

POLITICAL HOMOPHOBIA IN SOVIET LITHUANIA REVISITED: THE CASE OF THE DISSIDENT VIKTORAS PETKUS

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This article explores the uses of homophobia as a part of the Soviet repressive apparatus. It examines the case of the Lithuanian dissident, political prisoner, and human rights activist Viktoras Petkus (1928–2012), in particular, the accusation of sodomy he faced in 1978, as a part of the highly political case related to Petkus’ involvement with the Lithuanian Helsinki Group. I employ the concept of political homophobia to analyse the ways that the KGB tried to destroy Petkus’ reputation and defame the Lithuanian dissident movement for human rights, which the Soviet authorities perceived as particularly threatening.

Keywords: homophobia, Soviet Union, dissidents, LGBTQ people, Lithuania, Baltic states, Helsinki groups

From the history of LGBTQ people in the Soviet Union we know of certain famous victims of political homophobia, such as the Russian singer Vadim Kozin, the Armenian film director Sergei Parajanov, and the Russian poet Gennady Trifonov.¹ All of them were more or less open about their homosexuality, were arrested for their lack of collaboration with the state or “anti-Soviet” views, and convicted under sodomy article or in combination with other accusations. As the historian Dan Healey writes, “the Soviet authorities used the sodomy law to harass these figures and destroy their reputations”.² Unlike these people,

1 Healey 2018, 172–173; de Jong 1982, 341–157.

2 Healey 2018, 172.

the Lithuanian dissident and human rights activist Viktoras Petkus was not openly homosexual and has not left any personal archival materials (that we know of) that would show his attraction to men or would advocate tolerance of homosexuality. In his case, the aggravated sodomy charge and other criminal charges were added to a clearly political case, in which Petkus was initially arrested for his involvement in dissident activities and, specifically, in the formation of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group (LHG). The accusation of “pederasty”³ under Article 122 of the Lithuanian SSR Criminal Code served a certain clearly defined function for the Soviet authorities. By employing homophobia, they wished to damage his reputation, and obfuscate the fact that his persecution was political and illegal, even by the Soviet legal standards. As I argue in this article, Petkus’ case is an important example of the use of political homophobia as a tool of repression against dissent in the Soviet Union.

Since the Soviet authorities had so many tools for repression through intimidation, blackmailing, *kompromat*, abusive psychiatric practices, coercion etc. at their disposal, one wonders why political homophobia (which was used only in exceptional cases) should deserve any special attention.⁴ The main reason to consider it separately is the persistence of homophobia in Lithuania after the fall of the Soviet Union, which makes this tool of public humiliation a particularly lasting legacy. While many of the denigrating labels systematically used by the KGB, such as “banditism”,⁵ “hooliganism”⁶ and the psychiatric diagnosis of “sluggish schizophrenia”,⁷ have been reconsidered in historical studies on the Soviet period in Lithuania, the term ‘pederasty’ has never attracted such a critical attention.⁸ Probably due to the lack of such historical reflection, the term ‘pederast’ at times re-appears in contemporary political discourse as a tool of humiliation and mockery, used, in particular, against those who advocate for various human

3 In this article I use the words ‘sodomy’ and ‘pederasty’ interchangeably. The word ‘sodomy’ is used by Healey in discussing Soviet law, and it helps to show the historical parallels with similar laws in other countries and periods. The Lithuanian law referred to “sexual intercourse between men”, but the word “pederasty” (Lit. *pederastija*) was used in the case files and in forensic literature. The term ‘pederasty’ also implicitly suggests connection or equivalence between male homosexuality and paedophilia, hence I use it in quotation marks.

4 de Jong 1982.

5 Jurkutė 2015, 4–16.

6 Swain 2015, 162–182.

7 Kuklytė 2007; van Voren 2010.

8 The attempt at attributing the label of ‘homosexuality’ to Romas Kalanta is mentioned in passing by Burinskaitė 2006, 63–82.

rights issues.⁹ Revisiting the case of Petkus can help us reevaluate political homophobia as a part of the arsenal of the repressive tools of the Soviet state, and reflect on the harm it has caused to people who have expressed dissent against the state, irrespective of their sexual orientation.

In this article I first of all explain the concept of political homophobia and show how it can be understood, from a historical perspective, as a part of the repressive apparatus of the Soviet state. Then I introduce Petkus and his involvement with human rights activism in the Soviet Union, explaining why it was perceived as threatening by the authorities. I then describe how the pederasty charge was introduced into Petkus' case. I show that the chronology, the circumstances in which the evidence was collected, the parallels with similar cases in other Soviet republics, and the ways the charge of "pederasty" was discussed in the Soviet press afterwards show intent at defamation. I discuss how the dissident circles reacted to the charge initially, wishing to vindicate Petkus from criminal charges and also to prove that he was not homosexual, and how eventually the charge was erased from the memory of Petkus and the LHG, and "forgotten" in post-Soviet Lithuania. Nevertheless, Petkus was never exonerated from these charges. Finally, I argue that there has never been an attempt to rethink and reevaluate the sodomy article and the very notion of "pederasty" (either in the case of Petkus or in general) as a repressive tool used by the Soviet authorities in Lithuania.

Political homophobia as a KGB tool

Homophobia is often considered to be a "natural" response to homosexual, bisexual, trans or queer identities and sexualities, founded upon deeply ingrained feelings or certain moral or religious values.¹⁰ Nowadays, in Lithuania and elsewhere, homophobia is also often seen as a reaction to the demands of the LGBTQ peoples' movement for equal rights and increased visibility. However, as Michael J. Bosia and Meredith L. Weiss argue, when various state actors invoke homophobia, it is normally a "conscious political strategy", and is independent of sexual rights movements or privately held views regarding sexual minorities.¹¹ In such cases it should be understood as political homophobia (or state homophobia) which takes the form of a coordinated attack against an individual or a group

9 Platukytė 2022; Sinica 2022.

10 Bosia, Weiss 2013, 11.

11 Ibid., 2.

of people, on the basis of allegations regarding their “immoral” and “abnormal” sexual behavior, with a clear political goal in mind. As Bosia shows, a charge of sodomy brought up against a political enemy “provides a public forum to define a surrogate foreign menace embodied by the accused, and behind whom lurk the international pressures on state sovereignty”.¹² In other words, accusing someone of homosexuality (“sodomy”, “pederasty”, etc.) is a strategy of political retaliation or a preemptive strike, employed by the authorities against political opponents, whom they want to portray as destructive to the society, the state, and, eventually, the moral order. Political homophobia therefore often manifests itself in public arrests, prosecutions, and show trials, and is supported by the media, compliant to the state.¹³

