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Úvodník
Editorial

The first issue of Historia scholastica Journal presents 10 studies, most of them in some way thematizing the impact of the totalitarian regime on the field of education. A. Canales focuses on the change of educational policy of the Franco Regime in Spain in the 1960s, which was in contradiction with the still prevailing political and ideological principles of Franco's Dictatorship. E. Protner's study provides insight into the discontinuity of pre- and post-war Marxist pedagogy in Yugoslavia, using the example of slovenian pedagogue Jože Jurančič. How communist ideology was reflected in the functioning of education in Yugoslavia, specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shows in her study S. Šušnjara.

Three other studies focus on education in the area of states in the territory of the former Soviet Union. I. Nelin examines the evolution of psychoanalytic pedagogical ideas in the Soviet Union, his study highlights the experiments in psychoanalytic education and their subsequent prohibition due to political shifts.

E. Bērziņš and I. Ķestere examines how Soviet narratives in the field of history of education were deconstructed in the Baltic States and how historians constructed a new view of the national history of these states.

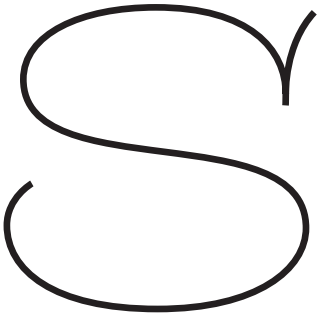
I. Ivanavičė and I. Stonkuvienė focuses on the mechanism of ideological assimilation of Lithuanian Roma through school and education in the Soviet Union; the study explores key dimensions of Roma education, including the construction of the New Soviet Man, the impact of forced sedentarisation, and the role of schooling in promoting linguistic assimilation, discipline, and social control. Belonging is an important phenomenon, the basis of which does not have to be only belonging to one ethnic group, as is the case in the study of Roma in Lithuania. F. Guerrini explores generational belonging in the generation of children born during the war. Her work focuses not only on specific research on belonging in the war generation, but also shows the theoretical perspectives of research on such a complex phenomenon as belonging.

Two studies in this issue relate to special education. J. Randák looks into the situation in special education in Czechoslovakia after the communists came to power in February 1948 and shows that the optimistic proclamations of the state representatives were often at odds with the real experience of teachers at special schools. K. Eliášková and M. Šmejkalová examine teaching of Czech language of visually impaired pupils at special schools from 1972 to 2010. The long period of research allowed the authors to examine not only the development of didactic approaches, but also the change in the ideological framework of education during this time.

While most studies deal with education in the second half of the 20th century, I. Garai investigates the issue of deprofessionalization of secondary school teachers in pre-war Hungary.

We believe that all of the submitted studies will contribute to the clarification of many unresolved research questions as well as stimulate interest in further research.

Jan Šimek



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Education of Lithuanian Roma in the Context of Creating the New Soviet Man

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Abstract The Soviet Union's ideological objective of shaping the New Soviet Man profoundly influenced the education of ethnic minorities, including the Roma. This article investigates the education of Lithuanian Roma in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) as a mechanism of social engineering and ideological assimilation within broader Soviet policies. The study focuses on the period from 1956 – marked by the decree on forced sedentarisation and the beginning of Roma integration into the education system – until 1985, the onset of Gorbachev's *perestroika*. The research addresses the question: How did Soviet education policy in the LSSR function as a means of ideological assimilation and social engineering for the Roma, and how do Roma individuals recall experiencing this process? It explores key dimensions of Roma education, including the construction of the New Soviet Man, the impact of forced sedentarisation, and the role of schooling in promoting linguistic assimilation, discipline, and social control. Furthermore, it examines how educational institutions were instrumental in advancing the Soviet visions of "socialist welfare", atheism, and "friendship between nations" through russification. Employing an oral history approach, the study incorporates testimonies of Roma who attended Soviet schools alongside document analysis. Findings reveal that while Soviet education policies sought to promote literacy, they simultaneously acted as instruments of cultural assimilation – reinforcing Soviet identity at the expense of ethnic distinctiveness. This research contributes to the broader discourse on education, ideology, and minority identity under Soviet rule, offering a nuanced perspective on Roma experiences in the LSSR.

Keywords Soviet education, New Soviet Man, Roma, Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, oral history

Introduction

The creation of the Soviet Union (hereafter USSR) in 1922 marked the beginning of a communist-based era. One of its main goals was to create New Soviet Man (Soboleva, 2017) and to create a completely new type of society in which the national, social, cultural, and other problems of the past humanity would supposedly be solved (Slezkine, 2017). The educational system was clearly used to achieve these goals. Following Lenin's statements, one of the main barriers to communist ideas obtaining support among the population was illiteracy. Its elimination (Russian: *likvidatsiya bezgramotnosti*) was used not only as a tool for overcoming "backwardness" but also as an element of political propaganda (Kenez, 1985). As a result of the national Leninist policy of the time, the so-called "*korenizatsiya*" (trans. "indigenisation" or "nativisation"), many small ethnic groups were able to learn their mother tongue[1] (Connor, 1984), while the Roma were recognised as a historically oppressed minority and the *korenizatsiya* was used to achieve equal rights for the Roma as full soviet citizens, which suggested a kind of emancipation of Roma (Selling, 2022). As a result of the above-mentioned *korenizatsiya*, Roma schools were established in the 1920s and 1930s, where teachers were specially trained (Marushiakova & Popov, 2017; Dunajeva, 2021b), considerable attention was paid to linguistic research, and textbooks for adults and children, methodological tools, magazines, publicist, and fictional texts were published (Demeter & Chernykh, 2018, p. 18). However, researchers suggest that some materials never reached their direct readers (Marushiakova & Popov, 2017, p. 50).

