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Sammendrag

I Europa er islam et polariserende tema blant ikke-muslimer, vanligvis i konteksten av innvandringen de siste tiårene. Muslimske minoritetsgrupper, med dype historiske røtter i de kristne delene av kontinentet, har derimot i stor grad unngått diskursen. Hva disse minoritetsgruppene mener og hvordan de føler seg berørt er spørsmål som har inspirert meg til å fokusere på selvbildet til Litauens muslimske minoritet siden Sovjetunionens fall.

Oppgaven fokuserer på minoritetsgruppen «Lipka Tatar», en etnisk gruppe med islam som religion, som ikke bare var tolerert, men i all hovedsak fikk blomstre med sentral innflytelse i regionens historiske utvikling i over 600 år. Gruppen er nokså unik i Europa fordi de har ivarettatt sin kulturelle og religiøse identitet på tross for å ha levd under konstant kristen innflytelse siden de immigrerte mot slutten 1300-tallet.²

I arbeid med oppgaven benyttet jeg metodene passiv observasjon og uformelle intervju til å undersøke hvordan innvandring og dagens diskurs om islam i Europa har påvirket selvbildet til Litauens muslimer. Som den mest sentrale metoden avslørte mine uformelle intervju, med både tatar- og ikke-tatar muslimer, interessante og delvis overraskende utviklinger.

Forskningen produserte tre primære funn: For det første er Litauen, på lik linje med resten av Europa, i varierende grad bekymret for konsekvensene av «uhemmet» innvandring av nye muslimer. For det andre nyter tatarer fortsatt en særstilling hos den gjennomsnittlige litauer, da de sees på som «våre muslimer» som har gjort seg fortjent sitt statsborgerskap. Det tredje, mest interessante, funnet var derimot det anstrengte forholdet som har utviklet seg mellom tatar og ikke-tatar muslimer. Mens tatarene frykter sin arvs endelige utryddelse av «tradisjonelle muslimer» mener ikke-tatarene at de kun gir en hjelpende hånd for å sette tatarer tilbake på riktige religiøse spor.

Temaet er ikke nytt innen litauisk, polsk og russisk forskning, men forhåpentligvis vil denne oppgaven bidra til å belyse et tema innen religionsvitenskapen som enn så lenge har hatt et begrenset fokus innen norsk og engelsk litteratur.

² De første immigrasjonsbølgene fant sted rundt samme tid som kristningen av Litauen pågikk.

Preface

The journey that led to this master's thesis has certainly been a long one. Going all the way back to 2010, what began as mere curiosity eventually developed into a deep interest for a field of study of which I had previously never heard and, finally became the motivation for this thesis.

As many who have assisted me along the way have heard countless times, my primary area of study at the University of Bergen was a master's degree in jurisprudence. However, throughout my law studies I decided to take extracurricular courses in religious studies and eventually managed to produce a bachelor's degree. Yet, my fascination for the field was not satisfactorily abated, and I decided to attempt a parallel master's degree in religious studies.

While tackling individual subjects proved manageable, developing my master's thesis was something completely different. I began developing ideas for a thesis in 2016, the same year which marked the end of my life as a full-time student having completed my degree in jurisprudence. My plan then was to simultaneously work on my thesis while beginning a professional career, a four-year undertaking I would eventually realise I had severely underestimated. My first task was spending the autumn finding a topic.

In 2017, I began an internship at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vilnius, granting me a unique opportunity to conduct field research for six months outside of workhours. Therefore, my supervisor and I spent a month developing my initial research focus, before I packed my bags and prepared to study Lithuania's Islamic minority and, most especially, the Lipka Tatars. As a topic rarely covered in Norwegian and English literature, it was an opportunity both exciting and intimidating. I had few sources to work with and a potential language barrier, but my supervisors and I appreciated the chance to shed much needed light on the subject.

My time in Lithuania was the most extensive period between 2016 and 2020 in which I focus regularly on my project. This was partly because I enjoyed the research. However, it was primarily due to complications in gaining access to the Tatar community and the significant language barrier. Thankfully, towards the end of my stay, I finally achieved the necessary breakthrough to gain fascinating insights through a series of interviews.

After finishing my internship and research, I headed home to Norway for what would turn out to be a couple of years of slow progress. During a subsequent period of unemployment, I lacked

motivation. I then found work, and my motivation returned, but then I rarely had time. Coupled with the fact that I was regularly moving work locations, the thesis became a low priority. However, while progress remained slow, it was also steady, and thankfully my supervisor and university department showed much needed sympathy through support and granting the necessary extensions.

And here we are, at journey's end, and I sincerely hope that readers find the thesis interesting enough to inspire further research. I wholeheartedly endorse Lithuania as an accessible destination for students on which to focus future thesis work.

Before delving into the thesis, I would like to take the time to acknowledge a few individuals that have contributed in their own way to ensure this thesis became a finished product.

My supervisor, Richard Natvig, stuck by me for over five years while arguably having many excellent reasons for pulling out of the project, including retirement.

My manager at work, Nina Rieber-Mohn, who went above and beyond in facilitating what I needed at work, thus granting me the time and opportunity to finish the thesis.

I would also like to thank my parents, Timothy Mark Croucher and Astrid Swan Croucher, for supporting me in the homestretch of this thesis, and for all the time and effort they have spent in supporting my studies all these years.

Finally, I must naturally thank my fiancée, Ingvild Yndestad, for her incredible patience and support while I indulge myself with complementary degrees, courses, assignments and theses.

Thomas Mark Swan Croucher,
Oslo, June 2020

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Theme, research question and limitations

The topic of Islam and its current and/or potential influence in the “West” is a common subject in both academic and popular discourse, and with good reason. There is no doubt that there are advantages to studying such phenomena, as history has shown us many potential outcomes as different religious groups interact. However, if such discourses are to be in any way useful, there should be no room for guesswork and assumptions, therefore basing one’s arguments on well documented facts is a prerequisite.³

While academic discourse generally manages to uphold the ideals of nuance, rigorous research and peer-reviews, public discourse often leaves much to be desired. Due to limitations inherent in popular media, complicated issues are too often oversimplified and generalised, thus painting a “black and white” picture. The problem worsens when you also consider the fact that some might join the discourse with a clear agenda that does not necessarily have any interest in taking “truths” into account. Furthermore, with the development of information and communications technology, we can observe an interesting and almost paradoxical development where academic depictions are ignored, mistrusted and ridiculed if they challenge simplified opinions. For every academic paper on a subject, anyone can find questionable sources that state contrary views, and when scholars challenge the authenticity and methods of unreliable sources, their opponents often dismiss the challenges as “elitist”. As a result, many academics will unfortunately, but understandably, decide to avoid the public discourse, potentially causing a vicious circle where the concept of academic elitism is reconfirmed.⁴

In a worst-case situation, we sometimes witness groups being unfairly associated with another group due to certain shared characteristics. In the case of Islam this is a regular occurrence in the public discourse, and most of my interviewees mentioned how Islam is often equated with terrorism in the media. History has shown that such deductive leaps on a large scale can undoubtedly lead to extremely dangerous and dire consequences. However, one should not underestimate deductive leaps at a smaller, more “innocent”, level and the potential damage that unreasonable “group associations” can mean for any groups self-esteem and self-worth.


Please note that sources are abbreviated when referencing using footnotes. See bibliography for full details.

³ Račius, Egdūnas (2013). “Both Muslim and European? An Inquiry into the Case of the Muslim Community in Lithuania”. In *Journal of Muslims in Europe – Volume 2*, page 165-166.

⁴ Sprain, Leah (2004). *Sending Signals from the Ivory Tower: Barriers to Connecting Academic Research to the Public*, page 8.

In the case of this thesis, I will be studying a very small Muslim ethnic group that has existed as minorities in Catholic Lithuania for over 600 years. Throughout most of this long period of time, this group has developed their own take on the Islamic faith. As an example, they even found themselves in a position of power and respect amongst nobles and commoners, not least due to their role in the Battle of Grunwald against the Teutonic Order, which cemented Polish and Lithuanian power and influence in Europe for centuries to come.



Picture 1: *The Battle of Grunwald*, as painted by Jan Matejko (1838-1893) in 1878. It currently resides in the National Museum in Warsaw.  Public domain.

And yet, has this been enough for them to avoid being grouped together with other Muslims in the context of today's, sometimes toxic, debate of Islam in Europe? Have Lithuanians become more sceptical of "their own Muslims"? How are individual Tatars affected by the discourse of Islam in Europe, especially during their childhood years? Does it, together with the growing presence of Islam in Lithuania⁵, affect the relationship between Tatar and non-Tatar Muslim groups?

These were the reflections that led to the development of this thesis' primary research question: "How has Lithuania's Islamic community self-perception changed since Lithuania gained independence in 1991?"

Due to the potential scope of the theme and research question, certain limitations have been put into place to narrow the focus. The final scope also came about as a necessity while conducting field research in Lithuania. Before travelling I had expectations of meeting many Tatars and thus focus solely on them. However, I eventually realised that it was difficult to find enough

⁵ Račius, Egdūnas (2002). "Islam in Lithuania: Changing Patterns of Religious and Social Life of Lithuanian Muslims". In *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 176-183, page 177.

individuals that would fit within my original criteria.⁶ I therefore expanded the scope from just the Tatars to rather consider Lithuania's Muslim community as a whole. As a result, I interviewed three Tatars as well as four non-Tatars. Also, the timeframe of the last three decades gave me an opportunity to question the experiences of Muslims both before and after "9/11". The geographic scope was limited to only Lithuania, despite the Lipka Tatars being also present in Belarus and Poland. This limitation was pragmatic, due to both the limiting size of the thesis, as well as reducing the necessity for long distance travel during my field research. Finally, I am limiting the time spent on explaining all the complex nuances found in the Islamic faith. For the purposes of this thesis, it will be sufficient to portray a general overview of the key features that differentiate the Tatar Muslims from the official, and majority, Sunni faith of Turkey. The reasoning for choosing this denomination is explained later in the thesis.

1.2 Definitions

"Lithuania", such as we know it today, is easy enough to define. However, this thesis must contemplate over 600 years of complicated history fraught with conflict, war, and ever-changing borders and state authorities. With this in mind, I want to emphasise that "Lithuania" as both name and state has not been fixed over these many centuries. Its lands expanded and diminished, the profile and political situation of its populations varied, and even the state itself went "from being a super-power, to complete non-existence on the political map of the world, to revival under a new structure".⁷ When studying historical sources, it is not unusual to find long periods of time where the name of Lithuania is hardly mentioned. For example, during the era of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth many historical sources simply referred to the power's Polish fragment due to Polish nobles being perceived as more disciplined, culturally sophisticated and of higher morals.⁸

However, the one constant throughout the centuries is the Lithuanian people who even under the control of foreign states never lost their "status as a subject of political life".⁹ For the purpose of this thesis, when referring to Lithuania it is the geographical area at whatever point in history where the Lithuanian people is concentrated. This means that, just as its state border, the area in question can fluctuate depending on the point in time currently being discussed. In general, it usually encompasses today's areas of Lithuania, Belarus and Eastern Poland.¹⁰ It is in these

⁶ The criteria were Tatar, Lithuanian, Muslim, religious, could communicate in English.

⁷ Kiaupa, Zigmantas (2002). *The History of Lithuania* – first edition. Baltos lankos, Lithuania, page 8.

⁸ Briedis, Laimonas (2016). *Vilnius – City of Strangers*. Baltos lankos, Lithuania, page 52.

⁹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 8.

¹⁰ Račius, Egdūnas (2009). "Islam in Lithuania". In *Islam in the Nordic and Baltic Countries*, page 16-17.

same areas that we today find most of the 10.000 to 15.000 individuals that make up the ethnic group known as the Lipka Tatar.

“Lipka Tatars”¹¹ (hence referred to as Tatars) are an ethnic group with roots going back as far as the descendant states of Genghis Khan’s Mongol Empire.¹² Today, the Tatars are a Muslim minority group that has been part of Lithuanian/Polish/Belarus society for over half a millennium, “constituting a unique phenomenon in respect to the history of Muslim–Christian relations and the presence of Islam in Europe”.¹³ Starting in the 14th century, the Tatars were welcomed into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where they were originally attempting to find sanctuary to preserve their non-Muslim religious ways. However, new waves of Muslim Tatars emigrated later, and with time, the Muslim faith came to replace all the previous beliefs of the group. On the other hand, as will be explained in detail later, their nomadic heritage and pre-Islam religious ways have not been left completely behind.

With the establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Tatars began spreading to areas that are now part Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus.¹⁴ Today, the largest concentration of Tatars is found in Belarus, with Lithuania having the second largest group, and Poland the smallest. While playing a small, but significant, role in the histories of these states, the Tatars have been able to maintain their own religious beliefs without having to convert to Christianity. On the other hand, they have lost their original language and now chose to adopt the native tongue of the country in which they live, be that Belarusian, Polish or Lithuanian.



Picture 2: 50 litas coin issued to commemorate the 600th Anniversary of the settling down of Karaims and Tatars in Lithuania. The words on the edge of the coin: LIETUVA, TEVYNE MUSU (LITHUANIA, OUR FATHERLAND). Designed by Vldas Vildziunas and issued in 1997. The coin was minted at the state enterprise Lithuanian Mint. © Public domain.

¹¹ Previously also spelled “Tartar”, but nowadays Tatar is the preferred spelling.

¹² For example, the Golden Horde, Crimean Khanate, Volga Khanate and Kazan Khanate.

¹³ Op. cit. Račius 2002, page 178.

¹⁴ The Lithuanian Tatars. *The Red Book of the Peoples of the Russian Empire*. URL: http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/lithuanian_tatars.shtml

In modern day Lithuania, the Tatars are a small but integral part of Lithuanian society. Despite Lithuania primarily being a Catholic country, any Muslims associated with the Lipka Tatars have traditionally been considered trustworthy, familiar, and “one of us”.¹⁵

“Islam” is the world’s second-largest religion with almost 1.8 billion followers.¹⁶ Muslims represent dozens of states and nations, as well as hundreds of different cultural and ethnic groups. In fact, you could say that “there are almost as many Muslim views of Islam as there are Muslims”.¹⁷ As a result, it should come as no surprise that there potentially exists numerous Islamic variations, denominations and sects. Simplified explanations of Islam will usually divide it into two main branches, Sunni and Shia. Going one step further each of these denominations has several schools of jurisprudence¹⁸ and theology to which Muslim communities usually, at least officially, adhere. Finally, we also must take into account the number of different Sufi orders that can either exist within or outside of the groupings mentioned above.

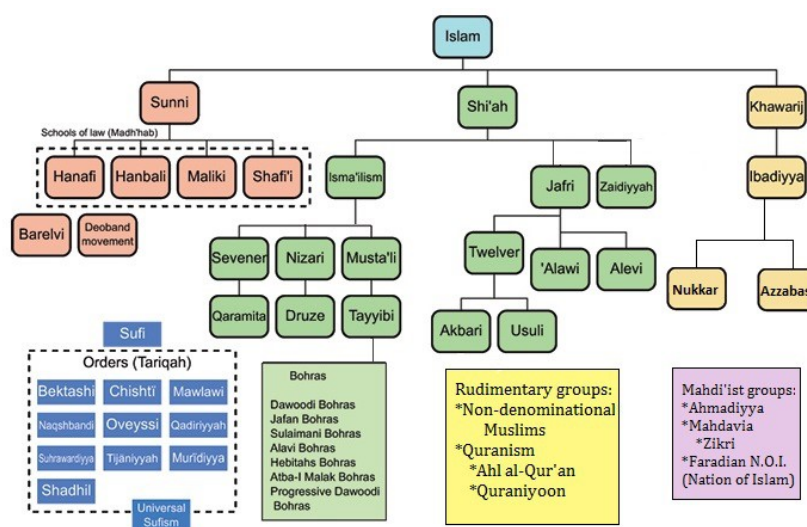


Figure 1: Diagram showing Islamic branches of Sunnism, Shi'ism, Sufism and more. It is the unaltered work of user

Abdulrafeh857 who is in no way associated with this thesis.  [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

While for many this may seem complicated, the reality of the matter is that Islam in practice is even more varied with potentially thousands of unique interpretations of the Islamic faith found all over the planet. These interpretations of their faith will often reflect exclusive features that have developed based upon groups unique culture, history and more.

¹⁵ Op. cit. Račius 2013, page 183.

¹⁶ Muslim Population by Country 2020. *World Population Review*. URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/muslim-population-by-country/>

¹⁷ Shepard, William (2009). *Introducing Islam*, page 6.

¹⁸ Peters, F. E. (2004). *The Children of Abraham – Judaism, Christianity, Islam – The New Edition*, page 82.

For example, the Tatars' religious practice eventually departed from that of other Muslim societies during their 600 years stay in Lithuania. While traditionally Islamic, the customs and religious practices of the Tatars ultimately accommodated Christian elements into their faith while also preserving the traditions and superstitions from their nomadic Mongol heritage. Some examples of divergent behaviour are their treatment of women, who generally enjoy a large degree of freedom, their co-education of both male and female children, and the fact that Tatar women don't wear the veil – except at marriage ceremonies.¹⁹

Lithuania's non-Tatar Muslim community is small, but still includes individuals from multiple different backgrounds. However, the Turkish presence in Lithuania, represented by the Turkish embassy, is by far the most influential in most, if not all, religious matters outside of the Tatar community. The exception to this rule is arguably the role of webpages like *islamast*. It has become “biggest source and resource for *Lithuanian converts* to Islam in their search for the “true” Islamic belief and practice” [my emphasis].²⁰ However, for the sake of simplicity, whenever I refer to the non-Tatar Muslim community, I am referring to the followers of the Hanafi Sunni doctrine of Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs.²¹

“Secularity” is a complex term with many possible meanings, but in the context of this thesis it refers to people, groups or individuals, “not [being] overtly or specifically religious”.²² With this in mind, it is crucial to be aware of the difference between individuals who are less *overtly* religious by merely ceasing to engage in religious organisations and communities, and those who are less *specifically* religious due to individual belief having a less central role in their lives.²³ This distinction is important in this case because of the fact that Lithuania's Tatar community, along with the majority of the country, become significantly less religious during the 20th century, first overtly by engaging less in public religious areas and then later specifically by leaving their religion behind.²⁴

¹⁹ Nalborczyk, Agata S. (2009). “Muslim Women in Poland and Lithuania. Tatar Tradition, Religious Practice, hijab and Marriage”. In *Gender and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe*, page 67.

²⁰ Račius, Egdūnas (2013). “A “Virtual Club” of Lithuanian Converts to Islam”. In *Muslims and the New Information and Communications Technologies – Notes from an Emerging Field*, page 44.

²¹ Presidency of Religious Affairs. *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*. URL: <https://www.diyinet.gov.tr/en-US/>

²² Secular. *Merriam-Webster*. URL: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secular>

²³ Furseth, Inger og Repstad, Pål (2003). *Innføring i religionssociologi*, page 119.

²⁴ Račius, Egdūnas (2013). “Lithuanian Muslims' Attitudes Towards Participation in the Democratic Political Process: The Case of Converts”. In *Muslim Political Participation in Europe*, page 84-85.

According to one of my interviewees,²⁵ half of the Tatar community do not identify themselves as Muslim, while most of the other half admit to being Muslim because it is a natural extension of being Tatar, and perhaps only ten percent are actually religious. While I originally did not consider this statement too much when starting my field study, later interviews confirmed the account. This relatively recent secularisation of the Tatar community would also turn out to be one of the most important details that was repeated in multiple interviews in various contexts.

1.3 Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter two introduces a brief history of Lithuania and its Muslim minority group, the Lipka Tatar. The goal is to provide the necessary historical context to properly understand the significance of the developments that has come about in the last three decades. Lithuania has a rich history that I have divided into four distinct “eras” wherein the Lithuanian people fell under the sphere of various states. While I have attempted to include the most significant highlights, it should be noted that there is only so much that could be covered in a master’s thesis when summarising over 600 years of rich history.

In chapter three I focus on the field study I conducted in Vilnius, Lithuania, and the methods utilised to gather the necessary data to produce this thesis. While I planned on using both the methods of observation and interview from the beginning, it became evident over time as the scope of my research narrowed, that observations were of limited direct use. However, it did provide me with the experiences necessary to expand my network of contacts and finally to establish contact with my interview subjects. The chapter mixes together both theory and practice to best illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of my chosen methods. The chapter rounds off with a critical assessment of the ethical challenges of my field study and choice of methods.

Chapter four begins with a presentation of my field study and includes descriptions of my preparations and execution, my experience in conducting interviews, and some post-production work. Most importantly, I will present my reflections of these experiences based upon observational notes from the field journal I kept while in Lithuania. I will also provide some insights into my thought process once I left Lithuania and began what would eventually be the lengthy process of data processing. I go on to analyse the findings from my seven interviews under two separate headings, first Lithuania’s relationship with “their” Tatar Muslims and

²⁵ See interview one in the appendix.

Lithuanian relationship with “other” Muslims and second, perhaps most interestingly, the relationship between Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims.

Chapter five presents a critical assessment of my research as a whole. The entire process is evaluated from beginning to end with the primary focus on the project’s shortcomings. By appraising what went wrong and how I might improve these failings in a hypothetical future endeavour, I hope to provide others with the opportunity to learn from both my successes *and* failures. Given that I went into this project rather naively, many elementary mistakes were made that future researchers can easily avoid through easy adjustments to an otherwise quite successful field trip.

Chapter six concludes the thesis with a summary of its contents, as well as presenting the final answers to the research question.

Chapter 2: A brief history of Lithuania and the Lipka Tatars

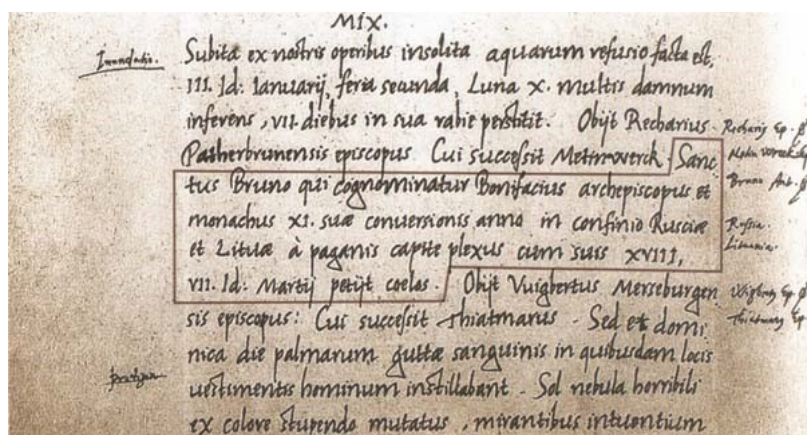
2.1 Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1219 – 1569)

"The Tartars are genuine Saracens, having no knowledge of the teachings of Jesus Christ". Vytautas [Grand Duke of Lithuania] embraced this local diversity which was, in part, created by his own policies of allowing peoples of various creeds to settle in and around Vilnius. In a more cautionary tone, [Lannoy] commented on [Vytautas'] laxity in spiritual matters, finding him dining together with the "Saracen infidels".²⁶

– Guillebert de Lannoy, patrician from Flanders, early 15th century²⁷

Despite being very much a Catholic country, modern day Lithuanians still boast of how they resisted the Christian crusades and became the last nation in Europe to be baptised. In fact, many inhabitants will argue that the Lithuanian national identity still clings to its ancient pagan roots by enjoying local customs and remaining relatively secular.

Due to the lack of historical sources, it is difficult to give a precise date for when Baltic tribes began uniting and consolidating into what would later become a Lithuanian state. However, the event of 21 Lithuanian chiefs signing a common peace treaty with the state of Galicia-Volhynia in 1219 is accepted by most historians as proof of an early stage of a uniting nation.²⁸



Picture 3: Lithuania's name in writing, 1009. The exact source is unknown. Most likely a canoness at the Quedlinburg Abbey
- Scan from A. Bumblauskas, *Senosios Lietuvos istorija 1009-1795*. © Public domain.

The final stages of statehood for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania came about due to existence of a common external enemy, namely the Christian crusaders. By the early 13th century Christianity was locally represented by two crusader orders known as the Teutonic Knights (the

²⁶ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 31-32.

²⁷ Jurginis, Juozas & Šidlauskas, Algirdas [editors] (1983). *Kraštas ir žmonės: Lietuvos geografiniai ir etnografiniai aprašymai*, page 49-50.

²⁸ Kiaupa, Zigmantas (2004). *The History of Lithuania* – second edition, page 28.

Order) to the east and the Livonian Brothers of the Sword (the Brotherhood) to the north, the latter having recently conquered most of modern-day Latvia and Estonia. When the Pope declared a Lithuanian crusade in 1236, Lithuanian tribes eventually united under Mindaugas as their first Grand Duke.²⁹

In the years that followed, Mindaugas expanded his borders into Ruthenia in the east and south, consolidated his rule by defeating and manipulating rivals, and frequently resisting incursions from the crusader alliance. While initially successful, the external threat coupled with internal rebellions led to Mindaugas seeking support from the Order. A deal was struck by Mindaugas agreeing to baptism and granting the Order some western lands in exchange for military support and a royal crown.³⁰ Mindaugas swiftly dealt with the rebellion and in 1253 he was crowned the first and *only* King of Lithuania. It should be noted that while he was indeed baptised in 1251, he would later renounce Christianity in 1260 as part of a deal where the Samogitians, who had recently defeated the Order in battle, would submit to his rule in return. The manipulation of Catholic powers by utilising baptisms for political and military gains, while secretly remaining pagan, would be a common strategy by Lithuanian rulers for centuries to come.³¹

Mindaugas' rule came to a violent end in 1263 when he was murdered by rivals. What followed was a period of unrest and civil war, which eventually led to the rise of the great Gediminid dynasty in 1285. The reign of Gediminas, after whom the dynasty is named, as the 10th Grand Duke is when Lithuania was first recognised as a great power.³² This is primarily due to how he could fend off the Order while simultaneously expanding ever further into Ruthenia. However, he was also a skilled statesman as demonstrated through his regular correspondence with Rome, which kept the Order in check. He cooperated with Riga in the north, kept his subjects in line, and eventually brokered a marriage between his daughter and the future King of Poland. Gediminas was also the founder of Vilnius, the current Lithuanian capital, moving the administrative from the Grand Ducal castle in Trakai.³³ However, new external threats loomed when Rus (formally the Grand Duchy of Moscow) became a competing power for Ruthenian lands and the Golden Horde invaded in the south. The Golden Horde was a Mongol

²⁹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 30.

³⁰ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 32.

³¹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 36.

³² Stone, Daniel (2001). *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795*, page 3.

³³ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 42.

khanate which converted to Islam and peaked in power during the 14th century.³⁴ While the Golden Horde was a competitor for Ruthenian lands, there were periods where Lithuania and the Golden Horde opted to rule jointly instead of fighting, marking the first example of Lithuanian-Muslim cooperation.

Upon the death of Gediminas, the Grand Duchy was divided between his seven sons, and due to external threats, they were forced to cooperate to keep the country together. Lithuania experienced regular incursions from the Order, the Brotherhood, the Grand Duchy of Moscow, Poland and the Golden Horde. During a period dominated by an almost constant need to defend and retreat, the seven brothers managed the situation admirably well. Many a hard peace was won, alliances were made and broken, however, eventually internal rivalries between a growing number of the ambitious sons made Lithuania's situation increasingly dire. It peaked when the cousins Jogaila and Vytautas competed for the Grand Dukes title with Jogaila inheriting it from his father, and Vytautas coveting it.

It was Jogaila who officially initiated the full Christianisation of Lithuania in 1386 when he was offered the crown of Poland in exchange for his baptism. This gave him considerable power and influence, as well as finally neutralising the 200-year-old threat of the Order, as the Pope prohibited them from going to war against a Christian Lithuania. Despite Jogaila's belief that this situation would finally allow him to control his cousin, the Lithuanian Civil War of 1389-92 began, which decimated the country and brought it close to collapse. Eventually Jogaila was forced to accept Vytautas' demands. The compromise led to Vytautas essentially ruling Lithuania, although formally as Jogaila's regent.³⁵

Vytautas' reign would be the peak of Lithuanian power and influence. As a proud Lithuanian, he resisted Jogaila and the Polish nobility's ambitions of annexing Lithuania into the Polish kingdom. However, his internal policies were dominated by Lithuanian centralisation to reduce Polish influence and it is largely due to these attempts of reducing Polish influence that Islam came to the Lithuanian heartland. Wishing to develop Vilnius into a capital that could rival Warszawa, Vytautas invited foreigners to help in its development and encourage trade.³⁶

³⁴ Račius, Egdūnas and Bairašauskaitė, Tamara (2016). "Chapter 1: Lithuania". In *Muslim Tatar Minorities in the Baltic Sea Region*, page 21.