In the Soviet Union, including the Lithuanian SSR, as in many other modern contexts worldwide, the use of political homophobia preceded the formation of collective identity of LGBTQ people or their demands for rights. Homosexual acts between men (Rus. *muzhelozhstvo*) were re-criminalised by Stalin already in 1933–1934, because homosexual men were considered to form a counter-revolutionary threat and have a demoralising effect on Soviet youths.¹⁴ Homosexuals, or “pederasts”, as they were called by the authorities, were regarded by the communist ideologues to be “a declassed rabble, or the scum of society, or remnants of the exploiting classes”, who may corrupt healthy youths.¹⁵ The criminalisation of homosexuality fell neatly into the overall context of the time, in which Stalin became increasingly anxious with preventing various “conspiracies”, which led to the Great Terror.¹⁶ Since the death of Stalin in 1953, the character of political repression in the Soviet Union changed considerably, moving from direct mass repressions to more sophisticated means of control of the population, such as through imposing “Communist morality” and policing the private sphere.¹⁷ While Khrushchev’s reformers relaxed many of the Stalin’s laws, this did not apply to the sodomy article, which remained in force until the collapse of the Soviet Union and beyond.¹⁸ Furthermore, as Healey has shown, in 1958, a special directive was issued by the Russian SFSR (RSFSR) Ministry of Internal Affairs which demanded the strengthening of the crackdown on sodomy and

12 Bosia 2013, 41.

13 Ibid., 41–42.

14 Healey 2018, 158–159.

15 Healey 2018, 165–166; de Jong 1982, 342; see also Healey 2002, 349–378.

16 Snyder 2010, 71.

17 Field 2007, 11.

18 Healey 2018, 170–71; Alexander 2012, 138.

apparently resulted in the increased amount of convictions under the sodomy article.¹⁹ While the exact rationale for increasing the persecution of homosexual men is still unknown, Healey attributes it to the “anxieties” that followed the massive release of GULAG prisoners back into the Soviet Union and fears over their negative impact on the public morals.²⁰ Following Healey, the historian Rustam Alexander also sees the increasing policing of homosexuality as characteristic of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation period, where it was fuelled by the “anxieties” regarding the declining institution of family.²¹ However, in understanding the ongoing criminalisation and persecution of homosexuality one cannot ignore another, arguably even more significant “anxiety” permeating the Soviet authorities, namely, the fear of the national independence movements in the territories occupied by the Soviet Union and political resistance in general. I believe that the continuous stigmatisation of homosexual men, framed as “pederasts”, who allegedly posed a demoralising threat to Soviet youths, provided the authorities with yet another tool (among many) of humiliation, intimidation and repression of men, perceived as threatening to the regime.

The Soviet Union invaded the three independent Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia first in 1940 and then again in 1944, upon which it annexed the countries. The occupation sparked armed resistance movements. In Lithuania alone, between 1944 and 1953, around 20,000 people were killed by the authorities in relation to the partisan movement.²² By 1953, the armed resistance was curbed by the authorities; and the anti-Soviet underground, mostly centred around the Lithuanian Catholic Church, adopted peaceful means of disobedience – forming clandestine organisations, distributing samizdat, organising symbolic gestures, such as the raising of the national Lithuanian flag or celebrating traditional Catholic holidays. On the official level, since Khrushchev’s rise to power, the ideological narrative promoted by the state was that socialism has been achieved, and therefore, no political or ideological resistance was possible anymore in the Soviet Union.²³ This, in turn, meant that anti-Soviet dissidence was interpreted as either a diversion instigated by the so-called bourgeois West, or an act of individual madness, perpetrated by “dangerous and anti-social elements” and individuals with “psychiatric disorders”.²⁴ While there was less of

19 Healey 2018, 42–43.

20 Healey 2001, 241; Healey 2018, 41.

21 Alexander 2021, 39.

22 Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija, 2024.

23 Burinskaitė 2015, 39.

24 Ibid., 39–46.

an outright violent suppression of anti-Soviet dissidence, the KGB employed more subtle means of repression: by trying to damage the image of dissidents in the eyes of the broader public, by presenting them as eccentric and having no support in the broader society, by depoliticising their activities.²⁵ Oftentimes the dissident was suppressed preemptively – preventing any unwanted social or political actions through “prophylactic” intimidation and blackmailing.²⁶ Criminalisation and stigmatisation of homosexuality allowed to keep a large group of people in fear of repressions simply because of their sexual preferences – this was also useful for the regime.

The Soviet legal framework was introduced in the Baltic states upon their occupation, including the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, which punished sodomy with imprisonment from three to five years, and, in aggravated circumstances, up to eight years.²⁷ In 1961, all three countries adopted renewed Soviet Criminal Code with removed minimum sentences and with some variations regarding maximum imprisonment sentences for sodomy (Latvia – 5 years, Estonia – 2 years, Lithuania – 3 years). According to the historian Ineta Lipša, the adoption of the new Criminal Code was carefully monitored by the central leadership of the Communist Party and the KGB.²⁸ Article 122 of the new Criminal Code of the Lithuanian SSR criminalised “man’s sexual intercourse with another man” and deemed it punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, and in aggravated cases (“performed with the use of force or by taking advantage of the dependent or powerless situation of the victim, or if a victim is a minor”), with imprisonment from three to eight years.²⁹ In addition to criminalisation, throughout the Soviet period, the understanding of homosexuality as a deviance and moral degeneration was popularised by medical, psychiatric, criminological, forensic, and pedagogical texts.³⁰ The simultaneous criminalisation and pathologising of homosexuality meant that people with same-sex attraction had little or no perception of themselves as a distinct group with social and political rights, and society as a whole saw homosexuality as a taboo topic.³¹ This underlying context created perfect conditions for the use of homophobia as a tool of political repression.

