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**"The Continuation or the Invention of Tradition: Cultivating Religious and National
Identities among Lithuanian Immigrants in Norway"**

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Introduction

Much of the research concerning religious and national/ethnic identities of contemporary migrants in Europe focus on Islam. Writing back in 2008 and 2014, Nancy Foner and Richard Alba (Foner and Alba 2008, 2014) noticed that in contrast to the Western Europe-centred research on the topic of religion and migration, US-oriented studies either viewed religion as unproblematic or focused mostly on the positive effects of religion in the lives of migrants. Two central reasons for that, according to them, are, first, religious background of migrants – large proportion of Muslim migrants in Western Europe vs. Christians in the US, and, second, the lower level of secularism in the US compared to Western Europe.

However, many Western European and Nordic states – especially after 2004 enlargement of the European Union – experience significant levels of migration of individuals self-identifying as Christians. Yet, as Dominic Pasura and Marta Bivand Erdal (Pasura and Bivand Erdal 2016) or Olav Hovdelien (2019) rightly point out, the knowledge – especially insights regarding mainstream Christian churches such as Roman Catholic Church – about the influence that religious identities and institutions have for the social adaptation and national self-understanding among Christian migrants in Europe is very scarce. Therefore, it is difficult to argue with certainty that Christian religious background of the migrants in Europe would function similarly to the US: is it a “bridge” *with* rather than a “barrier” *from* the host society, to use the terms of Foner and Alba?

Focusing on a case study of contemporary Lithuanian labour migrants in Norway and employing in-depth interviewing together with participant observations, I examine the role of the Catholic Church when it comes to the ways that Lithuanian migrants adjust to their temporal or permanent life in Norway. Given the status of Catholicism in Norway as a minority religion, cultivation of Catholic identity perhaps cannot be considered an assimilationist move par excellence. However, could it function as one of the points of intersection between Lithuanians

and Norwegians? For example, in her research about Polish migrants in Norway, Bivand Erdal noticed that for many of them Catholic Church and community surrounding it served as means of easier exposure and adaptation to Norwegian society (Bivand Erdal 2016, 279). Or does it signal social isolation and enclosure within one's own ethnic/national boundaries? For instance, studies of Sidsel Mæland (2016) and Hovdelien (2019) about ethnic diversity within Catholic Church in Norway provide evidence for existence of enclosed ethnic-bubbles. Perhaps it reflects transnational dimension of migrants' lives as exemplified in the study of Cuban migrants in Miami by Thomas A. Tweed (1997). Or is Catholicism a form of multiculturalism – claims for recognition and accommodation by Lithuanians within the host society – similar to those of Catholics and Jews in predominantly Protestant USA up until the second half of the twentieth century (Kivisto 2012, 13)?

Though large-scale migration from Lithuania to Norway is a relatively recent phenomenon (the main wave of labour-migration followed the 2008 economic crisis), Lithuanians constitute the second largest group of migrants in Norway ever since 2016. As of 2020 there are 40.632 Lithuanians registered as living in Norway. Together with Poles, who form the largest migrant group, Lithuanians contribute to historically record-high growth of at least nominal if not practicing Roman Catholics in Norway.

The Church of Norway is the largest religious group in Norway: 3,686,715 individuals in 2020.¹ Roman Catholics form the second largest religious and life stance community outside the Church of Norway comprising 165.254 members as of 2020.² In 2019, 18.680 Lithuanians³ were officially registered as Catholics in Norway constituting the third largest ethnic group among Catholics in Norway. Poles are the biggest group – 60.706 individuals – and

¹ https://www.ssb.no/en/kultur-og-fritid/statistikker/kirke_koetra [Last accessed on the 29th of December 2020].

² <https://www.ssb.no/en/statbank/table/06339/tableViewLayout1/> [Last accessed on the 29th of December 2020].

³ Data from the registry of Catholic Church in Norway.

Norwegians account for 39.552 individuals as of 2019.⁴ Moreover, Catholic Church in Norway in cooperation with Catholic Church in Lithuania provide pastoral services in Lithuanian language in eight Norwegian cities: Oslo, Bergen, Drammen, Stavanger, Sandefjord, Hamar, Trondheim, Tønsberg⁵.