According to Dunajeva, who investigated the textbooks written in the Romani language in 1920–30, even the teaching of simple

1 In 1926, an attempt was made to introduce a written Romani language based on the Cyrillic dialect of *Ruska Roma* in Moscow (Wixman, 1984, p. 77), which, according to some authors, could be considered as another crime in violation of fundamental human rights, given the heterogeneity of the group speaking different dialects (Marushiakova & Popov, 2017, pp. 49–52).

grammatical rules was intended to transform their identities from "unsettled fortune-tellers" to the working Roma:

'The Roma way of life was equated with the oppression of old, pre-revolutionary times, while the new socialist life of which the Roma were to become part was characterised by equality and work. What was seen as the traditional Roma way of life was incompatible with the goals of the state, and schools were to "transform" Roma children into productive socialist workers. Socialism, therefore, was seen as the emancipation and empowerment the Roma needed in order to leave their "backwards" habits in the past (Dunajeva, 2021a, p. 65).

In 1938, soviet education policy changed radically: Roma schools were closed and Roma had to be integrated into general education schools without any elements of multilingualism (Marushiakova & Popov, 2017), where they had to be further "civilised" and "normalised" (Dunajeva, 2021b, pp. 66–67). The soviet authorities aimed to create a uniform socialist society with standardised norms for its citizens in which the Roma with their "deviant" lifestyles were perceived as a potential obstacle (Barany, 2002, p. 114). According to Stewart (1997, p. 5) the assimilation and complete "disappearance" of the Roma were supposed to be a kind of proof of the power of socialism and the effectiveness of the communist method, also author argues that the communist government set itself "the truly Herculean task" of cultural and social assimilation of millions of people. Thus, an almost identical policy of Roma assimilation was pursued throughout the countries of the socialist bloc (i.e., in the USSR itself, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and partly in Yugoslavia), with a few exceptions, and continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Lithuania, the process in question significantly accelerated following the reoccupation of the country in 1944 and its subsequent incorporation into the Soviet Union as the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. According to statistical data[2] in 1959 there were 13,124 Roma living in the USSR (1,238

2 The reliability of Soviet statistics is a contentious issue among scholars, with many authors, such as Naum Jasny, arguing that these data often served as a tool for pro-

in the LSSR); in 1970 – 175,335 (1,880 in the LSSR); in 1979 – 209,159 (2,306 in the LSSR) (Goskomstat, 1988). In 1989 – 26,383.899 Roma lived in the USSR, of whom 2,718 lived in Lithuania, i.e., 1.03 % of the total population of Lithuania (Demeter & Chernykh, 2018, p. 119). It is true that in the soviet statistics, the Roma were referred to as *tsygane*. Under this generalised term, there were many groups that were different in language, culture and way of life (ibid., p. 18), whose list kept changing during the census years in the USSR: *Sinti, Bosha, Rom, Dom, Mugat* (Roma of Central Asia) (Wixman, 1984, p. 77), *Karachi, Mazang, Jugli, Lyuli, Gurbat* (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016, p. 32–33) and others. Currently, there are also several subgroups of Roma in Lithuania: *Litóvska, Lotfktka, Kalderash* or *Kotliar*, *Fliuki* (the latter are almost extinct) (Kozhanov, 2022) and *Polska Roma*, in the LSSR all of them were also most commonly called *čigõnai* (in Lithuanian) or *tsygane* (in Russian: цыгане)[3].

The Soviet policy aimed not only to standardize ethnonyms but also to homogenize the Roma population itself. This objective was pursued, in part, through the educational system. Ascertaining the practical implementation of this policy within the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) educational context remains challenging due to the highly fragmented nature of scientific data concerning the education of Lithuanian Roma during the Soviet period. While the general history of Roma in Eastern Europe and Russia has received considerable

paganda rather than a factual representation. Consequently, researchers generally advise exercising considerable caution when utilizing Soviet statistical sources.

3 The widely used term *Roma* embraces a broad categorisation of different groups. Although some researchers (Lemon, 2000; Petrova, 2003; Edele, 2014; Marushiakova & Popov, 2016) have criticised it as insufficiently accurate or even historically misleading (Demeter & Chernykh, 2018), this article uses it as the main term (with exceptions when quoting informants, where their language remains unedited). This choice is based not only on its current perception as the most politically correct term in the Lithuanian context but also because the First World Romani Congress (1971) and the Council of Europe (2012) have reached a consensus on accepting and using this term. Moreover, it has been adopted in the EU as an anti-discrimination term (Cemlyn & Ryder, 2016, pp. 163–164).

attention from scholars such as Crowe (1994), Kenrick (2007), Demeter and Chernykh (2018), and the broader life of Roma in the USSR and its bloc countries has been examined by Konstantinova (2012), O'Keeffe (2013), Marushiakova and Popov (2016, 2017), and Dunajeva (2021a, b), specific information on the situation of Roma in the Baltic States, or Lithuania between 1940 and 1990, is limited. Simoniukštytė (2003, 2022) offers some insight, but without detailed discussion of education. Furthermore, studies concerning the formation of the New Soviet Man in the Soviet Union generally (Kogan, 2011; Kelly, 2013; Soboleva, 2017) and particularly within the LSSR (Svičiulienė, 2016; Kestere et al., 2020; Naudžiūnienė, 2021; Stonkuvienė, 2023, 2024; Stonkuvienė and Ivanavičė, 2024) have not, to date, included an examination of Roma education within this ideological framework.