25 Burinskaitė 2006.

26 Cohn 2018, 769–792.

27 Healey 2001, 330.

28 See Lipša, in Healey 2018, 171.

29 Lietuvos Respublikos Aukščiausioji Taryba, 1961.

30 Healey 2001, 229–50; Healey 2018; Alexander 2021, 170–206.

31 Skirmantė 2013; Čičelis 2011.

How was political homophobia used in the Soviet Union, including the Lithuanian SSR? According to researchers, a popular way of “neutralising” dissident groups and resistance in general was through the use of *kompromat*, namely, by casting a bad light on the character of anti-Soviet activists in the press or their activist circles.³² As the KGB textbook for Lithuanian officers indicated, when it was “difficult to prove their guilt with evidence”, the right approach in the fight against dissidents was “to discredit them publicly”, namely “by publicising the information on the immoral behaviour of nationalists, as well as charging them with criminal offenses”.³³ This was supposed to remove the heroic aura from the dissidents and, through defamation campaigns, portray them as simple criminals. In order for slander to be more convincing in the eyes of the public, as the historian Kristina Burinskaitė argues, the KGB normally would do preparatory work to figure out the person’s weaknesses, hobbies, health problems, details of their private lives, their social networks, etc. Once the *kompromat* was collected and a need for it arose, it would be publicly released, most often by the state newspapers, “with as much detail as possible”.³⁴ Homosexuality, which was both seen as immoral, pathological, and punished as criminal, was in many ways an ideal piece of *kompromat*. The KGB and the *milicija* (police) kept record of gay meeting places and harassed homosexual men, with a goal to extract bribes and, most importantly, to collect useful information for the purposes of blackmail or public humiliation.³⁵ The accusation of “pederasty”, which carried a huge social stigma, was very rarely publicly applied in political cases, probably only when the blackmail and prophylactic intimidation was not successful, and radical measures were needed. The case of Petkus is therefore valuable in helping to understand the details of how the KGB employed homophobia as one of its many tools of political repression.

Petkus and the Lithuanian Helsinki Group

The Lithuanian dissident and writer Tomas Venclova described Viktoras Petkus as a very well-read man, especially knowledgeable about Lithuanian history and literature, very courageous, but also as a very private and even

32 Falkov 2023, 1–28.

33 Aukštoji TSRS KGB mokykla, 1993, 85.

34 Burinskaitė 2015, 96.

35 Navickaitė 2022.

“mysterious” person.³⁶ The Russian dissident and historian Lyudmila Alexeyeva, who met Petkus in 1976, described him as a “tactful, insightful, charming” man.³⁷ Petkus was born in a small town of Raseiniai, in central Lithuania, in 1928³⁸ and was first arrested during Stalinist repressions in 1947, while still a minor, for participating in the Catholic youth organisation *Ateitininkai*. In 1948, he was sent to hard labour for five years in a “corrective labour colony” in Inta, Komi Republic of the RSFSR. After his attempted escape, the sentence was increased by ten years. With the amnesty after Stalin’s death, in 1953, he was released and returned to Lithuania, where he finished high school and moved to Vilnius. Petkus was a devout Catholic and in the 1950s considered joining the Kaunas Priest Seminary, but was prevented from it by the state. Petkus was soon arrested again for keeping and distributing “anti-Soviet” literature, and served another sentence, between 1958 and 1965, in the labour camps of Irkutsk and Mordovia.³⁹ After his second return to Lithuania, Petkus continued speaking out against the Soviet occupation of Lithuania and participating in dissident activities. Petkus was therefore closely followed by the KGB, who prevented him from obtaining higher education and forced him to change jobs often. They also tried to undermine his reputation through “satirical” articles in press, where he was accused of stealing money from his employer and leading a lascivious lifestyle.⁴⁰

Even though under constant surveillance, in the 1960s, Petkus’s apartment in Vilnius became a meeting point for anti-Soviet Lithuanian intelligentsia and youth.⁴¹ Due to his long imprisonment as a political prisoner, Petkus had contacts with dissidents across the Soviet Union: Russians (Yuri Orlov, Alexander Ginzburg, Sergei Kovalev), Latvians (Ints Cālītis, Viktors Kalniņš), and Estonians (Mart Niklus, Erik Udam, Enn Tarto). Among his comrades was also the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov, who was the initiator of the first Helsinki Group, formed in Moscow in 1976. Petkus was among the closest contacts of Sakharov in Lithuania, when the latter came to the trial of Kovalev in Vilnius in 1975.⁴² Given his network, it is not surprising that Petkus was one of the initiators

36 Venclova 1978.

37 Alexeyeva 1999, 500–511.

38 For an unknown reason, the archival KGB documents date his birth to 1930.

39 “Viktoras Petkus,” in *Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija*, n.d., <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/viktoras-petkus/>.

40 Jūsų Kritikauskas, 1972.

41 Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania, “In Memoriam. Viktoras Petkus,” *genocid.lt*, accessible at: <http://genocid.lt/centras/lt/1620/a/> (viewed 27.12.2023).

42 Venclova 1978.

and, later, the unofficial leader of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group (LHG). His personal convictions and character also made him suitable for such a role. A Catholic and ethnic Lithuanian himself, Petkus was concerned with the rights of all ethnic minorities and religious denominations in the Soviet Union and with the universal implementation of democratic principles and human rights⁴³. This was also the vision of the LHG.

The idea of forming such Helsinki groups across the Soviet Union was prompted by Helsinki Accords – an international document, signed by the Soviet Union and the Western countries at the Helsinki summit in 1975, as the final agreement of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Signing the Accords was an important part of the process of *détente*, the relaxation of political relations between the West, including the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Initially, the Helsinki summit raised some worries in the Baltic diaspora and dissident circles, who feared that the desire to normalise the relationship with the Soviet Union might lead Western countries to abandon the question of the illegal annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.⁴⁴ In the long run, however, Helsinki Accords played a positive role in the demise of the Soviet Union and the democratisation of Eastern Europe, by promoting human rights protection on an international level and in this way strengthening the position of dissidents.⁴⁵ Given the context of *détente*, the Soviet Union could not completely ignore the Western opinion about its internal affairs.⁴⁶ Knowing this, Soviet dissidents used the Helsinki Agreement to “illustrate the discrepancy between international commitment by their governments and the everyday reality in the socialist countries” and make human rights part of the agenda of the East–West diplomatic relations in order to push for democratisation.⁴⁷

Helsinki groups were intended as monitoring bodies of the implementation of Helsinki Accords, and tasked themselves with recording and reporting human rights abuses. They in particular based their activities on Principle VII of the Accords: “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief”; and on Principle VIII: “equal rights and self-determination of peoples”.⁴⁸ The first Helsinki group in

43 Venclova 1999, 489.

44 Bergmane 2023, 30.

45 Thomas 1999, 205.

46 Morgan 2018.

47 Bergmane 2023, 30.

48 Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe Final Act (Helsinki, 1975), <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/c/39501.pdf>.