³⁵ Op. cit. Stone 2001, page 10.


³⁶ Weeks, Theodore R. (1999). "'Our Muslims' – The Lithuanian Tatars and the Russian imperial government". In *Journal of Baltic Studies*, page 5.

Vytautas, like his forefathers, embraced his pagan roots and had little concern about religious differences.³⁷

Thanks to Jogaila's successes of Christianising the Lithuanian nobles, the nobility would grow in prominence although never receiving the respect they felt due from Poland's nobility in Warszawa.³⁸ Poland and Lithuania were together able to deflect skirmishes from the Order, but eventually Vytautas granted them their desired territory to gain the necessary freedom to handle internal affairs and continue his Ruthenia campaign.

Lithuania's territorial expansions continued to grow, but complete control of Ruthenia was upset once again by the Golden Horde in a catastrophic defeat in 1399. Realising that he needed a complete and permanent alliance with Poland, Vytautas agreed to the Union of Vilnius, granting him the Grand Dukes title in a personal alliance with the Polish King. Through this alliance, the two states achieved their final victory against their oldest foe, the Order, at the Battle of Grunwald. To this day, this victory is considered the greatest in the history of Lithuania, Poland and Belarus, and the Order would never recover.



Picture 4: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania at its greatest expansion at the end of Vytautas' reign. The map is not my work and is unaltered from its original design. The artist has no association to this thesis.  [CC BY-SA 2.5](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/)

Vytautas' greatest achievement was arguably to bring the Crimean Khanate and Volga Tatars under his sphere of influence.³⁹ Respecting their military prowess, diligence, formidable horsemanship and agricultural skill, Vytautas realised the advantages these groups could bring

³⁷ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 31.

³⁸ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 75.

³⁹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 65.

to his Grand Duchy.⁴⁰ Through the practise of religious tolerance, he welcomed foreign ethnic groups, Muslims, Jews, the Orthodox church and more to his lands. He was especially interested in bringing these new assets to Vilnius and Trakai where they would play an important role in developing the city landscape into a modern multicultural metropolis. Vytautas towards the end of his reign, attempted to acquire his own royal crown, but was thwarted by Jogaila and died a year later in 1430.⁴¹ Considered by many as Lithuania's greatest ruler, he has since passed into history as Vytautas the Great.

Following Vytautas' death, another civil war broke out, marking another period of gradual decline.⁴² The years up until 1569 were mostly dominated by internal strife, for example, the competing ambitions of the Polish and Lithuanian nobles and the regular conflicts with the growing influences of the Grand Duchy of Moscow in the east and the Ottoman Empire to the south. The Ottoman's influence peaked when they won the allegiance of the Tatar regions that Vytautas had previously conquered who then began raiding the Lithuanian heartland looking for slaves and plunder. Following a long and tedious political game between Poland and Lithuania, the necessity for a close personal union led to the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569 with the Union of Lublin.

2.2 Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569 – 1795)

In addition to the "Martinists" [i.e. followers of Martin Luther], the city has also many sorts of religions and sects, all of whom have their churches and public exercises, such as Papists, Calvinists, Jesuits, Ruthenians or Muscovites, Anabaptists, Zwinglians, and Jews, who also have their synagogue and place of gathering. Then there are also the heathens, or Tartars, and all the religions, companies, and sects have freedom of conscience, in which no one is hindered.

– Samuel Kiechel, Lutheran merchant from Ulm, 1585⁴³

While legally and officially an equal union between two independent states, most authorities at the time, as well as many historians (until relatively recently), considered the Union of Lublin as the final annexation of Lithuania by the Kingdom of Poland. As such, relatively few historical sources from this point refers to Lithuania by name, instead using merely Poland.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 21.

⁴¹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 76

⁴² Op. cit. Stone 2001, page 11.

⁴³ Burger, Glenn (2003). *Making Contact: Maps, Identity, and Travel*, page 25.

⁴⁴ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 117.

However, the Lithuanian nation and the ruling classes remained in control of the Lithuanian holdings and kept considerable local influence through a separate army and treasury.

In the context of this thesis, perhaps the most important influence that Lithuania could extend to the entire Commonwealth was its religious tolerance. In 1573, the Warszawa Confederation enacted a law protecting an individual's right to freedom of religion. This tolerance, as well as the democratic procedures that existed among the ruling elite, was quite unique in Europe at the time. Furthermore, during this period, Vilnius became famed for being the only European capital that rested on the border between the East and West. While a great many religions practiced here, Vilnius became especially enamoured for Jews who regarded the city as "Jerusalem of the North".⁴⁵

Lithuania continued to be an officially Catholic country throughout the Commonwealth period. By the late 18th century, state registries estimate that 80 per cent of Poland and Lithuania were Catholics. However, in the wake of the reformation, historians still dispute whether this was the case. Especially in and around Vilnius, with its highly influential university, multiple sources demonstrate the possibility of Catholicism losing ground to Orthodox and Protestant Christians, as well as the ever-increasing number of Jews. Muslim Tatars remained relatively few but continued to be both well-respected and influential.⁴⁶ So, in the first years after the creation of the new Commonwealth, the influence of Lithuanian tolerance came to be associated with the Commonwealth as a whole. This even went so far as to attract the praise from the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷

However, Lithuanian influence of religious tolerance could only do so much to counter the "xenophobia that dominated Poland".⁴⁸ As a result, during the Commonwealth era there were some setbacks between the Tatar and non-Tatar communities. It began under the rule of Sigismund III (1587-1632) who was an ardent Catholic that brought a number of restrictions to the liberties granted to non-Catholics, including the Tatars, as part of Counter-Reformation movement.⁴⁹ Despite diplomatic interventions by Sultan Murad III of the Ottoman Empire, this marked the beginning of almost a century of gradual erosion of the Tatars ancient rights and privileges. Eventually, these erosions led to the "Lipka Rebellion" in 1672 when Tatar

⁴⁵ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 130.

⁴⁶ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 22.

⁴⁷ Polczynski, Michael (2015). "Seljuks on the Baltic: Polish-Lithuanian Muslim Pilgrims in the Court of Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I". In *Journal of Early Modern History* – volume 19, page 24.

⁴⁸ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 175.

⁴⁹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 177-8.

regiments garrisoned in the south-eastern regions of the Commonwealth abandoned their posts and joined the Ottomans in the “Second Polish-Ottoman War”.



Picture 5: *Taniec tatarski (Tatar's Dance)* as painted by Juliusz Kossak (1824-1899).  Public domain.

A couple of years into this war, the Commonwealth achieved a victory at Chocim. Shortly after, they lay siege the stronghold of Bar that was held by the same Tatars who had rebelled against them. However, the siege was short-lived as a deal was struck where the Tatars re-joined the Commonwealth in return for the restoration of their ancient rights and privileges. After the war these rights were officially confirmed by the Commonwealth governing body, the Sejm.⁵⁰ Tatars could rebuild their mosques, employ Christian labour, acquire noble estates, and were freed from all taxation. Furthermore, King Jan Sobieski rewarded their return by granting them land that had been cleared of the previous occupants, from 0.5 to 7.5 square kilometres per head, according to rank and length of service.

Many of the Tatar rebels who returned to the service of the Commonwealth would later take part in the Vienna campaign of 1683, together with the Holy Roman Empire, to counter the Ottoman Empire's hugely successful westward advance. This included 60 Tatars in a light cavalry company that would eventually save the life of King Jan III Sobieski during the disastrous first day of the Battle of Parkany,⁵¹ an event that took place mere weeks after the victory at the Battle of Vienna that turned the tide of Islamic expansion into Europe.⁵² Due to Tatars being on both sides of the battle, Tatars who fought for the Commonwealth wore straw in their helmets to differentiate themselves from the Ottoman Tatars. Today, Lipka Tatars

⁵⁰ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 23.

⁵¹ Warminska, Katarzyna (1999). *Polish Tatars: Their ethnic and religious identity*, page 205.

⁵² Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 190.

visiting Vienna “traditionally wear straw hats to commemorate their ancestors’ participation in the breaking of the Siege of Vienna”.⁵³

Like the development in the rest of Europe, the Lithuanian economy was growing due to the development of modern trade practices. The two primary economic contributions were sizeable measures of grain being sold to Western Europe, as well as the important Hanseatic trade route between Klaipeda, Danzig and Amsterdam. However, Lithuanians valued military skill, horsemanship and agriculture far more than skills in trade and commerce. As a result, while Jews were arguably doing more to develop the country, Muslims were generally more respected.⁵⁴ They developed their own sort of noble class, below that of the official Catholic nobility, with their own land, their own farms and at times even their own serfs.⁵⁵ Muslims lording over Christian serfs in Catholic domains was a circumstance quite unheard of in other parts of the world.⁵⁶

A crucial detail of this period of Lithuanian history was gradual decline of both the Lithuanian and Tatar language.⁵⁷ The question of language has for centuries remained a sensitive and crucial part of Lithuanian identity, and even today, it is regularly discussed by the Lithuanian parliament. During the Commonwealth era, Lithuania experienced another period of decline partly due to natural developments, but also by design of the Polish elite.⁵⁸ Still dreaming of the day when Poland could officially annex Lithuania, the Polish nobles encouraged their Lithuanian counterparts to increasingly utilise Polish if they wanted larger roles in the Commonwealth. However, much due to Lithuanian elites in the Western parts of the country, the language was not completely lost. It is interesting to note that the Tatars also played a role in the continuation of the Lithuanian language, a point which one could argue has been important to the Lithuanian people’s favourable perception of their Muslim countrymen. Due to the Tatars talents, which quickly granted them relatively influential positions in society, the necessity to learn Lithuanian was evident to them from the start. Within a relatively brief period, Lithuanian Tatars grew proficient at Lithuanian while simultaneously forgetting their own language. They even dressed in similar fashion and imitated local customs.⁵⁹ However, while

⁵³ Lipka, Jakub Mirza [translations from Polish to English]. *A Short History of the Lipka Tatars of the White Horde*. URL: <http://www.angelfire.com/jazz/ntstar/history.htm>

⁵⁴ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 23.

⁵⁵ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 23.

⁵⁶ Op. cit. Weeks 1999, page 6.

⁵⁷ Op. cit. Stone 2001, page 231.

⁵⁸ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 157.

⁵⁹ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 30.

the Lithuanian language was slowly being replaced by Polish, the Tatars did not embrace this change, instead opting to work with the language they had come to embrace as their own. By the time the Lithuanian language became the focal point for Lithuanian nationalism under Russian rule, the fact that Tatar Muslims was using the same language granted them considerable favour and respect.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth never really grew beyond its foundation territories during its almost 230 years' existence. Furthermore, the almost constant internal disputes over power, influence and nationality made it all too easy for its surrounding neighbours to slowly, but surely, pick them apart. Besides the uprisings in the East of their territory (modern day Ukraine), Lithuania was ravaged by forces from the Empires of Sweden and Russia in a substantial number of wars. Plagues and intrigue would also further weaken the state when 40 per cent of the population perished and a growing number of the nobility came under the influence of the Russian Tsar. The final blows came during the late 18th century when three successive partitions divided the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between Russia (90 per cent) and Prussia (10 per cent).⁶⁰

2.3 Under Imperial Russia (1795 – 1918)

In contrast to the Jewish neighbourhood, which conspicuously exists outside the perimeters of war, this neighbourhood, which had been housing local Muslim Tartars since the fifteenth century, is fully rearranged by the spectre of war. (...) High above the graves perches a shiny cross, an imperial symbol that dominates over the homeless half-moon of the mosque. The forefathers of the residents were prisoners of war whose graveyard dreams are the last vestiges of the Islamic faith. Sorrow and grief linger over the mosque and the entire Turkish district.

– Paul Otto Heinrich Fechter, pseudonym Paul Monty, co-editor of *Wilnaer Zeitung*, 1918⁶¹

While Lithuania did to a considerable extent disappear into Poland's shadow under the Commonwealth, at least the Grand Duchy continued to officially exist in the two-state union. In the case of Lithuania's annexation by the Russian Empire, this was no longer the case and Lithuania officially ceased to exist for over a century.⁶² This went on to be further underlined


⁶⁰ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 166.

⁶¹ Monty, Paul (1918). *Wanderstunden in Wilna*, page 75-76.

⁶² Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, pages 170-171.

when "the victorious powers in 1814, sealed the fate of [Vilnius] – the town, along with most of the territory of the former Grand Duchy, was to remain Russian".⁶³



Picture 6: *Lithuanian Tatars in the Napoleonic Army with Red and White banners of Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.*
Painted by Jan Chelmiński (1851-1925).  Public domain.

In the early days of this new period, there were indications that Lithuania might somehow get certain recognition as a separate entity, but this was not to be. In fact, during the 19th century, Russian tsars would gradually intensify repression and "Russification programs".⁶⁴ However, these measures were arguably done in response to Lithuanian/Polish revolts as well as Lithuanian reactions to Napoleon's 1812 invasion, which they celebrated by signing up for Napoleon's army's march towards Moscow. Amongst the volunteers were a squadron of Lithuanian Tatars that became a source of romantic artistic expression.⁶⁵

Eventually the Russian authorities would close universities, forbid the teaching of Polish and Lithuanian, and crack down on any activities that were deemed as rebellious and nationalist. On multiple occasions, Russia cracked down on Polish/Lithuanian uprisings with "brutal military force".⁶⁶ However, the "core of the cultural struggle were the religious loyalties of the population",⁶⁷ and most non-Orthodox faiths were either forced into the Orthodox fold or severely repressed.

During the latter half of the 19th century, Lithuanian nationalism came to full fruition thanks to Russian policies. On the one hand, Russia created a cultural backlash amongst Lithuanians through the banning of local education and customs, while on the other hand failing to meet

⁶³ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 125.

⁶⁴ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 179.

⁶⁵ Pawly, Ronald (2007). *Napoleon's Polish Lancers of the Imperial Guard.*

⁶⁶ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 186.

⁶⁷ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 128.

this demand through necessary Russification programs.⁶⁸ Nationalistic Lithuanians would instead create underground networks of Lithuanian literature and art. While Polish and Russian continued to dominate, both having Slavic origins, Lithuanian was on the verge of extinction. However, through cooperation with countries with competing interests with Russia, the Lithuanian language endured.⁶⁹ A vicious cycle emerged where Russian authorities gradually grew more ruthless in their attempts to stamp out any Lithuanian remnants. This led to huge waves of Lithuanians fleeing the country, some estimates say 20 per cent of the total population, to settle in the West. For Lithuanians staying behind, the cities became ever more dominated by non-Lithuanians (primarily Jews and Poles) and the countryside was for the most-part left underdeveloped.⁷⁰

Lithuania's fortunes were finally strengthened in 1905 due to the Russian Revolution, which amongst other things led to Moscow finally agreeing to certain regional concessions.⁷¹ For Lithuania, this meant increased political autonomy, Lithuanian was once again taught at schools, and Catholic churches were reopened. These changes are perhaps best exemplified as follows: "Before 1905, [Vilnius] had 15 periodical publications, all Russian; by 1911, there were already 69 periodicals, among them 35 Polish, 20 Lithuanian, 7 Russian, 5 Jewish and 2 Byelorussian".⁷²

The loss of Imperial Russia's hold of the Lithuanian nation was drawing to a close at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Already by 1915, Germany had occupied most of Lithuania and plans for their own annexation began immediately.⁷³ While under German occupation, Lithuanian intellectuals attempted to take advantage of the chaos of war to re-establish Lithuania's independence. The 20-member Council of Lithuania was elected in September 1917, and five months later they implemented the Act of Independence of Lithuania on the 16th of February 1918. The act proclaimed the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania governed by democratic principles.⁷⁴ The first Lithuanian government came into being when the first Provisional Constitution of Lithuania was adopted, shortly after the capitulation of Germany in November 1918. This Lithuanian state, built upon the framework

⁶⁸ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 181.

⁶⁹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 198.

⁷⁰ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 193.

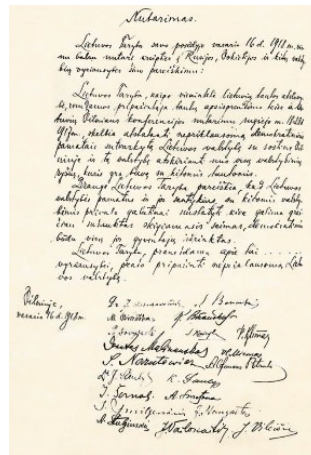
⁷¹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 208.

⁷² Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 150.

⁷³ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 227.

⁷⁴ Lithuania's Independence Acts in the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court. *Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania*. URL: <https://www.lrkt.lt/en/legal-information/lithuanias-independence-acts/lithuanias-independence-acts-in-the-jurisprudence-of-the-constitutional-court/367>

of this Act, lasted until 1940. Meanwhile, the Tatars joined newly created army formations, as the struggle for independence had only just begun, not least due to the world believing that Lithuania was a part of Russia.⁷⁵



Picture 7: Scan of original Act of Independence of Lithuania hand-written in Lithuanian language and with twenty original signatures, which was found on 29 March 2017 by Vytautas Magnus University professor Liudas Mažylis at the Federal Foreign Office Political Archive in Berlin, Germany. © Public domain.

Throughout this entire period, Lithuanian Tatars attempted to maintain a low profile. While the Russian government placed the Tatars firmly in a "non-Christian" category, they also decided to recognise their long-time rights of property and freedoms. The Russians even went one step further in letting Tatars attempt to pursue their own nobility status, as this would qualify them for Russian civil and military service.⁷⁶ It is clear that the Russian authorities realised the military potential of these "Lithuanian Muslims" and thereby enacted the necessary frameworks to allow for the exploitation of this opportunity. During this era of Lithuanian history, the Russian army utilised Lipka Tatars in several different regular and cavalry regiments, as well as having at least 20 serving generals of Tatar heritage.⁷⁷

Considering the growing influence of Lithuanian nationalism in the early 20th century, it would seem logical that the Tatars' neutral role towards the Russians would be reason for growing resentment towards the group. However, by the 19th century Tatars were no longer "monolithic, unified ethnic group socially or economically".⁷⁸ This meant that the Tatars actions at the time was not necessarily singled out, but rather fell into the general category of all Lithuanians that chose cooperation rather than resistance. On the other hand, they were still slightly unique as described in a pamphlet at the time: "The Lithuanian Tatars, though by language and appearance

⁷⁵ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2004, page 231.

⁷⁶ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, pages 23-24.

⁷⁷ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 25.

⁷⁸ Op. cit. Weeks 1999 page 6.

have become true denizens in Lithuania, nonetheless their origins and religion set them apart from the surrounding population, and aside from this they also have their own legends, customs and even their own history in this region".⁷⁹

However, these differences should not be exaggerated, as Tatars and non-Tatars continued to live in close-contact with each-other. Even when looking at Tatar religiosity at the time, it was clear that the centuries had removed most traces of Muslim orthodoxy. Officially, Lithuanian Tatars are Sunni Muslims, but "by the nineteenth century their general knowledge of the sacral Arabic language had declined almost to nil and they were compelled to rely on translations of and commentaries on the Quran".⁸⁰ Nonetheless, they continued to teach their children Muslim prayers even though they would then send them to government schools, there being no well-developed Muslim educational institutions in the region.⁸¹

All these details made for huge advantages when, for example, one compares the Tatar community to that of the Jews. Jews safeguarded their language and never fully embraced Lithuanian, Polish or Russian. They also continued to dress in their own fashion and specialised in work that clearly set them apart from regular Lithuanian society. It should also be noted that at the time, Muslims were not burdened by the general hostility that Jews encountered from Christians. While this was largely due to religious convictions that was predominant in Europe, one cannot ignore that the fact that the Tatars hard working attitude within the military and agriculture was far more respected in Lithuania than commerce and finance. This is exemplified by a report stating that: "The Tatars are honest, calm and diligent. Some of them serve in the military and in the civil service, but the largest part of them are occupied in agriculture, the tanning of leather and other useful labours. The Jews, however, are pushy, wily, avaricious, and sly. They are engaged exclusively in trade, as middlemen, suppliers, and on government contracts. Only a few of them work as artisans and even fewer in agriculture".⁸²

This combination of Tatar skills, their successful integration into Lithuanian society, their neutral or even cooperative attitude to their new Russian overlords by not involving themselves in uprisings, yielded lucrative fruits. Unlike the increasingly harsh measures directed at Lithuanians and Poles, the "the Lithuanian Tatars won the respect and gratitude of the Russian authorities. In the ensuing decades, this memory of Tatar loyalty would be reflected in official

⁷⁹ Op. cit. Weeks 1999 page 6.

⁸⁰ Op. cit. Weeks 1999 pages 7.

⁸¹ Op. cit. Weeks 1999 page 8.

⁸² Op. cit. Weeks 1999 page 10.

Russian attitudes and policies toward them".⁸³ And yet, despite the Tatars being recognised as "our Muslims" by the Russians, there is little historical indication that this caused resentment by Lithuanian nationals. However, what might have potentially caused resentment amongst Lithuanian nationalists, instead turned into sympathy for the already tiny Tatar community left in ruin due to disastrous Russian battles and their aftermath during the First World War.

2.4 Struggle for independence (1918 – 1991)

*Often the unwelcome local dead of ideologically or nationally suspicious origins were replaced with relics of heroic Soviet figures. (...) The small Muslim cemetery near the main city prison melancholically encountered by Paul Monty during the Great War was also levelled. With the destruction of that cemetery and the adjacent mosque, the last vestiges of the historic Tartar neighbourhood were eliminated from the cityscape.*⁸⁴

Following the Great War, while the new state of Lithuania was only just getting started at organising its army and other state institutions, they also had to defend themselves in three separate "wars of independence". The Bolsheviks had proclaimed Lithuania as a Soviet Socialist Republic, the remnants of the Russian Empire were hoping to regain control of their Baltic holdings, and Poland was once again hoping to recover its influence over its Commonwealth "little brother".⁸⁵ Not able to get all of Lithuania, Poland settled for control of Vilnius in 1920 and formally annexed the region in 1922.⁸⁶ Lithuania established a "government-in-exile" in neighbouring Kaunas and continued to claim Vilnius as its capital. Tense and hostile relations with Poland persisted throughout the whole interwar period, while Polish-Lithuanian borders remained unchanged.

Lithuania would be busy during the interwar years. They held their first meetings of the democratically elected constituent assembly who endeavoured to regulate the life of the new state. They adopted the new constitution of Lithuania, implemented important land, finance, and educational reforms, introduced their own national currency, the Lithuanian litas, opened the University of Lithuania and all major public institutions were established.⁸⁷ As Lithuania began to gain stability, foreign countries started to recognize it as an independent nation, and already by 1921 Lithuania was admitted into the League of Nations. They were also able to

⁸³ Op. cit. Weeks 1999 page 10.

⁸⁴ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 232.

⁸⁵ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 194.

⁸⁶ Račius, Egdūnas (2014). "Muslim Tatar Communities of the Inter-War Republic of Lithuania". In *Turks' History and Culture in Lithuania*, page 101.

⁸⁷ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 350.

expand their territories westward by staging the Klaipėda Revolt, thus capturing what would be organised as the autonomous Klaipėda Region.



Picture 8: Lithuanian armoured train *Gediminas 3*, used in Lithuanian Wars of Independence and Lithuanian soldiers.

© Public domain.

However, all was not well in this new republic. In 1926, a military coup d'état replaced the democratically elected government with a conservative authoritarian government. Following similar trends with the rest of Europe, authoritarianism had arrived in Lithuania and strengthened the influence of the Lithuanian Nationalist Union.⁸⁸ Starting in 1927, Lithuania shortly experienced the dismissal of their parliament and a new constitution was introduced that consolidated presidential powers. Gradually, these powers were exerted on Lithuania's civil society by banning opposition parties, tightening censorship, and removing the rights of national minorities.

The provisional capital of Kaunas and the country at-large enjoyed a high standard of living, with high salaries and low prices. However, the Wall Street crash sent Lithuania, along with the rest of the globe, into an economic crisis.⁸⁹ As the prices of agricultural products drastically declined, farmers began strikes in an attempt to improve their economic and political situation. However, the government brutally suppressed the unrest. In 1936, it sentenced four peasants to death on grounds of sowing discontent.

In 1939, after years of rising tensions, Nazi Germany handed Lithuania an ultimatum, demanding the Klaipėda Region, known as Memel amongst Germans.⁹⁰ After only two days,

⁸⁸ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 352-353.

⁸⁹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 356.

⁹⁰ Beevor, Antony (2012). *The Second World War*, page 19.

fearing the consequences of denying Hitler, the Lithuanian government accepted the ultimatum. Later that same year, Lithuania was initially assigned to the German sphere of influence according to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.⁹¹ However, the parties of the pact later agreed to transfer Lithuania to the Soviet sphere. When the Second World War finally broke out, Lithuania decided upon a policy of neutrality.

In the interwar years, the vast majority of the Tatars ended up in Polish territory, primarily due to annexation of the Vilnius region, their ancestral home.⁹² When Poland re-entered the world stage, following the First World War, a Tatar regiment was re-integrated into the new Polish Army. Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, they valiantly fought the Germans, and the Tatars stationed at Vilnius were recognised to be amongst the last of the Polish Army carrying on the fight against German aggressors.

However, despite living in Polish territory, it was the interwar period that marked the transition of the local Tatar Muslim community beginning to consciously identify themselves with the Lithuanian *nation-state*, and no longer the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.⁹³ This was due to their identity being closely tied to the settlement stories of how the Tatars were recognised as brave and loyal soldiers of Vytautas the Great and how he rewarded them for their service. Despite this romantic narrative, the interwar period shows that the Tatar community as a whole failed to recognise the benefit of discontinuing the tradition of independent congregations inherited from the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. They resisted centralisation and institutionalisation, and as with their inactivity during Russian rule, they missed the opportunity to unite an otherwise dispersed minority group. Conversely, one group, the Kaunas Muslim Society, sought to unite Lithuania's Muslims and increase standards of Islamic practices. Furthermore, their broad vision allowed them to cooperate with their Vilnius-based colleagues. As no one else shared this sentiment, their ambitions would inevitably remain unfulfilled, thus demonstrating how “Muslims of the interim capital, and provincial Tatars had divergent perspectives on the development of the Lithuanian Muslim community”.⁹⁴ In their defence, one could argue that, with no pressure from the state authorities, there existed little incentive to organize Lithuania's Muslims into a comprehensible religious community.

⁹¹ Beevor, Antony (2012). *The Second World War*, page 41.

⁹² Op. cit. Račius 2014, page 101.

⁹³ Op. cit. Račius 2014, page 115.

⁹⁴ Op. cit. Račius 2014, page 115.

In October 1939, the Soviet Union forced Lithuania to sign the Soviet–Lithuanian Mutual Assistance Treaty.⁹⁵ While the agreement reintegrated Vilnius into Lithuanian territory, it came at the cost of five Soviet military bases with 20,000 troops being established in Lithuania. The following year, the Soviets issued an ultimatum to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, demanding their governments be replaced by Soviet puppet regimes. The Red Army was also to be allowed into the short-lived independent nation. As the Soviets already had bases in Lithuanian territory, Lithuania accepted the ultimatum as resistance was impossible. The government fled in exile with arrival of the Red Army with “around 150,000 soldiers and there was not even symbolic resistance”,⁹⁶ and in short time they had occupied all three Baltic states. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were quickly transforming into Soviet republics and incorporated into the Soviet Union. The occupation was at no point recognized by Western powers and the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service, based on pre-war consulates and legations, continued to represent independent Lithuania until 1990.



Picture 9: Lithuanian delegation before departing to Moscow to negotiate the Soviet–Lithuanian Mutual Assistance Treaty.

© Public domain.

