized advertising campaign called “Vilnius, the G-spot of Europe” launched in August, 2018. The campaign calls Vilnius “the G-spot of Europe” because “nobody knows where it is, but when you find it – it’s amazing.” The accompanying image shows a woman lying on a bed sheet printed with a map of Europe in the throes of passion, her hand tightly gripping Lithuania (Go Vilnius 2018). A series of short videos, featuring the hash tag ‘vilniusgspot’, showing ecstatic tourists, both male and female, looking at Vilnius churches and modern architectural sites, has already been posted on YouTube and other social media.

Interestingly, Lithuania’s government had asked the city to postpone the campaign until after Pope Francis visits Vilnius in late September, 2018, due to its sexual nature, but the creators refused, saying the advertising would end before his planned visit. Critics argued that the campaign exploited “women’s sexuality for advertising” and gave “wrong ideas” about Vilnius as a city for sex tourism. The former Vilnius mayor Artūras Zuokas criticized the campaign, emphasizing that “no one in the West [was] using sexist references in marketing any more” („Europos G taško“ temą analizuoja ir tarptautinė žiniasklaida 2018). However, despite the outrage of the Catholic Church, conservatives and right-wingers, the campaign started as planned and was very successful.

It is possible to tell more similar stories. Some of them are rather difficult to believe. For instance, in the spring session of 2018, the Lithuanian

Parliament discussed the regulation of the sale of sex toys and condoms. It was planned to remove condoms from supermarkets and sell them only in drugstores and sex shops because condoms were classified as sex toys harmful to minors (Šantaraitė 2018). Only after a series of media articles ridiculing the plan and public outrage this issue was removed from the Parliament's agenda.

The above examples demonstrate that sexuality remains a cultural battleground and a focus of basic value debates about sexual rights, erotic pleasure, sexual and gender diversity, family, sexual norms and the role of the state in regulating the erotic. These examples in addition to some other described in the following chapter also show that, in Jeffrey Weeks's words, "the erotic is deeply implicated in power relations and the ways in which power is always challengeable at all levels" (Weeks 2008, 32).

In such a contradictory sexual panorama, the article will focus on alternative intimacies and sexualities and their expression in public. I call these intimacies precarious to emphasize an inescapable relation between sexual and gender norms and the historically shaped distribution of vulnerability across LGBTQ+ sexualities and bodies. I base my presentation on my own sociological novel *Endless Summer: A Memoir of Love and Sex* (Tereškinas 2017) that contains a specific postsocialist sexual ethnography and enables me to examine the ways in which Lithuania's socio-economic and political institutions create unequal conditions for different intimate behaviors. I look closely at the social phenomena described in this book and perform a close reading of queer intimacies instead of relying on any "high" theory or doctrine.

How do we read queer subjects and their intimacies that are often rendered unrecognizable and out of place in Lithuanian society? How do we trace "suffering bodies," in Richard Sennett (1996) words, that are deemed as non-normative and not worthy of state protection? How do we listen to queer silences without disrupting our own expectations about queer sexualities and intimacies in the current sexual regime? In what ways could precarious intimacies represent forms of connection and solidarity as survival strategies? By immersing myself in the ethnography of queer sexual communities described in *Endless Summer*, the article will problematize the relationship between 'fact' and 'fiction' and will rethink queer sexualities by referring to the evidence included in this ethnographic novel. My research is informed by sociology, cultural studies, queer studies and other fields of scientific inquiry which have long examined the effects of exclusion, symbolic violence, and disregard of specific groups with maximized amounts of precariousness and vulnerability and which have essentially invested in the idea of social change.

Setting the Context: the Failure of Discursive Sexual Revolution in Lithuania

In describing the changes in sexual discourse in Russia in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet years, Dan Healey argued that

A discursive 'sexual revolution' accompanied the wider political revolution. With increasing boldness, in the late 1980s, the Soviet media talked openly and explicitly about sex to an audience that was amazed, titillated, shocked and disgusted – and could not, it seems, get enough of it. Glasnost in the realm of sexuality brought stunning media openness to Western ideas and values, frank reflection on the anxieties and joys of ordinary citizens, and even crude attempts to arouse audiences. Sex became of badge of 'post-ness,' post-Sovietness, of life after Communism however it might take shape. All sex became in late Soviet and early post-Soviet culture a credential marking out one's text or product as non- or anti-Soviet, new, fresh and democratic (Healey 2014, 107).

