



# DISPLACEMENT AND EDUCATION: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITUATION IN OBER OST, BETWEEN 1914 AND 1918

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## Abstract

The German occupation of Ober Ost during the First World War represented an undeniable incentive for further nation and state-building in the occupied lands. Although in the early 20th century education societies had already spread their networks, it was during the years of the German occupation that the centralisation and consolidation of the education network could take place. Regardless of the fact that some ideological divisions between education societies endured, both the limitations imposed by the occupying regime and the existence of a relief committee, the Lithuanian War Relief Committee, with the task to coordinate virtually all Lithuanian activities, functioned as means of rationalising the whole education system. Not only did the Lithuanian War Relief Committee try to overcome ideological divisions in the field of education, but its quasi-state structure also helped to create, finance and effectively direct the whole official network of Lithuanian educational institutions.

Key words: First World War, education, Lithuania, Ober Ost, war relief.

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## Anotacija

Vokietijos okupacinis režimas *Ober Osto* srityje per Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą tiek būsimajai nacijai, tiek ir valstybei kurti okupuotoje teritorijoje suteikė neginčijamų paskatų. Nors švietimo draugijos XX a. pradžioje čia jau buvo suformavusios savo veiklos tinklus, būtent Vokietijos okupacijos metais įvyko šių tinklų centralizacija ir konsolidacija. Tarp švietimo draugijų tebebūta tam tikrų ideologinių nesutarimų, tačiau tiek okupacinio režimo įvesti apribojimai, tiek ir šelpimo organizacijos – Lietuvių draugijos nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpti – užmačios koordinuoti kone visas lietuvių veiklos formas padėjo racionalizuoti visą švietimo sistemą. Lietuvių šalpos draugija ne tik stengėsi įveikti buvusius ideologinius skirtumus švietimo srityje – jos kvazivalstybinė struktūra taip pat padėjo sukurti, finansuoti ir faktiškai vadovauti visam lietuvių švietimo institucijų oficialiajam tinklui.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Pirmasis pasaulinis karas, švietimas, Lietuva, *Ober Ost*, karo šalpa.

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Education has traditionally been considered one of the main means that helped 'create' modern nations, by conveying a sense of belonging to the national community, its values and symbols.<sup>1</sup> In wartime, when the whole polity becomes the object of mobilisation, the education system represents an important means to achieve this goal among young people. Events related to wartime, such as the search for substitutes for teachers mobilised into the army or the displacement of educational institutions, can sometimes stimulate new nationalising processes. Moreover, relief organisations often play a fundamental role, by connecting, supervising and financing activities from different fields of society life.<sup>2</sup> The German occupation of Ober Ost during the First World War produced similar results. While hundreds of thousands of inhabitants and institutions were displaced to Russia and developed a considerable network of cultural and political institutions, the intelligentsia that remained in the occupied lands organised relief and education work in much more difficult conditions, characterised by the occupiers' acculturation and colonisation plans. Alongside the split of Lithuanian relief organisations into two branches, one operating among refugees in Russia and the other working in Ober Ost, Lithuanian cultural and political life experienced an overall split. How did this split influence the development of the education system in Ober Ost? And how did the displacement of people and relief activities influence the fate of the Lithuanian education system? I will try to briefly answer these questions in the following pages.

The history of schools and education during the First World War has remained for a long time an almost unexplored field of study. More recently, scholars have begun to fill the void and concentrated mainly on the changes that the education systems of belligerent states underwent in the course of the war. Scholars have concentrated mainly on how schools were used as tools for the pupils' mobilisation during the war.<sup>3</sup> Much less attention has been devoted to wartime national mobilisation within non-dominant groups, and its connection with the work of relief committees. In the case of the western borderland of the Tsarist Empire occupied by the German armies, the First World War has remained an almost totally neglected research issue until recently. Although the first study on Lithuanian education in wartime was published in 1938, the issue was only recently faced in works devoted to the development of the Lithuanian education system. The scholarship, however, concentrated mainly on

<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by a grant (No LIT-7-6) from the Research Council of Lithuania. The research was performed in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University.

<sup>2</sup> LITTLE, B. Humanitarian Relief and the Analogue of War, 1914–1918. In *Finding a Common Ground: New Directions in First World War Studies*. Ed. by J. D. KEENE, M. S. NEIBERG. Leiden-Boston, 2011, pp. 139–158; *Humanitarianism in the Era of the First World War*. Ed. by B. LITTLE. *First World War Studies* (Special issue), 2014, vol. 5, no. 1.

<sup>3</sup> AUDOIN-ROUZEAU, S. *La guerre des enfants 1914–1918: essai d'histoire culturelle*. Paris, 1993; DONSON, A. *Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism, and Authority in Germany, 1914–1918*. Cambridge, MA, 2010; PARKER, D. *Hertfordshire Children in War and Peace, 1914–1939*. Hatfield, 2007.

refugees to Russia, while virtually no attention has been paid to the relation between displacement and education in Ober Ost.<sup>4</sup>