In the year that followed, all political parties, except the Communist Party, and various organizations were outlawed. Also, roughly 12,000 people, including many prominent figures, were arrested and imprisoned in Gulags as "enemies of the people". Private property was nationalized, the Soviet ruble was introduced, farm taxes increased, and the Lithuanian Army was integrated into the Red Army. Less than a week before Nazi Germany invaded in the summer of 1941, some 12,000 Lithuanians were deported to Siberia.⁹⁷ Many would never return.

⁹⁵ Beevor, Antony (2012). *The Second World War*, page 42.

⁹⁶ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 366.

⁹⁷ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 377.

When Nazi Germany finally attacked the Soviet Union,⁹⁸ Lithuanians began the anti-Soviet June Uprising and proclaimed independence. The Provisional Government of Lithuania was short-lived, however, as they quickly self-disbanded when Lithuania was invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany.⁹⁹ Under this new occupation, nationalised assets were not returned to the residents. Many Lithuanians were forced to fight for Nazi Germany or were taken to German territories as forced labourers. The Jewish people were herded into ghettos and gradually killed or sent to concentration camps. Already by the end of 1941, over 120,000 Lithuanian Jews, or 91–95% of Lithuania's pre-war Jewish community, had been killed.¹⁰⁰

In the summer of 1944, following the retreat of Germany, the Soviets re-established their control of Lithuania and the deportations to Siberia were resumed, lasting until the death of Stalin in 1953. Under the pretext of Lithuania's economic recovery, Lithuanians were encouraged to work in the USSR through promises of many privileges. Moscow also encouraged the migration of workers and specialists from the USSR to Lithuania. While the USSR's primary intention was to integrate Lithuania ever-more into the Soviet Union and develop the country's industry, this Soviet era policy saw a huge influx of new Tatars emigrating from Khazan. While they would initially integrate into the pre-existing Tatar community, most would eventually go back to Khazan after the fall of the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹

During the second Soviet occupation, there was a period of Lithuanian resistance, primarily manifesting in guerrilla warfare between 1944–1954. Around 50,000 Lithuanians took to the forests and fought the Soviets in a vain attempt to restore an independent state of Lithuania, to consolidate democracy, and to return national values and the freedom of religion that Lithuania had enjoyed throughout most of their history.¹⁰² While this effort did not achieve its goal of liberating Lithuania, and although it resulted in more than 20,000 deaths, the Lithuanian people had clearly demonstrated that they would not voluntarily join the USSR.¹⁰³ It also legitimized the will of the people of Lithuania to be independent, and even with the suppression of partisan resistance, the Soviet government failed to completely stop the movement. Subversive rebel groups were actively publishing the underground press and Catholic literature, talents they had honed for years while under the yoke of the Russian Empire. They also relied heavily on the

⁹⁸ Beevor, Antony (2012). *The Second World War*, page 238.

⁹⁹ Op. cit. Briedis 2016, page 225.

¹⁰⁰ Buttar, Prit (2013). *Between Giants – The Battle for the Baltics in World War II*, page 110.

¹⁰¹ See interview 7 in the appendix.

¹⁰² Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 409.

¹⁰³ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 411.

use of radio, both within Lithuania and through Western radio stations. One group, calling themselves The Helsinki Group,¹⁰⁴ announced a declaration for Lithuania's independence on foreign radio station and informed the Western world of the situation in the Soviet Lithuania including the violation of human rights.

For Lithuania's Tatars, this four-decade Soviet era "grounded the communal, especially religious, life [...] to a standstill and supplemented with other, typical Soviet, forms of socialisation".¹⁰⁵ As a result, an entire generation grew up with little to know religious experience. The one advantage for the Tatars was the fact that most of their Mosques were not destroyed due to them being out in countryside, rather than in the cities. A noticeable exception was Vilnius, where the mosque was dismantled and, according to Domantas,¹⁰⁶ the Muslim graveyard was destroyed and turned into a park.

Eventually, following the Soviet Union's new "glasnost" policy of increased openness and transparency in government institutions and activities, Lithuania once again began to openly seek its independence. Lithuanians were given the opportunity to freely elect their own "Supreme Council" and the newly founded Sąjūdis movement inspired independence groups to emerge throughout Lithuania. In 1988, a huge rally took place in Vilnius, with approximately 250,000 people in attendance. A year later, the Baltic Way was organized where a human chain was formed spanning about 600 kilometres across the three Baltic capitals—Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn.¹⁰⁷ The peaceful demonstration showed the desire of the people of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to break away from the USSR.



Picture 10: The Baltic Way was a mass anti-Soviet demonstration where approx. 25% of the population of the Baltic states participated. The picture is the unaltered property of Rimantas Lazdynas who is in no way associated with this thesis.

 [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

¹⁰⁴ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 423.

¹⁰⁵ Op. cit. Račius, Egdūnas 2013, "Both Muslim and European?", page 170.

¹⁰⁶ See interview four in the appendix.

¹⁰⁷ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 430.

In 1990, Lithuania became the first Soviet occupied state to announce its restoration of independence.¹⁰⁸ In response, the Soviets imposed an economic blockade, which lasted for 74 days. While the population undoubtedly suffered from the lack of fuel, essential goods, and even hot water, their resolve never wavered. Economic relations were restored, but tensions resurfaced in January 1991 when the Soviet Union attempted a coup using the Soviet Armed Forces, the Internal Army of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the USSR Committee for State Security (KGB).¹⁰⁹ Their assumption was that the bad economic situation in Lithuania, would lead to strong public support for the forces from Moscow. However, the reality of the situation could not be more from the truth.

In an attempt to defend their freely elected Supreme Council, people from all over Lithuania flooded to Vilnius, while simultaneously demanding full independence. The coup failed in more ways than one. Firstly, the Supreme Council remained unaltered. Secondly, while attempting to defend the Lithuanian parliament without the use of weapons, 14 Lithuanian civilians were shot and killed by the Soviet Army. Hundreds more were injured. Following this event, Lithuania's bid for freedom picked up considerable pace. In February 1991, Iceland would formally recognise Lithuania's independence in their parliament and establish diplomatic relations.¹¹⁰ In July 1991, Soviet forces killed seven Lithuanian border guards on the Belarusian border in what became known as the Medininkai Massacre. In September 1991, Lithuania was admitted into the United Nations. In December 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and Republic of Lithuania was finally free. Shortly after regaining independence, Lithuania arguably recognized Islam as one of the "nine traditional religions" due to its Tatar minority.



Picture 11: On 13 January 1991, Soviets began using tanks to shoot and crush unarmed independence supporters. This work is free and may be used by anyone for any purpose. [GFDL](#)

¹⁰⁸ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 436s.

¹⁰⁹ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 439.

¹¹⁰ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 440.

Chapter 3: Key elements of the research design

3.1 Subject: Lithuania's Islamic minority

In October 2016, I got a call from the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vilnius inviting me to work for them as an intern from January to July in 2017. Until I received this call, I had struggled to identify exactly what I wanted to base my master's thesis on. Other than knowing that I wanted to focus on Islam, my supervisor and I had discussed many possible topics and methods, but never got close to anything remotely realistic or captivating. However, soon after accepting the Embassy's offer, I jumped online and Googled two words: "Islam" and "Lithuania". Even today, if you do this same search you arrive at the same top recommended site at Wikipedia, Islam in Lithuania.¹¹¹ The title of the article is somewhat misleading, as it is almost exclusively dedicated to introducing the Tatars, but it turned out to be exactly what I needed. Being an avid reader of history, the setting and culture introduced in the article led to many hours of internet searches seeking more details. I had now decided that this was the religious group I wanted to research during my stay in Lithuania.



Picture 12: The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vilnius where I worked as an intern in 2017. The Embassy and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs are in no way associated with this work. Photo: Norwegian Embassy [permission given].

My first step was to build a general overview of the Tatars before deciding on what aspect, or phenomena, around which I would build my research question. What fascinated me at first was how long Lithuania's Muslim minority had been living and thriving in the country as an almost single cohesive unit. However, reading up on the history of Lithuania, from their original foundation and until the fall of the Soviet Union, I discovered that, post 1991, Lithuania's Islamic minority was a far less of a unitary group. So far in this thesis we have seen that over 600 years of history it had become reasonable to virtually equate "Muslim" with "Tatar" in the

¹¹¹ Islam in Lithuania. *Wikipedia*. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Lithuania

areas that now make up Lithuania, Belarus and Poland. However, during less than 30 years since 1991, we notice a dramatic shift where Tatars now only make up slightly more than 50 percent of the total number of Muslims in Lithuania.¹¹² However, the “other half” of this equation is also far from a uniform ethnic group, being made up of a constellation of different ethnic groups and denominations. However, as emphasised in the introduction, the primary influences on the non-Tatar Muslims is from Hanafi Sunni Islam as practiced in most of Turkey.

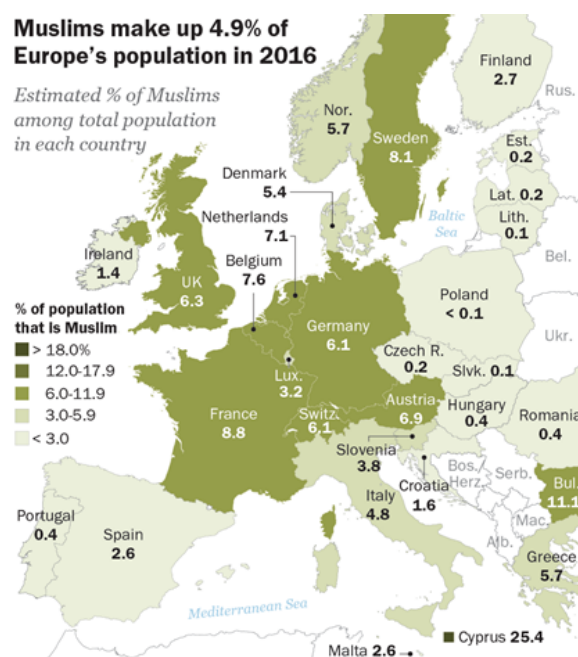


Figure 2: This map constitutes work belonging to the Pew Research Center, Washington (US), and is in no way associated with this thesis. For details see footnote 109.

Compared to Europe's 4.9 percent, Lithuania's tiny Muslim minority makes up only 0.1 percent of their total population. Furthermore, forecasts made by the Pew Research Center estimate that while the number of Muslims in Europe will continue to rise,¹¹³ Lithuania's Muslim population seems to be falling (there were less individuals who identified as Muslim in the country's official consensus in 2011 than in 2001).¹¹⁴ This trend seems to continue into this last decade.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, these trends aren't necessarily surprising since they reflect similar trends in the country's general population decrease due to low immigration coupled with declining births, and increasing numbers of Lithuanian's emigrating to the West.¹¹⁶ It is possible, however, that

¹¹² Račius, Egdūnas (2012). “Chapter 8 – Muslims in Catholic Lithuania: Divergent Strategies in Dealing with the Marginality Status”. In *Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Society*, page 169.

¹¹³ 5 facts about the Muslim population in Europe. *Pew Research Center*. URL: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>

¹¹⁴ Op. cit. Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016, page 27.

¹¹⁵ Religious communities and membership organisations. *Official Statistics. Portal* URL: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/religines-bendruomenes-ir-narystes-organizacijos>

¹¹⁶ MacDonald, Jessica Lynn (2010). *Lithuania Migration in Crisis? A look at the effects of the current economic crisis on migration*, page 43.

the number of Muslims in Lithuania will increase in the consensus of 2020 due to the waves of migrating Syrians to Europe since the middle of the current decade.

As previously discussed, it has been said that “traditional” Islam was formally introduced to Lithuania by Tatars, but such a statement is misleading. In reality, the Tatars were not expressing *traditional* Islam, but rather their own unique take on Islam. This Islamic variation was based upon Sunni Hanafi tradition, but mixed in with details from their nomadic heritage from before immigrating to Lithuania. Furthermore, their belief would gradually become even more unique while cut off from the Islamic world in Lithuania. They both imitated local customs as well as coming up with some original practices of their own. For example, Tatars could have been said to be representatives of the Hanafi legal tradition, and yet they had no judges or muftis and, generally, no religious leaders. In this sense, the Islam practiced in Lithuania was the Tatar “folk Islam”. Still, while the Tatars developed their own Islamic practises, the majority of Tatars remained relatively religious until the Soviet era. It was during this period of history that Tatars would be drastically secularised through both being assimilated into the population at large and through Soviet anti-religion policy.¹¹⁷ As Paulius (please note that all my interviewees have been given fake names) explained to me during an interview,¹¹⁸ before the Soviet occupation, Tatars tended to live in relatively closed communities and only nobles would occasionally marry non-Tatars. However, following the Second World War, Tatars would increasingly marry outside their own community and children of this mixed heritage would rarely decide to be Muslim. In fact, Aleksandras¹¹⁹ explained (another interview) that his own parents decided to wait until he was 16 before revealing both his Tatar and Muslim heritage. They were motivated to do this in an attempt to make sure that we became “common” and also to ensure that he had a “good relationship with the other[s]”.

Remarkably, in Lithuania’s 2011 census, out of 2,727 people who identified themselves as Muslims, 400 were ethnic Lithuanians. Furthermore, in the 2011 consensus of England and Wales, 600 migrants from Lithuania declared Islam as their religion.¹²⁰ This demonstrates that Lithuanian Muslims, most likely Tatars, are emigrating west and reducing the size of their community at home. The size of the Muslim community in Lithuania has not fallen as drastically as expected, partly due to the immigration of non-Tatar Muslims. However, the

¹¹⁷ Op. cit. Račius, Egdūnas 2013, “Both Muslim and European?”, page 170.

¹¹⁸ See interview seven in the appendix.

¹¹⁹ See interview six in the appendix.

¹²⁰ Religion. *Office for National Statistics*. URL: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion>

primary reason is the number of Lithuanian nationals that have converted to Islam. In fact, it has been stated that “for [every] on Muslim arriving in the country, there are two Lithuanian converts”.¹²¹

So, in summary, after 600 years of a united Muslim minority group, Lithuania today has a situation where “their” Muslim Tatars are either being secularised and/or are emigrating elsewhere around the globe. Tatars practicing Sunni Islam in Lithuania is increasingly rare. On the other hand, the Muslim group as a whole is increasing in diversity due to both Lithuanians nationals converting and the slowly increasing number of Muslim immigrants. Over time, it seems increasingly likely that these “new” Lithuanian Muslims might eventually outnumber the Tatars. Even more ominous is the fact that statistics seem to indicate that Tatars Muslims might eventually cease to exist altogether.

Despite the misleading Wikipedia article, I found before I began my field study, I was aware that Muslims in Lithuania were not exclusively Tatar. However, my original idea for studying Islam in Lithuania was to *just* focus on the Tatars and investigate if 600 years of development away from the Islamic world had affected their religious beliefs, practices, and general religiosity. On the other hand, I was prepared to keep an open mind and decided against having a pre-prepared research question before beginning my field study. Time would show that this was wise as my research turned out very different from what I first expected.

While conducting my field research,¹²² it gradually dawned on me that while getting in touch with Tatars in general was difficult enough, finding Tatars who claimed to be Muslim was even harder. Additionally, finding Tatars that were actively religious became extremely unlikely. Finally, few Tatars speak fluent English, creating a further challenge. As a result, I spent a long time, patiently waiting for the opportunity to make contact with the Tatars I needed to interview. In the end, I came to the realisation that I had to change both my strategy for identifying interview subjects, and the scope of my research design. As a result, I set my sight on Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre, despite already being told that the Tatar presence there was negligible by one of my contacts.¹²³ I had always planned on making a visit, but this was originally only to “get my bearings”. However, when I was finally ready to make my first official visit, I had decided that I was going to start interviewing *any* Muslim, regardless of their

¹²¹ For every Muslim immigrant, two Lithuanians convert to Islam. *ProQuest*, URL: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/459302038?accountid=8579>

¹²² Details to follow in chapter four.

¹²³ See interview one in the appendix.

ethnic and/or national background. This choice marked the point when my research went from studying “Lipka Tatars” to “Lithuania’s Islamic community”, and thus I had my final research *subject* and the first half of my eventual research question.

3.2 Phenomena: The perception of Islam in Lithuania

The next step in my process was identifying the final phenomena that I needed to build my research question around. As briefly mentioned, I first considered focusing on how the Tatars had developed their own unique take on Islam over the course of six centuries in Lithuania. In other words, it would be a comparison between “conventional” Islamic beliefs and practice and Tatar Islamic beliefs and practice. However, due to my struggles to find Tatar interview subjects, I had to abandon this idea. At one point I was actually worried that I might not find *a single* Tatar interview subject.¹²⁴ As a result, I had to turn my interview guide “upside-down” when I started interviewing non-Tatar Muslims. Instead of having Tatars explain what separates them from non-Tatar Muslims, I wanted to hear what non-Tatar Muslims thought of Tatar religious beliefs and practices.

However, with reference to interviews two and three in the appendix, it was quickly made clear that my interview subjects were in no real position to give descriptions of exactly how Tatars were practicing Islam differently from themselves. In fact, their opinions and perspectives opened an entirely new avenue for me to pursue. While they were both polite and respectful, it was clear that they were very critical of the Tatar community and how they were either practicing their faith incorrectly or, in the worst case, they had lost their religion by being assimilated into Lithuania’s majority community. *Comments like these* were what really caught my interest as I now wanted to shift my focus from changes in religious practice to how Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims perceived themselves and how they perceived the “opposite” Muslim community in Lithuania. While I continued to ask my original questions in my later interviews, I supplemented my interview guide¹²⁵ with new questions and was able to gradually improve the way I conducted my interviews. This explains why my interviews gradually increased in length and my interviewees got more room to elaborate without interruption.

This new focus complemented my original interview guide, as my original plan for the field study included learning more about the relationship between Lithuanian non-Muslims and the Tatar community (now also including the non-Tatar Muslim perspective). However, I had not

¹²⁴ Luckily this turned out not to be the case!

¹²⁵ For details, please see the final interview guide in the appendix.

intended to use relationships between communities as a primary focus. This was already one of the few research subjects already covered in what little English literature I was able to source. On the other hand, this literature was not written by Tatar scholars. I still wanted to hear the Tatars present their own perspective on their traditionally positive relationship with Lithuanian non-Muslim over such a long period of time.

From what literature I could find, it could be argued that Tatars living in Lithuania had *too much* of a positive relationship with Lithuanian nationals, if they wanted to remain an independent and separate community. Consequentially, the integration and assimilation that happened rapidly during the Soviet era happened surprisingly easy. All three of the Tatars I interviewed shared this opinion, although they also admitted to the historical advantages this had given Tatars as it ensured the trust of Lithuanians. The Tatars were easily integrated with Lithuanian nationals for three reasons: 1) the nature of their interpretation of Islam, which was flexible enough to be culturally integrated, 2) their division into multiple small communities rather than a single mass that could be deemed threatening, and 3) the fact that Lithuanian society has traditionally been inclusive and tolerant.¹²⁶ However, time is arguably the most important factor. As has been repeated many times already, Tatars have been part of Lithuanian society for over six centuries. Therefore, with so much time getting accustomed to, and imitating, each other it follows naturally that the likelihood of integration, assimilation and/or peaceful co-existence becomes very likely. In contrast, the recent non-Tatar Muslim immigrants have lived less than three decades in Lithuania. Therefore, in comparison, it follows logically that they will have a much harder time at being tolerated and/respected by the Lithuanians at the same level as the Tatars.

This stands in sharp contrast to the immigration trends in Europe today where countries are repeatedly accepting large numbers of new Muslim migrants before the last waves of migrants have even had the time to settle in. Political debate will often focus on the pros vs. cons of integrating immigrants or letting them develop parallel communities. According to my interview subjects, most of them believed integration is the first step to assimilation, which naturally represents an undesirable circumstance for Muslims in Christian Europe. They were of the opinion that every community in a society should be left to their own devices, within reasonable limits, and respect the differences of other communities. In contrast, a considerable

¹²⁶ Lamoreaux, Jeremy W. (2016). "Survival of the smallest: threat perceptions among religious minorities in Latvia and Lithuania". In *European Politics and Society* – volume 17, page 305-307.

portion of the public discourse in Europe view that large numbers of Muslim minority groups, with their own set of beliefs and values, as a potential threat to the majority culture and ethnic groups of Europe. Furthermore, the idea of Islam “is somehow inherently political, and perhaps inherently violent, has been central to Western debates about (...) Western states’ domestic policies”.¹²⁷ also s One will often hear the argument that such threats can only be solved through integration.

In a European context, there exist obvious and substantial differences between stereotypical Western and Islamic values. However, while these difference seemed generally acceptable before the tragic events of September 11th 2001, we have seen over the course of the last two decades that the previous ideals of “religious tolerance” have gradually eroded.¹²⁸ According to the Eurostat data of 2018, immigrants in Europe mainly came from Morocco, Albania and Turkey,¹²⁹ and in 2016 immigrants mostly came from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Nigeria. Research shows that in all countries but Syria, the majority of people agree that sharia should be the official law of their state. This has led to a situation where, in recent decades, Muslims in Lithuania, even Tatars, have had to face issues of being associated these stereotypical Islamic values even though they are generally not practiced by them. As a result, many Tatars feel the need to justify themselves to others through emphasis to the contrary, actively disassociating themselves from the global Muslim community.

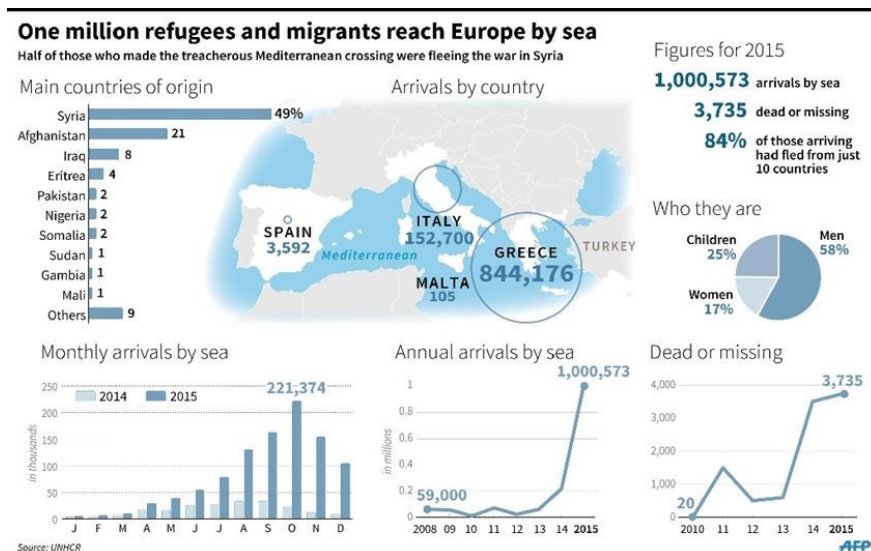


Figure 3: This overview was produced by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, who is in no way associated with this thesis.

¹²⁷ Teti, Andrea and Mura, Andrea (2009). “Islam and Islamism”. In *Routledge Handbook of Religions and Politics*, page 92.

¹²⁸ Mahmood, Saleha S. (2002). “A Word About Ourselves”. In *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, page 5.

¹²⁹ Migration and migrant population statistics. Eurostat. URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/1275.pdf>

Public opinion polls conducted in 2016 and 2017 show that Lithuanians' opinion of Muslims had recently worsened.¹³⁰ More than 40-percent of Lithuanians don't want to share a neighbourhood with Muslims or rent them housing, a fact that was confirmed in multiple interviews. In certain cases, a Muslim husband will not bring their wives when meeting potential landlords, for fear that the homeowner could be provoked by the hijab. Of course, as Tatar women generally don't cover their head or face, this is rarely an issue for them. On the other hand, both Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims express fatigue over having to constantly defending themselves after every Islamist terrorist attack,¹³¹ emphasising that "they don't support terrorism" or that "they condemn the violence".

Still, while Lithuanian media at times can be on the verge of hatred, which undoubtedly can negatively affect the perception of Lithuania's Muslims, it has yet to reach the same inflammatory level found further west. Multiple interview subjects confirmed that they generally feel that Lithuanians are respectful at work and at official institutions for politics and education. While some Europeans come to increasingly fear terrorism, which is often related to the growing number of Muslim immigrants,¹³² other Europeans are pleased by the potential of the rise and growth of new religious communities since they might share certain core values, even if they might not agree on everything. For example, it is not unusual that conservative Christians and Muslims share certain fundamental family values and see eye to eye on technological advances that are deemed as "humans playing God".

Interestingly, I did have a single interview subject who echoed such sentiments, but he was the only non-Muslim I interviewed.¹³³ Basing his well-nuanced opinion on decades of research and personal experience, he gave the impression of being an optimistic individual, at least in a Lithuanian context. On the other hand, he also emphasised that one cannot ignore the fact that Lithuanians might consider Islam, so far, less threatening than much of Europe simply because their Islamic community is still very small. Still, in contrast to his more optimistic view, the Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims that I interviewed were generally more sceptical.

I did eventually manage to interview three Tatars, and as with my interviews with the non-Tatar Muslims, I was struck by the way they talked about relationships between communities. On one

¹³⁰ Public opinion and mass media monitoring. *Institute for ethnic studies of LSRC*. URL: <http://ces.lt/en/institute/media-monitoring/>

¹³¹ Lithuanian imam, expert deny terrorist recruitment report. *ProQuest*, URL: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/459550488?accountid=8579>

¹³² Mahmood, Saleha S. (2002). "A Word About Ourselves". In *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, page 6.

¹³³ See interview one in the appendix.

hand, they made substantial emphasis on the century's old relationship between Tatars and Lithuanian nationals. On the other hand, almost without prompting, they would get passionate regarding the relationship between Tatars and the non-Tatar Muslim community.¹³⁴ This fascinated me so much, that I would shape my research question and do an in-depth analysis around these themes (covered in greater detail in chapter four).

In summary, through the experiences of my field study, and by studying various sources, I decided to change my focus away from religious belief and practice. Through a combination of my pre-field trip planning, and the opportunity to interview a diverse group of candidates,¹³⁵ I managed to conduct seven interviews that gave me enough data and inspiration to decide upon a phenomenon to study. That phenomenon is the perception, possibly self-perception, of the Islamic community, and how it's changed over the course of the last three decades. Taking all of this into account, I subsequently adjusted my research question one final time and ended up with "how has Lithuania's Islamic community's self-perception changed since Lithuania gained independence in 1991?"

3.3 Research method

3.3.1 Introducing method and methodology

The study of religion is a *social science*, which means it deals with the complicated nature of human behaviour.¹³⁶ Therefore, unlike natural sciences, what generally constitutes a research method is both broader and more flexible. In the context of religious studies, the amount of acceptable methods is extensive. However, certain methods are generally more popular and arguably "more helpful than others".¹³⁷ This thesis has a primarily qualitative focus, meaning that the data generated was not quantifiable or numerical in nature.¹³⁸ This allows for "deeper delves" into the phenomena being studied, thus generating increasingly nuanced and personal data.

In any given research project, the choice of method for data gathering and analysis is perhaps the most influential variable affecting the results. This is because every method generates different types of data, which can serve varied purposes. No method is perfect, as they all have

¹³⁴ Mahmood, Saleha S. (2002). "A Word About Ourselves". In *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, page 9.

¹³⁵ One Lithuanian national (non-Muslim), four non-Tatar Muslim, two Tatar Muslim (religious) and one Tatar Muslim (secular but identified as culturally a Muslim).

¹³⁶ Bryman, Alan (2016). *Social Research Methods*, page 3.

¹³⁷ Stausberg, Michael and Engler, Steven [editors] (2014). *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, page 5.

¹³⁸ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 31.

different advantages and disadvantages at the various stages of a field study. However, while single methods can be utilised, scholars often combine methods in an attempt to minimise the weaknesses any individual method as well as “to help validate the claims that might arise from an initial pilot study”.¹³⁹ As religious studies cover a wide range of religious topics, groups and phenomena, it is both “natural and necessary with a diverse set of methods, and equally natural and necessary to receive methodological inspiration from other disciplines”.¹⁴⁰

“Methodology” is the systematic study of scientific methods utilised in academic fields. It offers the theoretical foundation for understanding methods that enables effective planning of the *general* research design of a project.¹⁴¹ This enables a scholar to identify which methods are best suited to achieve optimal results.