The same could be said about Lithuania. It seemed that in the 1990s and the beginning of 2000 the discursive sexual revolution was in full bloom when Lithuanian citizens were granted access to sexual information and images. However, this optimistic discursive sexual revolution went hand in hand with an increasing patriarchy, the lack of basic civil rights for LGBTQ+ people and state-sponsored homophobia. Although Lithuania decriminalized homosexuality in 1993, marriage or registered partnership is still not possible for same-sex partners. Thus, the individual's intimate decision making is compromised since the Lithuanian state does not recognize a plurality of intimate behaviors including same-sex domestic partnership that occupies an inferior legal status.

It could be argued that while sexual and gender self-determination became an inseparable part of the official state policies in the Western world, the opposite process of the retraditionalization of gender and sexual norms occurred in Lithuania during the last decade. It is comprised of an ineffective partnership law for either heterosexual or same-sex couples, the refusal to implement sex reassignment law² and to ratify the Istanbul Convention, the enactment of the discriminatory Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information and continuous attempts to prohibit abortions by the current Parliament of Lithuania. However, one

2 It should be added that transgender persons' rights have also been persistently neglected by failing to implement the ruling of European Court of Human Rights in 2007 that obligated Lithuania to make sex change procedures possible (Gudžinskas 2015).

exception to this restrictive gender and sexual regime should be mentioned: in January, 2019, Lithuania's Constitutional Court ruled that "foreign, same-sex spouses must be granted residence permits by the country's migration department, despite same-sex unions not being recognized in the Baltic state" (LRKT 2019; for more see Shah 2019).

One of the most important state initiatives that compromises citizens' intimate autonomy is the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information. It was introduced in 2010, and since then it has been applied in restricting public provision of LGBTQ+-related information. According to Liutauras Gudžinskas, in 2006 and 2007 the similar proposals did not receive the adequate backing in the Parliament. However, after parliamentary elections in 2008 when the conservative political parties came to power a proposal to recognize public information that "advocates homosexual relations and defies family values" as having a detrimental effect on minors was put forward. Because of the lack of a precise definition of such advocacy, any non-negative information on homosexuality could have been banned as an "infringement on family values." After long discussions and the presidential veto, in 2010 the proposal was revised by replacing the term of homosexuality with the general notion of "sexual relations." However, the "infringement on family values" was not amended in the proposal which still has power to restrict the LGBTQ+-related information (Gudžinskas 2015) because same-sex relationships are widely regarded as a "negative information" directed against "family values" (Dombrovskytė 2017).

Another initiative was a 2011 proposal to amend the Constitution by explicitly defining family as based on the marriage between a man and a woman. However, the Parliament failed to pass it by one vote (Gudžinskas 2015). Despite this failure, neoconservative NGOs such as the "Institute of Free Society" and "Lithuanian Association of Human Rights" fighting for "traditional family values" and disseminating homophobia, transphobia and sexism have been popping up recently. In the discourse of these organizations, LGBTQ+ people are associated with illness, deviance and even crime. These NGOs claim that there is a sinister agenda behind the goal of same-sex marriage, i. e. to destroy the institution of marriage altogether. Along with these organizations, the conservative Parliament members do not keep away from calling LGBTQ+ people deviants and AIDS, the God's judgment against homosexuals (Jackevičius 2016). This message widely available during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and early 1990s in the US (Burack 2008) remains a profitable political currency in contemporary Lithuania.

The case against tolerance of same-sex sexualities focuses on its harms to marriage, the family, an individual, and the whole nation. The coalition

of Lithuanian religious and intellectual leaders mentioned in the introduction argues that both LGBTQ+ “ideology” and “the ideology of genderism”³ arose directly from 19th-century Marxist communism, which had had the goal of destroying both the foundations of the old society and the concept of family.” This coalition calls the LGBTQ+ movement a “continuation of the 20th-century totalitarian regimes’ – Soviet Communism and German National Socialism – unsuccessful attempts to implement projects to create a ‘new man of the future’” (Lithuanian intellectuals issue manifesto 2016). It is only natural that, in their manifesto, the Lithuanian intellectuals deny any intolerance towards LGBTQ+ people who allegedly strive to “make homosexuality a behavioral norm.” Therefore, the coalition intends to reject “so-called progressive norms” akin to the Communist morality disseminated by Pride Parades because they are an “attack on human nature and the public good.” The following excerpt from the manifesto once again reiterates the historical connection between sexual revolution, LGBTQ+ rights movement and Marxist-Leninist ideas:

For a long time, our country has maintained traditions of tolerance and peaceful coexistence of different peoples. They will remain in place. Lithuanians have not hated and will not hate sexual minorities and, moreover, will not fight with them. However, we are a nation that has survived communist oppression and, at the cost of many sacrifices, regained our freedom. We did not regain our freedom for this and we will never reconcile with the return to Lithuania, via Brussels and the other Western European capitals, of totalitarian, albeit differently packaged, Marxist-Leninist ideas that refute the intelligence, conscience and dignity of free people. The government supporting such disastrous ideas and fostering their advocates still has a chance to reconsider them (Lithuanian intellectuals issue manifesto 2016).