This article analyzes aspects of the education of Roma as "new Soviet people" within schools in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic[4]. Given the absence of detailed academic research on this specific topic, this study addresses the gap by employing an oral history approach. This methodology facilitates the active participation of informants – both Roma individuals and their former classmates –in the co-construction of historical narratives, thereby generating a new and unique source of historical knowledge.

Methodology

Considering the general lack of data resulting from the scarce research on educational processes of the ethnic Roma group in Lithuania, this article uses data from two separate qualitative studies conducted at

4 The Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) functioned as a de facto constituent republic of the Soviet Union from 1940–1941 and again from 1944–1990. However, since no significant educational reforms were implemented during the initial Soviet occupation, this article focuses solely on the second occupation. Particular attention is given to the period from 1956, which marked the adoption of a decree on the compulsory settlement of Roma and the commencement of their integration into the educational system, through 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika reforms began.

different times. Both studies were conducted by using oral history as the main approach.

Firstly, this article is based on part of the research data collected during the project "Raising of the 'New Man' in Soviet Schools: The Case of Lithuania" (funded by the Research Council of Lithuania, No. S-LIP-19-68/ (1.78) SU-810) conducted over the period 2020–2022. A total of 34 individuals, comprising 20 women and 14 men, participated in the study. The main criterion for selection was their experience of attending a soviet-era school. Accordingly, the informants were aged 45–75 and had attended various types of educational institutions in Lithuania during the late soviet period. The analysis and evaluation of all the interview material gathered during this research has revealed that the project aims have been met with additional, unplanned and qualitatively unique information – the stories of Roma (4 in total) and those who studied with Roma (3) about their school experiences during the soviet era. The material from interviews provides not only a glimpse (even if fragmentary) of the unique school experiences of Roma during the soviet era but also compares them in the general context of learners of different nationalities in schools of the LSSR of that time.

Secondly, it is also based on the data collected during the dissertation research[5] *Challenges of Roma Education in Lithuania and Initiatives to Overcome Them: A Multi-perspective Historical (1956–2024) Narrative* conducted by I. Ivanavičė at Vilnius University in 2024. In the first study, the questions were divided into thematic blocks related to the school building and environment itself; curriculum; relationships with teachers and peers; parental involvement; celebrations; and memorable events. Meanwhile, in the second study, the informants were asked to describe the realities of their children's and grandchildren's education, comparing them with the past, i.e., their own memories of school. The informants were asked to share their earliest memories of school. The learning experiences of 9 Roma (7 woman, 2 men) who were educated

5 Approval from the Research Ethics Compliance Committee was obtained on 28 March 2024 (No. [1.13 E] 250000-KT-50).

in the soviet educational system before 1985 were selected for this article. The table provides data on the informants. In accordance with research ethics and given that the Roma ethnic group in Lithuania is not large, the names of the informants are not disclosed; instead, codes are used. The exact ages of the informants are also not specified; only their rounded years of birth are provided. In order to ensure maximum anonymity, places of birth are also not specified. It is also important to note that not all informants in the study started school at the typical school age of 7–8 years old; some started much later.

Table No. 1. *Data on the informants.*

Code	Gender	Date of birth	Place of birth	School education
IR-01	Female	~1950	Rural area	Can't remember (about four grades)
IR-02	Female	~1950	City	Completed 8th grade
IR-03	Female	The mid-1950s	District center	Completed 8th grade
IR-04	Female	The mid-1950s	District center	Completed 4th grade
IR-05	Female	The mid-1950s	Rural area	Can't remember (about four grades)
IR-06	Male	~1960	City	Completed 8th grade
IR-07	Male	~1960	City	Completed 8th grade
IR-08	Female	The mid-1960s	District center	Can't remember (about four grades)
IR-09	Female	~1970	District center	Completed 8th grade
NR-010	Male	1970	City	Completed 11th grade
NR-011	Female	1965	City	Completed 10th grade
NR-012	Male	1967	Rural area	Completed 11th grade

Most of the narratives in both studies were recorded with the consent of the informants. The transcription process de-personalised the informants' data. One aspect to note regarding the data collected during the

COVID-19 pandemic is that some of the data was collected remotely using video chat platforms (MS Teams, Zoom, Messenger), while others were collected in person. The recordings ranged in length from 20 minutes to almost 2 hours (average length approx. 40 minutes). Four narratives were handwritten after the informants refused to use audio recording. The interviews were conducted in Lithuanian and Russian. Data analysis was conducted using the principles of reflexive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). MAXQDA Analytic Pro 2022 facilitated the coding of the data. While the primary themes of this article emerged directly from the informants' narratives, these were analyzed within the broader framework of the project "New Man in Soviet Schools: The Case of Lithuania"[6]. Various Soviet documents, including state decrees and orders, served as additional sources of data.