Within social sciences, “methods” include a “variety of research approaches, tools, and techniques, such as qualitative and quantitative data analysis, statistical analysis, experiments, field surveys, case research, and so forth”.¹⁴² Furthermore, one must recognize that these methods are motivated principally by empirical research. This means first collecting data followed by analysis and interpretation of the data. As a result, methods are “foundational for modern science”.¹⁴³ Methods are generally required to be grounded in concepts and theories recognized by the academic community, which naturally is susceptible to change. In short, methods are the research tools and fundamental components of the research, while methodology provides justification for their use.

3.3.2 Methodological Triangulation

“Triangulation” is defined in social sciences as an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint”.¹⁴⁴ Hence, “methodological triangulation” is a technique where scholars mix multiple methods, and the sets of resulting data, in an attempt to increase the diversity of viewpoints that might cast light upon the relevant topic.¹⁴⁵ By utilising such techniques,

¹³⁹ Olsen, Wendy (2004). “Triangulation in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods Can Really Be Mixed”. In *Developments in Sociology*, page 3.

¹⁴⁰ Kraft, Siv Ellen and Natvig, Richard J. (2006). “Innledning”. In *Metode i Religionsvitenskap*, page 7.

¹⁴¹ Op. cit. Stausberg and Engler 2014, page 5.

¹⁴² Bhattacharjee, Anol (2012). *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*, page 5.

¹⁴³ Op. cit. Stausberg and Engler 2014, page 3.

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, Louis and Manion, Lawrence and Morrison, Keith (2000). *Research methods in education – 5th edition*, page 254.

¹⁴⁵ Op. cit. Olsen 2004, page 3.

scholars hope to gain “a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation”.¹⁴⁶ When first conceptualised by Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest in their 1966 book “Unobtrusive measures”, triangulation was associated with quantitative research, but it can also function in a qualitative context. In fact, in contemporary religious studies, scholars will often triangulate the methods of qualitative interviews and observations.¹⁴⁷

Triangulation is popularly utilised to conduct pure validation research (quantitative methods) or inquiry research (qualitative methods). It can also combine qualitative and quantitative methods, a combination popularly referred to as “mixed methods research”.¹⁴⁸ Certain purists argue against the mixing of these categories as it either weakens the data due to poor execution of the data gathering stage, or that the resulting data is fundamentally incomparable.¹⁴⁹ For example, the research design becomes significantly more complex when formulating a research question that accommodates both methods, or if a study is conducted with multiple research questions.¹⁵⁰ Also, mixed methods research will often be more complicated to employ, thus leading to increased time consumption and financial impact.

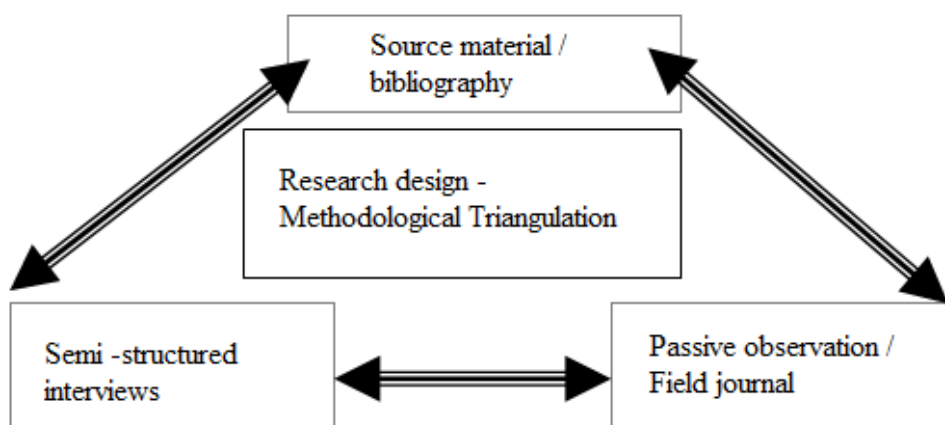


Figure 4: Figure of my own design that illustrates the sum of my research design.

Other scholars claim that “there should not be a contradiction between these two modes of analysis, but rather that it should be possible to bring them together to shed light on any chosen social research topic”.¹⁵¹ In other words, there are possible advantages in utilising such a scheme when conducting research. As a result, while one should not consider it a universally applicable approach, mixed methods research was utilised for this thesis. Such an approach

¹⁴⁶ Altrichter, Herbert and Feldman, Allan and Posch, Peter and Somekh, Bridget (2008). *Teachers Investigate Their Work: An introduction to action research across the professions* – 2nd edition, page 147.

¹⁴⁷ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 386.

¹⁴⁸ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 634.

¹⁴⁹ Op. cit. Olsen 2004, page 8.

¹⁵⁰ Op. cit. Olsen 2004, page 13.

¹⁵¹ Op. cit. Olsen 2004, page 3.

should only be attempted in cases where the potential advantages justify the increased complexity. Keep in mind that “mixed methods research is not necessarily superior to mono-method research”.¹⁵² Instead scholars should consider it as just another method variation, which has practical uses when used sensibly.

3.3.3 Interviewing

Interviews concern the generation of data through the questioning of people. At its most basic level, “the qualitative interview should be a source of rich conversations” [my translation], and it produces data by asking people questions.¹⁵³ The best advantage of interviews is the ability to generate in-depth data from individual interviewee’s point-of-view. In the context of religious studies, the interview method is essential for “studying people’s complex conceptions of religion and beliefs”.¹⁵⁴

The potential disadvantages of interviews are that they can be expensive and time consuming. While modern technology can help “reduce distances” to a certain degree through telephone or video calls, interviews generally achieve optimal results when all parties are in the same room. With this in mind, travel time and cost become huge issues. The number of variables in interview situations means that it is difficult to limit variations in the data material. Furthermore, each interview takes considerable time, and the following stages of data transcription and analysis are correspondingly time consuming. These factors go on to heavily influence the data analysis, primarily by limiting the possibility to generalise the results.¹⁵⁵ As a result, this method is poorly suited for establishing general theories, but instead more suited to test pre-existing theories by comparing them to the final portfolio of individual’s stories and point-of-views.

There are several variations of interviewing as a method. Regardless of the variation they will generally generate considerable amounts of data. This is based on the principle that the interviewee should do most of the talking, and preferably go into as much detail as possible. This minimizes the need for an interviewer to ask potentially leading questions, which contaminates the data.

¹⁵² Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 659.

¹⁵³ Fonneland, Trude A. (2006). ”Kvalitative metodar: Intervju og observasjon”. In *Metode i Religionsvitenskap*, page 224.

¹⁵⁴ Bremborg, Anna Davidsson (2004). “Interviewing”. In *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, page 319.

¹⁵⁵ Op. cit. Bremborg 2004, page 319.

It was decided early on to have one-on-one interviews to allow for more *personal* and *private* engagement between the interviewer and interviewee. This would create a laid-back atmosphere allowing for honesty and criticism. In contrast, the *focus group* interview engages multiple people in open discussions, reducing the interviewer to a moderator. Moderators introduce topics, but otherwise observe the groups conversations and interactions.¹⁵⁶ The primary weaknesses of focus groups are the possibilities of individuals influencing the group, others that are not willing to open-up, or those that dominate the conversation too much.

It must be noted that one *focus group interview* was conducted during my field study in Lithuania. This occurred accidentally while I was interviewing one the Turkish Imams at the local Mosque when other people randomly joined in out of curiosity. As the interview was amongst my first, and I wanted to be polite, I decided to allow the intrusion and welcomed them into the larger group discussion. In fact, it quickly turned out to be an advantage for me, as I was able to gather significantly more information than I otherwise would have done. This was information that I would use to both find new interview subjects, as well as make adjustments to my interview guide.



Picture 13: It was in this room I conducted all my interviews at the Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre. For the group interview, we all sat around the round table. I took the picture with my own Canon compact camera.

The primary interview variant applied during my field study was *semi-structured* interviews, as it grants increased flexibility to the researcher.¹⁵⁷ A hybrid between the “strict” *structured* interview and the “loose” *unstructured* interview, it allows the interviewer to have pre-prepared

¹⁵⁶ Op. cit. Stausberg and Engler 2014, page 313.

¹⁵⁷ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 469.

questions and topics to guide the session while still encouraging the uniqueness of each interviewee and conversation. This keeps the overall focus on relevant topics for the project.

The semi-structured approach belongs to the methodological category *qualitative and informal interviews*, which is considered the “most widely employed method in qualitative research”.¹⁵⁸ This category focuses on fewer interview subjects, allowing for deeper dives into individual’s unique point-of-view, thus generating a desirable degree of detail and nuance. During such interviews, the interviewer asks specific pre-prepared questions relating to the research topic, prompts the interviewee for relevant answers and generally probes for crucial details. Given the personal and casual setting, interviewees can express personal and intimate views with which they might otherwise be uncomfortable. Furthermore, an ethical advantage exists as researcher and respondent engage in dialogue after agreeing to a mutual set of rules.

3.3.4 Observations

For scholars of religion, “observation” is one of the most important and useful tools available when attempting to “understand as fully as possible what people do, when, where, how and (possibly) why they do” certain actions and activities.¹⁵⁹ Over the centuries, the increased use of observation demonstrates how social scientific academics have evolved from being overly reliant on second-hand reports when they rarely left the comforts of their respective institutions. Modern scholars are expected to spend time among the people they are studying, thus gathering first-hand data.¹⁶⁰

However, observational methods are rarely applied alone, often being complemented by other methods. This is due to the inherent risks of misinterpretation and prejudice when observations are made by a subjective outsider. For example, combining the method with different types of interviews enable scholars to compare their perspectives with that of the religious followers themselves.

There are three main observational methods, i.e. *structured*, *participant*, and *passive* observation. For my field study in Vilnius I planned on utilising passive observation, and for the most part I was successful. However, over time my involvement at the Vilnius Mosque

¹⁵⁸ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 466.

¹⁵⁹ Op. cit. Stausberg and Engler 2014, page 218.

¹⁶⁰ Op. cit. Stausberg and Engler 2014, page 219.

inevitably went a bit back and forth between *passive* to *participant* as the Mosque member's curiosity of my attendance grew.

Participant and *passive* observation are in many ways quite similar in approach. Where they differ is in how much a researcher involves himself in the observable phenomena.¹⁶¹ An advantage of participation is the ability to learn first-hand, through direct involvement, about the phenomena in question. On the other hand, the disadvantage of participant observations is how the observer affects the data due to his presence and involvement through interaction with his subjects.

Passive observation attempts to limit a scholar's contamination of data by actively avoiding involvement. Some scholars will argue that "avoiding involvement" is impossible unless the researcher remains hidden, and never reveals his intentions as a researcher.¹⁶² Considering the fact that such actions is generally considered unethical from an *academic* point of view, true passive observation becomes impossible.

During the field study in Lithuania it was decided to go as far as possible to be a passive observer while attending the Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre. In the early stages of the research, this proved to not be a problem. While my visits were always made in agreement with the Imam, most of the other visitors did not know who I was or why I was there. However, over time my passiveness became increasingly difficult to uphold due to other visitors gradually growing curious of my attendance. Another important factor was that my visits were in the evening during the month of Ramadan. As religiosity and religious duty for Muslims peak during this month, members began to regularly invite me to attend their breaking of the fast, as well as wanting to discuss my research and religiosity.

3.4 Issues concerning research ethics

3.4.1 General

The question of ethics is paramount in any research project. The actions of even a single researcher can have huge ramifications for both his own reputation as well as that of the larger scientific community. As a result, every scholar should ask two crucial questions when conducting research: "how should we treat the people with whom we conduct research, [and] are there activities in which we should or should not engage in1 contact with respondents must

¹⁶¹ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 438.

¹⁶² Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 425.

be made by the head researcher. Thirdly, all material must be anonymous or destroyed at the end of the project”.¹⁶³ With some methods this is easy while others, (e.g. observation), can be more challenging. Methodological triangulation attempts to limit these challenges as parts of the research can strive further to take individual choices into account.

3.4.2 Interviews

Anonymity for research subjects is essential in limiting the chances of breaching the ethical principles discussed above. As the topics I focused on during my field study was neither controversial nor dangerous, the chances of my interviewees being harmed were negligible. Furthermore, while I guaranteed the anonymity of all the interviewee at the beginning of every session, this was always met with a shrug and them stating that they had nothing to hide. I considered the possibility that perhaps this was a case where the researcher must protect his interview subjects "against themselves".

While I agree with the interviewees that no compromising details were recorded, all the data has regardless been anonymised. The phenomena of the thesis can definitely be sensitive as it touches upon the heated disagreement of religious practice and what constitutes "Islam" between different minority groups in Lithuania. Furthermore, since the field study investigated individuals' faith and beliefs, and allowed them to criticise groups, countries and individuals on both sides of the conflict, the anonymity of the participants was taken seriously.

Another ethical dilemma was how the interviewees were not aware of the final focus of the thesis. This was primarily accidental, as the final topic was not completely decided upon during my field study in Lithuania. However, it was somewhat deliberate as I was gradually getting a better idea of where the research question was going following each interview. I chose not to change my approach to ensure that the interviews were conducted similarly to reduce variability in the data. This decision arguably brings into doubt the topic of "sufficiently informed consent." However, all the interviewees were more than willing to be completely open, they were unconcerned with their anonymity and they were comfortable to touch upon sensitive topics. As a result, I deemed it acceptable to not change my approach and instead improve my interview technique based upon a familiar set of questions and topics.

¹⁶³ Kraft, Siv Ellen (2006). "Kritiske Perspektiver – Ethiske Utfordringer ved Samtidsstudier av Religion". In *Metode i Religionsvitenskap*, page 260.

3.4.3 Observations

While permission was granted for observing the Mosque services, it is doubtful that most of the attendees were aware that they were part of a research project. However, it was the individuals that granted permission for the project who made the decision to not publicly announce the field study. This was an advantage as the services were arguably more *authentic*.¹⁶⁴ While it is doubtful that members of the Mosque would have acted any differently, newcomers might have been uncomfortable if they knew that their actions were being observed and could have adapted their behaviour accordingly. It was for this reason that I, amongst other things, decided against using pictures taken during my field study where individuals were included in the frame, especially people in prayer.

Interpretation when observing religious phenomena is challenging for an outsider, and it is easy to be overwhelmed by new impressions. Furthermore, there is a constant risk of misinterpretation due to prejudice or a lack of understanding. This is usually because observation does not provide insight into the thoughts of the participants themselves. Through the use of interviews, I limited the risk of subjectivity as the interviewees could explain what was observed. However, it is important to note that given the central roles of the interviewees in the Mosque (i.e. Imam) a new risk emerged. As the research topic concerned the perception of Islam in Lithuania it is possible that the interviewees at the Mosque told me what they wanted me to hear. This risk is further increased when we consider the fact that the Mosque is run by individuals who completed their Islamic studies at Turkish government institutions, and they have close ties to the Turkish embassy and Presidency of Religious Affairs.¹⁶⁵

That scholars should be “critical” is a hugely respected ideal in religious studies¹⁶⁶, and could be easier to achieve if scholars keep themselves distant from what they are studying. If a researcher gets too close to the subject matter, there is an increased risk of the researcher losing his/her objectivity, professionalism, and overall critical ideal. Conversely, “a central characteristic of qualitative methods is the closeness between the researcher and the field of which she studies”.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 426.

¹⁶⁵ Presidency of the Republic of Turkey. *Presidency of Religious Affairs*. URL: <https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/en-US/>

¹⁶⁶ Op. cit. Kraft 2006, page 271.

¹⁶⁷ Op. cit. Fonneland 2006, page 233.

Once again, by combining methods scholars hope to achieve a compromise. As mentioned previously, I began my observations by being passive, but was gradually drawn into closer interactions with the Mosque's members when sharing their food during Ramadan. I quickly came to discover that only a small minority of them knew English, and all the English speakers were amongst the most invested and engaged members.

Chapter 4: Data assessment and analysis

4.1 Field study report

In chapter three, I described the process that I went through to eventually arrive at my final research question. In this chapter, I will first present and assess the data that I collected from my passive observations, and the entries that I made in my field journal. Following this, I will assess the utilisation of my semi-structured interviews and the resulting data. This data will then be the foundation upon which I conduct my data analysis in the following three sub-chapters.

I should emphasise that my utilisation of the observation method had to be drastically adjusted over the course of the field trip. This was due to my shift away focusing on religious belief and practise, which would have been a phenomenon that made more sense on which to base my research, spread equally between observational and interview data. In the end, I chose to direct my attention towards Muslim self-perception, a phenomenon that made me rely *more* on interview data, and less on observations. However, passive observations were still an important part of my research design. In my opinion, both my journal entries and interview notes provide an interesting insight into my process, as well as allowing me to balance my interviewees subjective opinions with my own assessments.

So, what follows is an elaboration based upon the entries I made in my field journal and the observational notes I took during my interviews. Please note that I, regretfully, did not date my journal entries.

Before travelling to Vilnius:

I was confirmed for my stay in Lithuania in late October 2016. Shortly after, I got in touch with my supervisor at the University of Bergen and let him know of my plans to use this as opportunity to conduct a field study abroad. The choice of research subject is easy enough, as I decided long ago that Islam was the religion of choice for me when working on a master's thesis. Furthermore, preliminary research showed that there is a fascinating and small Muslim community in Lithuania. Therefore, I decided to study Lithuania's Muslim minority in Vilnius, although the resulting data will, most probably, be applicable to the Lithuania's Muslim community in general.

My choice of methods was interviews and observations. The fact that, I would be working full-time while in Lithuania required making the field study as little complicated as possible. I've always preferred qualitative research over quantitative research, and I did get some useful

experience working with these methods during the spring term of 2016. However, finding Tatars to interview would always be a challenge, therefore I prepared myself for this stretch possibility.

Regarding identifying a phenomenon with which to work, I followed the recommendations of my lecturer from my last methods course. He advised me to begin a field study with a wide angle, and then focus the scope based upon the results. However, I did need some kind of a foundation. With that in mind, I played to my strengths and interests and decided on a historical theme. The Tatars have a fascinatingly unique circumstance due to their long and continuous history in a Catholic majority region. It follows that, after six hundred years away from the traditional Islamic regions to the south-east, they must have developed some beliefs and practices that are exclusive to their group. I considered making it a comparative study as there is considerable source material in English that describes “normative” Muslim beliefs and practice.

In December 2016, I conducted my “first interview” over Skype.¹⁶⁸ My contact confirmed my suspicions as he emphasised how the Tatars are a small and spread group. There are certain villages where the presence of Tatars is more noticeable, but they are still quite “out-of-the-way”. Furthermore, few if any of the families in these villages speak English and/or are especially religious. Half of Tatars in Lithuania claim to have no religion, and amongst the other half there are few particularly religious Muslims. The odds of finding representatives amongst these that also speak English is slim. Moreover, how could I collect reasonable data on beliefs and practices if the community in general no longer demonstrated beliefs or practices? One possible alternative route could be to ask if anyone in the community remembered how their parents or grandparents practised their faith.

On the positive side, I had been given names of individuals I could try to contact. Amongst them was the chairman of the “Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre”, although I had been warned that he is a controversial figure in the Tatar community. Apparently, the Islamic centre is heavily influenced by non-Tatar Muslims that practice Islam in a very different way from how the Tatars have developed their beliefs since moving to Lithuania 600 years ago. Additionally, amongst the contacts that he shared with me are examples of Tatars with

¹⁶⁸ See interview one in the appendix, although it should be noted that this meeting was conducted without an interview guide. This was due to my thoughts at the time was limited to only use this meeting as an opportunity to get “get my bearings” and get potential contacts in the Tatar community for when I arrived in Vilnius.

influential positions, both in the Tatar community as well as in Lithuania/Vilnius as a whole. Examples of professions are politicians and university professors. I remained optimistic that I would find the breakthrough I needed to generate a solid set of data!

During the field study:¹⁶⁹

This section is based on my journal written during my stay in Vilnius, hence the informal nature of the text.

Coincidentally, my apartment in Vilnius was a short walk from Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre. I made a point of walking over there as soon as possible after I arrived. When I landed in Vilnius, the temperature was -23°C and my first attempts at sightseeing was quite literally a painful experience. I decided to postpone my explorations until the worst of the winter had passed. In the meantime, I spent my time attempting to get in touch with the contacts I had been given.

Unfortunately, my e-mails, phone calls and SMSs went unanswered. This was disappointing, but not really surprising as I had been warned beforehand that some of the potential contacts are difficult to contact for a number of reasons, not least the language barrier. I continued to try a little longer but decided to make my first visit to Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre earlier than originally planned.

I got the impression that, due to the very cold winter temperatures, there was very little activity in Vilnius during the middle of winter. Conversations with my Lithuanian colleagues at work seem to confirm this. Apparently, the truth is somewhat more complicated and in fact its due to the combination of extreme cold, little sunlight and low average incomes. Keeping your home is expensive and going out will only cost more money. As a result, most Lithuanians in Vilnius tend to spend winter mostly at home. This could explain why the contacts I was given seemed uninterested in contacting me. When mentioning this to my colleagues, they suggested that it could be due to Lithuanians being “standoffish”. Of course, they could also quite simply just be uninterested in spending time on helping me out with my thesis.

I made my first observation of the Vilnius Mosque while out jogging in preparation for the “Trakai Half-marathon 2017”. While I usually went running in Vingis Park, I occasionally made alternative routes to get in some sightseeing. As a result, I made sure to pass by the

¹⁶⁹ This section is based on my field journal notes.

mosque so I would know what to look for in the future. I'm glad I did, because it's quite easy to miss the building unless you know where to look due to it being a regular office building that's been converted for its current use. The whole building seemed abandoned even though I visited at a time one would expect it to be open.



Picture 14: Picture of Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre taken with my own Canon compact camera.

The day I made my first real visit to Vilnius Mosque, my earlier observations were confirmed. It took me a while to find the entrance, which was well hidden down a side street and around the corner from the main road. Having found the door, it was not immediately obvious how to get it open. However, I did eventually get through to the mosque through an intercom and one of the caretakers “buzzed me in”. There was little activity at the time, although I did see two or three men praying in the musallā (Prayer Hall).

I attempted to talk with the caretaker on duty, but unfortunately, he did not speak a word of English. I assumed he was Lithuanian, although it sounded like he initially tried to communicate in Russian, which is rare for young people in Lithuania. Through use of body language and hand gestures, I believed I was given permission to explore the mosque. Once I started wandering about, including into the musallā, he generally didn't take much notice of my presence. Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre was a single complex, and most of the building seemed to function as a community centre. The only clearly religious room was the musallā. Otherwise, there were offices, meeting rooms, common areas, washing rooms, a kitchen with an adjacent dining area, and other facilities. The common area was filled with literature (mostly pamphlets) about Islam, and there was a single room dedicated to Tatar culture. In contrast to

the rest of the building, this last room gave the impression of being rarely used. I did not want to disturb the individuals who were praying, but a couple of them did finish while I was still there. I tried to talk to them, but the conversation did not amount to much. One of them did speak a little English but claimed he did not know much, and that he only came to the mosque for prayer. I eventually left after giving my contact details to the caretaker.



Picture 15: The musallā of Vilnius mosque. The room used to an office but has now been converted with traditional features. The picture was taken with my own Canon compact camera.

It took a little while, but the mosque eventually called me back. The person who called me, Person A [he will be kept anonymous], invited me to visit again when he was at the mosque. He spoke understandable English, although it was clear that he was not fluent. Following this introduction, I would visit Vilnius mosque on several occasions to get in touch with potential interview subjects.

The language barrier made it difficult to find candidates that matched my original focus on Tatars. While I was disappointed, I could not honestly say I was surprised as, prior to my departure, I had been warned of exactly this risk. I eventually agreed to return during Ramadan for a couple of interviews with non-Lithuanian Muslims (Turkish and Pakistani). Two of the interview subjects were Turkish Imams, one young and one middle-aged.

It should be noted that during my conversations with Person A he gave the impression that he was always very mindful of what he told me. He never really seemed to relax either, although both of these details could simply be due to him not being comfortable communicating in English. I admit to suspecting that he was only giving me answers he wanted me to hear. For example, he gave the impression that everything was well in the Muslim community in general and there was nothing wrong. This was in sharp contrast to what I had been told during my

Skype interview in December. When I tried to press him on issues relating to Tatars religiosity and lack of engagement at the mosque, he would change the subject. He was mostly concerned with talking about how well Muslims got on with Lithuanians or how Islam is unfairly equated with terrorism in the news.

For a while, I made relatively little progress, primarily due to it being my busiest month at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vilnius.¹⁷⁰ My half-marathon was coming up, the 17th of May celebrations had to be organised, and Norway was hosting of the annual Scandinavian midsummer event. On the other hand, I did find a couple of opportunities to leave Vilnius for short road trips and thus got to experience more of what the country had to offer.

I finally got a reply from one of the Tatar contacts that had been given me, Person B [he will be kept anonymous]. He answered me through “WhatsApp”, but only after I first informed him that I had been in contact with Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre. This did not seem to impress him at all, as he claimed that the mosque has little or nothing to do with Tatar Muslims. He seemed specially disappointed that I had talked to representatives from the Turkish Embassy as “he’s a foreigner, has nothing to do with Lithuania”. I was surprised by this comment since 1) I had been told that the Chairperson at the mosque was Tatar and 2) there is a room in the mosque used as a “Tatar Culture Centre” (TCC).



Picture 16: A room dedicated to Tatar Culture at Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre. The picture was taken with my own Canon compact camera.

Anyway, I informed Person B that I had been recommended to visit the mosque “to get my bearings” by an individual that he knew. While still not impressed, he did eventually seem more

¹⁷⁰ This must have been the month of May.

understanding. Person B promised me that I could interview him, and since he lived in Vilnius, this offered an excellent opportunity. He also encouraged me to get a better point of view by contacting Person C [he will be kept anonymous]. He told me to mention to Person C that Person B had recommended him. I must admit that I was surprised by the apparent hostility in the way he communicated, although given that we were communicating through text, I should be *very* careful not to overanalyse any signals. Most probably, I could simply be reading too much into this due to the potential of an exciting development in my field study.

Person C proved very keen to meet me for a coffee and an interview! He was in Poland when I first contacted him, but he quickly got back in touch once he was back in Vilnius. Unfortunately, Person B stopped answering my messages and I could not conduct an interview, despite him emphasising that it would be easy enough since he both lived and works in Vilnius.

I visited the Vilnius Mosque several times during Ramadan. Since Ramadan had begun, the general activity at the mosque had increased significantly, granting me the opportunity for more interesting observational opportunities. First, I got to observe the congregation in prayer,¹⁷¹ and I counted around 40 people including the Imam that led the prayer. Everyone there were almost exclusively male, the only exception being a single girl who I would guess was of kindergarten age. There were hardly any teenagers, but otherwise, the age disparity was quite wide. Also, it needs to be emphasised that almost everyone there seemed to be of West/Central-Asian origin.



Picture 17: Food prepared at the centre to feed all the community members when they break the fast. The picture was taken with my own Canon compact camera.

¹⁷¹ Please note that while I did take pictures of the congregation in collective prayer, I decided against including it in this thesis to respect their privacy.

Every time I was at the mosque during Ramadan, I was invited to join them in breaking the fast. Trying to keep a professional distance I declined on most of the occasions, but I did accept the offer during one of the evenings when my interviews lasted until quite late.

The interviews with non-Lithuanians did not go as expected, but I was reasonably pleased with the data generated! I had originally intended to interview them one at a time, but instead I ended up running two group interviews. I suppose there were some advantages to this, but it is possible that I lost the opportunity to hear someone talk about something that they may not have felt comfortable discussing in the presence of the others. There was no doubt that some of the interviewees “stole the show” while others sat more quietly in the background. On the other hand, there were a couple of instances that they suddenly woke up in response to the answer of one of the others. Some of these reactions were especially interesting to me, not least the comments concerning how the Tatars “have lost their religion” and that the Turkish Imams are in Lithuania to help them find their way again. As mentioned before, occasionally the Imams seemed very careful not to say anything that they didn’t want me to hear. In fact, in interview two I got the feeling that the Ali¹⁷² (alias name) at times seemed very uncomfortable with the frankness of Muhammad (alias name). On the other hand, Muhammed was generally optimistic and described their faith and their relationship with Lithuanians in a favourable light.