The manifesto denies any hostility and hatred “towards persons of different sexual orientation” but calls them victims of ideological manipulation and an experiment funded from abroad.

Thus, throughout much of the last twenty years, particularly since Lithuania’s accession to the EU in 2004, same-sex love has been presented

3 This is how a neoconservative intellectual describes “genderism”: “What is the essence of genderism? In it, sexual deviations or, in a folk language, perversions are transformed into values. They are turned into certain social aesthetics, an act of admiration, an example worth following, a standard and a point of reference; they are insistently exhibited and advocated in the public space. Those who do not admire them, do not rejoice and try publicly oppose it are labelled, for example, “homophobes.” Those who dare to publicly criticize these things become suspected and convicted” (Merkys 2015).

as “unnatural” or “degenerate” in the public discourse. The state still disempowers specific groups of people by refusing to grant basic civil rights and putting alternative forms of intimate behaviors, arrangements and identities outside legal protection. It should be reiterated that by not recognizing nonmarital practices the Lithuanian state delegitimizes different forms of intimate life and spreads an unequal amount of vulnerability across queer sexualities that remain culturally devalued and pathologized. Similarly like in Russia, the expression of “nontraditional sexual orientation” (Lith. *netradicinė seksualinė orientacija*) (on the Russian usage of this expression, see Stella 2013) commonly used in Lithuania to refer to homosexuality reflects the perception of queer sexualities and intimacies as socially inferior and marginalized. In public discourse, people with “nontraditional sexual orientation” are associated with the decline of morals and sexual promiscuity and are encouraged to retreat into private life. The slogan “We tolerate you as long as you stay out of public eye. Do whatever you want in your bedroom” still stands.

Thus, the high hopes that queer communities might have had after the fall of the Soviet state and in the period of the transition to a free market economy were bound to fail. On the contrary, Lithuania has experienced a renaissance of state homophobia and discursive silence about queer sexualities and intimacies. There is the continued lack of research on LGBTQ+ sexualities that could be also considered an “effect of an entrenched homophobia” (Baer 2013, 185). Moreover, the Lithuanian gay agenda, first of all, focuses on rather diffuse goals of social recognition and respect since other objectives including equality in family policies and public entitlements are not forthcoming. The weak political representation of LGBTQ+ people by one organization, the Lithuanian Gay League (another one is the Tolerant Youth Association that caters to younger people)⁴ also contributes to a broad process of both invisibility and normalization of LGBTQ+ people by erasing “the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead” (Love 2007, 30). Being invisible and non-represented gives some gays and lesbians new opportunities but it does not allow to forget the outrages and humiliations of gay and lesbian everyday and to ignore the ongoing suffering of the misrecognized, stigmatized and excluded.

Social negativity clings not only to queer people for whom Lithuania’s socio-economic and political institutions create unequal life conditions but

4 Amidst antigay bias, stigma and discrimination, the simple “LGBT friendly Vilnius” slogan often suffices. Here I have in mind a rather wide equality campaign initiated by a film director and activist Romas Zabarauskas. For more, see <http://www.vilnius-tourism.lt/en/what-to-see/vilnius-for-you/lgbt-friendly-vilnius/> and <https://cafebabel.com/en/article/friendly-vilnius-map-dont-fight-the-rainbow-5ae00bcef723b35a145e7f16/>

also to all things sexual. The current Parliament discussions on sexual addictions and prohibitions of advertising of sexual commodities point to the intensifying attempts to regulate sexual market. Moreover, the incessant dissemination of radical homosexual conspiracies by neoconservative NGOs and Parliament members that ascribe to LGBTQ+ rights movement the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, criminality and assault on family values also reflects the failure of discursive sexual revolution in Lithuania.

Theoretical Notes: Making a Queer World

In 1998, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner wrote that “making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property and to the nation” (Berlant, Warner 1998, 558). In this chapter, I will briefly describe what making a queer world means in relation to the processes of precarization and Othering.

First of all, the inflection of intimacy as social, emotional and sexual closeness (Seidman 2013, 13) with the adjective “precarious” needs some explanation since, in Volker Woltersdorff’s words, by using the term “precarity” in relation to sexuality we claim “the sexual dimension of capitalist socialization as an indispensable category for analysis” (Woltersdorff 2011, 167).