Considering the chronological frame of the research, and the specificity of the ideology of that period, both studies were expected to encounter the issues already discussed in Lithuania (Pušinskytė, 2008; Švedas, 2010; Vinogradnaitė et al., 2018), the complex challenges inherent in the research of soviet-era oral history. They included stereotypes about the genre of conversation in the context of the period under discussion, prejudices, caution, and reluctance to speak on certain topics. However, for the Roma informants in the research, the narratives of the soviet era did not evoke such reactions. The negative aspects were not related to the soviet ideology or the period itself, but rather to personal life experiences. Even the direct object of this research – education itself as a phenomenon and its related aspects – became a sensitive issue when interviewing some of the informants, e.g. low-literate people, for example, admitting that if they did not learn to read at school, they only learned to do so in correctional facilities as adults. In line with the ethics of the research and the chosen oral history approach (Thompson, 2000; Ritchie 2015), the aim was to enable the informants to dominate and narrate their own lives without specific guidance or

6 The comprehensive results of this project are detailed in publications by Kestere et al. (2020), Kestere & Gonzalez-Fernandez (2021), Naudžiūnienė (2021), Stonkuvienė (2023, 2024), and Stonkuvienė & Ivanavičė (2024).

direction from the researcher (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008). While it is true that data collected in this way can be criticised for its lack of comprehensiveness and objectivity (Perks & Thomson, 2005), it also allows the voices of those (in this case, the Roma) who are not usually heard to be heard (Portelli, 2009).

In line with the ethical requirements of the research and taking into account that the ethnonym Roma may be too generalising, it should be specified that the empirical study analyses interviews with representatives of *Litovska Roma, Kotliars* and *one Polska Roma* self-identifier.

Formation of the New Soviet Roma in LSSR Schools

A propaganda report from 1960, eloquently titled " Not on the Parents' Path"[7], found in the *Lithuanian Central State Archives*, depicts two parallels in Roma life: the "old traditional" and the "new socialist". The "old" life depicts the life of Roma who "never learnt to work for centuries" and who "earned a living dishonestly" in tents and large families. At the same time, the moralistic question is asked: "What does the life of their parents in the camp hold for these children?". The answer is also not shy: poverty and dubious freedom. Meanwhile, the second part of the report introduces the "new soviet Roma": a fifth grader wearing a pioneer's[8] neckerchief, a 19-year-old girl working in a machine shop, a factory worker, a seamstress and her brother, an economist. The latter are described with the following eloquent epithets: "young people earning money honestly", "the new generation that has not followed the path of their parents", the generation "re-educated by our [soviet] reality". This report provides a good insight into the soviet

7 *Ne tėvų keliu* [Not on the Parents' Path. A Propaganda Report], 1960. LCVA, KX/1/0548-35, Lithuanian Central State Archives.

8 The Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization, commonly known as the Young Pioneers, was a state-sponsored youth organization in the Soviet Union. Established in 1922 and active until 1991, it enrolled children and adolescents between the ages of 9 and 14, serving as a preparatory stage for the Komsomol (*The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League*) and a key instrument of political socialization. Informants in the present study frequently referred to their past membership in this organization using the abbreviated term "pioneers".

government's attitude towards the Roma and calls for a closer look at the policy of Roma's education and the main institution of (re)education – the school.

Forced Sedentarisation and Education. Although the Soviet Union had been developing a communist society and shaping the New Man for nearly three decades, this process gained momentum in Lithuania only after the World War II. The inhabitants of Lithuania, including the Roma who lived or wandered there, *de jure* became part of the new soviet society. Perhaps because the experiments in social engineering aimed at creating the New Soviet Man reached Lithuania significantly later, aggressive measures were quickly implemented. These included a series of regime policies, repressions, and obligations imposed on all citizens of the Lithuanian SSR, some specifically targeting the Roma.

One of the aggressive measures of repressive policies directed at the Roma was the decree issued by the USSR Council of Ministers on 5 October 1956, Resolution No. 1373 (approved by the Lithuanian Council of Ministers on 17 November, Resolution No. 552 (ChR, 1956, 190), titled "On Reconciling Vagrant Gypsies to Labour". According to Edele, the soviet authorities saw the Roma only as nomads, which *a priori* did not fit the image of the "new man" and was automatically perceived as a problem to be "solved" (2014, p. 289). So the document in question became that solution. It is true that, due to the extremely difficult post-war situation, it is difficult to say how many Roma in Lithuania at the beginning of the soviet era were actually nomads and how many were sedentary, but according to the new decree, within the next three months after the announcement, the nomadic Roma living in the Allied republics had to be settled in permanent residences, registered and employed. Referring to oral history of the Roma, Demeter, Chernykh (2018, pp. 185–186) argues that it is the order of 1956 that many Roma groups today associate with the end of their families' nomadic life and the transition to a sedentary lifestyle (although some groups have managed to continue to live in the seasonal traditions of resettlement, and many more still do so in some forms today). From the perspective of the Communist Party, this resolution was part of the integration of the

Roma into socialist society, while after the collapse of the USSR it came to be seen as a violation of human rights (Petrova, 2003) or even the culmination of the repression of the Roma in the context of all the other resolutions (Crowe, 1994; Lemon, 2000; Barany, 2002; Dunajeva, 2021).