During this period, it seemed that my luck had definitely turned! I was also informed at the mosque of the opportunity to interview, not only the non-Lithuanian Muslims, but also two religious Tatars! One of them was in his twenties and the other middle-aged. Based upon my research thus far, I got the impression that these were a rarity in the Tatar community since they wished to be Muslim in a more traditional sense, i.e. following the Hanafi Sunni doctrine of Turkey’s Presidency of Religious Affairs. We came to an agreement that I would meet both of them separately over the next two days.

I first interviewed the middle-aged Tatar, and he *certainly* had a lot to talk about. The interview ended up being divided into two sessions, enabling him to pray in-between. He came across as very knowledgeable about Tatar history, culture and religiosity. Throughout the entire session, I rarely spoke, instead letting him converse on at his own pace. However, it should be noted that while he did indeed speak English, he was clearly not fluent, and it was at times difficult to know exactly what he was trying to say. Luckily, he was very willing to touch upon more

¹⁷² Please note that all interview subjects have been given fake names.

sensitive subjects. For example, he was very opinionated about the risk for Tatars regarding assimilation into the Lithuanian nation at-large. On the other hand, he was worried that what made Tatars unique could be lost to the Lithuanian majority. However, he was less concerned by the risks that the non-Tatar Muslim posed for Tatars, and the fact that Tatars could lose their unique take on Islam by conforming to the wishes of the Turkish Imams. He openly criticised how foreign Muslims came to Lithuania and claimed that Tatars are no longer Muslim. He also talked at length about how the Tatars were treated during the Soviet Union occupation period, a time he laments as perhaps the most destructive in Tatar history due to the resulting secularity amongst Tatars.



Picture 18: An old Quran, previously a Tatar family heirloom, that is kept at the Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre. The picture was taken with my own Canon compact camera.

My interview with the young Tatar was equally fascinating. While certainly more hesitant and careful than the older Tatar, he was clearly proud of his Tatar heritage. Like others before him, he made an effort to emphasise how well Tatars get on with Lithuanians, due to history and the fact that Tatars learn and speak Lithuanian rather than Russian. He also gave some fascinating insights into his experience of growing up in Lithuania as a Tatar. The most interesting fact here was how his parents decided to wait until he was 16 to actually explain to him that he was a Tatar and a Muslim, explaining they had waited so that he wouldn't feel "different" growing up. However, he was very reluctant to talk about differences between Tatars and the non-Tatar Muslim community. He grew noticeably uncomfortable and tried to avoid the subject. He did mention some religious practises that separate the community, but quickly moved on to emphasise that the non-Tatar Muslims were here to help Tatars learn to be better Muslims. He also went on to give an impression that, while Lithuanians had a period where they liked Muslims less and less (post 9/11), things were looking more positive in current times. However, Tatars had generally always been respected, in his experience.

Finally, my last interview was with Person C and it was conducted in a café. While I was never able to interview Person B, Person C had time to meet me a couple days before I was leaving Lithuania. While the meeting was uncomfortably close to me leaving the country, it was absolutely worth the wait! It turned out being a fascinating interview with a person who obviously had a lot of knowledge on the topic. What's more, unlike the other Tatars I interviewed, Person C was very secular, although he admitted that he identifies himself as a Muslim since that is what Tatars should be out of respect for their heritage and forefathers.

4.2 Observation and interview assessment

In social scientific data evaluation, the three most important criteria are *reliability*, *replication* and *validity* (Bryman 2016:41).¹⁷³ *Reliability* relates to the extent that it is possible to repeat the study. This is a useful trait as it allows for second opinions. A well specified research design allows for other scholars to repeat the study and generate their own data. Thus, the original data is more reliable. *Replication* addresses the chances that data results will be the same, *if* the study is repeated. *Validity*, considered by many as the most important of the three, deals with the “integrity of the conclusions that are generated” by the research data (Bryman 2016:41).¹⁷⁴

At the end of the day, I would say that the *reliability* of the data resulting from the interviews can be deemed as high as the final version of the interview guide coupled with the general research design clearly illustrates the parameters of the method. As a result, it would be easy for anyone to attempt to repeat the same research in an attempt to either verify or disprove my findings, assuming they can find the right individuals to interview. However, it is difficult to *replicate* results in qualitative research designs. Unless the exact same individuals are identified and interviewed again, there is a high probability that the data will, to a certain degree, be different given the uniqueness of any individual. On the other hand, many of opinions that were demonstrated on the topics that were discussed in the interviews were, interestingly enough, shared between the majority of the interviewees at the mosque. This could be an indication that, in this case, the results would be possible to replicate, within reasonable limits.

The validity of the data is mixed, although it helps somewhat to combine the data from the interviews with that of my observations and knowledge gained from source material. The *internal validity*, or causality, is deemed to allow for the drawing of conclusions based on causal relationships. It is possible to compare the answers from the interviews, as well as utilising the

¹⁷³ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 41.

¹⁷⁴ Op. cit. Bryman 2016, page 41.

perspective gained through the observations of the interview participants, activities at the mosque and other forms of communication. Furthermore, the *external validity*, the possibility for generalisation, is strong enough to allow for generalising the results of each group. However, the data is in no way sufficient to allow for generalisations outside of the specific communities under scrutiny.

Allowing for some criticism, one could argue that the data was, to a certain extent, compromised due to my lack of experience with conducting interviews. However, due to the experience gained from each subsequent interview, this weakness gradually becomes more limited for each new interview conducted. This is best illustrated by the obvious increase in data generated. On the other hand, one could also argue that it all came down to the personality of the individuals I interviewed, as the interviews that generated the best data were undoubtedly with the most outspoken interviewees.

Whether it is possible to achieve true passive observer status, without compromising academic ethical standards, is questionable. In this case, I would argue that my results were mixed. At times it was indeed achieved to a limited degree. However, for the most part I was too directly engaged with individuals to be deemed truly passive. The times when I believe that I was best able to achieve passive observations were when visiting the Vilnius mosque while members of the community were too busy with their rituals to really notice I was there. This created an opportunity for me to observe the community leaders and members behaviour during services which would not be affected by the presence of me as an “audience”. This has arguably increased the quality of my observational data, as it increases the dependability that the behaviour witnessed was authentic. On the other hand, the instances that I have just described, although relevant, has limited values for the scope of my final research question.

While I’ve concluded that my observations were authentic, it is important to be careful when making assumptions. In this case, there is little evidence to suggest either way if the activities at the mosque would have been adjusted if the congregation knew they had a foreign observer in their midst. To be fair, based on my interaction with the members outside of the musallā it was clear that both the leadership, and the members, are proud of both their faith, service, and activity. My conclusion of the authenticity is further supported by the fact that the services were open to the public, they were consistent in their practices, and were at no time concerned with concealing any motives from first time attendees like myself.

However, the observation method was utilised poorly, and as a result there are reasons to doubt the quality or usefulness of the data gathered. Due to the fact that the method was not sufficiently utilised, it is reasonable to assume that potential data was lost. This does not mean that *no* data was generated. Notes of relevance were attained in multiple instances both during interviews, while visiting the mosque and when in communications with potential contacts. However, these notes would have been problematic to use on their own. It is when coupled with the data derived from the interview transcriptions that they complement each other.

Given the qualitative nature of the data from these observations, it is difficult to *replicate* or *measure* in the same way as with quantitative data. Also, due to the poor planning of this method, the *reliability* of the data is low as it makes it difficult for others to *repeat* the research in the future. When coupled with the data from the interviews, the *internal validity* allows an opportunity to draw conclusions based upon causal relationship. There is also sufficient *external validity* to allow for generalisations to the specific congregation in question, but there are no reasons to assume that the findings can be generalised to Lithuania's Muslim community as a whole.

Now, before we begin the analyses, please note that what follows in the next two sub-chapters is based upon the data gathered through interviews and observations, as well as information gathered through source material. The observations were presented in the previous sub-chapter, while all of my interview transcripts can be found in the appendix.

4.3 Relationship between Lithuanians and their Muslim community

"We are the oldest community... Muslim community in the European Union because it is a community who is living here like minority for a long time. This is... all this old history."

(Paulius)

As I have already covered in previous chapters, the relationship between Lithuanians and the Tatars goes back over six hundred years, and the vast majority of this time has been marked by mutual tolerance and respect. Even until this very day, it is well documented that the average Lithuanian has a higher respect for their Muslim minority than the European average. However, in the years since 1991, there have been a number of developments, both local and international, that can have affected this relationship on various levels. In addition, rather than evaluating what Lithuanians would answer if asked of their opinion for Muslims, I was curious to hear the Muslim's perspective of how they are experiencing their relationship with the Lithuanian

majority. Over the course of my interviews, I got the opportunity to gain some insights into what the Muslim community thought about the historical and current situation for Muslims in Lithuania, immigration, Tatars and more. Each of these topics can be said to have an effect on what they perceive as the current direction that the country is going in regard to their Muslim minority group. Before I begin to discuss the details of what I learned during my field study, it is important to still make a distinction between the Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims.

Considering the Tatar community first, all of my interviewees¹⁷⁵ expressed that they feel that tolerance and respect between Lithuanians and Tatars is still very strong, but they admit to being concerned of where the relationship could potentially be going. Throughout the interviews, three primary reasons were highlighted for why they still get on so well: the long common history of both Lithuanians and Tatars, the significant increase in mixed marriages and the how Tatars are increasingly secularised, just like Lithuanians.

Tatars of Lithuania have their own history. Have their own, how I say, fundamentals and so on. That's when they're more respected. But also, we are respecting all of the nations like the Lithuanians. (Aleksandras)

As emphasised by Paulius, it is interesting to note that in many ways both Islam and Christianity arrived in pagan Lithuania almost at the same time, meaning that the Lithuanians and Tatars would develop their beliefs together. What is more, while these two communities up until the Soviet period avoided mixing family ties together, they would still help each other develop their own faith: “Sometimes Lithuanian people helped [finance] this mosque (...) and Tatar peoples give (...) money to (...) build this church”. Such close cooperation, over a significant period of time, has helped lay the foundation of an unusually close bond between Christian and Muslim peoples. Furthermore, as Domantas points out, “Lithuania has never living like a monoculture, mono-religion”, meaning that Lithuanians perhaps been so used to living in a somewhat multicultural society that they seem to be less affected by the newer migration trends of Muslims in other parts of Europe. Considering Lithuania’s pagan heritage, which historians argue helped develop their tolerance, this statement is makes sense.

And yet, it was not always easy for Tatars to live in their traditional home region over the past six hundred years. During the course of the conversations, many of the interviewees, especially the ones of Tatar background, would circle back to the Soviet period of Lithuanian history as a

¹⁷⁵ Domantas, Paulius and Aleksandras.

prime example of how also they have been persecuted. “So, I remember. This is who is a teacher, like a religion, sent to ... [prison?] or killed you know, this we have this time and it is not possible. Not have a possibility.” (Domantas) That being said, they were nuanced enough to acknowledge that this was not uniquely limited to them as Muslims. In fact, the banning and persecution of religious groups was directed at more or less all religious communities in Lithuania, including Christian denominations and Judaism. “Before Soviet Union, we had a good. Like a, uh, religion. People who is no good religion [Soviets].” (Domantas)

“You know, here in Lithuania it was maybe not very difficult, but one special thing. In Soviet times, [there] was a struggle with religion. With Catholic, Protestant (...) also with Islam.”

(Paulius)

Growing up in Soviet Lithuania, Domantas reflected over the Soviet doctrine that “you must not believe in the God (...) no, God not existed”. Furthermore, despite being born into a proud Tatar family, Domantas’ parents decided early on to be pragmatic in how to cope with the Soviet presence. For example, they gave their son a typical Russian/Lithuanian name, rather than a Tatar/Muslim, as having a Muslim name “would not have a (...) good chance to go to a good school” (Domantas). These developments have now carried over into the independent Republic of Lithuania, as many of my interview subjects reflected. An example is Aleksandras, born in 1995, who described how his parents waited until he was 16 before telling him of his Tatar and Muslim heritage. Their reasoning was that they did not want their child to feel like the odd one out, or as he put it, “feeling myself like a special one”. However, despite this beginning Aleksandras has made his own choice to focus on this part of his heritage, and in doing so, he is one of very few young Tatars that does not only identifies as being a Muslim but actually practices his belief regularly.

Over the course of this Soviet period, the Tatars would gradually become ever more secularised. For most Tatars that live today, this does not seem to be an issue, but for all three of the Tatars I interviewed, this is symptomatic of huge problem. As far as all three are concerned, what we are witnessing is the integration and potentially complete assimilation of the Tatar minority group into the Lithuanian majority, and this is a development that also began with the Soviet Union. Before the mid-20th century, the Tatars of Lithuania were more or less living in closed communities. By closed I mean that they rarely married outside of their own culture group, although they would work together with Lithuanians when practising their chosen professions. However, when the Tatars were gradually secularised, they increasingly began to marry non-

Tatars, and as far as Paulius is concerned “the biggest problem I see gets these mixed marriages”. The reason for this statement is that generally the children of mixed marriages will not end up being Muslim, but instead Christian if not atheist.

“And of course, uh, when Tatar not learned much about self-history, self-religion, culture. Of course, it this is little more... not good for it. And to forget this.” (Domantas)

As a result, Tatar community leaders like Paulius are increasingly concerned that if current trends continue, the Tatar community will eventually become extinct due to integration and assimilation. His worries were echoed by Domantas who emphasised the importance of safeguarding cultural and religious diversity. “You know, [we are] doing a mistake in Europe today. Why? Because we say, "we must do assimilation", you know, [we must] integrate, [these] people” (Domantas). To make matters worse for the Tatars, I will remind the reader that the community is extremely small. The fact that the minority group is so small would arguably mean that the majority group might “like them more” due merely to the fact that they will not find them threatening. However, in the case of the Tatar leaders in Lithuania, they do not look at it this way. While they would generally be enthusiastic to know that the Tatar and Lithuanian communities get along well, this is of lesser importance compared to their marginal size and increased risk of assimilation and extinction. In such cases, it was important for my interviewees to state “I can speak the language [Lithuanian], you know? But I'm not Lithuanian. I am Tatar Muslim. (...) My religion is Islam.” (Domantas)

But it's very primitive. If we will speak about Islamic terror or terrorism, it will be in a very primitive way. Because these people who speaks they are Muslim and they work in terror, [they are] 0,00001 percent of a very big global Muslim community. (Paulius)

Another important factor, concerning the relationship between Lithuanians and the Muslim community, is the public discourse making unfair generalizations about all Muslims, including the Tatar community. Generally, the way that popular media depicts Islam goes mostly ignored, but it happens with such regularity that over time it gradually manages to have an impact. Based on the comments of my interviewees, I got the impression that their biggest worry is the potential damage such unnuanced debates can be on impressionable children and the minds of youths who are still developing their critical thinking. Paulius admitted to being worried that not enough is being done to teach children about minority issues in Lithuania. Such worries are especially relevant when we take into account the use of stereotypes, like for example equating

Islam with terrorism. However, Paulius did reflect that he has gotten the general impression that both the school system and children in general are gradually getting better equipped to counter such manipulating tactics in the public discourse.

“This is terrorist doing to say, are these Muslims doing like this? Of course (...) I feel this negative. (...) And, of course, Lithuanian Citizen, you know, Lithuanian people say Muslim every Muslim like this.” (Domantas)

In summary, traditionally, the relationship between Lithuanians and the Tatars has been, and still is, good. Arguably, the relationship improved during in the years under Soviet influence as Tatars became secular, Lithuanians and Tatars would have mixed marriages, and they grew closer by suffering together under the unjust communist regime. However, since 1991, there have been several factors that have somewhat eroded the relationship in the minds of Tatars. Firstly, the Tatars are increasingly anxious that their whole culture might disappear one day if they are assimilated into the Lithuanian majority and given the Tatars communities small size, this is an understandable worry. Second, Lithuania, like the rest of Europe, are increasingly falling prey to media trends and oversimplified debates about Islam in Europe. While the Tatars are less susceptible than non-Tatars to the possible damage from such inflammatory language, over time it gradually chips away at the strong foundation of the close relationship between Lithuanians and Tatars. Third, much due to increased numbers of refugees in the country, an increasingly number of Lithuanians are perpetuating stereotypes, for example that Islam and terrorism are generally closely associated. Interestingly, the interviewees seemed to be looking on the bright side, as there is reason to believe that young Lithuanians are increasingly becoming aware of such stereotypes and are being schooled in how to avoid stereotyping and instead think critically.

“And also, I say about the Lithuanian people, they are very respectful, obviously, but they are very much not very right away become friendly.” (Muhammad)

I will now focus on the non-Tatar Muslims in Lithuania. Over the course of all the interviews I conducted, there was a clear trend where interviewees would describe the relationship between Lithuanians and Muslims as primarily based on tolerance and a certain amount of respect. And yet, the interviewees also gave the impression of a certain reluctance or scepticism in how Lithuanians might approach encounters with non-Tatar Muslims. More or less all of the interviewees emphasised how the Tatar heritage has been an immense advantage for non-Tatars

in establishing today's relationship. However, there are still clear differences between how Tatars and non-Tatars Muslims perceive what Lithuanians will generally think of the two distinct communities. For example, Aleksandras expressed the view that Lithuanians look upon non-Tatar Muslim as mere "guests in the country", while the Tatars "are like part of the country (...) of the nation". While being considered as a guest does not sound particularly negative, Domantas painted a slightly darker picture by describing how Lithuanians differentiate between the two: "if you speak about Muslim Tatar community, this is good, but if you speak [about] not Muslim Tatar community, this not good". Despite this, Lithuania's pagan heritage and secularity is almost equally of help for the non-Tatars as it is for Lithuania's Tatar community.

"We should live together as a Muslim, with Christian, with Jewish people, and other... ehm... atheist, it doesn't matter." (Ali)

On the other hand, since Lithuania's Islamic community is so small compared to similar communities elsewhere in Europe, even the most critical Lithuanians cannot go too far in claiming some kind of damaging influence Muslims are having on their country. Also, most of the Muslim community are Tatars, and "Tatars of Lithuania have more respect (...) because they are living in (...) the regular way" (Aleksandras). Whether or not Tatars want to be associated with other Muslims is of little consequence when the non-Tatars have a few influential Tatar allies that help maintain an image that all of Lithuanian Muslims are a united entity.

A considerable amount of rhetoric is directed at what *can be trouble one day*, and not what is currently problematic, although they also managed to comment on some modern-day problems as well. Another reason why the non-Tatar Muslim community has a reasonable relationship with Lithuanian nationals is the fact that they have tended to keep their collective heads down. However, there is a downside to this strategy due to the image they have created of them being a separate and closed community. Considering the amount of inflammatory dialogue that is already being thrown around in popular media, closed and private communities can give the critical elements of society all the excuses they need to create more stereotypes and potential conspiracy theories where the non-Tatar Muslim community are, for example, terrorists hiding away until they are ready to strike. Arguably, it would be far more beneficial for the non-Tatars to consider being slightly more visible to counteract rumours and gossip.

In Lithuania, this kind of destructive dialogue really took off during the refugee crisis. As Aleksander emphasised, by 2017 “quite a lot of refugees that came from Syria” had arrived in Lithuania over a short time period. The resulting outrage from certain political parties and other interest groups was immense. Domantas recollected a program he had recently seen on TV where “a guy come to the Lithuania, and of course, after this negative information, this TV... nobody not want rent house to refugees.”. The last time that Abdul could remember a similar fallout directed against Muslims collectively was “I think it just changed after 11th September. All the waves of non-Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe” (Abdul). There is a clear tendency, just as in the rest of Europe, that certain parties will, in my opinion, overact just because something new is introduced to society, in this case, new communities

A final factor that effects the relationship between non-Tatar Muslims and Lithuanians in a negative way is the topic of converts. In Lithuania’s 2011 census, many were surprised to see that a significant percentage of Lithuanian nationals had registered as Muslims. While the actual number, compared to the total population, was very small (around 400), compared to the total Muslim community, totalling at around 3000, this is a significant share of the whole. The resulting aftermath of this realisation was that many outraged pundits and politicians felt threatened by how successful, relatively speaking, the non-Tatar Muslim community were at converting “innocent” and maybe “vulnerable” Lithuanians. I emphasise non-Tatar Muslim as these converts are almost uniformly Hanafi Sunni Muslims, like the Turkish Imams. However, despite all the outrage and poor press, many of my interviewees expressed optimism that most Lithuanians, of all ages, safely ignore “the noise”. Thanks to the internet and an adapted school system, Lithuanians are gradually becoming more critical to the oversimplified narrative sometimes portrayed in the news.

“I think that it's getting better getting more informed. And we also are like examples.”

(Aleksandras)

In summary, the relationship between Lithuanians and non-Tatar Muslims is similar to that of Lithuanians and Tatar, but significant differences make it necessary to study them apart. While the non-Tatar Muslims are generally polite, respectful and positive, the Lithuanians are currently tolerant of the non-Tatar Muslims, but still sceptical. And, while it does take Lithuanians time to warm to someone, the most important detail for many Muslims is that they get the impression that Lithuanians are generally respectful of their beliefs.

There are a number of important factors explaining why this relationship is currently good. Firstly, the non-Tatar Muslim community's meagre size creates little or no threat, indeed, the community tries to stay out of the public eye as much as possible, Secondly, Lithuania's pagan heritage, and the secularity that came with the Soviet Union, means they have above average religious tolerance, and thirdly, certain key members of the community are, in fact, Tatars which lends them "star power" and trust as Lithuanians will assume they're all united.

On the other hand, there are several key factors that potentially complicate the relationship. Firstly, the simple fact that non-Tatar Muslims are still a relatively "new" type of Muslim for Lithuania, unlike the Tatars, and these feelings worsened with the refugee crisis that caused a relatively large new influx of non-Tatar Muslims from Syria. The second factor is the surprising number of Lithuanian nationals that have converted to Islam, which led to quite an uproar. The third factor is how some Lithuanians become hugely sceptical of communities that chose to live separately from the rest of society, which stands in sharp contrast to how the Tatar community has been organised for hundreds of years. The final two factors are the same as mentioned with reference to the Tatar community, namely that the public discourse and perpetuations of stereotypes (i.e. Muslims are terrorists) can at times strain the relationship for both Muslims and Lithuanians.

Unlike the optimistic closing remarks regarding the Tatar/Lithuanian relationship, the direction of where this is all going is far more ambiguous. On the one hand, my interviewees at the Vilnius mosque did express a certain optimism, assuming that Europe would stop asserting integration policies and instead learn to live side-by-side with minorities in mutual respect. On the other hand, Paulius' warning that the Tatar community is gradually being reduced while non-Tatar Muslims are increasing would arguably be a circumstance that can only fan the flames.

4.4 Relationship between Tatar Muslim and non-Tatar Muslims

In the previous sub-chapter, I discussed at the perceived current relationship between Lithuanians and the Tatar community, as well as the perceived current relationship between Lithuanians and the non-Tatar Muslim community. In this final sub-chapter of chapter four, I will present an analysis of my data in an attempt to determine how the Tatar community and the non-Tatar community each perceive the relationship between themselves. As has already been stated above, I never really considered examining the relationship between Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims until a couple of interesting experiences that caught my attention. Adapting to

this new information, I started delving more deeply by asking my interviewees concrete questions concerning their awareness of each other and how much they cooperated or interacted with each other.

My first proper hint came when “Person B”, with whom I had struggled to make contact, suddenly started answering my messages, but only after I mentioned that I had started cooperating closely with Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre to learn more about Vilnius’ Tatar history. Apparently, this provoked him as his messages were quite hostile, not towards me, but towards the Turkish Imams that he claimed “controlled” the mosque. Furthermore, my premise that I might learn something about Tatars from them was a notion he completely dismissed. In the end he helped me organise interview number seven with Paulius, but his rhetoric had awoken a curiosity in me.

Later, when I started conducting my interviews at the Vilnius mosque, Ali and Muhammad would eventually bring up the topic of Tatar religiosity without any prompting from myself. While they did present themselves as polite and respectful when they were telling me about the Tatars, they also seemed to come across as somewhat patronizing, almost as if they were explaining the antics of children.

“Even if we live in different cultures and different places, we can come together under the umbrella of Islam. They can live peaceful together” (Ali).

In short, they presented the Tatars suggesting that they had done the best that they could in the time they had been in Vilnius, and in many ways it was impressive what they have achieved. However, Muhammad went on to explain that while Tatars “do have the blood of being a Muslim (...) they are not able to catch up and practice traditionally”. Ali followed shortly after claiming “they forgot, I think, their religion. The religion’s rules, then the religions activities”. These sentiments would be echoed by the other leading figures at the mosque, clearly demonstrating that Hanafi Sunni congregation at the Vilnius mosque did not consider the Tatar community’s unique take on Islamic belief and practice as a legitimate religion. As the interviews progressed, it became increasingly clear that in the eyes of the congregation, it was the obligation of Turkish Imams to come to the Tatar’s aid and, hopefully, bring them back into the fold, before it was too late.

“When I see the picture I [was] shocked. Really, because they changed. They changed from Muslim activity to Christian. Because they saw always the Christian activity and Christian

practice (...) because we are Muslim, I think [we] should be different from another religion”
(Ali).

After hearing these comments, I got a better understanding of why Person B had reacted as so strongly. In my interview with Paulius, he confirmed that a considerable portion of the Tatar community is not impressed by the non-Tatar community’s attitudes towards their old and their unique take on Islam. In fact, the Tatars believe there is nothing wrong with their own beliefs and practices and are proud of their religious traditions, for example, praying “one long prayer on Friday, Muslim holy day. Two or two and a half hours, so we would collect all our prayers into one big prayer (...) one time a week” (Paulius).

The Tatars are also indignant about the fact that the non-Tatar Muslims, who had arrived in the Vilnius region six hundred years later than themselves, somehow had the audacity to claim they had the only correct way to practice the Islamic faith. To make matters worse, Paulius explained to me that many Tatars perceive the Turkish presence as quite threatening for a number of reasons:

“Yes, it's very dangerous because they sent letters to authorities in Arab countries, et cetera, et cetera, about Tatars and they say "Tatars, they are not Muslim". But this, of course, is not true. Because Tatars maybe they are better Muslims than they are, because we preserved our Islam for six hundred years, in a Catholic environment.” (Paulius)

Furthermore, while the Tatars currently outnumber the non-Tatars in the collective Muslim community of Lithuania, Paulius believes this can change faster than one would think. I have already discussed in previous chapters that the Tatar population is shrinking due to assimilation and immigration, while the non-Tatar population is gradually growing. Additionally, the non-Tatar Muslim community seem to be employing quite aggressive strategies to assert their influence in Lithuania:

“Because Islamic centre... it was bought to support Turkish Ministry of Religion, and money for the Mufti... you know Mufti yes? Some people from business they bought this Islamic centre, but I think it is mostly for foreigners, not for Tatars” (Paulius).

Paulius had seen similar actions at other mosques. For example, Kaunas mosque used to be utilised by Tatars, but gradually non-Tatars would join the congregation until “they make the critical mass, [and] they will take the control of this mosque” (Paulius).

Strictly speaking I am not in a position to evaluate the validity of the claims from either side. However, I see no reason for why I should do this either. The focus of this thesis is to consider Lithuania's Muslim community's self-perception, and in this case, I find it fascinating to learn about the intrigue and drama going on between these seemingly opposing halves of the total Muslim community.

On the one hand, the non-Tatar Muslims believe the Tatars are not real Muslims and they further believe that can, and should, make sure that all Tatars return to the proper interpretation of Islamic belief and practice. They admit to this with complete honesty in a polite, positive, albeit slightly patronising, way. In short, they see themselves as the potential saviours of the Tatars who have lost their way.

On the other hand, the Tatars seem extremely agitated by this whole situation, driven predominately by the attitude of the non-Tatar Muslims. They feel frustrated, angry and scared. As Paulius sees it, the strategies and goals of the non-Tatar Muslims are potentially just as "lethal" for the Tatar community as worrying trends of emigration and assimilation. Ultimately, it would mean the destruction of the unique character of the Tatar Muslims, not only in Lithuania, but across the world.