Precarity is frequently characterized as a structure of affect/emotion and an intensified sense of disposability that is differently distributed throughout society (Berlant 2011; Butler 2013). Precarity most often applies itself to those that are not so easily normalized – abnormal, problematic and resistant subjects. These precarious subjects represented as abject, disgusting, base or aberrant are the very ones that do not matter in different social spheres. Judith Butler argues that precarity largely depends on economic and social relationships and the “presence or absence of sustaining infrastructures and social and political institutions” (Puar 2012, 170). In this sense, precarity addresses our interdependencies and intimate sociality. Butler distinguishes between precarity as specific ways in which socio-economic and political institutions create unequal life conditions for people and precariousness as vulnerability, an unavoidable aspect of any life (Butler 2011).

Isabell Lorey uses precarity as a “category of order that denotes social positionings of insecurity and hierarchization, which accompanies processes of Othering” (Puar 2012, 164). In this process of Othering, those who do not live their genders and sexualities according to the dominant regimes of gender and sexual normativity are rendered precarious and risk to experience

violence, discrimination, harassment and even death. An “unequal distribution of precarity” inherent in the management of populations makes certain lives less worthy of protection and recognition (Butler, Athanasiou 2013).

The unequal distribution of precarity and vulnerability indelibly marks and even damages alternative sexualities and intimacies making them both painfully closeted and shameful. These sexualities and intimacies are often turned into specific forms of denigration of queer subjects. Therefore, in analyzing queer intimacies we need to place experiences of precarity in the center of “archive of feeling,” an account of the corporeal and psychic costs of homophobia, transphobia and queerphobia. By paying a particular attention to “feelings such as nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, resentment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness” (Love 2007), we could rethink the histories of social exclusion and damage and ask how these feelings have affected the conditions of contemporary queer lives.

At the same time, precarity may refer to different modes of “collective existence that pose a challenge to the constraining, destructible and unbearable effects of contemporaneous living” (McCormack, Salmenniemi 2016, 4). It may also point to the tension between damage, exclusion, pathology and harm and the need to resist them by affirming queer sexualities in our attempts to make a queer world and document queer experiences (Love 2007, 3). Thus, by analyzing the novel *Endless Summer* in the last chapter of this article I will attempt to outline complex configurations of queer intimacies within postsocialism that deeply unsettle the notion of progress and dreams of better life for queer people and make their claims for justice and social recognition ambiguous and ephemeral.

Intimacies in Precarity

The book *Endless Summer: A Memoir of Love and Sex* is an example of sexual ethnography that accurately documents erotic experiences in a rich but repressed postsocialist sexual underground. A sociologist Alina Žvinklienė calls *Endless Summer* a novel that focuses on the eternal issue of sexual frustration and alienation or, in other words, unbearable loneliness that has been haunting people from the rise of capitalism and nuclear family. According to her, some sexual encounters described in the book with ethnomethodological precision would be approved by the pioneer of the conception of social gender construction Harold Garfinkel and the founders of the laboratory study of human sexuality Alfred Kinsey and the Masters and Johnson research team (Žvinklienė 2018). The novel outlines what it is like

to live queer identity that interrogates the limits of normative culture and history. The book also attests to the difficulty of turning a personal archive of desires and memories into public artifacts that would become a part of collective queer history. To some degree, *Endless Summer* is also an attempt of sexual autoethnography, highly reflexive self-knowledge and the inquiry into sexual subcultures.

Endless Summer is the story of Raimundas, a 30-year-old PR specialist, and his obsessive love to the 22-year-old Dmitry. The protagonist's involvement with Dmitry lasted only twelve weeks, but his process of mourning would continue over seven summers. He records his memories, feelings and sexual adventures in a diary he calls "Love Memoirs." Obsessing about Dmitry and their ended relationship, he often indulges in questioning his life choices and reminiscing about his survival in the homophobic and violent Lithuanian society. Determined to forget Dmitry, the protagonist delves into a series of sexual encounters with men, mostly set in Soviet-era apartments, dilapidated dormitories and flats without toilets. Casual sex becomes Raimundas's daily escape and a way for him to create social connections.

To a certain degree, it could be argued that the main queer character defiantly refuses to grow up, celebrates his endless sexual encounters and remains stubbornly attached to his lost object of love. Sexual pleasure occupies a central place not only in his documenting the past that haunts him but also in his encountering the present:

I come back to find the men rubbing each other's crotches. "Can we cum on your face?" the musicologist asks out of nowhere. "Sure, but just tell me when to close my eyes." I take off my shirt and sit down on a chair as both men stand up and take out their dicks. I imitate erotic moaning as I try to adapt to their fantasies in that toilet-less apartment. The musicologist can't get hard and he soon tires, sits down next to me and lazily watches the masturbating doctor, who reaches orgasm a few minutes later. His sperm squirts onto my chest and the musicologist's face, hitting the cup of cognac just as he was raising it to his lips. "Fuck!" shouts the musicologist. Such is the price of an erotic fantasy, I laugh to myself. A fantasy that now consists of French cognac, sperm, a flat with no toilet, and the Ibis Hotel next to the bus station – which is where I spend the night, watching the porn flick Sperm Flood (Tereškinas 2017, 212).⁵

The protagonist's daily routine involves going to the gym, cruising on Grindr, Hornet and other hookup apps, and meeting men for casual sex.