There is no doubt that this new regime profoundly altered the lives of Roma in Lithuania. Local authorities were required to organise cultural and housing provisions. If housing could not be provided, Roma individuals had to be granted funds for the construction of living space. It was also stipulated that arbitrarily changing or abandoning one's registered permanent residence, as well as refusing to perform public work, could result in search operation and criminal charges. In fact, most Roma were provided with housing, primarily barrack-type flats in district centres (Žilevičius, 2001, p. 10), while some were given plots of land (Bradaitytė, 1998). Simoniukštytė (2003, p. 888) argues that this forced sedentarisation had a profound impact on the Roma community as "the natural inheritance of many of the traditions was interrupted, and the observance of some of the norms of the customary law was weakened". According to Dunajeva (2021, p. 89), the order adopted in 1956 acknowledged the need to bring together Roma and non-Roma. However, the proposed solutions were based solely on complete assimilation and the abandonment of the traditional way of life of the former. It can be argued that, at least formally, the enforcement of this order of 1956 marked the moment when Roma in the Lithuanian SSR were forcibly assigned all the obligatory attributes of the New Soviet Man – USSR passports, *propiska* (registration with a permanent residence address), employment, and the phase of compulsory integration into the educational system. However, at the same time, there was a parallel effort to alienate the Roma and to weaken or eliminate any expression of individual or cultural distinctiveness.

Education as linguistic assimilation. Immediately after the occupation of the country, the educational system was restructured along Union-wide lines. It was intended that the educational process should introduce people to the Marxist view of the world and society, the doctrine and ideology of bolshevism, and communist values (Kašauskienė,

1993). After the war, the Soviet Union, and in particular the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, was used in the transformation of cultural life with the "experience and constant help" (Ministry of Education of the LSSR, 1967, pp. 9–22). The changes affected both the structure of schools and, obviously, the school curricula themselves and their content. The transition to general eight-year education began in the years 1959–60 and was completed in Lithuania in the period from 1962–63 (ibid., 1967, p. 22). Following the conversion of pro-gymnasiums and gymnasiums into secondary/unfinished secondary schools, compulsory, general ten-year education in the Soviet Union was supposedly achieved in 1975 (Zajda, 1979, p. 287). The 11-grade secondary school model was applied in schools with Lithuanian language of instruction. Thus, Roma in the soviet era could complete eight, ten, or eleven grades in the country, depending on the type of school (Lithuanian, Russian, Polish).

The informants' narratives and remembrances gathered during the empirical research show that Roma attended the schools closest to where they lived. When referring to themselves and their large families (e.g. one informant mentioned five brothers, another informant reported three sisters and two brothers), the informants stated that during the soviet era, Roma families "gave all their children" for education. Most of the relatives the Roma referred to had attended school and had completed eight grades (similar data is also provided by Žilevičius, (2001, p. 9–10), some had completed ten grades, or vice versa, just a few grades, but all of them had studied in a language other than the mother tongue. Unlike Lithuanians, Poles, and Russians, schoolchildren of the Roma ethnic group in the LSSR could not choose a school where their mother tongue (i.e. at least one dialect of the Romani language) was taught as a subject. The Roma did not comply with Stalin's criteria for a national minority status (which included common language, territory, economy and culture (Puxon, 1973, p. 13), and once they did not achieve this status there was no ideological justification for guaranteeing them what those who were recognised as *a national minority* in the Soviet Union could have expected (Barany, 2002). At the same

time, this is directly related to one of the discursive domains of the New Soviet Man – specifically, the spatial discourse of nationality. As noted by Kestere and Fernandez-Gonzalez (2020, p. 15), drawing on the Communist Party Programme of 1961, which called for the "eradication of national differences, especially language differences", this discourse is also interpreted as a form of colonial discourse.

Education as a disciplinary tool. The formation of the New Soviet Man was inseparable from early socialisation in schools, and the soviet school was inseparable from politicised moral-ideological upbringing. Early socialisation in schools, politicised education and compulsory school activities were supposed to ensure the education of committed proletarians (Dunajeva, 2021b, p. 93).

The Ministry of Education of the LSSR claimed that Young Pioneers and Komsomol organisations played a great role in improving upbringing work in schools. The efforts of these organisations were to be directed towards the struggle "against bourgeois-religious ideology", and they were also to "raise the communist consciousness of schoolchildren", etc. (1967, p. 27). Here is how this "raising of communist consciousness" is illustrated by one of the informants:

> "I used to be a Pioneer. I had a neckerchief. I used to wear it.[…] Everybody was wearing […] they used to check how you were learning, how you were doing on the curriculum. [if it was good], vsio – you were a pioneer! They also gave you a badge." (IR-07).

According to Naudžiūnienė, Young Pioneers and Komsomol at school were used "as a means of enabling the observance of collective rules […], while at the same time also prioritising collective activity over individual practices and private contacts outside the collective" (2021, p. 106). However, in order to evaluate how effective and efficient these practices were in the process of creating the New Man, it is worth asking how proactive the involvement of the schoolchildren in the activities of these organisations was and what did it mean in their everyday lives' (ibid., p. 106). To answer this question in the context of this article, some illustrative statements from the informants can be given:

> "I used to be a Pioneer and a komsomol. I didn't do so well there." (IR-02).