the Soviet Union was founded in Moscow in May 1976. The same year such groups were formed by dissidents in Lithuania and Ukraine, the following year – in Armenia and Georgia. Importantly, the groups were formed as official and not underground organisations, acting within the framework of Soviet legality.⁴⁹ The official Lithuanian name of the group was *Helsinki susitarimų vykdymui remti Lietuvos visuomeninė grupė* (Lithuanian Public Group in Support of the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreement).⁵⁰ The founding members of the LHG were the Jesuit priest Karolis Garuckas, the physicist and Jewish rights activist Eitanas Finkelšteinas, the poet and former political prisoner Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė, the aforementioned Venclova, and Petkus. The manifesto of the LHG and the first documentations of human rights abuses were publicly presented for the first time at the press conference in Moscow on 25 November 1976. The manifesto also included the statement about the illegal occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Army in 1940, meant to defend the right to self-determination of the Lithuanian nation. This statement was particularly daring, as it could have been interpreted by the government as an “attack on the territorial sovereignty of the Soviet Union”, punishable by death sentence.⁵¹ By 1981, despite repressions, the group had produced 30 documents, documenting human rights abuses in the Lithuanian SSR and across the Soviet Union.⁵² The LHG was quite unique in the Lithuanian landscape, as it was the first attempt at broadening the goals of political dissidence “beyond the confines of a narrow ethnic base”.⁵³

While the LHG and other Helsinki groups operated within the official restraints of Soviet legality and based their activities on Helsinki Accords signed by the Soviet Union, the formation of such groups was well understood to be a highly risky affair. While the Soviet Constitution and official rhetoric allowed freedom of speech, the self-determination of peoples, etc., in reality, the political system was based on censorship and the suppression of any dissent. Essentially, the task of Helsinki groups was to demonstrate to the Western world the blatant disregard for international agreements, legal norms and human rights as the everyday reality in the Soviet Union, even if they had to show it through

49 Račkauskaitė 1999, 6.

50 Juozavičiūtė 2024.

51 Venclova 1999, 493.

52 The topics covered by the LHG were the constraints on the freedom of conscience, rights of religious communities, freedom of movement, emigration and family reunification, ethnic minority rights, freedom of information, also the abuse of psychiatry against political prisoners and repressions against dissidents. See Petkus, Račkauskaitė, Uoka 1999.

53 Bilinsky, Panning 1981, 7.

their own personal example – by being punished for exercising their constitutional rights.⁵⁴ The Soviet authorities feared Helsinki groups not only because they publicised human rights abuses for Western publics to see. They also particularly disliked the unprecedented collaboration among dissident organisations across different Soviet republics, which challenged the centralised power of Moscow.⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, in 1977, the leaders of all the five Helsinki Groups across the Soviet Union were arrested and jailed. The goal was not only to stop the activities of these groups, but to crush them completely, delegitimise them in the eyes of the Soviet public and internationally. For that reason, the members of Helsinki groups were charged not only for “anti-Soviet agitation”, which would have left them “at least the dignity of being officially recognized as prisoners of conscience”, but also for various criminal offences.⁵⁶ Members of the Ukrainian Helsinki group, for example, were charged with “resisting militia” and “attempted rape”.⁵⁷ As I describe next, Petkus became a victim of a similar strategy of defamation, except that he was charged with sodomy.

The Petkus’ case and the sodomy charge

On 23 August 1977, Petkus was arrested by the KGB at the Vilnius Bus station. The KGB confiscated the documents that he carried, which were prepared by the LHG for the Belgrade conference.⁵⁸ Initially, on 1 September 1977, Petkus was charged only for his alleged offences under articles 68 and 70 of the Criminal Code, respectively “anti-Soviet activism and propaganda” and “organizing with the goal to commit particularly dangerous anti-state crimes, including the participation in an anti-Soviet organisation”.⁵⁹ The KGB interpreted Petkus’ participation in the creation and activities of the Helsinki group as falling under the category of such crimes. A separate concern for the KGB was

54 Venclova 1978.

55 Bilinsky, Panning 1981, 14.

56 Ibid., 16.

57 Ibid., 25.

58 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Apklauso Protokolas [Interrogation Record], 27.10.1977. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, p. 26. Helsinki groups across the Soviet Union hoped to present their findings on human rights abuses at this international conference, a follow up meeting to the Helsinki Accords. See Liskofsky 1979, 152–159.

59 Vytautas Kažys. Nutarimas Patraukti Kaltinamuojų Viktorą Petkų [Decision to Indict Viktoras Petkus], 01.09.1977. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, pp. 9–10.

Petkus' initiative to create a joint organisation of dissidents of all three Baltic Republics: *the Supreme Committee of the National Movements of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania* (the Supreme Committee).⁶⁰ While Latvia and Estonia, where the dissident movement was smaller than in Lithuania, did not manage to form their own Helsinki groups, they were hoping to co-operate with Lithuanians in publicising their concerns about human rights abuses and the issue of national self-determination.⁶¹ Petkus was placed under arrest and interrogated about his political activities numerous times throughout the months preceding his trial. His arrest lasted more than ten months.

Holding his arrest to be incompatible with the Soviet law and the international agreements, Petkus protested against what he saw as a sham process. He did not answer his interrogators' questions, except when making statements about the legal basis for the establishment of the LHG, reminding of the Soviet commitment to international law, requesting the Helsinki Accords to be listed among evidence, etc. The transcript of his interrogation shows Petkus's statements (of which there were very few) as contained and purposeful:

The Lithuanian public group in support of Helsinki agreements had no anti-Soviet aspect and its actions were never underground, but public, and therefore the charges that were raised against me (...) are not only untrue and have no basis, but are also absurd. I see the charges raised against me, as a member of this group, as a conscious effort to harm me and my reputation and in this way to slander the whole Lithuanian civil society group in support of Helsinki agreements and its activities.⁶²

In this typical example of his interaction with the interrogator, Petkus made it clear that he saw his arrest as purely political and a part of the larger slander campaign against the LHG. Already before forming the Helsinki group, all of its members were aware of the likely persecution ahead.⁶³ Petkus, a former political prisoner and already a victim of KGB persecution and defamation campaigns, was the most likely target of a show trial and imprisonment.⁶⁴

Throughout the months following his arrest, Petkus refused to cooperate with the interrogator, who kept inquiring him about his involvement in the activities of

60 Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Criminal Case. 1978–1988. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9560, p. 10. Also see Bungis 1988, 268–269.

61 Bilinsky, Panning, 1981, 8.

62 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Interrogation Record, 02.09.1977. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, p. 23.