5 All excerpts were translated by Darius Sužiedėlis.

Raimundas often thinks of himself as manager of an archive of sexual contacts, meetings and separations – in other words, a sexual ethnographer. He recounts for himself numerous short affairs and encounters. Among many others, he meets a PhD student in ornithology who imitates bird sounds during sex; a Catholic priest who has never had sex, with either a man or a woman; and a Lithuanian porn star who was featured in such bareback porn flicks as *Berlin Hotel* and *Berlin Guys*. He and his best friend and former lover Hubert participate in a BDSM session where they humiliate and discipline a well-known businessman. Seducing strangers or being seduced by them functions, in *Endless Summer*, as a way of domesticating “provocative otherness” (Dean 2009, 179) and conquering anxieties aroused by strangers.

Michael Warner talks about shame as a basis of a “special kind of sociability” in queer culture: in their relationships to others queer subjects begin to acknowledge a “shared abjection” (cited from Love 2007, 14). According to Warner, “Queer scenes are the true *salons des refuses*, where the most heterogeneous people are brought into great intimacy by their common experience of being despised and rejected in a world of norms that they now recognize as false morality” (Warner 1999, 35–36). The protagonist of *Endless Summer* does not feel gay shame for participating in an endless series of queer sex scenes but he is despised and verbally abused by some of his neighbors. On the other hand, being bound up sexually with others establishes the possibility of being relieved of this shared abjection and of experiencing fleeting love and the sense of justice:

Our tea time is silent, but hot and passionate. The computer guy's chest and back are covered in thick, black hair. His dick is massive and his balls are big and heavy. They swing back and forth like two unpeeled kiwis as I suck him. Eimutis holds me roughly by the back of my head, forcing it into his groin. “Fuck, swallow it all!” he shouts at me when I look up at his narrow, ironically pursed lips. He takes the condom I give him and, in one well-practiced move, slips it on and, without a beat, shoves his dick into me. It doesn't hurt this time. The wine bottle never gets opened, a bottle of poppers rolls around on the bed but I never get the chance to grab it. Computer guy's hands stroke my back or grab my waist to speed up or slow down his rhythm. Some techno or deep house music would have been great for our tea time – the kind that the Lithuanian Ten Walls plays sometimes, or that Italian Benny Benassi (Tereškinas 2017, 203).

In this regard, the book also documents the effects of ambiguity of queer identity in Lithuania: on the one hand, it is publicly represented as a

form of damaged subjectivity, but, on the other hand, it entails pride and defiance as “antidotes to shame and the legacy of the closet” (Love 2007, 2) still predominant among many Lithuanian LGBTQ+ people. In one of the scenes, the protagonist visits a dorm in which he meets a married bisexual man and his male lover:

They get off the trolleybus near the small Aibė shop to buy vodka and wine. They turn off Kalvarijų Street, the main road in Šnipiškės, into a narrow alley, walking down the hill toward a shabby five-storey dormitory. There's a room on the first floor with a tiny corridor, kitchen and toilet. No shower. No bathroom. Alfonsas, the man Kaunas told him about, is a small, lean construction worker whose wife lives in Gargždai, a town in Western Lithuania. He only comes to Vilnius to make extra cash, but he's been spending most of this time here for the past three years. He goes back to Gargždai every third weekend – he never invites his wife along to Vilnius. The pale man understands why. Alfonsas' lover is an Armenian who speaks perfect Lithuanian. He's lived here for over ten years (Tereškinas 2017, 215–216).

Queer love described in the novel does not follow the scripts of heteronormative culture that encompass a coupledom, marriage, children and loyalty to the state that shames him. Refusing the “ideals of conduct that is central to the reproduction of heteronormativity” (Ahmed 2004, 149), the protagonist also refuses to assimilate into homophobic and hostile society. For this reason, Raimundas sometimes feels terribly out of place in his country. He continues to work in a PR agency and spends a lot of time in the office. His co-workers tell stories about two former communist youth activists who have since become members of the staunchly anti-Russian Conservative Party and are now assiduously homophobic public figures. The co-workers joke that, with their exquisite tastes in clothing and fashion, these two men could make an ideal gay couple. Listening to these stories, the protagonist himself reflects on his life marked by discomfort:

Thinking about Dmitry I try to think about how I've lived, trying to imagine a life that would be more meaningful than the one I'm leading now. Sitting in a comfortable leather armchair, my computer on my lap, I keep catching myself poking fun at my own expense, finding the irony in my life's failures, including Dmitry, as the most prominent hallmarks of my life. Sometimes I feel as if I've never had a life that had any actual meaning to me. My entire life story is a collection of unexpressed gestures, unsaid phrases, things I never had the courage to do, and constant

interruptions, breakthroughs and recovery. Perhaps I could claim I had a life if I joined it to Dmitry's?