> "We had 9th of May, there was a parade then. We would not attend it. I was a Pioneer but we were laughed at by our fellow country people. You could not do that […]. When I was a pioneer, maybe in the seventh grade, that was when my fellow country people started to make fun of us because of those red neckerchiefs. There were still those pioneer camps in the summer, but we didn't go there." (IR-03)

Summarising the narratives of the Roma who participated in the study about their involvement in communist youth organisations and their activities, it is possible to state that the younger age group of Roma used to take part in them most of the time, while the older age group participated in them much less often, because of the need to perform other, mostly family-related activities, and sometimes also to avoid ridicule by their compatriots. Although the informants revealed a variety of experiences of Roma, both those who willingly participated and those who hardly participated at all in communist children's and youth organisations, this participation does not seem to have been of any great significance in the life of the Roma learner. Most of the informants mentioned that they could hardly remember participating in any additional activities of these organisations. Only one of the informants remembered that "I had to teach the Octobrists[9] there"(IR-03).Thus, to claim that through these activities Roma youth have learnt "class consciousness as well as discipline and loyalty to the regime" would not be accurate.

The analysis of the data collected during the informants shows that the Roma themselves were well aware of the realities of the soviet school, the prohibitions, the hidden content. All of them talked about

9 Little Octobrists was a youth organization for elementary school children in grades 1 through 3 in the Soviet Union.

the norms, rules, and rituals of the school at that time and aptly identified examples of (un)desirable behaviour, often using their own or a classmate's example. When describing what a "good school student" was in the soviet school, the Roma used epithets such as "smart school student", "one who had only fives", "obedient", "praised by the teachers", "the one whose picture was on the Wall of Fame", "wearing a neckerchief", "an activist", etc. When asked whether they themselves were good schoolchildren according to the perception of the time, the vast majority of Roma interviewed tended to view themselves critically:

> "On the opposite, I was on 'The Hedgehog'. I used to have some nice shoes like that and I was criticised for them. Well, if you dressed in a very fashionable way, or if you offended someone, then you got on 'The Hedgehog'. There was a certain wall there – 'The Hedgehog'." (IR-03)

> "We used to skip and miss a lot of lessons […]. They used to put us in 'the corner' at school. If you don't obey, they take you and keep you there for a couple of minutes." (IR-08)

> "I was a hooligan. Well, how? They would take me by the ear and put me in the corner. I attended [classes], but I also skipped them." (IR-07)

According to Nogee, "education involves considerably more than the developing of skills… it involves 'moulding the new soviet man' [and] pedagogic techniques are designed to foster discipline and respect for authority" (1972, p. 315). However, these techniques may have been poorly effective. In unfavourable circumstances, penitentiary institutions were involved in the disciplinary process. According to the informants' accounts, they could also have an educational function:

> "Then they put me in jail. I was sent to Pravieniškės [prison] for three years. There I learnt to read and write in Lithuanian. There

were classes in the prison where you could learn Russian and Lithuanian. I knew Russian, so I went to the Lithuanian class to learn it." (IR-01)

"Then they put her [the grandmother] in jail. She was very young. There she learnt to read and write. She was the most literate among us […]. Mother didn't learn to read or write. She doesn't know how to sign, she puts a cross. Now she's in prison. She hopes that maybe she will learn there. Like her mother (laughs)." (IR-09)

Education and "socialist welfare". As early as 1919, the communists proclaimed that all schoolchildren should be provided with food, clothing, footwear and learning materials at state expense (Mikėnas, 1960, p. 6). Later, the Ministry of Education of the LSSR continued this policy by announcing that "The funds for general education are formed from budgetary appropriations, as well as from the funds of collective farms, trade unions, cooperative organisations, and from the income of educational and experimental plots and workshops. These funds are used to provide assistance to children in need (free meals, clothing, textbooks, shoes, etc.)" (1967, p. 23). Similarly, the aforementioned "On Reconciling Vagrant Gypsies to Labour" (1956) obliged local authorities to organise cultural and housing provision specifically for the Roma, but further extracts from the informants raise critical questions about how this was done:

"I was admitted to the first grade… Some people came, some bosses. They inspected the families. They wanted me to enrol in school. I don't know how old I was. These people bought me 'a form' 10, a backpack. I had a pair of shoes with shoelaces. 'The form' was very long, 'for growing out of it'. I skipped, I skipped [the lessons], but I was forced to go. The school was

10 Author's note – a school uniform.

> good. In the morning they took me to the canteen, gave me porridge. Semolina porridge with jam. I stopped going to school when I outgrew the uniform. Maybe in the fourth grade." (IR-04)

> "The children say I'm the most literate in the family. I went to first grade, but it was a long way to school… through the forest. I still had to buy clothes. That's, uh. I didn't attend school because I didn't have shoes." (IR-01)

In these quotations, the slogan "the great concern of the Communist Party for the working people" (Ministry of Education of the LSSR, 1967, p. 39), according to the narratives of the informants, seems to have been less than great in reality. The lack of shoes as a reason for not attending school, or the joy of the simple porridge served at school, reveals the difficult socio-economic situation of families, or even poverty, which may have influenced the process of enrolment in the educational system.