63 Venclova 1999, 490.

64 Tomas Venclova, interview by Rasa Navickaitė, 16.02.2024.

the LHG and the Supreme Committee. The persecution collected a mass of “evidence” of Petkus’ involvement in the formation of these two dissident initiatives, even though Petkus never denied any of these accusations and stated his actions to be completely public and legal. He repeated this a few times in his very measured statements to the interrogator.⁶⁵ Almost eight months after his arrest, on 14 April 1978, Petkus was interrogated again and this was the first and the only time recorded in the KGB archive that Petkus was questioned about his allegedly indecent involvement with young men and minors in the period between 1972 and 1974. The interrogator T. Lazarevičius was rather brief and the questions addressed to Petkus were less detailed in comparison to earlier interrogations. The questions revolved around Petkus’ alleged sexual advances on two young men, called Jonas Šliauteris and Mindaugas Gabrys, which supposedly took place while Petkus was visiting the priest Česlovas Kavaliauskas in Dubingiai in 1974. The interrogator claimed that Petkus bribed young men with expensive gifts and would get them drunk with cognac, before trying to take advantage of them during the trip. The interrogator also claimed that Petkus groomed a certain Rimantas Čivilis with money and drinks and eventually sexually assaulted him in his apartment in 1973, a day before Čivilis’ seventeenth birthday. This event allegedly took place five years prior to the interrogation. As the interrogator put it, Petkus also took Čivilis with him “on trips to see friends in Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu, where he would then seek to satisfy his sexual urge while sleeping in one bed”.⁶⁶ The interrogation report says that Lazarevičius read to Petkus the witness statement of Čivilis, which ended with words “...I then understood that V. Petkus is a pederast”.⁶⁷ In line with Petkus’ general behaviour during the interrogation, he did not react to these allegations.

Four days after this interrogation, on 18 April, the KGB investigator Vytautas Kažys sent a letter to the Bureau of Forensic Medicine, attempting to have Petkus physically examined in order to “determine pederasty, namely, the insertion of penis into the rectum”. The reply explained that the act of “pederasty” can only be confirmed by a physical examination in “fresh” or “chronic” cases and not when it supposedly happened five years ago.⁶⁸ The case was therefore constructed on the basis of victims’ testimonies collected by the KGB. The testimonies of several men described in minute detail the behaviour of Petkus, allegedly taking place

65 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Interrogation Record, 11.04.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, pp. 63–64.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

68 Vytautas Kažys. To the Head of the Forensic Medical Expertise, Frnd. A. J. Laužikas, request and reply, 18.04.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, A-31, 47725, pp. 385–386.

at night during various trips and under the influence of alcohol, and involving touching, pranking, or kissing young men. The testimonies also described how Petkus allegedly took minors to restaurants and to his flat and gave them money, sweets, and alcohol.⁶⁹ Archival documents show that the collection of “evidence” of Petkus’ indecent behaviour with young men had started already in January 1977, before any charges against Petkus were brought and soon after the public launching of the LHG in November 1976. One of the first written testimonies collected by the KGB was that of Kazimieras Paulionis. On 4 January 1977, he testified to militia that Petkus allegedly wanted to “use him for sexual relations”, while sleeping in the same bed during a trip to Estonia.⁷⁰ Only about a month after giving this testimony, on 8 February 1977, Paulionis “killed himself by negligence with a shooting gun in the cellar at home”.⁷¹ At the time various conspiracy theories surrounded his premature death, from a suicide to a murder,⁷² and it is hard to interpret this event as a simple coincidence, but rather as somehow connected to the interrogation methods of the KGB.

Only on 11 May 1978, more than nine months after his arrest and two months before the trial, Petkus was officially charged (in addition to articles 68 and 70) under Article 122, part two (man’s sexual intercourse with a man, aggravated due to the use of force and the victim being underage and powerless), and Article 241, part three (the involvement of a minor into illegal activity or prostitution, although in Petkus’ case this probably related to “drunkenness”).⁷³ In a hand-written statement to the Highest Court of the Lithuanian SSR, written two months later, Petkus complained about the illegal methods used during the KGB interrogation.⁷⁴ As Petkus wrote, immediately upon his arrest and before any charges were brought up against him, the KGB investigator Kažys tried persuading him to sign a pledge that he would stop his anti-Soviet and political activities. The KGB officer threatened Petkus that if he did not sign such a pledge, “there would be not only a political, but also a criminal case started against me [Petkus],

69 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm. Witness interrogation report of Dainius Šeputis, Adolfo, 25.04.1978. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 47725/3, p. 344.

70 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Witness interrogation report of Kazimieras Paulionis, 25.04.1978. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, pp. 282–283.

71 Ibid., pp. 349–353.

72 Personal communication with Julius Sasnauskas by Rasa Navickaitė, 27.02.2024.

73 T. Lazarevičius. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Decision to Indict, 11.05.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9559, pp. 11–16.

74 Viktoras Petkus. Statement Addressed to the Highest Court of the LSSR, 05.07.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9558, p. 72.

which would harm me seriously”.⁷⁵ Petkus refused to sign such a pledge. In his letter, written just before his trial, he complained of “lies, threats and blackmailing”, which, he assumed, must have been used not only against him but also to other people in the process of “fabricating this case”, as he put it.⁷⁶ This was the only instance that Petkus tried in any way to refute the criminal charges brought against him – otherwise he simply boycotted the whole investigation and trial.

The trial started on 11 July 1978. The trial attracted a lot of public attention and dissidents gathered to support Petkus, some bringing him flowers and publicly reciting prayers.⁷⁷ However, since “the accused had perpetrated a sexual crime”, the judge decided that no observers would be allowed into the courtroom.⁷⁸ From the very start, Petkus expressed his refusal to participate in the trial and asked the judge’s permission to lie down on the floor. After doing so, he demonstratively pretended to sleep. It is unclear if Petkus continued to do so in the next days, but this form of protest was noted in the transcript of the first day of the trial.⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that while the case against Petkus was initially built on his involvement in the LHG and the Supreme Committee, the trial mostly centred on Petkus’ alleged criminal activities under articles 122 and 241, which were added to the prosecution case much later. The first person called to witness was Čivilis, recalled from military service specially for the trial, who repeated his statement regarding Petkus’ sexual assault on him in 1973. The following statements also revolved around Petkus’ involvement with minors and his alleged sexual advances, with some witnesses confirming and some denying the allegations. Only a few witnesses were called to give statements regarding Petkus’ involvement in his “anti-Soviet” activities. The dissident Romualdas Ragaišis, the LHG member Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė and some other dissidents publicly refused to give witness statements during the trial.⁸⁰ The Estonian dissidents Enn Tarto and Mart Niklus not only refused to give incriminating statements but also

75 Viktoras Petkus. Statement Addressed to the Highest Court of the LSSR, 05.07.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9558, pp. 69–72.

76 Ibid.

77 Anonymous witness, 1978.

78 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Trial proceedings transcript. 10.–13.07.1978. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, p. 8.