Research scrutinising nationalism related topics about Lithuanian migrants in Norway though sparse covers wide range of themes from their public image in Norway and Norwegian immigration policies (see, e.g., Daukšas 2013; Taljūnaitė and Labanauskas 2009; Tereškinas 2011) to migrants' language practices and integration strategies towards Norway (see, e.g., Daukšas 2011, 2018, 2019; Kuznecovienė 2009; Ramonienė 2019; Šutinienė 2009). However, the knowledge regarding the role of religious identities and institutions in the lives of Lithuanian migrants remains extremely limited. Bearing in mind that Catholic Church has been among the pivotal actors in the (re)production of modern Lithuanian national identity and statehood both within Lithuanian territory (see, e.g., Jokubaitis 2014; Philpott 2004; Ramonaitė 2018; Zapor Cruz 2014) and abroad (see, e.g., Dumčius and Antanaitis 2015; Danytė 2019; Dzialtuvaite 2006; Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2019; Strumickienė 2015) as well as the extent to which it connects with Lithuanian migrants through pastoral services in Norway, I hypothesize that Catholic religious identity and institutions also influence the way Lithuanian migrants relate to Norway.

Three main research questions guide me in this article. First, why and how Lithuanian migrants in Norway cultivate their Catholic identity? Second, how is the relationship with Norway framed within their discourses on religious identity, institutions and practice? Third,

⁴ Data from the registry of Catholic Church in Norway.

⁵ In the context of Covid-19 pandemic, the situation has dramatically changed. Priest Valdemaras Lisovskis, who was in charge of most of the cities except Bergen, has returned to Lithuania in January 2021 after working in Norway since 2012. The Bishop of Oslo is currently negotiating with the Catholic Church in Lithuania about finding a substitute for him (<http://www.katolsk.no/nyheter/2021/02/litauisk-prest-forlater-norge>, last accessed on the 21st of April 2021). Priest Saulius Stumbra, who is responsible for the region of Bergen, normally commutes to Bergen from Lithuania. Due to travel restrictions, he was unable to come to Bergen since September 2020.

how do the representatives of the Catholic Church perceive its role regarding Lithuanian migrants?

Definitions and Conceptual Framework

In this article, I prefer to use term “migrant” instead of “immigrant” when talking about Lithuanians residing in Norway even though the main object of this article is their life in Norway rather than their connection with Lithuania⁶. First, many of the informants expressed both uncertainty regarding their future in Norway as well as ambiguity about their attachment to Lithuania. Some of them already at the time of the interview were planning to return to Lithuania after many years spent in Norway. Others were not excluding the possibility of coming back to Lithuania at some indefinite point in time. Few were quite sure to remain in Norway for the rest of their lives. One of the informants even claimed that she does not feel like she has ever left Lithuania due to frequent visits and easy access to keeping in touch with family and friends in Lithuania. The term “migrant” thus appears to capture very well the ambivalence that often imbues migratory experience (Kivisto and La Vecchia-Mikkola 2013, 200).

Second, the concept of migrant is more suitable even when focusing on the adjustment of the newcomers to the host country within the spectrum of assimilation, ethnic retention and multiculturalism, since more often than not it is difficult to dissociate the immigratory aspect of migrants’ lives from their transnational dimension. It is beyond the scope of this article to engage with the broader theoretical discussions regarding transnationalism itself.⁷ However, I agree with Peter Kivisto and Vanja La Vecchia-Mikkola that transnationalism lens in migration studies – though not pointing out to something, as Rogers Brubaker puts it,

⁶ The format of an article would not allow doing justice to thorough analysis of both. Therefore, I focus on the ways that Lithuanian migrants in Norway forge and maintain ties with their homeland through Catholic identity and institutions in a separate article.

⁷ For a more detailed overview see, e.g., Kivisto 2010.

“fundamentally new in the world” (Brubaker 2005, 8) – strengthened interest in the relationship that migrants cultivate with their place of origin (Kivisto and La Vecchia-Mikkola 2013, 199). Certainly not all migrants are able or willing to be transnational: developing and maintaining transnational networks requires substantial resources. However, the mere presence or absence of such an option for migrants already frames the migratory side of their lives.

Another set of explanations – this time regarding the way that concepts of nationhood and ethnicity are interpreted in this article – is needed. First, to explain where I place my current study within the landscape of perennial debates in the academic literature about the definition and nature of nation and ethnicity (see, e.g., Barrington 1997). Secondly, to minimise possible confusion as these terms are often used interchangeably in migration studies (Kivisto 2010, 562).