Family responsibilities also played a role (especially for girls). One of the informants pointed out:

> "I didn't really go to school, to be honest. I had to look after the small children.[…] In winter I hardly went at all. Lots of snow, cold winters. The roads were snowed in. Because you had to walk, well, quite far. There was a road through the forest. They were afraid, they wouldn't let me. Wolves. […] I was hiding from the teachers then. I was at home. I was looking after the children. I tidied." (IR-04)

Education and atheisation. Religion became a particularly sensitive issue for the soviet authorities in the development of the new soviet people in the LSSR. As Vignieri observes "the communists, almost from the moment they occupied Lithuania, realised that because of education, influence, and prestige, the clergy –"'the servants of the cult' – were the most conspicuous soviet enemy" (1965, p. 219). The 1940

Constitution of the Lithuanian SSR established the complete separation of church and state, and of school and church. All positions of religious teachers in schools were abolished, and all clerical organisations were banned (Ministry of Education of the LSSR, 1967, pp. 12–13). The Communist party implemented a secularisation policy in public education, prohibiting religious instruction and the display of religious symbols. Local authorities intensified the surveillance of civil servants, particularly teachers, to ensure that they did not participate in religious activities or interact with religious leaders. Individuals observed attending religious services were often summoned to party offices for intimidation and threats. This is also reflected in the narratives of our research informants:

> "They didn't allow it earlier, but we still used to go there quietly. My father is deeply religious. Well, my mother's also very religious. We are Catholic. We used to go to church in X town. Of course, now all those priests have changed. At school we didn't say we were attending church. Oh, no, no. God forbid. It was communism then. They used to talk about it in the classroom, they used to discuss in public that this and that was in the church. They were strict about it […]. They didn't really let us go to church, but we would still go with my parents, especially if there was a holiday, especially Christmas, Easter. They [parents] wanted us to go to First Communion, but we couldn't." (IR-03)

This quote perfectly illustrates the reality of atheist education. It also becomes another example of resistance to the regime, where threat and prohibition were clearly understood, but ignored. Or, more precisely, it can be called an obvious subtle resistance of students and teachers to the creation of the New Soviet Man (Kestere & Fernandez-Gonzalez, 2021, p. 11). The authors describe this as, "slipping into the Grey Zone ('in-betweenness'), which is a symbolic place between the allowed and the forbidden, between two extremely different, anti-polar phenomena became yet another form of hidden resistance" (p. 27). It is worth

noting that atheist education did not succeed in definitively eliminating the religious attitudes not only of the Roma, but also of the Lithuanians, so this and similar responses from the informants are more likely to demonstrate the general tendencies of atheist education and resistance to atheisation in the LSSR (Streikus, 2003), rather than the patterns of resistance to the regime that are exclusively Roma-specific.

Education, friendship between nations and russification. Much work was also done in schools "to educate young people in the spirit of internationalism" (Ministry of Education of the LSSR [1967]). Although the concepts of internationalist education and friendship of nations are not identical (Stonkuvienė & Ivanavičė, 2024), the education of both in soviet schools took similar forms, e.g., encouraging children to engage in extracurricular activities with Russian children by taking part in hikes, creating joint exhibitions, attending soviet army events (Vaitiekūnas, 1965, p. 182), and to correspond with young people from other countries, that is, the "fraternal soviet republics and the countries of socialism" (p. 38). However, the narratives analysed in this article show that the Roma ethnic group was not involved in this kind of activity on a larger scale, i.e. memories of correspondence were not recorded. However, other manifestations of internationalist education emerged: participation in sporting competitions or "events of friendship between nations":

> "We used to do concerts. Our group of little gypsies, our compatriots, would gather. A few of them danced, I played. On the accordion. On New Year's Eve. We used to do a Roma concert at New Year. Some danced, others sang. The whole school cheered." (IR-03)

> "That friendship between nations was a very strange thing. It was not a matter of debate for anyone at all. There was a Roma boy in my sister's class. Everybody was friends with him, nobody cared, no problem. Then there was an Uzbek. It was a strange surname, but it wasn't that we noticed any national aspect or

> anything like that. Then the Turkmens, the Georgians would come. […] There was that friendship. At the music school, the children of officers from different countries would come. We loved them." (NR-010)

It is difficult to determine to what extent the principle of friendship between nations introduced by the USSR has been fully implemented in Lithuania, but Roma, Lithuanians (including exiles), Russians, Belarusians, Poles, Ukrainians, and other nationalities studying in Lithuania in the late soviet era, who participated in the survey, stated that their classrooms and schools were friendly in terms of nationality:

> "No, I never felt bad (author's note – at school)." (IR-02)

> "Our generation was very different. Well, softer. Everyone was very friendly. Not like young people now. […] I didn't feel different. No, no, never. Well, we were all equal. You can see this in the films. It was Russia, it was the Soviet Union, so everyone was equal. First of all, here I used to work as a taxi driver, as a driver. You would come to the workplace and they would just hire you and they would not ask you your nationality or anything. Do you understand? Not like that, when you go and, 'Oh, tzygane…' If something disappeared, he stole […]. People were all good. Well […]." (IR-07)

However, soviet research also reveals a darker side to the "friendship of nations". The reason why representatives of different nations and ethnic groups were able to communicate so easily with each other was perhaps the most important reason – a common language. The policy of socialist internationalism was very closely linked to language education and, in particular to the teaching of Russian. Therefore, it is not surprising that to promote the use of Russian in schools, joint festivals, gatherings and other events were organised. It can be stated that "internationalist upbringing served as a Trojan horse. […] the teaching of Russian was not only used to construct the soviet identity, but also

to heavily advocate the Russian culture" (Stonkuvienė & Ivanavičė, 2024, p. 17). The integration of ethnic minorities such as the Roma into the "new soviet society" was primarily understood through this linguistic assimilation. And although in Lithuania the russification of Roma culture and language may have been triggered by other aspects, such as the post-war gap between Lithuanian and Roma communities (due to collaboration, different treatment by the occupying army, the genocide being silenced) (Simoniukštytė, 2022, p. 65), the school became a particularly important tool in the implementation of the russification policy.