79 Ibid., p. 52.

80 Ragaišis later incurred a punishment of six months imprisonment at a corrective labour facility.

refused to speak Russian and demanded an Estonian–Lithuanian interpreter.⁸¹ On 13 July, after a semi-closed trial, the court found Petkus guilty on all counts and imposed a sentence of ten years of imprisonment and five years in exile.⁸²

It is notable how the “evidence” collected by the KGB made Petkus’ alleged sexual perversions and crimes look interconnected with his dissident activities. His visits to his dissident friends in Latvia and Estonia, as well as Lithuanian provinces were allegedly opportunities for Petkus to seek sexual gratification with men. His apartment in J. Garelio (now Dominikonų) Street, which served as a meeting spot for dissidents, was alleged to be the place where the rape of Čivilis had taken place. His engagement with dissident-leaning youths was portrayed as an act of grooming and molesting. This narrative was further enhanced and amplified in a slanderous article, published by the state magazine *Tiesa* after the trial, on 16 July, depicting Petkus as an abhorrent character. His anti-Soviet views and ideas of national independence, as well as his religiosity were depicted as a convenient “curtain” which hid his criminal intents and perverse desires. The article quoted statements from the trial (despite it being closed to public), in which Petkus was accused of corrupting and molesting minors. *Tiesa* also explicitly mentioned that Petkus was accused of “debauchery in perverse ways – homosexuality”.⁸³ In the article all of this was intertwined with Petkus’ participation in the LHG, which was presented as “a group of people, who had lost a sense of reality” and tried to defame the Soviet Union internationally. The article stated that Petkus’ “anti-Soviet activities and his moral degeneration complement each other” and that movements like the LHG only pretend to fight for human rights, while in fact they serve as a cover for “perverts, bandits, and terrorists”.⁸⁴ The appearance of such an article was a characteristic part of the KGB defamation strategy.⁸⁵ At the core of the slander campaign against Petkus was his supposed homosexuality, which was also depicted as inseparable from molesting young boys. This logically followed from the Stalinist understanding of “pederasty” as

81 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Trial proceedings transcript, 10.–13.07.1997. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, pp. 77–78. The Latvian dissident Ints Čālītis also refused to give incriminating statements. Another Latvian, Viktors Kalniņš, however, gave an incriminating statement against Petkus in exchange for the permission to go to the West. The statement was read out loud in court. See Anonymous witness, 1978.

82 Nuosprendis. Petkus, Viktoras, Antano. Court Verdict, 13.07.1978. Lithuanian Special Archive, K-6, 1, 9560, pp. 51–62.

83 Baltrūnas 1978.

84 Ibid.

85 Burinskaitė 2006, 70.

an anti-Soviet vice, a sign of the debauchery of the bourgeoisie, which could corrupt youths and pose counterrevolutionary danger.

Denying and forgetting the sodomy accusation

A year before Petkus' arrest, in October 1976, the aforementioned Alexeyeva, one of the founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG), was sent as the representative of MHG to the Lithuanian SSR, in order to investigate the recent expulsion of seven boys from a public high-school in Vilnius at the start of their final year at school.⁸⁶ The stated reason for the expulsion was that the boys acted in ways "irreconcilable with the behaviour required from Soviet pupils".⁸⁷ After conducting a short research in Vilnius together with Venclova, Alexeyeva concluded that the expulsion had been initiated by the KGB and violated legal norms and human rights.⁸⁸ One thing in common for the expelled boys was that they all stayed in close touch with Petkus, who was privately tutoring them on Lithuanian history and culture in the informal setting of his apartment on J. Garelio street. During her visit, Alexeyeva attended a dinner at Petkus' place and had a conversation with the youngsters, during which they told her about their encounters with the KGB. All of them had received threats from the government agents and all had been interrogated about their relationship with Petkus. The youngsters had been verbally, and some even physically, abused by the KGB, who took them for interrogation straight from school.⁸⁹ According to the subsequent MHG's report, the KGB had told the boys that Petkus was homosexual and pressured them to defame Petkus' character, to accuse him of giving them alcohol, cigarettes, money, and underground publications. The youngsters refused to give false witness statements. Therefore, according to Alexeyeva, the authorities later "extorted a "confession" from another poor one".⁹⁰ Indeed, the boys who formed the close circle of Petkus' informal students were not the same youngsters, whose

86 The following account of Alexeyeva was taken from the essay she wrote for the Lithuanian diaspora newsletter *Pasaulio lietuvis* on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the LHG. See Alexeyeva 1999.

87 Alexeyeva 1999, 506.

88 Moscow Helsinki Group. Moscow Helsinki Group Documents (1976–1982). Document No. 15. On the Exclusion of Seven Students from the Vienuolis Middle School (Vilnius), 08.12.1976. National Security Archive, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/23766-moscow-helsinki-monitoring-group-exclusion-seven-students-vienuolis-middle-school>.

89 Interview with Julius Sasnauskas by Rasa Navickaitė, 20.02.2024.

90 Alexeyeva 1999, 504.

witness testimonies were used by the KGB to frame Petkus as a “pederast”, even though most of them attended the same school.

Having the benefit of hindsight, Alexeyeva used her memoirs of her trip to Lithuania in 1976 to deny the later allegations against Petkus. She described Petkus’ informal students as “delightful”⁹¹ and stressed that the relationship between the youngsters and Petkus was nothing but respectful and teacher–student like. Alexeyeva interpreted the whole situation as the KGB’s attempt at smearing Petkus’ reputation through the accusation of the “crime” of homosexuality, which she ironically put in quotation marks.⁹² Similarly, in his article in 1978, Venclova described the accusations of homosexuality and sexual abuse of minors against Petkus as “absolutely unsubstantiated” and “silly”.⁹³ The Lithuanian Catholic underground also denied any allegations regarding Petkus’ homosexuality or his involvement with minors. The article, published in the dissident samizdat *Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Kronika* (The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, LK BK), claimed that after giving his incriminating statement in court, Čivilis confessed to his friends that “he was drunk when the KGB first interrogated him, did not understand anything and agreed with everything that he was told, which he later could not retract”.⁹⁴ The samizdat and diaspora articles portrayed Petkus’ trial as a political spectacle, and the allegations of sodomy against Petkus as pure slander.

Did the criminal charges against Petkus have any truth to them? Were they completely fabricated? And was Petkus in fact homosexual? As Burinskaitė notes, “the information spread by the Soviet propaganda was not mere invention, it also had a big part of truth in it.”⁹⁵ The priest Julius Sasnauskas, one of the youngsters from the informal group of Petkus’ students, recalled in an interview that since Petkus was unmarried and lived alone, there were some rumors regarding his sexual orientation. His tendency to have groups of male teenagers gathering at his apartment might have also raised suspicions. On the other hand, as Sasnauskas noted, Petkus did not belong to any informal network of gay men, which he only

91 Alexeyeva 1999, 503.

92 Alexeyeva 1999. In more recent times Alexeyeva also protested the Russian government’s suppression of LGBTQ people’s human rights. See Gabriela Baczyńska and Alissa De Carbonnel, “Russian Parliament Backs Ban on ‘Gay Propaganda,’” *Reuters*, accessible at 27.02.2024. <https://jp.reuters.com/article/us-russia-gay/russian-parliament-backs-ban-on-gay-propaganda-idUSBRE90O0QT20130125/> (viewed 27.02.2024).