Here, I agree with Lowell Barrington that a useful way to differentiate between the concepts of nation and ethnicity is to understand nations as collectives of people which “are not just unified by culture; they are also unified by a particular—and particularly powerful—sense of purpose: controlling the territory that the members of the group believe belongs to them” (Barrington 2006, 7). Whereas ethnicity can be defined in a Weberian sense as “groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration” (Weber 1978, 389). Thus, while ethnicity relates to collective identities based on a sense of shared culture and history, the term of nation refers to a constellation of both cultural and political elements.⁸

⁸ The definition of nation and ethnicity provided here are framed in terms of self-referential identification. The external identification, i.e., by others or in relation to others, is an inextricable part of any form of social collective identity (see Abdelal et al. 2009 for their discussion on identity as a variable). However, the focus of this article is mainly on the perspective of the social agents themselves. Therefore, I concentrate on the internal aspect of identification.

Certainly, this distinction is a simplification as there is no unified agreement regarding the understanding what can be considered as “ethnic” and “civic” dimensions of nations (Brubaker 1999, Kuzio 2001, Nieguth 1999, Smith 1991). However, treating the civic/ethnic dichotomy as ideal types relating to political and cultural criteria in the construction of national identities (Barrington 2006, 12, Canovan 2005, 46, Dieckhoff 2006) is helpful when analysing empirical data of this article: can migrants’ actions of interaction with host country be interpreted in the light of cultural terms or as a combination of political and cultural aspects?

I narrow down my focus in this article on a particular type of Lithuanian migrants’ actions – namely, cultivation of Catholic identity in the acts of speech expressed through interviews as well as informal conversations and behaviour observed during participant observations during pastoral services in Lithuanian language. Do their perceptions of Catholic Church and their own Catholic identity function as a bridge in relation to Norwegian society? Does cultivation of Catholicism enable or stem from what Robert Putnam would call an exclusive form of bonding social capital (Putnam 2000, 22) which represents self-isolating tendencies of Lithuanian migrants? Finally, can cultivation of Catholic identity be interpreted as a multiculturalist strategy?

Here, I follow Kivisto by arguing that multiculturalism is not only a set of normative questions about how culturally diverse societies ought to be organised. It can also be researched as an empirical phenomenon expressed “in two reciprocal ways: i) as a form of claims-making by minority groups; and ii) as a way in which the dominant society and its political system accommodate to and manage diversity” (Kivisto 2013, 5; see also Kivisto 2012). In this article, I limit analysis to the claims-making or lack thereof by Lithuanian migrants. Kivisto suggests that claims-making “may be concerned with redistribution, recognition, or some combination of the two” (Kivisto 2013, 5). Do Lithuanian migrants feel

that Catholics as such or their group within Catholic Church in Norway require special inclusion and support? How actively do they support pastoral services in Lithuanian language?

Catholic Church is second to no other religious institution when it comes to its global presence. On the one hand, this extended organisational pattern according to Peggy Levitt “allows migrants who choose to do so to move almost seamlessly between sending- and receiving country parishes and religious movement groups. The Church integrates them into powerful, well-established networks where they can express interests, gain skills, and make claims with respect to their home and host countries” (Levitt 2004, 2). Therefore, Catholic Church may support transnational and multicultural identities and activities of the migrants.

On the other hand, transnationalism and diversity of Catholicism is always in a fine balance with its more universalist dimension and goal of unity. For instance, Tweed remarks that the leader of Archdiocese of Miami Bishop Coleman F. Carroll in 1961, though supported Cuban exiles, “had rejected the idea of separate ‘national parishes’ organized along ethnic lines: that idea was out of favor nationally by this time, and he wanted a different strategy to assimilate the Cubans as quickly as possible” (Tweed 1997, 31). Jurgita Dzialtuvaite also indicates similar attitude of Church authorities in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century towards Lithuanian and Polish migrants summarized in their statement that “if the Poles and Lithuanians intend to reside here permanently, it is in their own interest to learn English” (Dzialtuvaite 2006, 80). Thus, Catholic Church at least theoretically has a potential to be the force both behind national/ethnic retention and more assimilationist tendencies among migrants.

Finally, extended organisational type of the Catholic Church may require less efforts and initiative on the side of migrants to practice and maintain their religious identity. Which in turn could lay ground for the development of symbolic ethnicity among migrants and their offspring. Herber J. Gans’ concept of symbolic ethnicity proposes “that ethnicity can survive

without significant social or cultural participation” (Gans 2009, 123), “a move from acting to feeling ethnic” (Gans 2017, 1411) especially among later generations of migrants when ethnicity is cultivated more through material or immaterial symbols than active and time-consuming participation. In the case of symbolic ethnicity, religion too may become such symbolic means of ethnic identity expression. Gans gives example of rites of passage and holidays that are “symbolic to begin with; equally important, they do not take much time, do not upset the everyday routine, and also become an occasion of family reunions” (Gans 1979, 10). Therefore, Catholicism may be a marker of and a tool in cultivating an ethnic identity even in the context of acculturation.