## Moving away from Home

In the summer of 1914, the advance of the German troops on the Eastern Front made displacement the unavoidable outcome of military operations. While on the western border of the Russian Empire the front line floated back and forth, an enormous amount of buildings were destroyed, thus forcing the inhabitants to seek shelter elsewhere. In the summer of 1915, when the German troops eventually came to occupy all the territory of *Lithuania Major*, the flow of displaced people throughout the territory reached its peak. Although we cannot rely on precise figures, after the beginning of the war, approximately 1,300,000 people, namely one third of the total prewar population, had fled their homes or fallen victim to the war.<sup>5</sup> In September 1915, the Vilnius Gubernia was already overwhelmed by tens of thousands of refugees. Villages inhabited in peace time by a few thousand people underwent an enormous and sudden growth: a small town like Rudniki, for example, had 15,000 to 20,000 refugees, while the town of Osmiany was flooded by 150,000 people.<sup>6</sup> The tendency to flee the advancing German army became more frequent when the Russian military authorities ordered 18 to 45-year-old men to evacuate along with the military in order to leave the enemy no manpower.<sup>7</sup> As a result, after the German armies had taken control of Vilnius and Grodno, about half a million refugees from the Northwest Territory continued, sometimes coerced through the use of violence,<sup>8</sup> their journey towards internal regions of Russia, from which they came back only after the end of the war or did not come back at all.<sup>9</sup>

The advance of the German troops messed up the ordinary life of the Lithuanian community. Along with people, institutions were compelled to flee the advance of the German troops as well. The network of Lithuanian educational institutions was affected considerably by the war. In the context of 19th and early 20th-century Lithuanian lin-

<sup>4</sup> LIULEVICIUS, V. G. *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I*. Cambridge, 2000, passim; PUKIENĖ, V. Voronežas – lietuvių švietimo židinys Rusijoje Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais. *Istorija*, 2008, t. LXX, p. 17–27; PUPŠYS, V. *Lietuvių mokykla: atgimimo metai (1905–1918)*. Klaipėda, 1995; URBŠIENĖ, M. *Lietuvos mokykla Didžiojo karo metu*. Kaunas, 1938; *Lietuvos mokyklos ir pedagoginės minties istorijos bruožai (ligi Didžiosios Spalio socialistinės revoliucijos)*. Vilnius, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> LIULEVICIUS, V. G. Op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Karo aukų globojimas. *Lietuvos žinios*, 1915 09 05 (18), Nr. 90, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> ČĖPĖNAS, P. *Naujųjų laikų Lietuvos istorija*. T. 2. Chicago, Ill., 1986, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> KLIMAS, P. *Dienoraštis: 1915.XII.1–1919.I.19: pradedamas P. Bugailišio užrašais 1915.VIII.23 (10)–X.13*. Chicago, Ill. 1988, p. 18–19.

<sup>9</sup> BALKELIS, T. In Search of a Native Realm: The Return of World War One Refugees to Lithuania, 1918–1924. In *Homelands. War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia, 1918–1924*. Ed. by N. BARON, P. GATRELL. London, 2004, p. 76.

guistic ethno-nationalism, education (especially proficiency in the Lithuanian language) represented a task that the Lithuanian national movement understood as one of its primary goals. Domestic illegal schooling had been extremely widespread throughout the 19th century. Although on the eve of the early 20th century's constitutional turn the Lithuanian language gained a new place in the public sphere, after being banned from it for over four decades, and the network of state schools increased considerably up to 532 units in 1915,<sup>10</sup> the place of local languages in state schooling remained limited. The Lithuanian and the Polish languages were introduced as subjects in primary schools where most of the pupils were recognised as Lithuanians or Poles. The task of spreading literacy and the use of the Lithuanian language, however, were taken over by private educational societies that retained the possibility to use Lithuanian as a medium of instruction. Members of the Catholic clergy were the first to benefit from the new situation. The first two Lithuanian education societies, Žiburys and Saulė, were founded in 1906, in the Gubernias of Suwałki<sup>11</sup> and Kaunas respectively. Only in 1912 was the Rytas society authorised to spread educational activity within the Vilnius Gubernia. Following the polarisation between Catholic and left-wing parties, the activity of Catholic education societies started to be challenged by left-wing societies, such as Šviesa in Marijampolė (1905) and Vilniaus Aušra in Vilnius (1907). In fact, political views influenced the goals of education societies (the Catholic societies aimed to educate Lithuanians, while the left-wing ones addressed their claims to all ethnic groups living in Lithuania), and damaged reciprocal relations.<sup>12</sup> In such a panorama, the Catholic societies played an overwhelmingly dominant role. Until the outbreak of the First World War, Saulė, for example, created up to 62 Lithuanian primary schools.<sup>13</sup> Apart from organisations whose activity was specifically devoted to education, there were other philanthropic (especially Catholic) organisations, such as the St Zita Society, deeply involved in professional educational activities.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the proximity of the front line, Lithuanian education societies in the Suwałki Gubernia were the first to be transferred after the outbreak of war. In the late summer of 1914, Marijampolė's progymnasium moved to the city of Trakai.<sup>15</sup> Just a few months later, in the spring of 1915, Trakai also became home to Marijampolė girls' gymnasium, led by the Žiburys society.<sup>16</sup> A similar destiny befell the Saulė society, which was forced by circumstances to transfer its courses to Vilnius in 1914.<sup>17</sup> The war did not threaten the activities of

<sup>10</sup> URBŠIENĖ, M. Op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the anachronism, in this article toponyms are indicated according to today's use.

<sup>12</sup> PUPŠYS, V. Op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> PUKIENĖ, V. Lietuvių švietimo draugijų steigimas ir veiklos pradžia 1906–1915 metais. In *Lietuvių švietimo draugija „Rytas“*. Sud. J. GUDAITĖ. Vilnius, 2013, p. 15–19.

<sup>14</sup> PUPŠYS, V. Op. cit., p. 48–49.

<sup>15</sup> PATAKIS, A. *Motiejus Gustainis*. Vilnius, 1993, p. 49–50.

<sup>16</sup> PUKIENĖ, V. *Lietuvių švietimo draugijos XX a. pradžioje (1906–1915 metais)*. Vilnius, 1994, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> VOKIETAITIS, A. Saulės kursų gyvavimo lapas (1907–1918). *Lietuvos mokykla*, 1918, Nr. 9–10, p. 256.