"This is interesting, our history, because we are living here six hundred years. And for two or three hundred years, we have had no relation with the rest of the Islamic world. We lived here alone with our traditions, customs, etc. So, this may be [that] our Islam is different from the traditional Islam in other country's" (Paulius).

Then again, it is still important to note that, despite all of this, some representatives of the Tatar community still work very closely with the non-Tatar community. In the case of my field study, I was after all able to interview two Tatars, one middle-aged and the other in this early twenties. Both seemed genuinely interested in working together with the Imams and the rest of the congregation at Vilnius mosque to be able to practice their faith and religiously in a serious manner.

Domantas was openly critical to certain attitudes of the non-Tatars he shared the mosque with, stating that he could at times hear comments along the lines of him "not [being] Islamic. I'm not Muslim. It was me and ten other people who is real Muslim" (Domantas). These attitudes were not enough to have Aleksandras or himself leave the mosque and, truthfully, even they seemed to indicate that the pros far outweighed the cons. After all, considering that most Tatars

have been secularised, a trend that will most likely continue, it makes sense that some Tatars would look to the influence of these new and resourceful “brothers and sisters” representing the global Islamic movement.

Aleksandras emphasised that “Tatars like nation is very close to the Islam. If we're talking about Tatars, I cannot say that "these two Tatars. are not Muslims"” (Aleksandras). He seemed hesitant to go into details surrounding the Tatar and non-Tatar Muslim communities, but he did touch upon Tatar heritage and how Tatars undoubtedly enjoy more popularity than non-Tatar Muslims, due to Tatars having “their own history. Have their own, how I say, fundamentals and so on. That's when they're more respected.” In contrast, he pondered slightly over how Lithuanian national will generally consider the “Islamic religion is quite more strict. You know? Especially in the all the topics like and in the family life...”.

However, at the end of the day, both Domantas and Aleksandras did feel that perhaps it was, to a certain extent, a good thing that the non-Tatar Muslims could help Tatars relearn the parts of their previous faith that they have forgotten, especially while part of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 5: Afterthought – a critical reflection

5.1 Research and field study

In chapters three and four I explained how I planned and conducted my field study, why I made my choices and what the results of the study. Now, I will first emphasise that, in my opinion, I was in the end undeniably successful in achieving my intended goals for both my field study and in my development of this thesis. What's more, this is especially the case when taking into account how my chosen research design was instrumental in giving me the experiences needed to gradually adjust my goals over the course the field study as described in chapter three. With this in mind, the previous chapters have demonstrated what has gone well and showed the advantages that came about as a consequence of my choices before, during and after my field study. Still, as with any project there is always room for improvement, regardless of the result.

Therefore, the point of this chapter is to take a step back and critically reflect over where my project leaves room for improvement, what parts of my field study demonstrated weaknesses in my research design, and what could or should have been done marginalise these weaknesses in future research designs. In theory, this will help me improve a hypothetical future field study. However, my primary motivation to critically reflect on my research process is to inspire readers of this thesis to pursue their own field study of Lithuania. Hopefully, the sum of my previous chapters, as well as my considerations here will contribute to others being better prepared in their pursuit of knowledge, both for themselves and the academic community as a whole.

Starting from the beginning, I must admit there is little doubt that I should have prepared myself better in the months leading up to the field study. I had good reasons for wanting to travel to Lithuania with a wide scope so that I could eventually narrow things down over the course of the field study. However, the lack of preparation did lead to the loss of crucial research time in the opening months of the field study and potentially limiting the amount and quality of data I eventually was able to collect. In my opinion, the primary factors I underestimated include, but are not limited to, my interview guide, my guidelines for making observations and routines for coding, building a better understanding of Lithuanian culture, history, climate and more.

For example, I could have developed a more detailed interview guide from the beginning. My initial idea was to start my first interviews with limited guidelines, expecting that the informal setting would help my initial contacts relax enough to feel comfortable to discuss sensitive

subjects. Once such subjects were identified, I would have the opportunity to adjust my interview guide to be able to question other interviewees more specifically. In fact, there are reasonable grounds for me to conclude that my approach was a huge success, due to the fact that the phenomena that I eventually built my whole thesis around was based upon topics of conversation I had never even considered before travelling to Lithuania. On the other hand, the downside of this approach was that the data from my first interviews is less focused than the interviews that came later in the study. Slowly, but surely, I learned and adapted to how I should best conduct my interviews in a way that made my interviewees stay on topic rather than going off on a tangent that was of little value to my research. Of course, these gradual realisations are all a part of the learning experience when conducting research in the field, but I do feel that a better focus prior to travelling to Lithuania would have saved me considerable time and many frustrations.

While I find both pros and cons to how I developed my interview guide, I find harder to find a similar number of positive arguments for how I initially planned to utilise observations as a method. When arriving in Lithuania, I had not yet developed any guidelines of how I would make and code observations in the field. My initial strategy was arguably to nonchalant as I had decided to first just have general look around and take pictures if I observed anything interesting. Once I had a better idea of what to expect, I would develop guidelines if necessary. On the other hand, the one thing I had decided and prepared beforehand was to keep a field journal. The idea was that at the end of every research day, I would take the time to consider if anything I had seen and experienced was significant enough to be entered into the journal along with my own thoughts surrounding the event. However, I should have been far more disciplined from the beginning and documented everything remotely relevant. This was something that improved over time, but only after realising that my initial approach was not adequate.

This realisation took place around the same time that I decided to expand my focus to include non-Tatar Muslims due to little success in establishing contact with any Tatars. From the beginning, I was planning on using observation as a primary method. However, at that point in time I was expecting to study religious beliefs and practice of the Tatars. By the time I redirected my focus toward the opinions and perceptions in the Muslim community, I initially struggled to find similar grounds to utilise observations with the same success in my research. Had I taken the time to properly consider how observation could complement my interviews as an equal method, I could potentially have landed a stronger final dataset to work with. On the other hand,

my journal and pictures have still been of crucial benefit, as it granted me a better opportunity to appraise the interview transcriptions without being too hampered by the risk of subjectivity. Furthermore, given the significant passage of time between the field study and writing this thesis, it has been contributory to helping me remember important details.

I mentioned on Lithuanian culture, history, climate and more as variables. I had been given multiple potential contacts in Lithuania which I did attempt to pursue, but I feel that I went about it in the wrong way. It should however be noted that when it comes to social encounters, taking the “first step” is not my strongest attribute. Additionally, when I first get in touch with someone, my general strategy is to be nice, polite and patient. However, in hindsight this seems like a poor strategy given Lithuanian culture. In this case, Lithuanians are in many ways similar to Norwegians, and there is a comparable stereotype. Apparently, it takes a long time to get to know Lithuanians, but once they’ve taken the time to get to know you, they become a firm friend. Their initial standoffishness does explain why it was so difficult for me to get close to them, and perhaps if I had been less patient and less polite, i.e. be more “aggressive” in my approach, they would have most likely yielded. On the other hand, this could have been unfortunate given my position at the Embassy, and the fact that in Vilnius I was an official representative of Norway. An alternative plan could have been to give them other incentives to meet me by offering to buy them coffee or dinner. Yet, monetary limitations could have made this difficult.

Monetary limitations were also an issue, and by this, I mean the fact that throughout my stay in Lithuania my funds were restricted. While I was paid enough from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be reasonably comfortable in Vilnius, I was not paid a regular salary. It was more “pocket money” than anything else, which meant that I needed to care not to overspend. To supplement my meagre funds, I did successfully apply for extra money through the Erasmus scholarship, which definitely helped. As a result, while I was able to invest some money into my field study, I still had to be very careful when deciding where to invest it. With a greater budget I would not have had to compromise so much on other areas, like for example treating contacts more regularly to dinners and coffees. The counter argument to this, of course, is whether it can be considered ethical that I am “bribing” my interview subjects. Given the low average income of Lithuania, one cannot ignore the possibility that certain individuals could take advantage of this situation.

Another variable that must be explored is my decision to limit my research to Vilnius only, perhaps the decision I regret the most. With reference to my journal summary in chapter four, as well as multiple interviews in the appendix, I was recommended a number of destinations to find both Tatar and non-Tatar communities around Lithuania, especially in the case of the Tatars. I feel that my decision to stay in Vilnius severely hampered my progress. On the other hand, there was no guarantee that I would have found anyone who spoke English in these other locations. The primary reason for why I decided to limit my research to Vilnius was financial. If I was to travel more extensively, I would have needed a car or other means of transport. I calculated that this would eventually become too expensive and I felt that my limited funds were better spent elsewhere, especially in the early days when I was still optimistic that Vilnius would offer what I needed.

The final variable is the language barrier, although I will save the details to the next sub-chapter. Many of the contacts I had been given, and individuals that I would meet during my field study, hardly spoke a word of English. That became such a big issue over an extended period of time. Had I identified it earlier I could have taken steps to improve the situation, although, as noted below, in reality there was little I could really do without either putting my data in serious risk or making me bankrupt in record time. In summary, it is evident that there are a number of aspects of my field study and research design that could have been drastically improved with a bigger budget. Best-case scenario would have been to hire a car and an interpreter and scour the countryside for Tatars. However, this was never realistic for this thesis and, arguably ultimately not really necessary.

For all my “complaining”, I would still argue that many of my limitations, be they conscious or accidental, were reasonable and useful in keeping my thesis within a reasonable scope. There were, however, clear opportunities to improving the study through better preparation and discipline, something I therefore highly recommend. If you are able to travel to Lithuania with an open bank account, then all the power to you!

5.2 Limiting source material and language barriers

When I first chose to study the Lipka Tatar in Lithuania, I suspected from the very beginning that the availability of source material in a language I could understand would be a limited. On the one hand, the Tatars are a *tiny* minority group in a country with a relatively small population in general. Even source material that focuses more generally on Lithuania is in relatively short supply, especially concerning their history. This is probably due to the fact that Lithuania was

controlled or annexed by other states for the majority of its history. Also, I knew that I was going to a country with a significant language barrier, something the Embassy had mentioned this to me during my interview for the internship. My suspicions grew as I started my preparations for the field study, primarily due to the fact that preliminary searches for literature online and at the University library was yielding limited results. While there was a magnitude of sources in Polish, Russian, Belorussian and German, material on Lithuania and/or the Tatars in English was negligible. In addition, when my project outline was approved by the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, I received feedback where this exact issue was emphasised as a legitimate concern. On the other hand, I was given some useful pointers on how to get around the issue, as well as a list of literature that could be of use. This was a promising start.

My own research had made me aware of a single Lithuanian scholar, based in Vilnius/Kaunas, who had actually published a fair few articles and books on Muslims in Lithuania, the Baltics, Eastern Europe and the like. One of the tips I received on my project outline was to attempt to contact this scholar directly. The result of this was my “first interview” that was made via a video call/conference by utilising Skype. During this meeting my contact emphasised the limitations in source material in English, and most especially Norwegian. On the other hand, he did send me a considerable amount of his own material, which gave me something to work with. Undeterred, I decided to look upon this fact as an exciting opportunity to produce a piece of work in a starved field of study, a sentiment echoed by my supervisor.

However, there is only so much you can do in writing a full master’s thesis without at least some sources to establish the necessary baseline for my own research to build upon. This thesis is an example of this, as some parts in the previous chapters have relatively few sources that, therefore, are used a lot, and arguably too much. Overusing few sources runs the risk of me becoming the authors “mouthpiece”. As an example, in the case of “The History of Lithuania”,¹⁷⁶ especially, one should question the motivations and objectivity of an author who is presenting an “insider perspective” on Lithuanian history. Kiaupa even emphasises in the book’s preface that Lithuania has traditionally been poorly represented in history books, and he is attempting to correct this injustice.¹⁷⁷ He is also attempting to correct mistakes made by previous attempts to cover the history of Lithuania by historians belonging to states that to

¹⁷⁶ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002 and 2004.

¹⁷⁷ Op. cit. Kiaupa 2002, page 7-11.

various degrees have “occupied” Lithuania in the past, including Poland, Russia and Germany. These limitations were, however, unavoidable and, in my opinion, the most important thing for me to do was to be aware of these risks as I utilised such sources. When presenting a brief history of Lithuania in chapter two, I did what I could to limit the black and white depictions, and instead take into account the shades of grey.

Another problematic, but different, example is overusing a single author, even if said author has produced a substantial number of different books and articles on various aspects of direct and indirect relevance for my thesis. I am, of course, referring to the scholar Egdūnas Račius,¹⁷⁸ as with a simple glance over my bibliography you will see is heavily represented amongst my source material. There is little doubt that Račius is a well-respected expert on Lithuanian Muslims, and especially the Tatars. However, on a more general level, one cannot avoid the fact that overusing a single academic’s point of view can present a similar issue to what was mentioned in the former paragraph. Having spent a considerable amount of time watching his online lectures, reading his work and reading about him in other media, there is a consistent narrative that is constantly repeated almost unchanged over a long period of time. In my bibliography alone I have articles of his that are separated by 14 years, and yet the summary of Tatars that is always included tell the same story. Of course, the simple reason for this could be that since 2002, there is little or no new historical evidence that states anything differently about the Tatars than that which Račius already advocates. This is not unlikely, since historical first-hand evidence of Lithuania and, especially, the Lipka Tatars has always been very limited. However, it is important to keep an open mind to such possibilities, especially when a thesis has a potential weakness in having to base itself on limited source material and prior research.

With this in mind, I have asked myself what I could have done to further ensure that my thesis was not built on faulty data and weak material? If I were to start again, what would I do differently? The simple answer, however challenging, would be to learn another language that would most benefit this particular task. On the one hand, this is common practice in religious studies as well as other social sciences. The advantages are many as it gives the researcher the opportunity to get more of an “insider perspective” and it also makes it easier to conduct research through networking, conducting of interviews, noticing subtleties in communication, building trust, and much more. However, learning a new language is not necessarily easy and, at the very least, it is definitely very time consuming. For my own part, I must admit to being

¹⁷⁸ Račius, Egdūnas. *Google Scholar*. URL: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=S2Zv7Q8AAAAJ&hl=en>

weak in general with learning new languages as I just don't have the ear for it. To make matters worse, Lithuanian is a notoriously difficult language to master. In conversations with the Norwegian Ambassador at the time, I was frequently told that it would be far better to learn Russian rather than Lithuanian due to it being easier as well as "more useful" as more people speak it around the globe. The ability to speak Lithuanian or Russian would clearly have been helpful during my field study. However, Polish might have been an even better choice, at least for reading rather than speaking, to get access to a substantial library of different source material on the history of the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth.

An alternative to learning a new language, is to instead rely on translations. In my own case, I did in fact partially try to find source material in other languages through the use of Google Translate, which allows you to translate webpages and whole electronic documents, assuming the documents are the right kind of format. You will notice in my bibliography that I was very careful in using such translations in my thesis, although a couple of Polish sources are in there. While I will unashamedly admit to using such tools to gain an overview and continue my search for something more substantial and reliable, I hesitate in basing my own work on it. The main reason for me being so careful with Google translated documents is due to the risk of important details being "lost in translation". Therefore, while it is relatively safe to use Google Translate to access certain fundamental, simple and "objective" facts, I find it best to avoid it when translating complex documents with analysis and critical reviews. It is in these situations that culture and context is essential to how an author might express himself/herself, and such details will rarely carry over into simple translations. Google translate struggles to even take into account that certain words can have multiple meanings.

At one point, I did consider another translation alternative, namely spending money on a professional interpreter in Lithuania. This would not have helped me with finding new source material, but it could have been useful for when I was conducting my field study. The idea was to have an interpreter for three possible cases:

On the one hand, I could have had a professional interpreter sit in on my interviews and do a live translation back and forth between interviewer and interviewee. The advantage of this would have been the fact that I could to larger degree trust in his/her professionalism, and it would minimise the risk of anything being "lost in translation". On the other hand, interviews would most likely take far longer to conduct, and after looking into the possibility I quickly learned that the hourly rate of professional interpreters was quite substantial, even in Vilnius.

An alternative would have been to use a non-professional as an interpreter. This could have been students at the University that would do it for free just in exchange for experience gained through the process. The risk of misunderstanding would however increase resulting in the loss of crucial information. In the case of Vilnius mosque, I could also have enquired if anyone there who spoke English would be willing to translate. Other than the same risk as with students, the issue here is two-fold. Having someone from the mosque sit in on an interview with a Muslim could mean that the interviewee might not speak freely. Also, I could not be sure that the person translating would do so truthfully, as maybe the translation would be twisted to produce a more favourable answer.

A compromise would have been to use a non-professional interpreter during the interviews themselves, and then have a professional interpreter go over the material afterwards. This would have definitely balanced out the risk and the expense but would not eliminate it completely. Furthermore, there would have been an ethical issue as all of these interviews are, after all, supposed to be anonymous. Most, if not all, of my interviewees were not concerned about this and I could have informed them at the beginning of the interview of my intentions to use an interpreter. However, with reference to the ethical sub-chapters in chapter three, one could argue that this is a poor justification because is it not a scholar's responsibility to look after the interest of his/her sources if they can't do it themselves?

Finally, a last alternative I considered for employing an interpreter was if I decided to do a survey/questionnaire. In this case, I could write my own survey and have an interpreter translate it to Lithuanian/Russian. Once the survey has been completed by a sufficient number of survey subjects, I could either read of the answers myself if they were multiple choice or have the interpreter translate the answers back into English. Eventually, I did not use surveys, but this would be a viable option should I elect to do a new field study in the future.

5.3 Combining a master's with a professional career

There is a final topic that should be critically reviewed in this chapter. That is how I combined the development of my thesis with that of starting a professional career having finished my years as a full-time student. At the University of Bergen, a master's level degree is generally completed over the course of two years. However, as briefly mentioned in the preface, I had already spent six years on my degree. When I started my master's in religious studies in 2014, I was already three years into my five-year law degree. Completing two master's degrees in the same two years would have been impossible for me, so I was approved by the Department of

Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion to be a “part-time” student for my religious studies. This meant that from 2014 to 2016 I was studying law “100-percent” and religious studies “50-percent”.

For the most part this went very well, as I was only taking regular classes and sitting exams rather than working on a thesis and conducting my own research. The one exception was the very challenging spring term semester during 2016, when I had to work on my master’s thesis in law, while simultaneously doing a minor field study, and writing a thesis based on the results, as part of an advanced course in research methods.¹⁷⁹ While the years between 2014 and 2016 were arguably overambitious and at times highly demanding, it was still highly enjoyable and interesting. By the end of my law studies, I was proud that I had not given up and powered through the years with good results! On the other hand, perhaps this also marked the point where I started developing some degree of hubris, as I became supremely confident that I would be able to plan, research and write a master’s thesis while also being in full-time employment. The logic, considering studying concurrent master’s degrees as a “150-percent student”, surely combining a single master’s degree with a professional career should be easy enough?

I started my master’s thesis course (RELV350) in the autumn of 2016, a course that should only take two semesters to complete, but since I was still a part-time student, I was allowed to stretch it out over four semesters. My first two semesters have already been well covered in chapters three and four, but in brief, I spent my first semester solely trying to find a research topic and my second semester conducting my field study.

One could ask why it took a whole semester just to find a topic, and the honest answer is simply a lack of motivation. However, I must emphasise that this was not due to me losing interest, but rather a disappointing “reality check” after eight years of political science and law school. The problem was that I had built up an expectation of how quickly I would find relevant work after finishing as a student, and yet it took me six months with research, sending dozens of applications, and attending the occasional interview before I finally got my chance. Furthermore, while my stay in Lithuania was both enjoyable and interesting, the position was strictly speaking an internship made for students in the middle of their studies, a criterion which technically I still met due my ongoing master’s thesis in religious studies. So, for most of that first semester, I was hardly productive due to struggling to cope with unemployment. However,

¹⁷⁹ Religionsvitskaplege forskingsmetodar (RELV306). *Universitetet i Bergen*. URL: <https://www.uib.no/emne/RELV306>

having learnt that I would go to Lithuania, I experienced the spark of inspiration to use the opportunity to my advantage by conducting my field study during my stay!

Once I got to Lithuania, I am satisfied with the time and effort that I managed to put into my field study and, as discussed in chapter three, this was my most productive semester of the entire master's thesis process. However, I must admit to being somewhat naïve about how much energy I would have left over in my spare time to focus on my research. It turns out working a full-time job, even as an intern, takes more out of you than what I imagined. This issue was at its worst at the beginning of my stay, since starting a new job is demanding. Also, during my six months I would occasionally be given larger projects at work that took considerable time and effort, and sometimes I would attend events that took place in the evening. Furthermore, I also had to “have a life” outside of work and establishing a social network in the beginning was time consuming. In fact, when working in the foreign service, one could argue that socialising activities outside of work is an essential part of the job. As a result, while I did have a longer than average stay abroad to conduct my field study, once one takes into account that I was doing researching “part-time”, I would argue that most of the advantages that came with a longer stay were lost.

I also had the disadvantage of not being able to conduct research during workhours. What I mean by this, is that I could not do any research from Monday to Friday, between 8 am and 4 pm, every single week of my entire stay. The only exception was when I got days off, but as an intern this was limited to *only* Norwegian public holidays. Admittedly, before I travelled to Lithuania the thought had not occurred of how my workhours could potentially limit my field study. Once I got started, it did not take long before I realised that for many of those with whom I needed to communicate, it was very inconvenient that I had to meet them in their spare time. Especially in my first two months, when the temperatures were at an extreme low, Vilnius was practically hibernating and there was very little general activity in the city during the winter. The reason for this is that the frigid temperatures combined with low average incomes meant that most Lithuanians would stay indoors during the winter with their families. In fact, to make matters even worse, Lithuania had joined the Eurozone and introduced the Euro only two years previously. Despite the government and the Bank of Lithuania insisting that the “benefits outweigh price increase”,¹⁸⁰ most Lithuanians at the time were sceptical as they, on an

¹⁸⁰ Euro benefits outweigh price increase, Lithuania's central bank says. *Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT)*. URL: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1125680/euro-benefits-outweigh-price-increases-lithuania-s-central-bank-says>

individual level, only experienced the burden of increasing prices. While there was a noticeable difference in activities once Spring came, the hindrances of not being able to research while at work was an issue that practically plagued my entire stay.

Unfortunately, once I finished my field study in July and returned to Norway, I experienced the exact same frustrating situation as the year before. Once again, I spent months searching for positions all over Norway, sending dozens of job applications and, occasionally, preparing for and attending job interviews. And again, this had a severe effect on my motivation. Eventually, in October, I moved to Stavanger for a temporary position that only lasted three and a half months. Less than a month after moving to Stavanger I was given a new job opportunity in Oslo. While this offered a significant new opportunity, this was a period where I was spending substantial time moving between cities and taking on new roles and responsibilities. The thought of going back to working on my thesis was, for now, pushed to the back of my mind while telling myself that I still had, after all, plenty of time.

After moving to Oslo in 2018, the passage of time became a blur. I expected it to be busy when I first started, but then eventually things would quiet down once I settled in. However, due to a number of coincidences, there has hardly been a quiet moment since I started work in Oslo. First starting a new job in February and I had to get accustomed to my new work environment. Second, in June a crisis took place at work that would takes months to solve, and I was given the task to handle it. Third, in October/November 2018 a scandal at another company led to an opportunity for one of my bosses, and as a consequence of the reshuffle at work I was lucky enough to get a promotion, and this new position meant that I in many ways was starting from scratch. Fourth, the reshuffle led to my section being understaffed, and I was expected to be central in picking up the resulting slack. Fifth, a new shuffle during the summer of 2019 led to another promotion and further understaffing. And finally, sixth, the company is part of a massive merger that is expected to take place in 2021 and this, on top of everything else, effects the general workload of everyone.

As a side note, in this same period of time, I moved three times between apartments. When I moved the first two times it was to small rental flats, and finally in May 2019 I moved into my own, more adequately sized, apartment. In my honest opinion, living and working under such circumstances is hugely significant for how most people can find the time and motivation to sit down and “turn on” for hours on end with something as complicated as a master’s thesis.

Now, the point of this summary is not to make excuses. After all, at the end of the day I finished what I started all those years ago. What I am attempting to establish is that having a full-time professional career and simultaneously attempting to go through the entire process of completing a master's thesis has been a considerable challenge that I definitely underestimated. Furthermore, having to constantly juggle both these commitments creates a complicating variable that has had a significant effect on the final product of this thesis. I have already mentioned how it affected my data gathering in Lithuania, and in the time since then it has also affected my data processing, analysis and, finally, the labour of writing the thesis itself.

This thesis is without any doubt the most substantial piece of work that I have ever manufactured. Its size and complexity meant that it is not enough to simply find a couple of hours "here and there", and then take a long break until the next time I found some spare time. At least, not if I wanted to piece something together that is actually coherent from front to back. No, if I was to do this properly, I would have to find the time to *really* work with it for long stretches at a time, something that I generally found difficult to do.

Circling back to the beginning of this sub-chapter, my original timeframe was two years, from 2016 to 2018, but I applied twice for an extension from the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion. Usually these extensions are only for a single semester but seeing as I was studying "50-percent" these extensions doubled to a total of four semesters. This brings us to the end of "my journey" as my final deadline for finally handing in a finished product is June 2020. It should be emphasised that I do not regret my choice to do this in any way, but I am glad this is finally coming to a close. Still, I can't honestly say that I recommend it to anyone. If you really want to study something in-depth, it is better by far to put other obligations aside and focus exclusively on the task at hand. Therefore, if someone was to attempt improving upon my work with their own similar study, I would say to them that they do it as a full-time student/fellow/academic thereby avoiding my own pitfalls.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

6.1 Summary

In summary, over the course of this master's thesis, I have covered different topics and aspects that in many ways are representative of this entire project. Starting all the way back in 2016, I really had no idea what was in store for me and now, four years later, I finally arrive at the thesis' summary and conclusion to the research question of "how has Lithuania's Islamic community's self-perception changed since Lithuania gained independence in 1991?"

In chapter one, I began by introducing and considering the theme, research question and limitations of my master's thesis. Inspired by what I occasionally consider an unfortunate standard in public discourse, I highlighted how complex and nuanced debates can devolve through oversimplifications, unfair associations and assumptions with little or no factual evidence to back it up. More specifically, there are few better examples than how the discourse of "Islam in Europe" is too often reduced to the use of inflammatory language, subjective opinions and the perpetuation of stereotypes. In my opinion, such discourse does little to help the issue at hand and instead runs the risk of making everything worse. In the case of Muslim minority groups, we regularly witness the tendency of how Muslim's self-perception is damaged and they feel alienated and unfairly treated when they are grouped together with other Muslim groups with which, in reality, they have little in common other than sharing the same religious "tag" of being a Muslim. I therefore emphasised my motivation to raise awareness of such risks and the potential consequences. As a result, I ended up studying Lithuania's Islamic community to get a deeper understanding of their experience and their own opinion on the subject of the Muslim minorities' role and popularity in Lithuania's non-Muslim society. What makes Lithuania especially fascinating to me is its six-century old Tatar population, which makes the experience for Lithuanian's very different from other parts of Europe.

The chapter goes on to highlight the limitations I had to place upon my research and thesis so that this complex topic could fit inside the word limit of this thesis. On another practical level, deciding and defining certain limitations was also necessary to be able to conduct a field study without overextending myself and potentially end up with a weak dataset. I go on to define key concepts for the thesis, namely "Lithuania", "Lipka Tatars", "Islam" and "Secularity". Due to the thesis basing itself on a heritage spanning hundreds of years, these concepts would not be immediately obvious for all readers. As a result, it was important to make sure that both writer and reader were on the same page. The chapter ended with a description of the thesis structure.

In chapter two, I presented a brief history of Lithuania and their Tatar minority group. Lithuania's history was divided into four eras depending on which state the Lithuanian people were organised under. The first era, from 1219 to 1569, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was founded by pagan tribes and organised in a way to defend themselves against Christian crusades. The most significant point in this era was when the Grand Duke Vytautas invited the Tatars to emigrate to the Vilnius region due to their military prowess. As Vytautas and Lithuania was religiously tolerant, the Tatars were granted the freedom to practice Islam as they wished. Even when Lithuania was Christianised, the Tatar's central role in defending and developing the duchy meant that they were, for the most part, both tolerated and respected.