Sampling and Analysis of Empirical Data

My interest in understanding the perspective on religious institutions, practices and identities of migrants and clergy has led me in adopting an interpretivist methodological framework. Therefore, I carried out semi-structured interviews with twenty-eight lay Lithuanian migrants and three with the representatives of clergy (two from the Catholic Church in Lithuania and one from the Catholic Church in Norway) who are related to pastoral care of Lithuanians in Norway. All interviews but two were individual interviews. Two of them were group discussions. I also did participant observations during Mass, courses for the fiancées and First Communion lessons for children as well Church coffee normally taking place after the Mass. These events not only served in recruitment of the informants for the interviews but also provided additional information through informal conversations as well as opened a window into actual practices of migrants and clergy. During my fieldwork in Oslo, Lithuanian pastoral services took place mostly in St. Joseph’s Church, and once, during Christmas 2019, in St. Olav’s Cathedral. First Communion lessons and courses for the fiancées took place in the building next to St. Joseph’s Church and Church coffee took place in the building next to St.

Olav's Cathedral. In Stavanger, the Mass and other religious events were taking place in St Svithun's Church and related administrative building.

Participant observations were not intended as a way of testing or somehow balancing out the lack of veracity or accuracy of the statements I heard during formal interviews. I agree with Rodney Barker who argues that as scholars we are forced to work with empirically accessible data. Since "true" feelings or thoughts of individuals are out of reach, what can be known is "what people say and do" (Barker 2017, 58) as well as the context of such acts of speech and behaviour. Thus, observations rather generated data on how Catholic identities of migrants are cultivated not only discursively but also in practice.

I did my formal fieldwork in two stages: first, from April to October 2019 in Oslo, and then from March to November 2020 in Oslo, Stavanger and Bergen. As a Lithuanian migrant who also participates in pastoral services of Catholic Church in Norway myself, I find that the line between formal and informal fieldwork can sometimes appear blurry. Thus, by formal fieldwork I mean periods where I was recruiting informants, conducting interviews, strategically attending pastoral care events, some of which I would have not otherwise attended (e.g., courses for the fiancées or First Communion lessons) in my regular life.

One of the major challenges created by this ethnography at-home aspect of my research is "to create sufficient distance in order to get a perspective on a very familiar lived reality" (Alvesson 2009, 162). What enabled me to establish at least partially such distance was decentralised manner in which pastoral care in Lithuanian language is organised in Norway. Carried out in multiple cities instead of being centred in one and served by only two priests resulted in that service in each city could take place only once a month or even less often. Combined with my own sporadic participation this meant that at the time I began my fieldwork I did not know personally anyone participating in Lithuanian pastoral services. Moreover, I

have never been to the pastoral services in the cities outside of Oslo. Thus, Bergen and Stavanger were completely unfamiliar environments to me.

Before Covid-19 pandemic, my intention was to make interviews and carry out participant observations in most if not all cities, where pastoral services in Lithuanian were taking place in Norway. However, the break out of pandemic forced me to limit the scope of my fieldwork. I chose to focus on Oslo, Bergen and Stavanger as these are cities with highest concentration of officially registered people with Lithuanian background.⁹ Yet, even within these three cities research was burdened by travel and social distancing restrictions. In the end, I managed to carry out participant observations as well as interviews in both Oslo and Stavanger. Since Lithuanian pastoral services were cancelled in Bergen since September 2020 – the time when I planned my visits there – I was able only to do the interviews and not participant observations.

I used purposive sampling when selecting lay informants based on the following three main criteria: age (all informants are adults between 20 and 60 years old), gender (I tried to interview both women and men to ensure gender balance among informants (men were much less inclined to give formal interviews than women, therefore, interviews were conducted with 23 women and 5 men), and participation in pastoral care in Lithuanian language at least once during their residence in Norway.

The duration of residence in Norway and push/pull factors for migration as a selection criterion were irrelevant. My goal was to examine the variety of migrants who can actually be met within the field of Lithuanian pastoral care of the Catholic Church regardless of the stage or type of their migration. The period of residence in Norway among the informants ranged from one and a half to over twenty years. The reasons for migration were varied as well: from following a Norwegian partner, to studies or work to mention just few.

⁹ Insert data from Statistics Norway.