Lithuanian education societies only. War operations emptied the primary schools in the Gubernias of Suwałki and Kaunas. During the first year of the war, more than 400 primary school teachers were evacuated from them.<sup>18</sup> The most serious blow to the whole system, however, was assessed by the advance of the German troops on the Eastern Front in the spring and summer of 1915. On that occasion, a large amount of educational institutions moved to internal regions of Russia, following the displacement of the population.

## Reorganising Schooling: War, Displacement and Relief Committees

Since the very first wave of evacuations in the summer of 1914, the main problem each actor in the public sphere had to face was connected with the reorganisation of activities in a rapidly changing and unpredictable context. Not only did organisations have to seek new sources of finance, but they also needed to start all their activities anew, far from home or in the presence of increasing flows of refugees, which had to be fed, given shelter, dressed, and supported financially. Education societies also needed to reinvent their activities and possibly to align themselves with the changing pace of Lithuanian life. The need for the major integration of public life was evident to all Lithuanian public actors. Although the war could stop and endanger the development of the national movement, the political conjuncture could also give a paradoxical chance to achieve further national goals. The need for a centralised organisation able to cope with all sides of relief activities could be a turning point for the coordination of different facets of the nation's cultural, political and educational life.

Although centralised war relief programmes led by the so-called Tatyana Committee and the League of Towns were created in the very early stages of the war by the Tsarist authorities, relief committees, using, among others, the aforementioned committees' funds, were created along ethnic lines throughout the Russian Empire. Cutting off the occupied territories from the rest of the Empire, the advance of German troops to the east just strengthened the role played by ethnic relief committees. As recent literature on humanitarian relief has pointed out, war relief usually overlaps the simple goal of satisfying the basic needs of the population. On the contrary, even if primary needs are taken into account as the most immediate actions to accomplish, the very emergence of relief committees just reproduces already-existing social conflicts and conveys the goals and values of groups involved in them. Thus, relief activities overlap originally only humanitarian goals and tend to reproduce and strengthen group identities. In the Lithuanian territories, a similar concurrence among relief committees arose from the very beginning of the war. Although each main ethnic group living in

<sup>18</sup> *Lietuvos mokyklos ir pedagoginės minties istorijos bruožai...*, p. 276.

the territory created its own relief committee, the strongest concurrence remained between the committees of the two main ethnic groups that had been fighting with one another for prevalence over the local peasant masses, the Poles and the Lithuanians. Local Poles could rely on the dense network of local committees that arose throughout Tsarist Poland in the summer of 1914.<sup>19</sup> However, it was not only the active and well-organised *komitety obywatelskie* that hindered the creation of a successful Lithuanian relief organisation. Local committees charged to support logistically institutional aid for conscripts started being created just after mobilisation.<sup>20</sup> As state support turned out to be insufficient, in October 1914, Lithuanian political activists, associations and clergy stimulated the foundation of parish relief committees, with the task of providing additional support to those families<sup>21</sup> and collecting money for further aid activities.<sup>22</sup> Over time, however, local committees turned out not to be able to cope with the increasing flow of refugees. That situation stimulated the creation of a centralised Lithuanian relief agency, the Lithuanian War Relief Committee (Lietuvių draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpti, LWRC). Established in November 1914, the LWRC was understood as a veritable ‘mobilisation of Lithuanian intellectuals’, which was given the task of organising and coordinating relief activities in all four of the ethnic Lithuanian Gubernias of Suwałki, Vilnius, Kaunas and Grodno.<sup>23</sup> In June 1915, the number of LWRC local committees had already reached 122.<sup>24</sup> However, due to the advance of the German army to the east, most of the committees created in the Gubernias of Suwałki and Kaunas operated for only a short time, thus making the Vilnius Gubernia and its committees the biggest beneficiaries of the collected funds. Although after the German occupation of the Northwest Territory of the Tsarist Empire a large part of the people involved in relief activities carried on their work in Russia among the Lithuanian population displaced there, neither migration nor the harsh German occupying regime stopped the development of the LWRC. In 1916, the figures concerning local committees within Ober Ost had even increased to 148.<sup>25</sup> The conflicting character of the humanitarian relief described in scientific literature can be seen not only between the LWRC and other ethnic relief committees, but also among the Lithuanians themselves. Due to the conflicts emerging between Catholics and the left wing of the LWRC, the left-wing Lithuanian Committee for War Relief, Agronomic

<sup>19</sup> GRABSKI, W; ŻABKO-POTOPOWICZ, A. Ratownictwo społeczne w czasie wojny. In *Polska w czasie Wielkiej Wojny (1914–1918)*. Tom II: *Historia społeczna*. Red. M. HANDELSMAN. Warszawa, 1932, s. 5–54.

<sup>20</sup> Dar apie globą atarginių kareivių šeimynų. *Šaltinis*, 1914 08 25 (12), Nr. 34, p. 504–505.

<sup>21</sup> JAKŠTAS, A. Nemetas atidėlioti. *Vienybė*, 1914 10 10, p. 529–530; Komitetai neturtingoms atarginių šeimoms šelpti. *Viltis*, 1914 10 01 (14), Nr. 220 (1168), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> [BUGAILIŠKIS, P.] Miesto dūma... *Lietuvos ūkininkas*, 1914 09 18 (10 01), Nr. 38, p. 352.