The following era of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, from 1569 to 1795, was marked with considerable variations of positive and negative periods for both the Commonwealth, Lithuania and the Tatars. While Lithuanian influence of religious tolerance was considerable, there was only so much it could do to limit the more sceptical nobles of Poland. As a result, there was a period when Tatars gradually had their rights removed, culminating in a rebellion. While Ottoman Empire was making considerable gains westward into Europe, the Tatars were welcomed back into the Commonwealth with all previous rights restored. At the decisive Battle of Vienna, the Tatars played their part in halting the Ottomans once and for all. While the Tatars had regained their lost respect and influence, this period was marked, crucially, by Lithuanians gradually losing their language and the Tatars replacing their own language with Lithuanian. This would come to be of immense importance later.

The third era marked the Russian Empire seizing control of Lithuania between 1795 and 1918. Unlike their symbolically equal status during the Commonwealth era, Lithuania was at this point stricken from the European map and reduced to a mere Russian district. Unhappy with this arrangement, both Lithuanians and Tatars joined forces with Napoleon in his Russian campaign, although this amounted to little due its failure. During the 19th century, Lithuanian culture was increasingly suppressed by Russian authorities, but instead of disappearing completely, the Lithuanians developed nationalistic ideals in secret and even reclaimed their language. The Tatars were primarily left to their own devices, despite Russia's historical grudge against the Tatar communities. However, the broader Tatar community was small enough to not be considered a threat, and their martial prowess led to the Russians giving them opportunities that interestingly enough did not lead to long lasting resentment from the Lithuanians. It could be argued that this was due to the Tatars utilising Lithuanian as their

primary language. Furthermore, by the end of the Great War their community had been so diminished that many Lithuanians would be sympathetic and considered them exploited rather than traitors.

The final era of chapter two focuses on the 20th century (1918-1991), and the Lithuanian struggle for independence from Poland, Germany and the Soviet Union. The Lithuanian experience in the interwar period is in many ways similar to many other parts of Europe. They experienced a boom in the 20s, followed by the Wall Street Crash, and their economic and political instability left them vulnerable to both fascism and communism. Immediately before and during the Second World War, Lithuania “changed hands” between Germany and the Soviet Union multiple times. However, in the end it was the communists that prevailed, and Lithuania was quickly annexed into the USSR. For Lithuanian nationals, the road to independence is similar to other Eastern European countries under occupation until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. By the time Lithuania finally was free, the Lithuanian nation was stronger than ever. However, for the Tatars the situation was completely different as this communist period was hugely impactful on their culture and religiousness. In fact, by 1991 it had become increasingly difficult to separate the Tatar and Lithuanian communities due to integration and assimilation. Also, the Tatar community had been severely secularised.

In chapter three, I introduced the key elements that made up my research design. Firstly, it was important for me to explain *how* I planned and executed my field study as it provided essential context for how I created my final research question. With this context in mind, I introduced my research subject, Lithuania’s Islamic Community, and explained the gradual process involved in arriving at this group rather than focusing exclusively on the Tatars. While the details concerning an inconvenient language barrier was covered in chapter five, it was important to introduce it in chapter three to demonstrate my difficulties in finding Tatar interview subjects. Eventually I widened the scope to include Muslims in general as I found alternative interview subjects at the Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre.

Similarly, I went through the process of how I decided upon which phenomenon around which I would build by research question. Compared to my choice of subject, the changes that were made to the phenomenon were far more extensive. The focus was originally on religious beliefs and practices, and how, after six centuries, the Tatars had come to be different Muslims than their Middle Eastern counterparts. However, based upon some interesting and surprising directions that the conversations of my interviews took, I eventually decided to focus on how

the Muslim community, divided between Tatars and non-Tatars, perceive themselves, their relationship with Lithuanians and between each other.

The final part of chapter three was dedicated to introducing and evaluating the methods that was utilised during my field study. My two primary methods were passive observations and semi-structured interviews, so I explained the theory behind them, the advantages and disadvantages of using them both individually and together through methodological triangulation. The chapter ended by considering possible issues surrounding research ethics generally, but most especially in utilising my chosen methods.

In chapter four, I first presented and assess the data that came from my passive observations and the entries that I made in my field journal. Going step-by-step through my entire observational process, I began briefly with some notes from before I travelled to Lithuania. I also made some observations based upon my first interview/meeting that was conducted over Skype. From there, I moved on to the main field study report that demonstrates my primary research activities during my time in Lithuania. The most important notes and reflections were in how I communicated with different individuals both in and out of interviews. Impressions of how people reacted to my field study of both Tatars and non-Tatar Muslims became instrumental in inspiring my final research question and focus.

Following this, I assessed the utilisation of my semi-structured interviews and the resulting data. This data was then the foundation upon which I conducted my data analysis for the remainder of the chapter. My data analysis was divided into two distinct topics, namely the relationship between Lithuanians and Muslims, both Tatars and non-Tatars, and the relationship between Tatars and non-Tatar Muslims. The details of this analysis will be covered in sub-chapter 6.2.

In chapter five, I take the time for some critical reflection over how my research and field study was executed. Up until this point in the theses I had primarily demonstrated what, how and why I had designed my field study. Furthermore, I had presented, assessed and analysed my findings, thus demonstrating the success of my field study in providing me with data and well-weighted arguments on which to base my eventual conclusions. However, it was necessary to also focus on what could have been theoretically done differently and better, both before and after the field study, but most especially *while* I was conducting my research.

Two of three sub-chapters were dedicated to issues that I was prepared for before my field study had begun, namely limitations due lack of source material, a significant language barrier, and having to balance the obligations I had to both my field study and my internship at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vilnius. In the end, I firmly believe that I managed to find suitable compromises in how I solved these issues to the best of my abilities. However, there is no doubt that these limitations had a substantial influence of the final product of the field study and this thesis. Furthermore, if anyone is considering their own field study in Lithuania, I highly recommend taking the time to carefully consider how best avoid these complications.

In the third sub-chapter, I considered how the actual field study was conducted and the effectiveness of my utilisation of the chosen research methods. I begin by emphasising that I, in the end, was absolutely successful in achieving my intended goals, especially when taking into account how those goals were gradually adjusted over the course the field study as described in chapter three. However, there is always room for improvement, and I wanted to identify the variables that I had underestimated the most and/or had the largest potential impact on my field study and data assessment. These variables include, but are not limited to, my interview guide, my guidelines for making observations and routines for coding, building a better understanding of Lithuanian culture, history, climate and more, monetary restrictions and the language barrier.

6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, throughout my field study I conducted interviews, made important observations and gathered complementary evidence through general interactions with potential contacts. Circling back to the primary research question and secondary questions presented in the introduction, I will now give my closing answers based upon the sum of the work contained in this thesis.

The primary research question is “how has Lithuania’s Islamic community self-perception changed since Lithuania gained independence in 1991?”

In the analysis of this data I considered two main relationships; firstly, the relationship between Lithuanian nationals and Lithuania’s Muslim community, and secondly, the relationship between Tartar Muslim community and the non-Tatar Muslim community. Furthermore, for the first relationship it was necessary split the Muslim community between Tatars and non-

Tatars, as they have differing perceptions on how Muslims are treated today and will be treated by Lithuanians in the years to come.

Beginning with the Tatars perception of their relationship with Lithuanian nationals, they are generally optimistic of the current state of affairs. Basing their opinions primarily on three main factors, all three of the Tatars that I interviewed claimed that Lithuanians today are generally fond and respectful of their Tatar community. These factors are the Tatars long history as part of Lithuanian society, that Tatars have become increasingly secular, and the relatively recent development where Tatars have begun entering mixed marriages with Lithuanians. The fact that these factors have endeared the Tatars to such a degree to Lithuania is a circumstance that Tatars admit makes them feel confident, proud and happy.

On the other hand, there are mitigating factors also, namely the ongoing negative public discourse about Islam in Europe, the fact that Islam is regularly equated with terrorism, and finally the fact that the Tatar community is so small. In the case of the two first two factors, the Tatars I have communicated with all admit to how frustrated it can, at times, make them. They feel that they must regularly distance themselves in a way which is unfair, and they are easily “shot down” if they try to engage in discourse in a constructive and reasonable way. However, the most worrying factor for the Tatars is how their community is both small and widely spread, leaving them vulnerable to integration and assimilation. All four Tatars (three interview subjects and my fourth contact), regardless of whether they were aligned with the foreign Imams or not, were in complete agreement concerning the topic of whether minority communities should live side-by-side in peace and with mutual respect, or if they should all be integrated or assimilated into the majority group. Assimilation and integration should be avoided at all costs, as it would mean the tragic loss of meaningful diversity. However, as my last interviewee emphasised, many Tatars are very worried of the observable trend where Tatars are gradually integrating more, while non-Tatar Muslim are increasing in number. It is their great fear that in the near future, the Tatars will practically cease to exist.

When considering the non-Tatar Muslims, there are some similarities, but also clear differences. I can start by emphasising that the non-Tatar Muslims experience of Lithuanian attitudes towards them is not necessarily positive or endearing as it is with the Tatars. However, the Muslim from abroad I interviewed did make a point that there is a noticeable easier atmosphere in Vilnius and Lithuania, than that which Muslims experience in most of the rest of Europe. Muslims in general do actually feel that they get to feel the positivity that is usually reserved

for the Tatars, as they are all Muslims. Furthermore, most of the non-Tatars did express opinions that Lithuanians pagan beginnings at around the time when the Tatars appeared might still be ingrained in their culture. The secularisation experienced during the Soviet period seems to make them far more religiously tolerant than many other Christians. And finally, it is easy for Muslims to be viewed as less of a general threat in Lithuania since their generally anonymity and the fact that their community is very small and spread compared to that of the rest of Europe.

On the other hand, there are four mitigating factors that characterize non-Tatars and the regular focus on these topics in the media, coupled with inflammatory language, naturally creates feelings of insecurity in the Muslim community. These factors are the fact that they are “new Muslims” with little understanding for Lithuania, that they live separate lives from Lithuanians rather than mixing together like the Tatars, that they are generally more easily associated with the “terror stereotype” and finally, that they have been reasonably successful at converting Lithuanian nationals, a fact that scares and intimidates the more outspoken anti-Muslim voices.

Moving on to my secondary research questions:

Firstly, I asked “has the Tatars long history in Lithuania been enough for them to avoid being grouped together with other Muslims in the context of today’s, sometimes toxic, debate of Islam in Europe? “

This is partly true. Tatars have been a part of Lithuanian society for over six centuries. Unlike the Muslim experience in other European countries in this same time-period, the Tatars enjoyed unprecedented respect, influence and freedom to live their lives according to their own creed. Also, the general populous of Lithuania at the time of when the Tatars arrived were still pagan, or had recently converted to Catholicism, and as a result, their own religious experience and development ran more or less parallel to how the Tatars developed their own take on Islam. This variation of Islam, and their culture in general, went far in adapting to the local culture where they had made their home, When coupled with their martial prowess which served grateful Lithuanian rulers many times, this led to the Tatars having a far more historically influential role in Lithuanian society than what one would expect from such a small community. Despite still being such a tiny minority, they have been able to be successfully viable in modern Lithuanian society. This is to large degree due to Tatar interest groups and multiple government initiatives celebrating Lithuania’s Tatars, since gaining independence in 1991. However, there is no doubt that, in the time since the terrorist attacks in on the World Trade centre on the 11th of September 2001, the discourse surrounding Muslims in “the west” has influenced Lithuanian

opinions negatively, even though the effect is relatively marginal when compared to the rest of Europe. It should be noted that many Lithuanians tend to associate “dangerous Islam” with that of the non-Tatars Muslim community rather than “their own Muslims”. Still, two of the Tatars I interviewed did emphasise that they feel Lithuania could do a better job at introducing Lithuanian children to minority groups as part of the primary school curriculum. I got the impression that they are worried that, while older generations are aware of Tatars, today’s younger generations have not necessarily been “educated”, compounded by the growing numbers for integration/assimilation of Tatars. As a result, this situation could eventually become far more serious in the future.

Secondly, I asked, “have Lithuanians become more sceptical of “their own Muslims”?”

In short, my data seems to indicate a “very slight yes”. My interviewees have demonstrated a feeling that a growing number of Lithuanians are allowing themselves to be convinced by simplified media debates that Islam and Muslims are dangerous and bad. This became especially the case during the migration crisis around 2015, as Lithuania had to carry their share of the burden within the EU. While the actual number of refugees they were obliged to take in was very small, certain politicians and media outlets blew the story way out of proportion, especially when one takes into account that many of these refugees quickly fled the country for places like Germany. This issue became so big that property landlords around Lithuania began refusing to rent out homes to refugees despite the fact that there was a housing surplus. While most Lithuanians made sure to separate “Tatars” from “other Muslims”, there is no doubt that this also affected Tatar Muslims, especially the ones that were more religious and thus more recognisable as Muslim. In these cases, it was not necessarily obvious to all Lithuanians that this was one of “their Muslims”. The size of the Lithuanian Tatar community is gradually falling, driven primarily by the fact that, during Lithuania’s time as part of the Soviet Union, Tatars would be increasingly secularised while also beginning to engage in mixed marriages, something which was very rare in pre-Soviet Lithuania. These reasons were crucial in gradually eroding away the differences between Tatars and Lithuanians to such an extent that many no longer associate themselves with Tatar heritage. They would rather be assimilated into the majority group, a fact that vexed all three of my Tatar interviewees.

Thirdly, I asked, “how are individual Tatars affected by the discourse of Islam in Europe, especially during their childhood years?”

While sad, the answer here is that many Tatar children in Lithuania grow up without being sufficiently informed of their heritage by their parents. Two of the Tatars I interviewed grew up in Lithuania while under the control of the Soviet Union, and the last Tatar was born in 1995. All three of them could tell stories of how their parents made the conscious choice to raise their children as Lithuanian, rather than Tatar. It began as way of tackling Soviet suppression, but by the time these children had grown up, most preferred to be associated with the Lithuanian majority rather than as “Tatar” and perhaps especially “Muslim”. In the case of my youngest interviewee, he had no idea that he was Tatar or Muslim until the year he turned 16. Interestingly enough, despite being one of a very small minority, he would eventually totally embrace his heritage and become a devout Muslim. On the other hand, he decided to follow the “Turkisk Imams” take on Islam. However, it should also be noted that the fact that parents chose to withhold such important details about their children’s identity also worked to reinforce the concern that many Tatars are experiencing that they are gradually being assimilated into the Lithuanian majority.

Fourthly I asked, “do these discourses, together with the growing presence of Islam in Lithuania¹⁸¹, affect the relationship between Tatar and non-Tatar Muslim groups?”

In this case, I can answer a definitive yes. This was a perspective I had not originally planned on exploring for this field study but, over the course of my interviews, I noticed that many of my interviewees did eventually arrive at the topic. Furthermore, they could give me very interesting answers. When I first started conducting interviews, I was mostly talking to non-Tatar Muslims from countries like Turkey and Pakistan. When I asked them about their thoughts on the Tatar community, they were initially polite and respectful of the differences between the communities. However, it did not take long for them to start being very critical of Tatars beliefs and religious practices. According to them, Tatars were not really Muslims, but instead a community with a Muslim background. However, the Imams from Turkey had arrived, and they were prepared to help these lost souls find their way back to the right path. Conversely, many Tatars are extremely provoked by the attitude of these new Muslims in Lithuania. My first experience of an extreme reaction was when I finally got an answer from one of my suggested contacts.

¹⁸¹ Račius, Egdūnas (2002). “Islam in Lithuania: Changing Patterns of Religious and Social Life of Lithuanian Muslims”. In *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 176-183, page 177.

After a long time being ignored, he finally answered me when I mentioned in a message that I had made contact with the Vilnius mosque for possible interviews about Tatars. He was, to put it mildly, not impressed at all stating quite bluntly that the people at the mosque “had nothing to do with Tatars” as they were Turkish Imams working for the Turkish embassy. Furthermore, the secular Tatar, that I interviewed last, was brutally open in his description of how he considered these attempts at changing Tatar culture and legitimate religious practice to be just as dangerous for the Tatar community as the risks he associated with Lithuanian assimilation. He also lamented over the fact that these outside Muslims had a tendency to “take over” the mosques around the country, either by buying them (Vilnius mosque) or by gradually increasing their membership numbers until they dominated the influence over the institution. It is clear to me that there is significant divide between the Tatars who still identify themselves as Muslims and the non-Tatar Muslim community in Lithuania. It certainly does not help this already fragile relationship that the Islamic stereotype in public discourses are most easily identified with the new Muslims, which means most Tatars want to disassociate themselves from these groups. However, there are some exceptions to the rule, where two of my interviewees are the best examples of how some Tatars will make the conscious decision to work closely with the non-Tatar Muslims. While even they could admit to certain unfortunate attitudes amongst the non-Tatars, at the end of the day it seems like they would conclude that the pros outweigh the cons, and in the long run it is for the best that Muslims stick together.

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Appendix

Norsk senter for forskningsdata – meldeplikt

Resultat av meldeplikttest: Ikke meldepliktig

Du har oppgitt at hverken direkte eller indirekte identifiserende personopplysninger skal registreres i forbindelse med prosjektet.

Når det ikke registreres personopplysninger, omfattes ikke prosjektet av meldeplikt, og du trenger ikke sende inn meldeskjema til oss.

Vi gjør oppmerksom på at dette er en veiledning basert på hvilke svar du selv har gitt i meldeplikttesten og ikke en formell vurdering.

Til info: For at prosjektet ikke skal være meldepliktig, forutsetter vi at alle opplysninger som registreres elektronisk i forbindelse med prosjektet er anonyme.

Med anonyme opplysninger forstås opplysninger som ikke på noe vis kan identifisere enkeltpersoner i et datamateriale, hverken:

- direkte via personentydige kjennetegn (som navn, personnummer, epostadresse el.)
- indirekte via kombinasjon av bakgrunnsvariabler (som bosted/institusjon, kjønn, alder osv.)
- via kode og koblingsnøkkel som viser til personopplysninger (f.eks. en navneliste)
- eller via gjenkjennelige ansikter e.l. på bilde eller videoopptak.

Vi forutsetter videre at navn/samtykkeerklæringer ikke knyttes til sensitive opplysninger.

Med vennlig hilsen,

NSD Personvern

Interview guide

Before the interview

- Introduce yourself, which university your affiliated with and your research.
- Thank them for allowing me to interview them and letting our conversation be “on record”.
- Explain the general outline of your work with a master’s thesis and the research involved.
- Emphasise the use of a recording device, and how anonymity will be ensured for all interview subjects.
- Avoid making the interview too formal by “explaining how the interview will be conducted”.
- Let the subjects be the ones in control of the conversation.
 - You can nudge them in the direction of the research topic if absolutely necessary.
- Simple Q&A / Yes and no questions should be avoided as much as possible. Have wide and general queries which allows the subject to go on a tangent.

- Don't be impatient... allow the subjects to have the time necessary to eventually find themselves in interesting fields of topics on their own.

Introduction/Background

- Wherever it might seem appropriate, without making it seem forced, try to have the interview subjects introduce themselves
 - Age
 - Name
 - Background (ethnic and/or religious)
 - Family status
- Try to get an indication of how religious they are. This does not necessarily have to be emphasised... the conversation it and by itself might give enough of an impression.
- If they are Tatar; question them about what it was like to grow up and how it is to live in Lithuania as a Tatar.

Main points of inquiry

- How is the Tatar community “organised” in Lithuania/Vilnius?
 - Are the communities spread or concentrated?
- How is the Muslim community “organised” in Lithuania/Vilnius?
- Are there major differences in religiosity and religious practice between Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims?
- What is the relationship between Lithuanian/Tatar and non-Lithuanian/Tatar Muslims?
 - Relevant to enquire about the rate of Islamic conversions in Lithuania.
 - Enquire about the relative size (how many) of each group.
- How religious are Lithuanian Tatars?
 - Why have Tatars become secularised?
 - Why do many Tatars identify as Muslim despite being secular?
- Historically, how has Islam been perceived by Lithuania?
 - Extra focus on Soviet period due to their official anti-religious policy.
 - If someone confirms a trend (negative or positive) push them for details. Gradual?
 - Has the recent refugee crisis affected popular opinion of Islam at all?
- Since the fall of the Soviet Union, has there been a noticeable change in the perception of Islam in Lithuania?

- What has been the Tatars historical significance in Lithuania?

Concluding the interview

- In an attempt to round off the interview, without coming off as rude, impatient or “obvious/unnatural” try to steer the conversation away from history and the big topics.
- Try to draw the subject’s attention to events and topics more recent... maybe something that is expected soon.
- Change the topic to something casual and unrelated to the thesis... some recent development in Vilnius perhaps or alternatively enquire about something.

After the interview

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Repeat some of information from the start of the interview.
- Encourage the participant to ask their own questions about me and my research.
- Share contact information / business card and invite them to get in touch if they have anything more they want to say.
- Inquire about the possibility to attend events or tips of places I should visit and people I should contact.

Interview transcriptions

For interviews two to seven, the names of all interviewees are picked at random for their anonymity. None of the names necessary reflect their cultural or ethnic background, but I have deliberately used Arab/Turkish names for interview subjects with a non-Tatar background and Lithuanian names for interview subjects with a Tatar background.

Interview 1

–

Lithuanian Non-Tatar non-Muslim academic specialised in the Tatar community

Please note that this was not a regular interview in the same sense as the others. This interview was conducted in December over Skype before I left for Vilnius in January 2017. At the time, the primary aim was to get as many pointers as possible to help me get started once I began my field studies. However, I believe the person gave many interesting insights that should be included in the dataset of this thesis. Unfortunately, I did not utilise my interview guide, nor did

record the audio from meeting. As a result, I was unable to transcribe the conversation word-for-word. Therefore, what follows is instead the notes that I took during the meeting.

1) Do you think that the local Muslim community in Vilnius is open to letting me observe and interview them? My general impression is that they are an open community, but I am curious to learn from your own experience.

- Tatars don't attend the "Mosque" → Musala
- The attendance is not really part of the congregation
- The Tatars are a community, but a non-mosque community
- Half of the Tatar community do not identify as Muslim
- The other half say they are Muslim only because they are Tatars and that is how it works
- Important to separate the Tatars ethnic community and the mosque
- Maybe 10 per cent of the Tatars are religious
- Third segment are the Lithuanian converts. Especially a lot of women, and they have a strong group in Kaunas. There you can find a mosque with some Tatars + some Lithuanian converts
- Should I focus on the ethnic of...?
- Compare to Kazan Tatar Islam (Russian)
- Go to mosques on Fridays and Saturdays
- The converts speak English
- Might not be allowed to speak with women
- Could interview non-Tatars as a control group

2) Do you, per chance, happen to have any knowledge of the local Muslim community, and how I might best get in touch with them? Could you perhaps recommend me individuals that it would be best that I contact directly?

- The mufti is Tatar, and technically the leader, but if you get an interview it will only be answers that he wants you to hear
- Also, there is the "head" of the Tatar community in Lithuania, but he does not speak English
 - He is a politician with former communist leanings
- There is a third person associated with the Gulan-movement
- The Muslims who are non-Gulan Tatars → Seems they prefer to be associated with the Turkish official religion

- Another Tatar who is a self-appointed Imam in Vilnius
 - Difficult to talk with... strange guy
- There are two ladies who are historians with doctorates
 - Do not speak English
 - Not really religious

3) To what extent would you say that the language barrier might be a problem? Unfortunately, I do not speak Lithuanian, and was hoping that I might get away with communicating in English. However, I am aware that this might be problematic, and have considered using local interpreters to assist in my interview sessions.

- Seems it is clear that I might need an interpreter
- Might have to travel to local villages where the Tatars are more concentrated
- The community is so small that they are not very accessible

4) Could you recommend me colleagues who, like yourself, are knowledgeable on this subject? Do you, or they, know of relevant source material for my subject that is available in English? Which library/libraries at the University of Vilnius would most likely contain source material of relevance, and would I be allowed to access the university as a student from Bergen?

- Maybe focus more on how they relate to Islam, although they strictly speaking are extremely non-
- They believe they are something but to everyone else they are not
 - They get very upset if someone from the outside pushes them on not really being Muslim
 - Tatars and Islam don't really go together anymore

Private afterthoughts:

- Tatars are very secular
- Only 3000 in Lithuania
 - Maybe 10 per cent are relatively religious
 - Around 1500 (50 per cent) do not even associate with Islam
 - Of the other half most of them will claim being Muslim purely due to their ethnic background (why are you Muslim? Because I am Tatar...)

- But do not push them on not being Muslim because they are sensitive to the subject
- Very few Tatars attend Mosque/Masala
- The closest one gets to Tatars being generally religious is at important life events like birth, marriage, death, etc.
 - They might also do a few general religious practices at certain events like Tatar festivals
- Could have difficulty finding the "right people to interview"
 - Either they are not religious
 - Or they do not speak English
 - Or they will be public figures that will only tell you what they want you to hear
- Language barrier / Communities
 - Important to separate community and congregation
 - This is mainly due to the fact that Tatars hardly ever attend mosques
 - To gain best access to Tatar communities it might be necessary to travel to villages that are outside the larger cities
 - Furthermore, it seems like the odds of having to involve interpreters are relatively high. This could become quite expensive apparently, especially if I have to bring such interpreters with me to said villages
- Point of entry
 - [Person] recommends attending the Masala on Fridays and Saturdays to get my bearings, but most of the attendants will be non-Tatar Muslims (mainly newer immigrants and Lithuanian converts)
 - [Person] also mentioned that another focus could be to try and focus the interviews towards how and why the Tatars relate to Islam in spite of the fact that they, from an outside perspective, seem very non-religious/secular
 - Could also interview non-Tatars as a control group...
 - Must keep in mind that I might not be able/allowed to interview women that I contact through the Masala/Mosque etc.
 - Regarding comparisons
 - Should consider dropping the whole comparison bit... [Person] claims that I could easily end up in an interview situation where they will not understand what I mean when I ask them to compare with other groups/places

- For example, Sunni vs. Shia, or Lithuania vs. another country, etc.
 - On the other hand; the one comparison he was open for me to attempt was to "Kazan Tatar Islam" which seems to be located in Russia
- List of possible contacts
 - [deleted for anonymity] – mufti
 - [deleted for anonymity] – highly influential person in the Tatar community
 - [deleted for anonymity] – former mufti, an imam
 - [deleted for anonymity] – historian
 - [deleted for anonymity] – philologist, historian
 - "Can get you the contacts, though, as warned, none speaks English."
 - "I will think of more names, converts and immigrants including, when you come to Lithuania."

Interview 2

–

Non-Lithuanian Non-Tatar Muslims that frequents "Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre"

[The interview begins with only two persons... interviewer and interviewee]

THOMAS

My name is Thomas Croucher. I study religious studies in Norway in a city called Bergen on the West coast.

ALI

At what university?

THOMAS

The University of Bergen.

ALI

Ah, the University of Bergen. Okay.

THOMAS

We have a little institute there that, amongst other things, studies religions with different kinds of "specialties". I wanted to go for, together with my tutor, is Islam. I wanted to choose an Islamic community which has not been research to much in the Norwegian language yet. Lithuania was both convenient and interesting, and I've always wanted to visit both Lithuania

and Vilnius, so this has allowed me to do everything at once. I'm here now for about three weeks.

ALI

Ah, okay.

THOMAS

As a formality, it's good for you to know that all the interviews, I'm hoping to do five or six interviews, will be anonymous. This means that nobody except myself will ever actually hear the recordings. This is the reason for why I record on this [audio recorder], rather than my mobile phone as it does not have access to the internet.

ALI

Okay.

THOMAS

At some point I will transcribe the work and I will make sure to anonymize everything.

ALI

Ah, Okay.

THOMAS

Not that it's at controversial subject or anything, but as I'm not a journalist but a researcher it's a necessary formality.

ALI

I understand. I am also a student at a university in our capital city. Last year I graduated from the Ankara university in Turkey, you know this place?

THOMAS

Yes, of course.

ALI

You see last week... I mean last year I graduate from their theology faculty.