Participation in pastoral services in Lithuanian language at least once during their residence in Norway was perhaps the key selection criterion for several reasons. From pragmatic perspective, it worked as a filter for national/ethnic self-identification of the informants. Most of the informants, who chose to attend Mass in Lithuanian, had some sort of idea of their relation with Lithuania be it ethnic or national, positive and negative. This criterion also helped to bypass the question of how religious or even Catholic the informants actually feel. The interest of the project rather is why and how, according to migrants, they found themselves actually being present in those events. Again, it is not about how genuine their cultivation of Catholic identity is. It is sufficient that this identity is being visibly cultivated both discursively (through interviews) and in practice (participating in Lithuanian pastoral services). My goal is to explore whether and how their religious and national/ethnic identities come forth in such cultivation.

While I managed to recruit informants in Oslo and Stavanger by approaching random people during my participant observations, I could not do the same in case of Bergen due to Covid pandemic. Here I used snowball method to recruit informants. I was lucky enough to recruit the members of the Lithuanian church choir and their acquaintances in Bergen through my professional network. Hopefully, this way I managed to ensure that all informants from Bergen had participated in pastoral events at least once, even if I have not met them in those events personally.

The criterion for the selection of Church representatives was participation in and/or organization of Lithuanian pastoral care in Norway. Here I had to use snowball method as these informants agreed to give an interview when I was referred by people they knew. I interviewed two priests from the side of Catholic Church in Lithuania: Prelate Edmundas Putrimas – the delegate of Lithuanian Bishops' Conference to coordinate pastoral care of Lithuanians abroad, – and Valdemaras Lisovskis, who was responsible for pastoral care of

Lithuanians in Norway between 2012 and 2021. As a representative from the Catholic Church in Norway I interviewed priest Claes Tande, who is one of the responsible for the registry of Catholics in Norway.

Being a Lithuanian Catholic in Norway (Expand and include the most relevant quotes from empirical material)

- Several paragraphs on religiosity/secularism in Lithuania and Norway.

When asked about the reaction they encounter when they tell anyone in their surroundings, be it work or private life, that they are Catholics, many of the informants would mention that the topic of religion or their religious identity would hardly ever come up in their interactions with Norwegians. Almost all of them also added that they generally do not talk about it first or in words of some of them “do not advertise” that there are Catholics.

At first, some of the informants would even appear surprised by my question and lost for words as if the possibility of their religious identity sparking any particular reaction has never crossed their minds. In most cases, the informants would explain this by, first, referring to Norway or Norwegians as being as “tolerant” – perceiving religion as a personal matter of each individual as well as showing respect for religious views different from their own, – second, as “not very religious” – either atheist or indifferent to religion, – finally, that their physical appearance would not attract attention from Norwegians regarding religion because Lithuanians do not “look” like Muslims.

Among the informants that could recall any instances of talking about being Catholic in working environment or with their Norwegian partners at home the most common reaction mentioned would be cultural interest – e.g., wish to find out more about traditions and customs of such religious holidays like Christmas or Easter. Few informants claimed that the reaction they would experience at work would be rather positive than neutral or simply culturally

curious. One of them, a member of a Lithuanian church choir, shared that knowing this fact her colleagues would arrange the timetable of her shifts so that she could make it to the choir rehearsals and Mass. Another informant stated that knowing that she is Catholic established stronger trust between her and her employers. For them this signalled that she has a stronger moral character. For couple of the informants, who claim having relatively international working milieu, discussing their religion was one of the ways to connect with religious, though not necessarily Catholic, colleagues from different ethnic backgrounds. They could compare their religious traditions, their experiences in Norway.

During my observations and interviews, I have not come across of an example of a Norwegian-speaking woman coming to Lithuanian pastoral services with a Lithuanian partner. However, I have witnessed on several occasions during Mass and courses for the fiancées (in Lithuanian language) Lithuanian-speaking women being accompanied by their Norwegian partners. This topic has also come up during interviews. One of the informants told me how her daughter's Norwegian boyfriend accompanied them to the Lithuanian Christmas Mass. Though the experience left him with ambivalent impressions, especially regarding the sense of "humility" during the Mass.

Another informant married with a Norwegian in the interview talked about taking her husband with her to the Lithuanian Mass in Norway as well as showing him her favourite churches and the Hill of Crosses during their visit to Lithuania. I have met them during Palm Sunday Mass in Oslo. She added that she intends to go with her husband to the Norwegian evangelical Lutheran services as well. She said she insists on it even though her husband, according to her, is not very religious and normally does not attend church by himself. In her words, attendance of both Catholic and evangelical Lutheran churches enables them as a couple to show respect and tolerance for each other's culture.