<sup>23</sup> GIRA, L. Lietuvių draugijos nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpti pirmasis susirinkimas. *Viltis*, 1914 11 23 (12 06), Nr. 265 (1213), p. 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> *Lietuvių draugijos Centralinio komiteto nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpti apyskaita nuo 1914 m. lapkričio mėn. 22 d. ligi 1915 m. liepos mėn. 1 d.* Petrapilis, 1915, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> LCWR proceedings, 11 October 1915. *Lietuvos mokslų akademijos bibliotekos Rankraščių skyrius* (hereafter LMAB RS), f. 70–187, l. 24.

and Legal Aid (Lietuvių draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo gyventojams agronomijos ir teisių pagalbai teikti, LCWRALA) was founded in the spring of 1915.<sup>26</sup> Although the creation of two Lithuanian committees mirrored the diverse trends existing within Lithuanian society, the further stages of the war contributed to reciprocal mistrust. That became visible especially after August-September 1915, when the LWRC split into two different branches, one operating among Lithuanian displaced persons in Russia, and the other continuing the relief work in Ober Ost. Differences and slight contrasts between LWRC and LCWRALA (the latter was present exclusively in Ober Ost) endured unchanged. Nevertheless, the German occupation and the restrictions imposed stimulated cooperation between them.

Among other activities, such as the creation of feeding points, dormitories and day centres for refugees, the committees started to establish schools and workshops for young displaced people throughout the land from the very beginning of the war. Relief committees played a central role in educational activities for at least two reasons. On one hand, in wartime, education societies turned out to be far too weak to survive on their own. The evacuation of schools and education societies from their home towns cut them off from their natural environment. Moving far from the front line did not mean simply carrying on the usual activities elsewhere. The displacement of schools and education societies entailed a new situation, characterised by a chronic lack of funds and a search for new space to carry on their activities. As organisations that could access relief funds from both state and/or private contributors, relief committees represented a source of necessary financial support for education societies. On the other hand, the participation of senior Lithuanian intellectuals in the activities and management of relief committees guaranteed the existence *per se* of a particular sensibility for educational issues: in fact, most of them had been directly involved in teaching, or at least had participated in the struggle for educational rights in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When people fleeing the advance of the German troops eventually gathered in cities and villages, relief committees turned out to be the most appropriate instruments to manage the situation, by guaranteeing support to survive, and thus enabling young people to attend school:

Most of [our] pupils [Fr Motiejus Gustainis commented while displaced with Marijampolė's progymnasium in Trakai in 1915] have come without sheets, linen or footwear [...] It was necessary to give them everything like a mother: to dress and comfort them. That was particularly important, since their morale was very low. Some were real orphans, others had just escaped from fire, they were frightened by the war, and appeared extremely sensitive, probably hysterically ill. Their eyes still remembered the flames at their parents' homes, their ears could still hear the cannon shots, and the sighs.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Lietuvių Draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo gyventojams agronomijos ir teisių pagalbai teikti. *Vairas*, 1915 05 30, Nr. 18, p. 293.

<sup>27</sup> PATACKIS, A. Op. cit., p. 50.



## Educating Refugees

The management of refugee flows was generally characterised by fixed steps. After arriving at their temporary destinations, refugees were usually registered by relief committees, which tried to divide the poor, who needed care, from those whose economic condition was sufficient to guarantee sustenance. Like other activities, education represented a major instrument to integrate refugees into the local population and homogenise communities. School-age displaced children were often accepted in local schools managed by Lithuanian education societies. The numbers of displaced children in school classes increased rapidly. In 1914 and 1915, for example, 70 out of 107 children attending the two-class Lithuanian school in Vilnius came from displaced families.<sup>28</sup> When possible, displaced children were grouped in classes according to their original living places, in order to preserve the integrity of the community. That was the case, for example, with the Žalasis Kalnas school in Kaunas, where 160 pupils from the Ežerėnai region were registered.<sup>29</sup>

The beginning of the German occupation was envisaged by the relief committees and education societies as a further reason to take the education system into their own hands. The lifting of the Russian ban on local idioms as languages of instruction in schools led to the establishment of about 1,000 primary schools throughout the occupied land.<sup>30</sup> This liberalisation, however, did not last long. The German military authorities outlined their education policy in a decree published in December 1915.<sup>31</sup> By the decree, the German command in the east officially took control of the whole Ober Ost education system. Schools could be created only with the permission of the German authorities. Even if mother tongues were introduced as teaching languages according to the majority of pupils that attended classes, the teaching could enjoy virtually no autonomy. The creation and functioning of public schools was supervised by regional and local officers controlling the functioning of the schools and the behaviour of the teachers. New curricula took shape accentuating loyalty to the German Kaiser and the German language over history. Moreover, schools that did not abide by the 'hygiene norms' or the ethics of the new order could be closed.<sup>32</sup> The decree was intended mainly to monopolise primary education, and limit the influx and spread of private education societies. The results of the chosen policy were not fully satisfactory. On one hand, although at first the regulation and control introduced by the German authorities drastically decreased the number of primary schools funded by

<sup>28</sup> *Vilniaus lietuvių dviklasė mokykla 1907–1917 m.* Vilnius, 1917, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> VIRELIŪNAS, A. Trumpa lietuvių Žaliojo kalno pradinės mokyklos mokslo apyskaita už pirmą mėnesį 1915 m., 1915 12 04. *Vilniaus universiteto bibliotekos Rankraščių skyrius*, F1–F518, l. 720.