I've lived in this exhausted country for over thirty years now, with the occasional break. I know it's not easy here for people like me. Their lives are usually dismissed because they don't conform to the generally accepted ideal of a "real" life. But I cling to it all the same – to that illegitimate, misunderstood, frightening and unreal life (Tereškinas 2017, 56).

The novel ends with a violent death of the protagonist's best friend and former lover Hubert and the disappearance of Dmitry who emigrates to the UK and ceases to answer Raimundas's emails. The protagonist thinks that perhaps it was his own imagination that invented Dmitry's Gyllenhaal eyes, stunning white teeth and strong, yet sensual chin. He mourns Dmitry as Patti Smith once mourned Robert Mapplethorpe in her book *Just Kids* (2010). Could this ending be interpreted as the impossibility of gay love linked to the impossibility of revolutionary change in a normative culture that either murders queer subjects or erases their ephemeral relationships?

There is no definite answer. Perhaps, to use Heather Love's insights, "because of the long-standing link of same-sex desire with the impossible, queer experience is characterized by extremes of feeling: the vertiginous joy of an escape from social structures; at the same time, a despair about the impossibility of existing outside of such structures" (Love 2007, 142). This novel also acknowledges that queer subjects do not have the power to alter social conditions and cultural codes which define their precarious sexualities. But at least they could own the adverse conditions and start a process of reversal by maintaining networks of shared sexual desires and by disseminating sexual biographies free of queer shame and self-hatred.

Although in normative cultures queer sexual and emotional relations are often conditioned by social stigmas, the novel attempts to embrace different and vulnerable but recognizable sexual histories. The book articulates a complex politics of visibility and vulnerability: the protagonist and men he encounters are presented as sexual agents acting on their desires, drawing on reserves of strength to challenge systems that seek to oppress, violate, and silence them. However, the novel does not depict sex as a revolutionary act. Instead, it rethinks the meaning of queer sexualities by depathologizing queer subjects and by embracing the "incoherent, the lonely, the defeated, and the melancholic formulations of selfhood that it sets in motion" (Halberstam 2011, 148).

It could also be argued that in *Endless Summer* precarity is also expressed through the protagonist's relationship to time – his nostalgic

attachment to the past, his lost object of love and the uncertain future. The last scenes of the novel document this raptured time or a standstill in which the protagonist finds himself. He falls ill but soon recovers, getting closure about his best friend's death and Dmitry's disappearance. He realizes that to love another is to recognize his own past and destiny. Although his past and romantic aspirations were located in Dmitry's body, what is left now is his own body that increasingly resembles Dmitry's. He once again embraces his own sense of discomfort, feeling excitement in the face of uncertainty. Perhaps it is not too much to say that despite being an object of contempt and derision, the queer protagonist experiments, in the book, with his body and those of others at the same time inventing new practices of hoping amidst precarity and vulnerability.

Conclusion

In the article, I examined queer intimacies in the sense of closeness and familiarity between queer subjects and considered how these intimacies are embedded in the material conditions of precarity marked by homophobia, transphobia, symbolic violence, etc. I argued that despite the fact that the sexual remains at the center of the political stage, the discursive sexual revolution related to basic human and sexual rights and the protection of individuals' intimate decision making has failed in Lithuania. LGBTQ+ people remain clearly dispossessed by regimes of gender and sexual normativity and their intimacies are rendered precarious in the country. Intimacies of people with so-called "nontraditional sexual orientation" are qualified, in the public discourse, as a threat, danger and harm to both an individual and the nation. Queer subjects are constructed in terms of disease, perversion and foreign "sexual revolution" transported to Lithuania by both the Soviet regime and EU institutions. To persist and survive in such society involves an acknowledgement of continuous precariousness and risks to which LGBTQ+ subjects are exposed.

The sociological novel *Endless Summer* that I briefly analyzed in this article details the ways in which Lithuania's socio-economic and political institutions create unequal conditions for different intimate behaviors and describes possibilities of love and sex that queer subjects create amidst the toxic political waste of the failed discursive sexual revolution.