93 Venclova 1978.

94 Anonymous witness, 1978.

95 Burinskaitė 2006, 69.

later became aware of as having existed during the Soviet period.⁹⁶ However, a homosexual man Saulius (b. 1945), also from the dissident circles, interviewed by me for a LGBTQ history project, mentioned the case of Petkus as the most notable example of persecution on the basis of Article 122 in Soviet Lithuania. He believed that the KGB had to have had information about Petkus' sexual orientation in order to start fabricating a case of this sort.⁹⁷

It is important to note, however, that during the time of Petkus' trial the Soviet Lithuanian society saw homosexuality almost exclusively in a negative light, which was also a product of its consistent criminalisation and pathologising by the state.⁹⁸ Therefore, those defending Petkus did not only aim to defend him against the charge of rape and abuse of minors, but also to prove that he could not have possibly been homosexual. In general, homosexuality and paedophilia were seen as almost inseparable in the Soviet expert medical and criminological discourses – this view remained prevalent in Lithuania until the end of the Soviet period and beyond.⁹⁹ As Venclova recalled, the term 'pederasty' was used synonymously with paedophilia in Soviet Lithuania and there was no awareness of homosexuality as a variation in sexual orientation.¹⁰⁰ While a few individuals might have viewed homosexuality neutrally, or even positively, the overall stigmatisation of same-sex attraction meant that, for the dissident community, defending Petkus from the charges of rape also included denying that he could possibly have been homosexual.

The interconnection between the notions of homosexuality and paedophilia persisted into the post-Soviet period and probably created obstacles for a formal reconsideration of Petkus' case. In 1990, after the declaration of Lithuanian independence, Petkus' case from 1978 was revisited by a prosecutor, who called Čivilis in for "a conversation". According to the short statement included in Petkus' file, neither Čivilis nor his mother wanted to change their testimony regarding the alleged events of 1973. Čivilis declared that "in general, Petkus had performed the actions recorded in the case".¹⁰¹ The prosecutor decided therefore

96 Sasnauskas 2024.

97 Interview with Saulius (b. 1945) by Rasa Navickaitė, 11.06.2022.

98 Healey 2018.

99 Mentions of homosexuality in popular press were extremely rare, but one of the first "expert" articles on homosexuality written already during the *perestroika*, in 1989, claimed that paedophilia is characteristic to 30–40% of homosexual men. See Lelis 1989.

100 Venclova 2024.

101 LSSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB). Viktoras Petkus, Antano, Microfilm, Certificate by B. Žeberskis, 04.04.1990. Lietuvos specialusis archyvas, K-1, 58, 47725/3, p. 191.

not to reopen the case. At that point homosexuality was still criminalised under the same Soviet sodomy article and would continue to be criminalised until 1993. The second part of Article 122, on aggravated sodomy, including sexual intercourse with a male person younger than 18 years, punishable with imprisonment up to eight years, was abolished only in 2003.¹⁰² Even if Petkus might have been homosexual or bisexual, or “in general” had had sexual relations with young men, his sexual orientation does not in itself constitute a crime, at least not after decriminalisation. However, in the public eyes the connection between homosexuality and criminality remained strong long after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This probably prevented Petkus or anyone else from seeking a formal revision of the case from 1978, and Petkus was never exonerated for his alleged crimes under articles 122 and 241. Later this part of the KGB’s persecution of Petkus even stopped being mentioned in the historical accounts of the LHG.¹⁰³ Seemingly “forgotten” on the official level, the earlier allegations fortunately did not prevent Petkus from living an intellectually and politically active life in post-Soviet Lithuania, after he was freed in 1988. A formal revision of the case, however, might have caused him a greater reputational damage, once again linking his name with the stigmatised label of “pederasty”.

Conclusion

The main intention of charging Petkus under Article 122 of the Lithuanian SSR Criminal Code was not only to attribute to him a certain criminal act (rape of a minor), which was a technique often employed by the KGB in dealing with dissidents. The main goal of this accusation was to attach to Petkus, who seemed to be immune to the threat of imprisonment and regular KGB intimidation, the label of “pederasty”. Not unlike labels such as “banditism”, “hooliganism”, “sluggish schizophrenia”, and others, the label of “pederasty” served the purpose of depicting the person as an outsider to Soviet society, as a dangerous and “anti-social” element. Even more so than other labels, “pederasty” was the charge of sexual deviance and moral transgression, making it detestable both for those aligned with the Soviet state and those resisting it, especially the Catholic Church. The role of the detailed descriptions of the alleged sexual advances and obscene behaviour by Petkus (likely fabricated by the KGB at least to some extent) aimed at portraying him as a molester and a pervert, and in this way damaging his

102 Jackevičius 2013.

103 See, for example, Račkauskaitė 1999.

reputation and defaming the LHG. The dissident circles and the Catholic underground, which knew the techniques of the KGB very well, were not affected by the accusations and defended Petkus fiercely, which included also denying that he could have possibly been homosexual.

In Western Europe, as Healey correctly notes, the commemoration of the Nazi crimes against homosexual and trans people, alongside other social groups, such as the Jews, the Roma and people with disabilities, has served an important part in the reconsideration of LGBTQ issues as essentially a part of the human rights agenda. In the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, formerly occupied by the Soviet Union, as well as in the rest of the former Soviet Union, the KGB's employment of homophobia as a tool of repression has never been fully examined, understood, and commemorated.¹⁰⁴ While the accusation of "pederasty" was not often publicly employed in the persecution of dissidents, it probably also served the purpose of prophylactic intimidation and blackmail, and thus remained largely invisible to the broader society. The lack of reflection on Soviet political homophobia results in the persistence of a stigma and taboo associated with homosexuality, which likely also prevented the authorities of independent Lithuania to properly revise Petkus' case and exonerate him of the charges under articles 122 and 241. This is in contrast, for example, to the case of Parajanov, who, during the writing of this article, was officially exonerated by the Ukraine's National Commission for Rehabilitation from the charges of "Ukrainian nationalism and homosexuality", for which he was sentenced in 1973.¹⁰⁵ Revisiting such prominent cases of political homophobia as the case of Petkus might shed light on the ways the Soviet authorities invoked prejudice against homosexuality to persecute, intimidate and defame anyone who resisted the regime.