Few of the informants claim that they have also experienced surprise and wonder from their more secular interlocutors not so much about being Catholic as about being religious at all. One of the informants recalled with strong emotions the “shock” and “surprise” he noticed in the facial expressions among the Norwegian staff and children of his child’s kindergarten group when he knelt down and made a sign of a cross upon entering a local evangelical Lutheran church. He was accompanying them on a school-trip to show children around the church. According to him, even if the church is not Catholic, he always performs this action as a sign of respect. When I asked whether he received any verbal comments at that time, he answered that not on the spot. However, later the staff did ask about his thoughts on Norwegian religious traditions and the way they introduce religion to the children. He claims that he called it a “circus”, meaning superficial and more as an entertainment, to which they agreed.

Though this is perhaps the most intense account among the informants about their encounters with what they perceive as secular scepticism, quite few mentioned that sometimes they felt obliged to change the topic of the conversation because they began feeling as if they had to justify themselves for being believers. Among the interviewees there were also two who brought up the ways that Catholics are generally perceived by the Norwegian society, especially, how they are represented in the national media. For example, that scandals in the Catholic Church would get a much bigger media coverage than problems within the Church of Norway.

Two informants discussed that societal tolerance or indifference to religion is not absolute and depends on the perceived level of “fanaticism” of a given religion or religious person. Mild religiosity is tolerated or ignored. However, anything that moves out of this contained spirituality into more active way of living one’s religious life is perceived as dangerous. According to them, Catholics are almost by default considered as belonging to more “radical” religions and being if not on a par then close to Islam.

This ties in with the comments of other informants who claim that the reason behind why their religious identity is either not inquired about or not problematised is their non-Muslim physical “appearance.” References to Muslims in the interviews indicate that interviewees consider this religious group as one of the ultimate “Others” within wider Norwegian society. Priest Valdemarás during the interview observed that in Europe and especially Scandinavian societies there often exist a priori assumptions and allegations that Catholicism is against democracy and similar ideals. However, according to him, in the eyes of the Norwegian state Catholics are not as problematic as Muslims. He related of being once invited to a state-financed conference on human rights, democracy, principles of equality organised by the University of Oslo for spiritual leaders of various religious denominations in Norway. In his opinion, which Valdemarás said was also expressed by representatives of other Christian denominations present at the event, the conference was targeted at Muslims while Christians were invited there as token participants in order for the organisers not to be accused of religious discrimination.

None of the informants mentioned experiencing discrimination on the basis of religion. Most felt that their Catholic identity is either accepted or even supported within their social environment and Norwegian society at large. Some of the informants considered that societal approval has to do not so much with the religious denomination itself as with the mode of religious expression favouring private and restrained practice. Yet, Muslims are understood by several informants as a religious group most liable for discrimination in Norway.

Catholic Church – a Gateway to or an Escape from Norway? (Expand and include the most relevant quotes from empirical material)

When it comes to the general strategies of the informants on the mode of relating to Norway, it would be difficult to categorize any of them as expressing intentional isolationist tendencies. Only one of my interlocutors, who at the time of the interview was working in Norway with frequent visits to Lithuania for three years, mentioned that his working and private environment in Norway is mostly among other Lithuanian immigrants. However, the way he discussed about his family back in Lithuania, how he works in Norway only to earn enough to go back and continue living in Lithuania, indicated that he did not seek deeper connections with Norwegians more out of pragmatic calculations rather than wishing to be in a Lithuanian social bubble. Another interviewee shared that after trying unsuccessfully befriending Norwegians and other Lithuanians in Stavanger, where she was based, she gave up describing both groups as extremely “cold” and “unwelcoming”. She said she is seriously planning to go back to Lithuania as soon as possible after spending almost six years in Norway at the time of the interview.

Most of the interviewees talked about having a good level of Norwegian language skills (one of them already had difficulties speaking Lithuanian freely), working either in a Norwegian or a more international environment. Several had Norwegian citizenship and had no plans of ever going back to live in Lithuania. Some claimed to have Norwegian partners, and majority mentioned Norwegian friends or acquaintances outside of work. Those who have children had additional connections to Norwegian social milieu through kindergartens or schools.

Having said that, very few of them could be placed under strictly assimilationist label. Even conversations with those, who had Norwegian partners and/or Norwegian citizenship, had no plans to go back to Lithuania, were characterized by some transnational or ethnic retention aspects. The degree and the nature of their connectedness to Lithuania differed. Yet,

in most of the conversations emerged a wish to cultivate at least some elements of Lithuanianness as they saw it.