Following Halberstam, I do not argue that that sexual acts described in the novel are progressive or conservative in themselves or that they could be connected to political radicalism (Halberstam 2011, 151). However, in *Endless Summer*, sexual encounters and multiple pleasures become a way

to forge queer intimacies and to produce meaningful forms of attachment. The book might have offended priests of sexual puritanism who multiplied in Lithuania during recent years but its intention was both to document and analyze the new forms of sociability that emerge from anonymous or semi-anonymous sexual contacts. I call them precarious intimacies that work against the structures of discursive violence and homophobia. The novel highlights the insecure conditions under which queer subjects live and shared connections that form through sexual encounters.

Endless Summer also dwells on the feeling of discomfort and other bad feelings that make the protagonist to inhabit norms differently and resist “various modalities of valuelessness” (Butler, Athanasiou 2013, 19) disseminated in Lithuanian society. Therefore, the question of what it means to turn bad feelings such as shame, self-hatred and despair into a vision of political agency also remains valid in the novel. I would argue that negative feelings described in *Endless Summer* present a framework for thinking not only about alternative sexualities but also about transformative politics that address larger social structures of subordination and exclusion. In order to come to terms with our own precarity and vulnerability, we need to incorporate bad feelings and the affective damage of social exclusion in both art work and civic activism.

References

- Ahmed, S. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Baer, B. J. 2013. “Queer in Russia: Othering the Other of the West.” In *Queer Presences and Absences*, eds. Y. Taylor, M. Addison, 173–188. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berlant, L. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L., Warner, M. 1998. “Sex in Public.” *Critical Inquiry* 24(2) (Winter): 547–566.
- Burack, S. 2008. *Sin, Sex, and Democracy. Antigay Rhetoric and the Christian Right*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Butler, J. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso.
- Butler, J. 2009. *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable*. London: Verso.
- Butler, J., Athanasiou, A. 2013. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Butler, J. 2013. *For and Against Precarity*. Available at: http://www.e-flux.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/7.-Butler_Precarity.pdf?b8c429
- Cleminson, R., Medina Doménech, R. M., Vélez, I. 2014. “The Queer Margins of Spanish cities, 1939–2010.” In *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures Europe Since 1945*, eds. M. Cook, J. V. Evans, 5–35. London: Bloomsbury.
- Dean, T. 2009. *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Dombrovskytė, R. 2017. *Gay Cannibalism and Lesbian Propaganda in Lithuania*. Available at: <https://www.studentsforliberty.org/2017/05/16/gay-cannibalism-lesbian-propaganda-lithuania/>
- Europos G taško temą analizuoja ir tarptautinė žiniasklaida. 2018. Available at: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/europos-g-tasko-tema-analizuoja-ir-tarptautine-ziniasklaida.d?id=78772675>
- Go Vilnius 2018. 2018. *Introducing Vilnius; The G-Spot of Europe*. Available at: <http://www.govilnius.lt/news/introducing-vilnius-the-g-spot-of-europe/>
- Gudžinskas, L. 2015. „LGBT teisių raida Lietuvoje jai įstojus į Europos Sąjungą“. In *Pirmasis Lietuvos dešimtmetis Europos sąjungoje: transformacija ar imitacija?*, ed. K. Maniokas, 196–216. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla.
- Halberstam, J. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Healey, D. 2014. “From Stalinist Pariahs to Subjects of ‘Managed Democracy’: Queers in Moscow 1945 to the Present.” In *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures Europe Since 1945*, eds. M. Cook, J. V. Evans, 95–117. London: Bloomsbury.
- Jackevičius, M. 2016. *Nauja Sveikatos komiteto pirmininkė: šita liga – Dievo bausmė už padarytą blogį*. Available at: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/nauja-sveikatos-komiteto-pirmininke-sita-liga-dievo-bausme-uz-padaryta-blogi.d?id=72939008>
- Lithuanian intellectuals issue manifesto. 2016. *Lithuanian Intellectuals Issue Manifesto Comparing Gay Pride with Soviet, Nazi Tactics*. Available at: <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/lithuanian-intellectuals-compare-gay-pride-with-soviet-goals-nazi-tactics>
- Love, H. 2007. *Feeling Backward Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- LRKT 2019. 2019. “A Refusal to Issue a Temporary Residence Permit in Lithuania to a Spouse or Partner May not be Based Solely on the Gender Identity and/or Sexual Orientation of a Foreign National.” *The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania*. Available at: <https://www.lrkt.lt/en/news/court-news/a-refusal-to-issue-a-temporary-residence-permit-in-lithuania-to-a-spouse-or-partner-may-not-be-based-solely-on-the-gender-identity-and-or-sexual-orientation-of-a-foreign-national/1291>
- McCormack, D., Salmenniemi, S. 2016. “The Biopolitics of Precarity and the Self.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(1): 3–15.
- Merkys, G. 2015. „Radikalusis genderizmas: kas tai ir kas mūsų laukia? (I)“. Available at: <http://www.propatria.lt/2015/05/gediminas-merkys-radikalusis.html>
- Puar, J., ed. 2012. “Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejic, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Anan Vujanovic.” *TDR: The Drama Review* 56(4): 163–177.
- Seidman, S. 2013. “State and Class Politics in the Making of a Culture of Intimacy.” In *Intimacies: A New World of Relational Life*, eds. A. Frank, P. T. Clough, S. Seidman, 13–29. London: Routledge.