<sup>30</sup> URBŠIENĖ, M. Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> LCWRALA proceedings, 21 December 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 225–2, l. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Pamatynės taisyklės mokykloms atgaivinti, 22 December 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 23–36, l. 2–3.



ethnic education societies in the occupied territory, their figures increased over time. In 1916, just 260 private and self-financed Lithuanian primary schools<sup>33</sup> were operating, while a couple of years later their figures had increased to 710.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the centralisation of the education system operated by the German authorities just partially concerned higher education. In fact, higher education remained managed mainly by private education societies financed by relief committees. Lithuanian education societies did not limit their actions to primary education either. Apart from primary schools, they created higher schools and professional courses in the main towns of Ober Ost. In the last quarter of 1915, Lithuanian progymnasia opened in Ukmergė, Telšiai and Viekšniai, while Lithuanian gymnasia (the first ever) opened in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Panevėžys.<sup>35</sup> Other non-public courses for illiterates, professional courses, were created all over Ober Ost.<sup>36</sup>

Lithuanian private schools were usually closely connected with LWRC and LCWRALA hostels. Since the very creation of the hostels, a joint School Board stated that each dorm belonging to Lithuanian relief committees in Vilnius should have its own school.<sup>37</sup> A similar trend could also be seen in other major Lithuanian towns,<sup>38</sup> and was even strengthened by a 1917 German order to close every primary school that did not have a hostel for children.<sup>39</sup> Children who were accepted by hostels, day-centres and schools came from both Polish and Lithuanian-speaking families, although priority was given to the latter.<sup>40</sup> By taking children from different linguistic environments, making them live together and attend the same Lithuanian school, the Lithuanian intelligentsia sought to strengthen the children's Lithuanian skills, as well as their feeling for their nation; in other words, as one of the LWRC members put it, to 'Lithuanianise children whose parents cannot speak Lithuanian'.<sup>41</sup> Schools separate from committees' hostels accepted children from various linguistic backgrounds as well, and pursued a similar goal: 'to educate denationalised Lithuanians and establish schools at their places'.<sup>42</sup> The results were sometimes paradoxical. Although in the autumn of 1915 Lithuanian intellectuals rushed to declare that only the Lithuanian language should be used in Lithuanian schools,<sup>43</sup> soon the reality turned out to be quite different. The result of

<sup>33</sup> Private primary schools needed official permission. See: Schulordnung für Litauen. *LMAB RS*, f. 256–1472, l. 1.

<sup>34</sup> URBŠIENĖ, M. *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> MOTUZAS, R. *Lietuvos vidurinės mokyklos raidos 1918–1940 metais pedagoginės kryptys*. Vilnius, 1995, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> URBŠIENĖ, M. *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> LCWR proceedings, 12 (25) September 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 13.

<sup>38</sup> LCWR proceedings, 6 February 1917. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 166.

<sup>39</sup> LCWR proceedings, 15 May 1917. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 184.

<sup>40</sup> BIELIAUSKAS, P. *Vilniaus dienoraštis 1915–1919*. Trakai, 2009, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Proceedings of the Conference of Lithuanian Hostel Directors in Vilnius, 19 December 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–10, l. 7.

<sup>42</sup> DOGELIS, P. *Mano gyvenimo prisiminimai*. Kaunas, 1936, p. 179.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, PIKČILINGIS, J. *Pergyventos valandos. Karo archyvas*, 1926, t. 3, p. 106.

displaced children's grouping in schools was that in some classes nobody could even pronounce a single word in Lithuanian. These circumstances often made the use of the Polish language unavoidable.<sup>44</sup> However, the creation of mixed classes turned out to be a very effective way of spreading the use of Lithuanian among Polish speakers. In order to make weaker Lithuanian speakers at the Vilnius gymnasium more confident, the LWRC gave them the chance to spend the summer in the hostel, and thus improve their linguistic skills and sense of community.<sup>45</sup> According to archival data, after attending classes for some months, almost every pupil could understand and communicate in Lithuanian.<sup>46</sup> Apart from the language, Lithuanian schools tried to instil in young people a sense of belonging to a common ethnic and historical community. Lithuanian history was always widely represented in LWRC programmes.<sup>47</sup> The patriotic sentiments of both Polish and Lithuanian-speaking pupils were also stimulated in illegal periodical journals that circulated in the hostels.<sup>48</sup> Performances, lectures and events with pictures on Lithuanian history and heroes were also organised.<sup>49</sup>

The spread of the Lithuanian language and a sense of Lithuanianness were not the only goals of Lithuanian wartime education. The chronic lack of funding and the need to fill up the ranks of the Lithuanian intelligentsia after huge numbers had fled to Russia stimulated education societies and relief committees to work out new strategies to cope with the increasing difficulties. From the beginning of the German occupation, the LWRC divided pupils attending its primary schools into three categories according to their parents' income. The poorest pupils were relieved from paying any fee, while the children of parents of those included in the other two categories were given free education only temporarily, or were obliged to make contributions in money or foodstuffs.<sup>50</sup> In some cases, scholarships were created in order to encourage people not to abandon school and pay the fees.<sup>51</sup> Pupils whose parents did not pay established education fees, however, were usually denied the chance to attend lessons.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, pupils who did not show an interest or achieve satisfactory results in learning were also invited to leave school,<sup>53</sup> to move to a lower-level school,<sup>54</sup> or, if accommodated in relief association dorms, even to leave them.<sup>55</sup> Con-

<sup>44</sup> VIRELIŪNAS, A. Op. cit., l. 722.

<sup>45</sup> *Vilniaus Vytauto Didžiojo gimnazijos protokolai (1915–1940 ir 1953–1955 metai)* (Kalbų ir kultūrų sankirtų archyvai, t. 1). Sud. D. B. PUCHOVIČIENĖ, I. RAŠČIUVIENĖ, J. ZABARSKAITĖ. Vilnius, 2011, p. 120.

<sup>46</sup> URBELIS, A. Vokiečių okupacijos laikai. *Karo archyvas*, 1926, t. 3, p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> LWRC proceedings, 9 (22) September 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 11.