Similarly, in my empirical material I could not identify any clear evidence neither of strong isolationist nor assimilationist tendencies when the interviewees were talking about why and how they were cultivating their religious identity and engaging with Catholic Church in Norway. I could identify five main reasons from the interviews and observations. First, enabling celebration of some of the pivotal life events in Lithuania – such as weddings, First Communion, Confirmation – by using pastoral services in Norway, e.g. courses for the fiancées, First Communion preparation and baptism. Second, as a help to maintain family ties, for example, promises to baptise children, ensure that they receive First Communion made to parents or grandparents in Lithuania, prayers for the sick or dead members of the family in Lithuania. Third, spiritual needs and/or psychological support. Fourth, social life, for example, church choirs, church coffee, friends and acquaintances from the church. Fifth, sense of connectedness to Lithuania.

None of these reasons appear to stem from a wish of seclusion or sense of being a vulnerable religious minority seeking self-preservation. This is consistent with a prevalent attitude among informants that Catholics are not a target of direct discrimination. However, none of these reasons indicate that Lithuanians – at least directly – perceive Catholic Church in Norway as one of the intersection points with Norwegians.

The fact that Norwegians are a relative ethnic minority in the Norwegian Catholic Church seems to be one of the main factors influencing such attitude. Many of the informants mentioned attending Mass and one of them also Church coffee in Norwegian language at least once either out of curiosity, religious inducement or by accident. However, many of them pointed out that Norwegian Catholics formed but a small a fraction among participants with different ethnic backgrounds in Norwegian-language Masses.

When asked about their impressions of the Norwegian language-based Mass and the interaction with Norwegians during such Masses or Church coffees, First Communion preparation lessons the accounts varied among informants. Several admired what they considered to be more simple, shorter and relaxed liturgy as well as general atmosphere during Norwegian Mass or the way children are prepared for the First Communion. Others pointed out that they missed more solemn and serious tone of the Lithuanian Mass, which sharpens focus and contemplation. Some claimed neither trying to reach out to the Norwegian or other co-participants themselves nor receiving any particular notice or attempt at conversation except the priest, who would shake the hand of parishioners after the Mass. Yet few others talked about friendly and warm welcome.

Another example of diversity of informants' experiences was particularly striking as two of them provided opposite interpretations of the same event. A priest from Lithuania was supposed to come for the Christmas Mass in Bergen in 2019. Unfortunately, on the way to Vilnius airport he got into a car accident and was hospitalized, thus not being able to come. In his absence a Norwegian priest took his place. He was carrying out the service in Norwegian, while Lithuanian church choir and the rest of the congregation sang and prayed in Lithuanian. Though both informants recounted this event in the same manner, their impressions about the general mood during this Mass was completely different. For one of them, everything went smoothly, both priest and congregation were at ease and enjoyed the experience. For the other, the priest appeared uncomfortable, like a "mouse trapped among cats", lay participants also felt strange and tensed.

This demonstrates that Catholic Church's in Norway practice of maintaining administratively and not ethnically divided parishes affects Lithuanian informants in more than one direction when it comes to interaction with Norwegians. On the one hand, it seems to open opportunities for them to attend Norwegian-language based Mass at least by accident,

send children to First Communion preparation classes, take courses for the fiancées. On the other hand, there appears to be no uniform understanding among the informants about the quality or consequences of such encounters.

Similar ambiguity can be said about the policy of offering pastoral care in different languages within administratively defined parishes. As mentioned above, some of the scholars and representatives of the Church themselves are afraid that it may strengthen existing ethnic divisions among Catholics in Norway. Indeed, many of the reasons, why Lithuanians in Norway choose pastoral services in Lithuanian, may be interpreted as the way to cultivate their ethnic identity and connection with Lithuania. Priest Valdemaras argued that if Lithuanian pastoral care would be over, majority of people who currently attend the church would simply give up on attending the Church in Norway altogether.

This attitude appears at least partially justified when looking at the interviews with the lay informants. Some of them stated that in the absence of Lithuanian pastoral services, they would rather wait for their visits to Lithuania or follow the Mass online in Lithuanian rather than joining Mass in Norwegian or other languages. Interestingly, none of the informants talked about the need of making demands or claims towards Catholic Church to provide a Lithuanian language based pastoral care in Norway in case it ceased to exist. Taking initiative and trying to organise Lithuanian oriented pastoral care did not even appear as an option. Only one of the informants expressed deep concern for Lithuanians having fewer Masses and worse locations for them than Poles as well as not having a permanent national parish, around which Lithuanian religious and cultural life could be organised.