Conclusions and Discussion

Throughout their history, Roma have faced a range of injustices, including persecution, state-sanctioned oppression, discrimination, and racial violence. These experiences have often been compounded by various institutions employing surveillance and control mechanisms to monitor and regulate Roma communities. After the occupation of Lithuania by the USSR in 1940 and the reoccupation in 1944, the country's educational system was transformed on the USSR model, and Lithuanian Roma began to be educated as The New Soviet Man. A further step in the assimilation of the Roma was taken in 1956 with the adoption of the resolution "On Reconciling Vagrant Gypsies to Labour". On the one hand, this document obliged local authorities to provide Roma with housing or to allocate funds for the construction of housing space and to guarantee access to work and education, but on the other hand, it did not take into account, for example, the arbitrary change/abandonment of the place of residence where a person was registered and the refusal to work in public works, which could lead to a risk of being searched for or prosecuted. According to McGarry "it was expected that the discipline and collective spirit of state-sponsored work in the factory or in the field would encourage Roma to participate equally in social life – if Roma abandoned their cultural identity and traditions, the majority of society would accept Roma as part of the communist ideal" (2010, pp. 26–27). The law on forced sedentarisation, adopted in 1956, not only marked the beginning of Roma settlement policies

in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), but also signaled the broader inclusion of Roma into the educational system. It may be assumed that this legal shift contributed to a more rapid and, in many cases, coercive integration of Roma children into schools. To sum up, after the entry into force of the resolution of 1956 and its rather rapid implementation, the issue of Roma education in the USSR, including the LSSR, was as it officially "solved and closed". Roma children, like other inhabitants of the LSSR, faced ideological pressure, linguistic assimilation, russification, and atheisation. These and other aspects of soviet schooling were also reflected in the memories of the informants.

A key inquiry was whether the memories of participants who identified as Roma differed significantly from those of other nationalities attending LSSR schools during the same period. In summary, no substantial differences were observed; however, the limited number of Roma participants in the study constrains the generalizability of these conclusions. Nevertheless, researchers noted that Roma participants were less inclined to discuss the curriculum, including school subjects, lesson topics, timetables, and didactic aspects of learning, as well as the physical environment of the school. This contrasts sharply with Lithuanian and Russian participants, who extensively detailed these aspects. Conversely, Roma participants tended to focus more on communication and cooperation, holidays, and memorable school events. Their recollections were particularly vivid regarding teachers and classmates, involvement or disinclination to participate in school activities or attend school altogether, prohibitions, and detailed accounts of family members and their activities. When analyzing solely the memories of Roma individuals within this article's framework, a compelling portrait emerges of a population frequently experiencing poverty, deprivation, and numerous social challenges. Aspects such as forced sedentarization, linguistic assimilation, Russification, and various prohibitions are illustrative of these experiences.

The participation of most Roma children in communist children's and youth organizations, while present, was generally not characterized by high levels of engagement. Similarly, their involvement in formal education was often reported as less than fully active. Informants

frequently indicated that Roma students were not consistently exemplary in their academic attendance or performance, with instances of truancy and eventual school dropout being noted. These educational disengagements were predominantly linked to the prevailing socio-economic conditions of their families. Despite official declarations of guaranteed "socialist welfare" for all Roma, a segment of the Roma population continued to experience relatively impoverished living conditions.

However, it should be noted that in the USSR, persons of Roma origin born between 1950 and 1975 are considered to be the most educated (Demeter & Chernykh, 2018, p. 124). A large number of Roma from the LSSR (including the informants of our study and their relatives) also graduated from schools (mostly eight-year schools) and acquired a profession: they used to work as drivers, locksmiths, and seamstresses (Žilevičius, 2001). Almost all Roma informants tended to romanticise the soviet era as one of the best periods, when there was no bullying or segregation in society, schools or work. These results are not surprising. Soviet nostalgia and romanticisation of childhood and youth are also characteristic of Latvian and Estonian Roma (Roth-Yilmaz, 2020, p. 98), as are, incidentally, a large number of people of other nationalities not only in the Soviet Union, but also in the countries of the post-socialist bloc (Stonkuvienė, 2023). Most of our research informants reiterated the soviet slogan of equality ("We were all equal"), even as they provided specific examples of inequality or discrimination during their interviews.[11] [12]

11 Limitations of the research. Although the oral history approach partially filled the gaps in the data on Roma education, the chosen method and the relatively small number of informants only reveal the experiences of individual participants rather than the experiences of all Roma in the soviet schools in the LSSR. This requires wider and more detailed studies.

12 Notes. The article can be used as part of the dissertation *The Challenges of Roma Education in Lithuania and Initiatives to Overcome Them: A Multi-perspective Historical (1956–2024) Narrative* (a provisional title) defended at Vilnius University.

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