<sup>48</sup> DOGELIS, P. Op. cit., p. 209.

<sup>49</sup> BIELIAUSKAS, P. Op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> LWRC proceedings, 11 September 1916. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 126.

<sup>51</sup> LCWRALA proceedings, 17 May 1916. *LMAB RS*, f. 225–2, l. 24.

<sup>52</sup> LWRC proceedings, 15 January 1917. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 156.

<sup>53</sup> LWRC proceedings, 8 January 1917. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 155.

<sup>54</sup> *Vilniaus Vytauto Didžiojo gimnazijos protokolai...*, p. 101, 124.

<sup>55</sup> Proceedings of the Conference of Lithuanian Hostel Directors in Vilnius, 3 January 1917. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–10, l. 10–11.

versely, talented pupils could be given a higher education (even for free)<sup>56</sup> at Lithuanian gymnasia, thus could the role of the relief associations as the creators of a new intelligentsia.<sup>57</sup> The aim to create a popular university (*liaudies universitetas*) was seen as a possible means for further specialisation by people who had already reached higher education level. The Polish popular university in Vilnius was already active at the very beginning of the war. In December 1915, the Lithuanians tried to oppose the Polish institution by bringing together all the main non-Polish communities (Jews and Belarusian) and creating a popular university inspired by civic nationalism.<sup>58</sup> The Lithuanian Popular University, which was finally created at the end of January 1916, was supposed to be open to all ethnic groups, while lectures were to be delivered in Lithuanian. However, not much time was left to put these goals into practice. In fact, the activities of all popular universities operating in Ober Ost were broken off by a decree from the German authorities in February 1916.<sup>59</sup>

Although the Lithuanians could rely on considerable experience in schooling, Lithuanian education was not still completely equipped for mass teaching. In particular, at the beginning of the German occupation, they still had practically no school books in Lithuanian. The spread of legal education in the Lithuanian language compelled leaders to prepare textbooks as quickly as possible. The result was surprising: 58 textbooks were printed over five years.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the high number of Polish-speaking pupils in Lithuanian schools made it necessary to create and distribute teaching material in Polish language as well.<sup>61</sup>

### Cooperation and Opposition: the LWRC, LCWRALA, and the German Authorities

The Lithuanians, however, opposed German education policy by using other means too. Home education had a long tradition throughout all the 19th-century Lithuanian revival. Although during the German occupation even private lessons could not be organised without previous approval from the authorities, people's attitude did not change radically.<sup>62</sup> Illegal schooling at home and at various associations<sup>63</sup> continued, and even improved after the Germans had banned schools that did not comply with

<sup>56</sup> LWRC proceedings, 11 October 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 24.

<sup>57</sup> LCWRALA proceedings, 16 October 1916. *LMAB RS*, f. 225–2, l. 32.

<sup>58</sup> KLIMAS, P. Op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> MOTUZAS, R. Op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> KLIMAS, P. Op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>62</sup> *Verwaltungsbericht der Deutschen Verwaltung für Litauen vom 1. Mai 1916*. Tilsit, 1916, S. 13 (*LMAB RS*, f. 23–35).

<sup>63</sup> Catholic Lithuanian St Nicholas Society proceedings, 19 November 1916. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–483, l. 20.

the new law.<sup>64</sup> If illegal teaching represented a means to fight against the Germanising approach of the new order, it did not remain the only one. In some cases, opposition became open disobedience. This was the case with the decision taken in 1918 by the LWRC not to introduce compulsory German language classes.<sup>65</sup> Sometimes open opposition to Germanising policy led to the deportation to Germany of Lithuanian school directors, such as Jurgis Galdikas and Antanas Dailydė, as well as to the closure of the gymnasias they headed in Šiauliai and Marijampolė.<sup>66</sup> Much more often, opposition was 'transferred' to the sphere of individual choice. For example, people started not to send children to German-founded schools for Lithuanians, as a form of silent protest against 'Germanisation'.<sup>67</sup>

196 | Opposition to the German authorities and to the possible nationalising practices adopted by other ethnic groups, however, was hardly conceivable without strengthening the Lithuanian ranks themselves. In order to better coordinate education logistics, the LWRC and the LCWRALA created a joint Education Commission in 1915.<sup>68</sup> The committees discussed jointly the content of education programmes,<sup>69</sup> and especially issues related to financial support for educational activities.<sup>70</sup> The existence of a joint commission, however, did not mean that relations between different organisations dealing with education were peaceful. The very establishment of the joint Education Commission had initially been opposed by members of the LCWRALA who did not accept the role the Rytas 'clerical' association was intended to play in it.<sup>71</sup> Although the LCWRALA eventually joined the commission, some of its members, such as the Vilnius intellectuals Jonas Vileišis and Jurgis Šaulys, felt dissatisfied and tried to create a coordination group with the Polish and Jewish relief committees.<sup>72</sup> Also, other liberal members of the Lithuanian intelligentsia did not avoid cooperating with other ethnic groups in the field of education. Petras Klimas was invited to give lectures on political economics at the Polish Popular University in Vilnius.<sup>73</sup> Regardless of the efforts to strengthen Lithuanian cohesion and collaboration, conflicts between the different parts of the political panorama constantly emerged. Quite often, the establishment of schools was prevented by quarrels that emerged between Lithuanian relief societies.<sup>74</sup> Members of the Catholic clergy occasionally objected to liberals and socialists entering

<sup>64</sup> EIDUKEVIČIUS, J. *Praeities atsiminimai*. Vilnius, 1989, p. 16.