The level of Norwegian language knowledge did play a role for some of them. For example, several informants said that even though their general skills of Norwegian are good, they are not used to liturgical language and prayers in Norwegian. Thus, participation in the Lithuanian Mass stemmed from this rather pragmatic reason. Priest Valdemaras argued that

even though for many children born to families with Lithuanian background in Norway Norwegian language becomes easier or preferred language to Lithuanian, yet more such children are registered in the preparation for the First Communion in Lithuanian language than in Norwegian. The reason being that their parents still prefer this being done in Lithuanian.

However, among the lay informants there were also those who said that they would choose to attend Mass in Norwegian or other languages when asked what would they do in case there would no longer be pastoral services in Lithuanian. Even those, who said that their Norwegian is not good enough to participate in Mass in Norwegian. They argued that the liturgy is so similar that they would simply pray in Lithuanian. Most of the informants, who talked about such possibility, were also those who reported religion as an important part of their life and/or were active in the life of the church such as helping out the priest during the Mass or being members of the church choir, as I have noticed during my observations.

For some maintaining Catholic identity was even more important than preserving Lithuanian identity, in case one needs to choose. This attitude was expressed by several informants when talking about the way they see the future of Lithuanian Catholic community in Norway. They said that children of the current immigrants or further generations born and raised in Norway will most likely abandon their Lithuanian identity. So, the aim of the parents should be at least preserving their Catholicism.

Another reason, why multilingual approach of Catholic Church in Norway might be contributing more towards building bridges between Norway and Lithuanian immigrants rather than fostering their ethnic seclusion, is that was interpreted as a positive move of acceptance and care by some of the informants. When asked, if they know why and how the regular pastoral care in Lithuanian language was established in Norway, some of the informants believed or guessed it to be an initiative rather on the side of the Catholic Church

in Norway catering to the needs of their community than its Lithuanian counterpart's wish to maintain ties with Lithuanian Catholics abroad.

Thus, though for majority of the informants' participation in Lithuanian pastoral service is about their Lithuanian identity and ties to Lithuania, there are signs that this does not prevent them from opening up to other communities within the Catholic Church in Norway. It just does not generate a need for it. When it comes to the more indirect ways that the Church as an institution or Catholic identity mediates between Lithuanian immigrants and Norway, like working as a social network offering advice and counselling about work, though few of them seemed to use Church coffee to discuss work related issues, for many of the informants the Church seemed to offer spiritual and psychological support when dealing with difficulties of the life as an migrant. For example, loneliness, homesickness, financial difficulties, uncertainty about the future, family and other social relationships. All these were mentioned as a way that eased their life in Norway.

The strategies of the Catholic Church vis-à-vis migrants in Norway (Expand and include the most relevant quotes from empirical material)

Finally, how does the Church itself views its role in the lives of immigrants and how much and what kind of integration the Church representatives appear to express? There are several puzzles that the Church struggles with. First, accommodation of the ideals of universalism and particularism in the situation of superdiversity of Catholic Church in Norway. Second, how to facilitate integration of migrants into the Norwegian society without them embracing secularism and leaving the Church.

The absence of nationally or ethnically defined parishes and using the same churches for all Catholics in Norway, as well as employing many priests with foreign backgrounds may

build ground for immigrants to overcome their ethnic boundaries and offer a gateway to local national community. However, allowing Mass and other pastoral services in different languages may encourage formation of ethnic ghettos. Finally, integration of Catholic migrants into a more secular Norwegian society as a whole is seen with caution and even anxiety by the clergy informants for the fear of secularised Catholics leaving the Church as a result.

Conclusions (Expand)

- Lithuanian migrants do not neatly fit into self-isolation, assimilation or active multiculturalism models. In their eyes, the Catholic Church rarely acts as a “bridge” with Norwegian society. Yet, not because they cultivate Catholicism as an intra-ethnic “bond.” Catholicism is also seldom discussed in terms of making multicultural claims of recognition and accommodation by Lithuanians. It rather represents symbolic ethnic retention and their transnational outlook.
- The Catholic Church is puzzled when it comes in balancing its wish for more “Norwegian” Catholics and aims at accommodating foreign Catholics. Moreover, it does not necessarily see the integration of migrants into secular Norwegian society as an advantage. Secularism is framed more as an existential threat than a discriminatory barrier.
- In the Norwegian context, it is rather Lithuanian national/ethnic identity that supports and enables religious identity of the migrants than vice versa.

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