- Sennett, R. 1996. *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Shah, S. 2019. *Lithuanian Constitutional Court Rules Same-sex Spouses be Granted Residence Permits*. January 14, 2019. Available at: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/lithuanian-constitutional-court-rules-same-sex-spouses-be-granted-residence-permits/>
- Smith, P. 2010. *Just Kids*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Stella, F. 2013. "Lesbian Lives and Real Existing Socialism in Late Soviet Russia." In *Queer Presences and Absences*, eds. Y. Taylor, M. Addison, 50–68. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Šantaraitė, E. 2018. *Erotines prekes ir sekso reikmenis prekybos centruose siūloma uždrausti įstatymu*. Available at: <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/952333/erotines-prekes-ir-sekso-reikmenis-prekybos-centruose-siuloma-uzdrausti-istatymu>
- Tereškinas, A. 2017. *Nesibaigianti vasara: sociologinis romanas apie meilę ir seksą* [Endless Summer: A Memoir of Love and Sex]. Vilnius: Kitos knygos.
- Warner, M. 1999. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Weeks, J. 2008. "Traps We Set Ourselves." *Sexualities* 11(27): 27–33.
- Woltersdorff, V. 2011. "Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities." *Cultural Studies* 25(2): 164–182.
- Žvinklienė, A. 2018. „Medaus mėnesio studijos“. *Culture and Society. Journal of Social Research* 9(2): 239–246.

Received 18 11 2018

Accepted 05 03 2019

ARTŪRAS TEREŠKINAS

Prėkariškas seksualumas, alternatyvus intymumas posocialistinėje Lietuvoje

Santrauka

Nors seksualinio ir lytinio apsisprendimo teisė yra tapusi oficialia valstybine Vakarų pasaulio politika, per paskutinį dešimtmetį Lietuvoje galima pastebėti atvirkštinį lyties ir seksualinių normų retradicionalizacijos procesą. Jį atspindi neveikiantis partnerystės įstatymas tiek heteroseksualioms, tiek tos pačios lyties poroms, diskriminacinio Lietuvos Respublikos nepilnamečių apsaugos nuo neigiamo viešosios informacijos poveikio įstatymo (galiojanti suvestinė 2011 m. redakcija) priėmimas, Seimo atsakymas priimti lyties keitimo įstatymą ir ratifikuoti Stambulo konvenciją bei nuolatiniai mėginimai uždrausti abortus. Atsiranda vis daugiau neokonservatyvių NVO, tokių kaip Laisvos visuomenės institutas ir Lietuvos žmogaus teisių asociacija, kurios

platina kasdienį seksizmą, homofobiją ir transfobiją. 2016–2020 m. kadencijos Seimo diskusijos apie seksualines priklausomybes ir seksualinių prekių (pvz., prezervatyvų ir sekso žaislų) draudimą taip pat rodo vis intensyvesnius mėginimus reguliuoti seksualinę šalies rinką. Atsižvelgiant į šį valstybinio ir institucinio sekso reguliavimo kontekstą, straipsnyje analizuojamos alternatyvaus intymumo formos ir seksualinės praktikos „iš apačios“ perspektyvos. Apibūdinant alternatyvaus intymumo formas, vartojama sąvoka „prekariškas“ (angl. *precarious*), kuria pabrėžiamas neišvengiamas ryšys tarp seksualinių bei lyties normų ir istoriškai formuojamo LGBTQ+ kūnų ir seksualumo formų pažeidžiamumo. Analizuojant romaną „Nesibaigianti vasara: sociologinis romanas apie meilę ir seksą“ (2017) kaip specifinės posocialistinės seksualinės etnografijos pavyzdį, straipsnyje atskleidžiama ne tik tai, kaip Lietuvos socioekonominės ir politinės institucijos kuria nevienodas sąlygas skirtingoms intymumo formoms, bet ir tai, kaip pažeidžiamos bendruomenės ieško meilės ir sekso galimybių tarp toksiškų politinių nepaisėkusios seksualinės revoliucijos atliekų.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: seksualumas, LGBTQ+ seksualumas, posocialistinė seksualinė etnografija, Lietuva.