<sup>65</sup> STULGINSKIS, A. *Atsiminimai*. Chicago, Ill., 1980, p. 136–139.

<sup>66</sup> MOTUZAS, R. *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> STULGINSKIS, A. *Op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>68</sup> LCWRALA proceedings, 21 December 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 225–2, l. 18.

<sup>69</sup> LWRC proceedings, 16 (29) September 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 15.

<sup>70</sup> LWRC proceedings, 26 November 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 43.

<sup>71</sup> LCWRALA proceedings, 22 February 1916. *LMAB RS*, f. 225–2, l. 20.

<sup>72</sup> KLIMAS, P. *Op. cit.*, p. 61–63.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>74</sup> BUGAILIŠKIS, P. Iš I Pasaulinio karo užrašų: 1915–1918 m. vokiečių okupacijos kronika, 1915 12 29 d. *LMAB RS*, f. 87–157, l. 6–7.

the educational process. In 1916, Fr Jurgis Galdikas, a member of the Catholic intelligentsia and the director of the progymnasium in the town of Šiauliai, repeatedly refused to take on liberal teachers, thus creating new disagreements between the LWRC and the LCWRALA.<sup>75</sup> The disagreements were made even stronger by Galdikas' desire to influence activities in schools belonging to the LCWRALA.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, when Lithuanian refugees started to return from Russia in 1918, it appeared clear to everyone that the real rift the war had created was between two other groups, those who had remained in occupied Ober Ost and those who had fled to Russia. If, on one hand, pupils who had spent their school years in Russia resulted in being somehow less prepared in comparison with their colleagues in Ober Ost, the main problems were related to the political reliability of the latter. In Russia, teachers and pupils (like other people) had experienced the revolutionary events. This experience not only multiplied the range of political options leading to the state-building process between the late 1910s and the early 1920s, but it also influenced profoundly the pupils' approach to authority: 'Pupils [the doctor Kazimieras Jokantas observed while describing pupils who had returned from Russia to Marijampolė's gymnasium] were strongly politicised, radically oriented and indisciplined. To pay attention to the teachers or the director appeared to them as an act of humiliation.'<sup>77</sup>

In the framework of the new education system, teachers' recruitment represented the first problematic issue to face. After being displaced and forced to move to internal regions of Russia, education relied on only a handful of intellectuals involved in the relief activity and some young women who had finished their gymnasium studies in the first half of 1915. The LWRC created the first courses for teachers in the same year. Due to the chronic lack of human resources after most teachers had fled to Russia, the entry requirements to be admitted to courses diminished progressively. If still in 1915 gymnasium students could be admitted to courses after completing the third and fourth class, in 1916 and 1917 people only needed to have completed the second class.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, teaching tasks were often assigned to unqualified people.<sup>79</sup> As the need for teachers increased, and the training courses created by the German authorities turned out to be insufficient and absolutely inadequate to prepare specialists, the LWRA hostels became a new source for teaching staff.<sup>80</sup> As a veritable way to fight with the German understanding of education in Ober Ost, the Lithuanian courses for teachers were not only a means to strengthen teachers' technical abilities, but also a way to build their political understanding.<sup>81</sup> Actually, in

<sup>75</sup> KLIMAS, P. Op. cit., p. 88; LWRC proceedings, 15 May 1916. *LMAB RS*, f. 70-4, l. 93.

<sup>76</sup> Pelikšas Bugailiškis' letter to Bishop Karevičius, 14 May 1916. *LMAB RS*, f. 87-2, l. 1-2.

<sup>77</sup> JOKANTAS, K. Suv. Kalvarijoje vokiečių okupacijos metu (1914-1918). *Karo archyvas*, 1937, t. 8, p. 185.

<sup>78</sup> PUPŠYS, V. Op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>79</sup> JOKANTAS, K. Op. cit., p. 184-185.

<sup>80</sup> DOGELIS, P. Op. cit., p. 197-200.

<sup>81</sup> KLIMAS, P. Op. cit., p. 114.

a context characterised by a shortage of food, a lack of work and deprivation of all kinds, the teaching profession was seen as a means for social change in wartime Lithuanian society. From the very beginning of the war, teachers became the recipients of benefits, such as a flat, a subsidy for electricity, fuel, and a salary.<sup>82</sup> Although conflicts occasionally emerged between Lithuanian teachers themselves, because of the different financial treatment<sup>83</sup> and teachers' negligence,<sup>84</sup> teachers remained the backbone of the Lithuanian intelligentsia during the war. When repatriation from Russia began in 1918, the LWRC profited from the need for repatriated teachers and employed them in teaching activities in the Lithuanian countryside.<sup>85</sup> Even if some of the teachers had fallen victim to the 'revolutionary syndrome', the existence of a widespread network of educational institutions functioned as a means of social containment for teachers, and, in the meantime, enabled the continuation of the education process during the critical concluding phases of Lithuanian state-building.

## Concluding Remarks

The eastward advance of German troops, and the years of the German occupation, strongly changed the fate of the Lithuanians. Far from just disturbing the development of civil society, the German occupation represented an undeniable incentive for further nation and state-building in the occupied land. Although supervision by the German authorities limited the building of a free education system, the Lithuanians who remained in Ober Ost could take advantage (like their compatriots in Russia) of a situation unknown in pre-war times. While over the years the Lithuanians became one of the main players of the intricate Ober Ost political game, and the possibilities to see Lithuanian *political* autonomy officially recognised increased along with the increase in political concurrence among national groups, the implementation of the education system remained one of the grounds for the stabilisation and widening of the Lithuanian moral community. Although in the early 20th century education societies had already spread their networks, it was during the years of the German occupation that the centralisation and consolidation of the education network could take place. In fact, although some ideological divisions between education societies endured, both the limitations imposed by the occupying regime and the existence of a relief committee, the LWRC, with the task to coordinate virtually all the Lithuanian activities, functioned as a means of rationalising the whole education system. Not only did the LWRC try to overcome ideological divisions in the field of education,

<sup>82</sup> LWRC proceedings, 7 (20) September 1915. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 16.