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104 Healey 2018, 154.

105 Panorama, 2024.

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POLITISKĀ HOMOFBIJA PADOMJU LIETUVĀ: PĀRVĒRTĒJOT DISIDENTA VIKTORA PETKUS GADĪJUMU

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Zinātniskās intereses: dzimumu vēsture, seksualitātes, LGBT+ un homofobijas vēsture, feminisma teorija, kvīru teorija, Padomju Savienības vēsture, postsociālisms, Austrumeiropa

Rakstā aplūkota homofobija kā padomju represīvā aparāta instruments. Tajā analizēta lietuviešu disidenta, politeslodzītā un cilvēktiesību aktīvista Viktora Petkus lieta, īpašu uzmanību pievēršot apsūdzībai sodomijā, kas viņam tika izvirzīta 1978. gadā. Šī apsūdzība bija daļa no ļoti politizētas prāvas, kas bija saistīta ar Petkus aktivitātēm Lietuvas Helsinku grupā. Rakstā tiek izmantots “politiskās homofobijas” jēdziens, analizējot paņēmienus, ar kādiem Lietuvas PSR Valsts drošības komiteja (VDK) centās iznīcināt Petkus reputāciju un celt neslavu lietuviešu disidentu cilvēktiesību kustībai, kurā padomju varas iestādes saskatīja īpaši bīstamu apdraudējumu.

Atslēgas vārdi: homofobija, Padomju Savienība, disidenti, Lietuva, Baltijas valstis, Helsinku grupas

Kopsavilkums

1976.–1977. gadā lietuviešu disidents Viktors Petkus (*Viktoras Petkus*, 1928–2012) ierosināja veidot divas organizācijas – Lietuvas Helsinku grupu (LHG) un “Igaunijas, Latvijas un Lietuvas Nacionālās kustības galveno komiteju” (Galvenā komiteja). Abas organizācijas balstījās uz Helsinku Nobeiguma aktu – starptautisko cilvēktiesību deklarāciju, ko bija parakstījusi arī Padomju Savienība. Padomju Lietuvā tās pārstāvēja jaunu atklātas pretošanās formu, kas izgāja ārpus nacionālo un Katoļu baznīcas interešu aizstāvības robežām un tiecās veicināt vispārējās cilvēktiesības un demokratizāciju. VDK sagrāva Helsinku grupas visās padomju republikās, kur tās bija izveidotas. LHG neoficiālais vadītājs Petkus kļuva par mērķi Lietuvas PSR rīkotā paraugprāvā, kuras gaitā tika aptraipīta viņa reputācija, izvirzot viņam apsūdzības saskaņā ar Lietuvas PSR Kriminālkodeksa 122. panta otro daļu (sodomija vainu pastiprinošos apstākļos) un 241. panta trešo daļu (mazgadīgo iesaistīšana nelikumīgās darbībās). Petkus tika atzīts par vainīgu visos apsūdzības punktos un notiesāts uz 10 gadiem ieslodzījumā un pieciem gadiem izsūtījumā; viņš tika apzēlots tikai 1988. gadā. Petkus sodīšana par viņa politikajām aktivitātēm, piespriežot viņam ilgu ieslodzījumu, kā arī izvērstās publiskās apmelošanas apmērs plašākā sabiedrībā noteikti raisīja bailes un palīdzēja novērst sociālās vai politiskās neapmierinātības izpausmes.

Rakstā vispirms tiek izskaidrots politiskās homofobijas jēdziens un parādīts, ka to var uztvert kā vienu no represīvajiem instrumentiem, kas Padomju Savienībā tika izmantots iebiedēšanai, šantāžai un apmelšanai. Tālāk tiek sniegta informācija par Petku un viņa iesaisti cilvēktiesību aktivismā Padomju Savienībā, izskaidrojot, kāpēc varas iestādes uzlūkoja LHG un Galveno komiteju kā īpaši bīstamu apdraudējumu. Turpinājumā aprakstīts, kā Petkus lietā tika iepītas apsūdzības sodomijā. Autore atklāj, ka laika izvēle, apstākļi un paralēles ar līdzīgām krimināllietām citās padomju republikās, kā arī apsūdzību iztirzāšanas veids tiesas procesa ietvaros un vēlāk valsts kontrolētajā presē atsedz uzskatāmu nolūku apmelot Petku. Raksta noslēgumā izklāstīts, ka disidentu aprindas, kurām VDK paņēmieni bija ļoti labi pazīstami, bija imūnas pret šīm apsūdzībām un dedzīgi aizstāvēja Petku. Galu galā, kā rakstā atklāts, apsūdzība sodomijā tika izdzēsta no Petkus piemiņas neatkarīgajā Lietuvā, tomēr viņš tā arī nav ticis attaisnots šajā apsūdzībā. Rakstā autore aicina no jauna izskatīt un izvērtēt sodomijas panta un paša “pederastijas” jēdziena kā padomju varas iestāžu represīvā instrumenta pielietojumu Lietuvā.

Rietumeiropā piemiņas kopšana par nacistu veiktajiem noziegumiem pret homoseksuāļiem un transpersonām līdzās noziegumiem pret citām sabiedrības grupām, kā, piemēram, ebrejiem, romiem un cilvēkiem ar īpašām vajadzībām, ir bijusi būtisks elements LGBT+ jautājumu kā neatņemama cilvēktiesību aspekta pārskatīšanā. Padomju Savienības okupētajās Baltijas valstīs – Igaunijā, Latvijā un Lietuvā, kā arī citviet bijušās Padomju Savienības teritorijā VDK veiktais politiskās homofobijas pielietojums kā ierocis cīņā ar disidentiem tā arī nav ticis pilnībā izpētīts, izprasts un ierakstīts piemiņā (sk. Healey 2018, 154). Tā rezultātā turpinās ar homoseksualitāti saistītā stigmatizācija, kas arī, visticamāk, ir kavējusi neatkarīgās Lietuvas institūcijas pienācīgi pārskatīt Petkus lietu un rehabilitēt viņu saskaņā ar 122. un 241. pantu izvirzītajās apsūdzībās.* Tādu skaļu politiskās homofobijas gadījumu kā Petkus lieta pārskatīšana varētu izgaismot veidu, kā padomju institūcijas raisīja sabiedrībā bailes un aizspriedumus pret homoseksualitāti, lai ar šī instrumenta (līdzās daudziem citiem to rīcībā esošiem līdzekļiem) palīdzību vajātu, iebiedētu un apmelotu ikvienu, kurš pretojās režīmam.

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