<sup>83</sup> KLIMAS, P. Op. cit., p. 121–122.

<sup>84</sup> *Vilniaus Vytauto Didžiojo gimnazijos protokolai...*, p. 122.

<sup>85</sup> LWRC proceedings, 22 June 1918. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–4, l. 299; Lietuvių Centro Komiteto kreipimasis į Visuomenę, 1918 06 21. *LMAB RS*, f. 70–21, l. 122.

but its quasi-state structure also helped to create, finance and actually direct the whole official network of Lithuanian educational institutions. As it began its own activities in 1917 and 1918, the Taryba, the Lithuanian executive commission entrusted with the first steps in Lithuanian state building, took over the network as the basis for the Lithuanian nation-state's education system. In the years that followed the emergence of the Lithuanian state, the existence of a network of educational institutions guaranteed the reintegration of pupils and teachers who were repatriated from Russia. In the meantime, the centralised coordination of the education system enabled a number of strategies aimed at preserving the nationalisation process in a context whose ideological fluidity was progressively increasing.

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## IŠVIETINIMAS IR ŠVIETIMAS: KELIOS PASTABOS APIE SITUACIJĄ OBER OSTE 1914–1918 METAIS

Andrea Griffante

### Santrauka

Vokietijos įvykdytas didžiosios Lietuvos dalies užėmimas Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais giliai paveikė lietuvių nacionalinio judėjimo likimą okupuotose žemėse. Griežto kolonijinio valdymo įvedimas *Ober Oste* ne tik pristabdė vietinį ekonominį ir kultūrinį gyvenimą, bet ir sudarė netikėtas sąlygas tolesniam žemesnių visuomenės sluoksnių įpilietinimui, būsimosios nacionalinės valstybės struktūrų kūrimuisi. Nors Vokietijos valdžios priežiūra neišvengiamai apribojo laisvos švietimo sistemos atsiradimo ir vystymosi galimybes, okupacija sudarė palankias sąlygas nacionalinio judėjimo veikloms koordinuoti. Didėjant vietinių nacionalinių bendruomenių konkurencijai ir vokiečių spaudai, *centralizuotos* švietimo sistemos kūrimas tapo viena pagrindinių priemonių savo bendruomenės moralei išlaikyti, jos riboms praplėsti.

Įvairios lietuvių švietimo draugijos buvo pradėjusios veikti, kurti savo skyrius etnografinės Lietuvos teritorijoje nuo pat amžiaus pradžios. Vis dėlto švietimo draugijos pasižymėjo tiek tam tikra ideologine konkurencija (katalikiškos, kairiosios), tiek šviečiamąjo darbo centrinio koordinavimo stoka. Okupacijos sąlygos nulėmė reikšmingus pokyčius. Nors tam tikrą ideologinę konkurenciją perėmė dvi tarpusavyje konkuruojančios lietuvių šelpimo draugijos (Lietuvių draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpti (LDNKŠ) ir Lietuvių draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo gyventojams agronomijos ir teisių pagalbai teikti), tačiau kuo glaudesnio bendradarbiavimo poreikis, susiduriant su dideliais finansiniais sunkumais bei kovojant su „vokietinimo“ politika, paskatino šviečiamosios veiklos racionalizavimą. Viena vertus, LDNKŠ tapo virtualiai visas lietuvių veiklas koordinuojančiu organu, nuo kurio tarpininkavimo su Vokietijos valdžia bei finansinės pagalbos priklausė kone visas visuomeninis lietuvių gyvenimas karo metu. LDNKŠ veikė kaip centrinė lietuvių įstaiga, palaikanti lietuvių švietimo tinklo veikimą ir prižiūrinti per tą tinklą skleidžiamas reikšmes. Švietimas buvo įtrauktas į kompleksinę pabėgėlių šelpimo veiklą visumą, sąveikavo su kitomis pabėgėlių įpilietinimo priemonėmis. Kita vertus, LDNKŠ pasinaudojo savo kvazimonopolija lietuvių švietimo srityje, atskiriant gabesnius moksleivius nuo prasčiau besimokančiųjų. Pirmiesiems, į kuriuos buvo žvelgiama kaip į būsimuosius inteligentijos atstovus, dažnai būdavo suteikiama galimybė nemokamai mokytis, gauti pašalpas ir nemokamai apsigyventi LDNKŠ bendrabučiuose. Tuo tarpu prastai besimokantieji ne tik privalėjo mokėti už mokslą, bet ir dažnai buvo prašomi mesti mokslą ir išsikraustyti iš bendrabučių.

Kai 1917–1918 m. Lietuvos Taryba pradėjo veikti, pamažėl perimdama švietimo priežiūrą bei valdymą, LDNKŠ sukurtas švietimo tinklas sąlyginiai palengvino edukacinės sistemos kūrimo darbą ir suteikė struktūrą, padedančią iš Rusijos grįžtančius pabėgėlius integruoti dar tik besikuriančioje nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje. Tuo pat metu centralizuotos švietimo sistemos egzistavimas leido taip pat pritaikyti praktikoje daugelį strategijų, kuriomis siekta apsaugoti įpilietinimo procesą kontekste, kuriame ideologinis susiskaidymas buvo itin didelis ir grėse valstybės / nacijos vientisumui.