THOMAS

Fascinating! So, the subject is... I mean... it's been a bit of a process as I originally wanted to write about something in general of the Muslim community in Vilnius, with a special focus on the Tatar population.

ALI

Okay.

THOMAS

Because one of the reasons why I was fascinated with Lithuania in a European context is that it's a Christian country that has had Islam present for such a very long time.

ALI

Yes.

THOMAS

So, I was kind of hoping that ... ehm, I know that the different people I will be interviewing will have different specialties there. Like I will be interviewing a professor who has studied these things, so he'll probably have a lot of the historical knowledge.

ALI

Mhm.

THOMAS

But I'm also interested to know about ... Okay so Lithuania has a very long history of Islam and as far as my research has told me so far, the Lithuanians perspective so far, or attitude towards Islam has generally been very positive. This because they've been fond of the Tatar community and how the Tatar community has played a central role in the development of the state.

ALI

Yes.

THOMAS

And, perhaps most interestingly, ever since Lithuania has gained its independence in the beginning of the 90s, I'm curious to know, from the Muslim perspective, if Muslims in Lithuania feel that that attitude is changing.

ALI

Actually, first of all I would like to say that I am a Turkish man.

THOMAS

Of course.

ALI

I just came here recently for one month for Ramadan. You know Ramadan?

THOMAS

Yeah.

ALI

Our holy month in a year.

THOMAS

Indeed.

ALI

After Ramadan we celebrate “Eid” holiday three days. Then, according to Islam, you are asking about independence of Lithuanian, the role of Tatar in this and how Islam looks on the independence. It's a different culture, different place, they are separate, and for example I am Muslim, but I live in London. As a Muslim, if for example an attack happened in London, as a Muslim what should I do? You are asking this?

THOMAS

Yeah...

ALI

Okay, actually we can directly certainly say that if we live in a place and we look at who are living there and what place, it does not matter, we defend. We should defend. This is, we can say, the rule of our religion. If we are to live together with peace and against any terrorist attack and any bad fight, just we can say that, this kind of thing. We should live together as a Muslim, with Christian, with Jewish people, and other... ehm... atheist, it doesn't matter.

THOMAS

You say you've been here for a month now?

ALI

Yes.

THOMAS

So, what is your experience as a Muslim man in Vilnius.

ALI

Actually, there are far less people who are Muslim here. They live very less, and they are also different societies, for example Saudi Arabia, Asian, Turkish, Azerbaijan, Libya, Egypt, and also that even if we live in different cultures and different places, we can come together under the umbrella of Islam. For example, I saw here [Vilnius Mosque], for example, even though we are from different sect, you know mezhep as we say in Islamic theology mezhep means sect, we can live together. For example, Shia, Sunni, you know? Maybe you've heard about this kind of thing. They can live peaceful... together. As I observe, that is my experience.

ACTIONS

[a third person enters the room]

THOMAS

Welcome!

MUHAMMAD

Thank you.

THOMAS

So, to quickly repeat what I told [ALI] before, I am a student at the University of Bergen. I study religious studies, and at my [academic] institute there are different types of specialties where one of them is Islam. This is the specialty that I wanted to do, and I am very fond of history so that my main reason for focusing on Islam in Lithuania is because I find Lithuania to be quite an interesting case because it has such a long history of Islam, despite being a very Christian, Catholic, country for a very long time.

Ehm, and I was curious to know and, even if the case was that you are not Lithuanian, or that you haven't been here for a long time. I'm still interested to know and to talk to as many Muslims as possible in Vilnius just to kind of get a feel of how you feel about Lithuanians attitude to Muslims. And of course, as you were just telling me, I would like to know how the Muslim community works in Vilnius at the moment.

You were just telling me that the community in Vilnius is a very mixed community.

ALI

Yes.

THOMAS

You have Muslims for many different backgrounds, countries, sects, as you were saying.

MUHAMMAD

You are absolutely trying, ehm, actually as the Imam has told you he recently came here, not long ago. And the experience of Imam will only tell you about recent things with your basic focus on history.

I am also interested in history and we did find graves of Muslims with words written from Quran that were 700 years old, those graves. And those graves you will find 40 minutes from here at another Mosque with the name (Kaunas). This is one of the five Mosques, which has already been built and one is now under construction, which will be the sixth one, which Mr. Alexander is working on it right now. But those five Mosques that you will find with addresses and all that (I can find them for you), you will find that they are very old... they are considered.

ALI

If you stay here [in Vilnius] we can go together, and I will show you.

MUHAMMAD

Yes, you can go after food (breaking of Ramadan fast in the evening) and Imam will tell you more. And here you will mostly see Islamic books that we have found in Lithuania and pictures of a Mosque. That is one of the oldest also.

ALI

200 years ago, it was built.

MUHAMMAD

That is the oldest one. And also in that Mosque, the old books give you the picture, when it all started, which was the oldest the scholar was, how the times changed, how they changed the structure and also give their books in that Mosque also will tell you. And also, some historical things you will find if your focus is on the histories, but this mosque is built six or seven years ago.

It was started from a small place, I don't know the exact address, but this will give you the right now condition on in the Islamic society in Vilnius. But these other towns will give you historical things about it, and yes, we have been talking to different people from different places and they will tell you their experiences.

My experience is that people are having the Islam being here a very long time, but the people are/have in a modern way, not keeping their forefathers having the ways of doing things. Of course, obviously it's not changed, but there are some modern things, you know you'll find some modern style of Muslims in this... my experience.

And also, I say about the Lithuanian people, they are very respectful, obviously, but they are very much not very right away become friendly. They want to know person, and once they know they do respect the religious and I think they are great people. You know my wife is from here, with my wife's experience she is very respectful to my religion and she also likes to visit. So, this is my own very close experience with Lithuanian people about Islam. And besides that, I think there is in the constitution there are some changes that mean government also has to give full backup (I'm sure Imam can give you more details as I know only the outlines). I've heard that the constitution also has some awareness and there is a mention about Islam there also, so I think Islam is getting support from the Lithuanian government as well as from the people. Very good, very well they are doing it.

THOMAS

How long have you been in Lithuania?

MUHAMMAD

I'm here a year and a half now. Getting close to a second year. I was studying, but took a break this semester. Mostly when I have free time, I come to the mosque here. I also mingle with people from all over the world. We have Turkish sisters, who also come, [unintelligible] university where they come also to this centre. Then besides other family members who just come to visit, they visit the centre a lot because I met some who have only been here one week. I met those people also, so you know I talk, and I get also the chance to meet people from all over the world. How they are acting in other parts of their countries as a Muslim and how they are doing it. So that is my experience in only a year and a half.

THOMAS

That is definitely a more thorough experience then I have. You said you wife is from here?

MUHAMMAD

Yes, my wife is from here, from Lithuania.

THOMAS

Is she Muslim also?

MUHAMMAD

Actually, she is not now. She is trying to... she asked me some questions, she always treats it with respect. When I read Quran, she always like... when she listens to music, she will close off the music. She gives a lot of respect towards my religion. And I always ask her, that if she has any questions, she can ask me. She will ask me different questions about it. And sometimes she will visit here [the Mosque] also to talk to Alexander. Alexander talking in the same language... in Lithuanian, as I am not Lithuanian. She is an English teacher, so she communicates with me in English. So, when she talks with Alexander, she is more comfortable because that is the basic language for Lithuanians so... I have a very good experience and I very much like the Lithuanian people. Very good.

ALI

So far, the picture is nice.

MUHAMMAD

Yes [laughs], I feel that only the Russians have some influence over the Russian Federation these people have, because my students who have two PHDs or three PHDs. You see, when I was in New York I saw my students did not have two PHDs or three PHDs. They had many other degrees and were very broad minded, but I see that because of the influence from Russia it will take time to broaden their minds. However, I see a bright future ahead once this happens. It is going in a very right direction. You know? [laughs] That at least is my experience.

THOMAS

You two have never gotten the impression from, for example Alexander, the locals, the Muslims that have been here for a long time, they have never given any kind of impression that Lithuanian attitudes have been changing over time? This thing has just been generally positive?

MUHAMMAD

You see, this thing is as I mentioned... that point broad-mindedness? That think is stuck over there. Otherwise these people want to know the new ideas, but again having that influence

[Russia] they are not just suddenly opened. They are slowly trying to come into the centers here [Mosque], time to consider Muslim centers and programs and all that. They are doing that on Saturdays, Sundays and sometimes others they do that with close communities. They are good at that. They are in the process, but not very fast.

THOMAS

Okay. And the Tatar community... some of the research I've done until now, it was just mentioned... or I guess you've already said it. You explained to me that the Tatars already are Muslim, but in a more contemporary and modern kind of way.

ALI

Yes.

MUHAMMAD

True.

THOMAS

Would that mean that they generally don't come to the Mosque? I'm assuming that in the time that you have been here you've engaged with Tatars?

MUHAMMAD

My experience with Tatars... their forefathers when you see the books, the founders, the scholars, are the Tatars going back 200, 300, 1000 years back. Their sons and daughters were not able to... they are still Muslim, but they are not able to catch up and practice traditionally. Do those things that let the tradition continue. But in the modern way... so because of that they are not coming to the Mosque, but they do have the blood of being a Muslim. Because when they died, their family would do exactly those ceremonies in the same way as the Muslim people does. And because of Alexander always at the time of a funeral service, he explained to them and they will listen very carefully. And being on the Saturday/Sunday on the cemetery, the way they come... flowers... flowers are very common here. To us the Muslim when they see towards the prayer time, they will listen very carefully. So they are slowly, but surely as we do not have to many Imams... we have Mustafar and he is very active both here in the Mosque, but also in his free time he will go to Lemayes and call all the new students of Tatar [background] and tell them passages and he gives them more and more then. And now the Imam is here especially for Ramadan, and those who are helping in the center now. Everyone is trying to the best they

can, but we need more scholars and all that, but I think Alexander knows how in a systematic way what needs to be done. So far these are the things...

ALI

They forgot I think their religion. The religions rules, then the religions activities, for example I witness cemetery... grave [Muslim] I suppose [in what] must be a Christian cemetery yeah? A grave... because we are Muslim, we I think should be different from another religion. Then when I see the picture I [was] shocked. Really, because they changed. They changed from Muslim activity to Christian. Because they saw always the Christian activity and Christian... [some talk with MUHAMMAD for clarification] practice. They saw this and then they practiced the same way. They practiced same way and they didn't have colour... you know Muslims colour? This is very important, because scholars teach them how to leave their religion. They didn't have for that reason... they forgot... they changed. They've changed and...

MUHAMMAD

Yes, he's absolutely right and my own experience is what I see. Any Muslim that opens... just a small example... when a Muslim opens a business of chicken... because we have to cut a chicken in a special halal way, these shops do very well. This is because people just want awareness. There is not that much awareness... no community programs, only Alexander who is the only person I think who is very active... and sometimes these Imams. But this is not enough for such a huge community. And that is why when there is no... and when people are... you know... they are just... when there is a program Muslims should just jump on it and rush on it like "oh you know we want to be part of it". So, there is a lack of awareness for those that Tatars who are right now, but the blood is that of a Muslim yes.

THOMAS

Is the community very spread around the country? Or is it concentrated into certain areas?

ALI

I think they are spread out.

MUHAMMAD

Yes, and there is one Tatar Mosque. We named it this because even though there is a big community, that does not mean they are not spread out.

ALI

For example, I can give you an example. Last week I was in Kaunas, you know? Another city of Lithuania. In Kaunas, the Muslims have another Mosque. It was built I think in 1935, almost one hundred years ago.

MUHAMMAD

Don't you mean 1835?

ALI

No...

MUHAMMAD

Okay, I'm sorry.

ALI

[stops to think] yes... 1935 it was built! And I asked the Imam of that Mosque “what is the history of this building and this area. Is there any Tatar that live here?”. He said to me no. The street in front of the Mosque, the name of the street, Tatars street [Totorių g. 6], but no Tatar lives there now. They lost their... I don't know where they go. And the Mosque is now empty, there is no Muslim. For example, they come to another country like here, like us, they come to here, they come to the Mosque. Just to pray. For example, in [unintelligible], another Tatar village, I regularly... I ask Alexander how many Tatar lives here, and he tell me “almost 20 or 30 family live here”. Then they separate out to different places I think, and they are less.

MUHAMMAD

Yes. I am trying to find a picture, there is a book here.

ACTION

[From 26:10 to 27:50 both subjects find different books in the room where the interview is being conducted. They spend the time finding pictures and giving brief summaries of the history and architecture of several Mosques in and around Vilnius and Kaunas].

ALI

I heard there were more Mosques, but the government I think...

MUHAMMAD

Yes, this I heard about it, but I'm not sure about it. My understanding is probably again the way of handling it by going through the system. Slowly it had to be reduced through the government,

which is why there has been much focus on having these five [last five Mosques in Lithuania] properly done. They are doing other ones also in the same way as the government wants it, but that is why the government closed the other ones [poor maintenance].

ALI

For example, behind this Mosque the place was graveyard, but you cannot see now any grave there. They were lost also. For example, many graves... many graveyards were in Lithuania for Muslims, also they were lost.

THOMAS

I seem to remember when I read in a new book I bought about Vilnius, just the city not Lithuania as a whole, that a chapter mentioned how after the Second World War the Soviet Union destroyed most of the Tatar graveyards.

ALI and MUHAMMAD

Yes!

THOMAS

Which is very sad, of course.

ALI

Maybe you've already read about how Tatars came to Lithuania? Maybe you read about something?

THOMAS

Yes, I have.

ALI

For example, in the [unintelligible]... I don't know how I can say in English, but the king of Lithuania brought them to protect the king. Then he said to the Tatars that "you can take the place... whatever you want".

MUHAMMAD

Yes, and that book I told you about will tell you clearly how these kings asked people to come and how to do and what exactly they as a Muslim these people would play their part and role. In that time their pictures and their way of living 600, 700, 1000 years ago when they came to Lithuania.

ALI

Yes... the size I think...

ACTION

[From 30:26 to 32:40 ALI and MUHAMMAD return to the topic of different books of interest where one of them is at another Mosque. They talk about where the book might be. The Mosque is only ten minutes away and ALI offers to take me there later].

MUHAMMAD

Now I must go, as I am to help prepare food.

THOMAS

Oh, before you go... just for the record what is your name?

MUHAMMAD

[gives his name].

THOMAS

Thank you very much. Also, where are you originally from?

MUHAMMAD

I am born in Pakistan.

THOMAS

Okay, you are born in Pakistan. I seem to recall someone mentioning it. Again; thank you very much! You will probably see me again.

MUHAMMAD

No problem and you are most welcome.

ACTION

[MUHAMMAD leaves]

THOMAS

So, what was it about Lithuania...? I mean did you choose to come to Lithuania for this month? Or was it delegated to you?

ALI

No, we didn't choose. Actually, they brought me to here because of my little English [laughs]. Because you know very people from different countries and the common language is English here [in the Mosque]. That means many needs to know this for communication, and it is for this reason I was chosen to come here.

THOMAS

I see. One of the things I wanted to say was since the Tatar community came here, is one of the things they've lost is this also the Arabic language?

ALI

Yes.

THOMAS

So, they don't speak Arabic, they don't speak Turkish...

ALI

Yes, and no as they can read Arabic. You know on the book? Our holy book is Arabic the language. Also, we don't speak Arabic [Turkish], but we recite, we read the Quran our holy book because we are taught to believe that if you recite and you read and understand. We make practice of our holy book it is a benefit for us. For the Tatar people mostly, they also forgot how to read Quran. Very old people just can read, then they also forgot this. For example, two weeks ago when I was in [unintelligible] village, one of the old men come to me then showed me the date. The holy book date, it was I think 90 years.

ACTIONS

[Two new people enter the room. One of them is an Imam at the centre. Everyone introduces themselves. Some of the information from earlier in the interview is repeated (who I am, the thesis, which University, and more). The recording is restarted to divide the interview into two separate parts]

Interview 3

—

Non-Lithuanian Non-Tatar Muslims that frequents “Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre”

THOMAS

Well, I am.

ABDUL

Shortly you can because...

THOMAS

I mean, I suppose. Yeah. Because I'm sure. Could you just repeat your name again?

ABDUL

[deleted]. My name is [deleted].

THOMAS

[deleted]?

ABDUL

[first name] [last name].

THOMAS

Yeah. And your full name is [deleted]?

IBRAHIM

[first name] [last name]

THOMAS

[deleted] ... okay! I study religious studies at the universities of ... University of Bergen, where I have chosen for my master's thesis to focus on Islam.

IBRAHIM

On Islam?

THOMAS

Yes, and I decided to focus on Islam in Lithuania because I am quite fascinated about how Lithuania, despite being a Christian country for a very, very long time, has had a very central Islamic community for six-seven hundred years.

ALI

You mean Tatars?

THOMAS

Tatars yes, exactly. So when I first started working on my project and came here , I was curious to know 1) What role the Tatar community has had in the development of Lithuania as a country, and also how the Lithuanian people, the non-Muslim Lithuanian people's perspective of the Tatars and Muslims. And then more importantly, I'm especially interested to know how it's been since 1991 when they [Lithuania] broke free from the Soviet Union, because as my research has been telling me, that Lithuanians have historically been [...] not only tolerant, but actually extremely respectful and fond of the Tatar community and the Muslim community.

ABDUL, IBRAHIM and ALI

Yes.

THOMAS

And I was curious because, again I don't know, I'm curious to know how in the last 25-26 years, has this changed or is it the same?

ABDUL

I don't know. I don't know. I think you knew you should... you should speak, or you should know Russian language.

THOMAS

Yes. Indeed.

ABDUL

If you want to research about this, why? I'm asking this because the Tatars are Polish or Russian or Belarus. I know one who she is, she's assistant doctors, professor in Vilnius university (excuse me my pronunciation okay? But you understand).

THOMAS

Yes, of course! No problem.

ABDUL

OK. Because she has, [studied] about Tatars [and] those community... historic. Also, in 27th and 28th there is a conference about Muslim community in Lithuania here in Vilnius.

THOMAS

On the 27th / 28th of June?

ABDUL

Yes, of June.

IBRAHIM

Will he have the opportunity to attend?

ABDUL

Yes.

THOMAS

This is at the university? I need to look into that. Do you have any information about this conference? When and where?

ABDUL

Yes, I have. Because I have got an invitation and will give a lecture. I will give a lecture to some about some topic.

IBRAHIM

Some topic, you know. Yeah.

ABDUL

Okay then. Also, I have a friend. He is native Tatar and he is chairman of this Islamic Cultural Education Centre.

THOMAS

I'm going to talk to him tomorrow.

ABDUL

huh? Okay. Okay. Then, it is helpful for you, I think.

THOMAS

Yes, definitely. Very much so! So, without looking at the whole history [of Islam] here, like very old history, I mean, you've been there for three years. So, what is your impression of none... I mean two questions: what is your perception or impression of the Muslim community? Like the community itself? And also, what is your impression of non-Muslims and their attitude?

ABDUL

Okay. You are citizen of Norway.

THOMAS

Yes.

ABDUL

And also native of Norway.

THOMAS

Yes.

ABDUL

Okay. Let's say I was in Germany before. 7 years, and I have some experience there. I think it just changed after 11th September. All the waves of non-Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe.

[In] my experience I saw before there were Muslims, the community Lithuania and Austria also, because the government of Austria accept Islam as a main religion in Austria. Also, I have been in education faculty in a university in Germany, which educate... eh... I'm sorry, but my first language is German... therefore, some priest is like... you know a priest?

THOMAS

Yes.

ABDUL

Yes. In charge.

IBRAHIM

All right. Place and time.

THOMAS

Tomorrow I can ... [try to find lecture information]. Okay. Except time and yeah.

THOMAS

I mean I can give you my email and then you can just.

ABDUL

Yes. Yes. The information... since it's more easy.

ABDUL, IBRAHIM and ALI

[They have a conversation in other language... a new person enters the room]

ABDUL

[introduces new person by name]

THOMAS

Yes, we have met.

ABDUL

As you may know, in Norway, there are imams from Turkey.

THOMAS

Yes, I have met a couple of them. The local mosque in Bergen is right next to my institute. It is this nice house.

ABDUL

Yeah, I'm also counsellor for religious affairs in the Turkish embassy. Yeah, my duties regarding religious affairs. Then I can, I didn't know... I can use some knowledge to help. I think so.

DISTURBANCE

[call to prayer comes on the speakers]

ABDUL

Okay, now it is prayer time for us.

THOMAS

Thank you!

ACTIONS

[Recording stops abruptly]

Interview 4

—

Middle-aged Lithuanian Tatar Muslim that frequents “Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre”

EXPLANATION

[before turning on the audio recorder we talked loosely about the subject, and almost without warning the interviewee just began talking. I decided not to stop him and waited for the earliest opportunity to emphasise the research formalities of the interview]

DOMANTAS

Old relationship like a Muslim community, which is a Lithuanian community. But this is a relationship starts in the beginning, not like a Christian community, and Muslim community. Because, first of all, why come here [the] Muslim Tatar community? Vytautas and Jogalia sent invitation to the Gold and Crimean Tatar to protect from the Christians who were from Germany and the Muslim Tatar come here and, protect this people. After they could stay here and work like a soldier, for Vytautas and Jogalia, or as guards and stay here.

And we have a good relationship because, Vytautas and Jogalia say if you want to stay here in Lithuania, you can stay like a community, first of all and given the possibility to the building Mosques, doing religious [acts], cultural like getting rights and granting access to the sunnah. This is good, good point. And sometimes Lithuanian people, uh, helped the financial. This, uh, mosque building. You know, this this could point into that over time. A stay here in Lithuania and then have a good relationship.

And I know today, and the one the village is in Nemezis when built church. You know? Church, Tatar people, help in this village. Uh, everybody, helping the formation, like I said, give some money and Tatar peoples give something money to the, uh, build this church. No. Because, you know, this is, uh, why they were let a friend into here in Lithuania. First of all, they have a good relationship for a long time ago, this time. Second, ehm, second time... second point, we have a good, um. Before Soviet Union, we had a good. Like a, uh, religion. People who is no good religion [Soviets]. Good tradition. Good religion and understand this religion and what, uh, religions say, if you come to the other country, you must be looking like this, uh, systemic, uh, in living, let alone stay Lithuania, like another, uh, looking in there, not fighting, not together. Like friends. And this is where every time is living like I'm a friend, of course.

This is, uh, Muslims Tatar community like a clothes and just give us not so we have had before our marriage like Tatar in Lithuania rational adult in Polish, not how we feel a marriage. Uh uh. Just, uh, talent at that. Not like that. And of course, like, uh, mingling a close community, uh, Lithuanian not manage which Tatar and Tatar not Lithuanian woman. You know, this one point the second point, uh, this is a good, um, and good possibility to living like a Muslim

community here because in Lithuania you know, this Lithuania some time a like the Russian Empire here and in the Russian period not, uh, have a possible [to be] Muslim, [or be] like a Muslim man. Not a possibility.

Uh, take one Slav. You know this in the system, uh, Russia imperial system. But, uh, this is a privileged provision that a possibility to do. Who is living in Lithuania? Uh, Polish and the west Russian within, uh, west Russia. If this possibility and Tatar, uh, Tatar cannot have us live not just a Muslim but [neither] a Christian. For this possibility, this is not the difference Tatar Muslim and, uh, Lithuanian Christian or Polish Christian is not... No difference. Rights you know?

Uh, second point. We are, uh, living here and we are right. This is, uh, we have a little, uh, assimilation here. What is assimilation? The, uh, all the Tatar religion. Book, uh, starting. Right. Right. In the, uh. What this, uh. In Lithuania. Uh, uh, a first... this vice Russia English official. After is, uh, Polish and after this Lithuania and Tatar every time as, uh. Right. This religion Like a Uh, uh, like, um. Book and some another into this, uh, wise Russian language are Polish and English. And to this day we, uh, see and to this day, however, is the book here. And, uh, uh, for a second.

What I said before, we have a good relationship, which, uh, this is what this administration [unintelligible] of, if you will. Mm hmm. time when, uh, Lithuanian descent meeting, you know, Polish country. Uh uh, king come in the mosque, you know? Mm hmm. And this is good relationship. Uh uh. And, uh, if you speak about a job in the Tatar, what doing in here in Lithuania Tatar you like a, uh, working like a soldier. Then something doing if we had a war in Lithuania this, Tatar soldier go to the war. But this is not Meeks. No, not, uh, Lithuania and Tatar and Polish and West Russia, get together. There's a difference. Difference, uh, difference. This is a group Tatar difference Polish and different Lithuania. Yeah. And this is not, you know, from one opinion. This is not mix it, but from another point. This not. But not in it.

Never, never do it like this, Uh, [where the] relation was mixed in my religion. And you come into my community. This is a difference. And uh, why here today we would stay here. Good relationship. Because, uh, because I remember my father. Father, I say let one situation. No, uh, one in this on the village living, uh, here in Lithuania. And say one guys who's living near this? My father. If Tatar say this is true. And every time that they say is a must be with this doing. You know? And, uh, nobody not, uh, every Lithuania and Polish wasn't any by the belief [that]

Tatar, everyone would say, "oh, Tatar this is good people". This is a good opinion. And, uh, this is a, uh, good example to another Europe today. [Living side by side, but different]

Today, what we have today? You know, [we are] doing a mistake in Europe today. Why? Because we say, "we must do assimilation", you know, [we must] integrate, [these] people whose, um. Local people. But if you doing and integrate into account people, if you're doing this and this guy who's come here and doing like it seem like another guy, this is a mistake. We must, ah what? Before we have into here, he said that he must be protect this. So, uh, specifically. No, this people save this, but, uh, from one opinion's safe from another. Uh, little uh, from one step to the tolerance letter from these people. And we must look in from another group tolerance. But if you do not mix this guy, forget who is who, who am I, what is my religion, what must I do here, what should I do in this world, you know. And if this guy did not now after this.

Of course, uh, there's more not good things in the mind, you know. But if you're this guy now, if another guy understands this group is a different group. Not like woke up, not look like me, I'm not looking and Lithuanian people every time know this Tatar, they have a different, Uh, culture, different religion, you know, and say, okay, I agree. And Tatar Muslim community, you know, agree. I didn't hear something at that point. It must be. Uh uh. I like it. Local people you know? I must be low in this low system. I must this. I agree. I can speak the language [Lithuanian], you know? But I'm not Lithuanian you. Mm hmm. I am Tatar Muslim. And I have a, uh. What? My religion is Islam. What my, uh. I am Tatar to know this. If you if we protect this this good. And Lithuanian people understand, and Tatar people understand.

But today what we have a problem. Something that we try to integrate the of people but not protect this culture not protect this, uh, religion. Second point, you know this is um so much. This is not us not having so much, Mosque, uh Islamic Mosque in the European country. Not have a like a one, central system difference of group, difference of people come and open up. Why? Because we know not like a you're not see like from our government, from this country. But if you speak today, what we have a problem. This must be don't like it. Uh, systemic. Like a, uh, central. Uh. You know what? If you wanna open a Mosque, we must be looking into a community Muslim who is living who is agree. This, uh uh, like I see in Lithuania, you know, this, uh uh, when we go to the this and speak about, uh, legalization is really Islam, religion in, uh, Lithuanian government looking to the, uh, history and say, OK, we're not fighting. This is

good example. And every day, every time we have a good relationship. Okay. This, uh, legalization, this, uh, Islam religion here in Lithuania, you know.

And of course, in another country. This is not easy because. Not so. Not, uh, not have a history of like it this. What, uh. Must be take this example and looking into what we can do. Like a Lithuanian. This is, uh, six hundred year before Lithuania. You must we must do like this in another in the French and the, uh, England. And the difference. country. Right. There must be protect this. But I say this specific of this that people, uh, religion after this issue. OK, I agree. But not like this might maybe what I say. The link because this community is not like a one in ten people here. Ten people. Uh, another. But like a living. Like a community in Lithuania or community. If I live in one community in Village or in the city. Like an example, like a Vilnius. We have a mosque. We have a, uh, grave into this place. And, um, before Soviet Union. Yeah, uh, sure. Uh. And living like a communication. And then the mosque. It is the house they're living together.

But if you were putting this today, these 10 guys here, 10 guys here, 10 guys here, you know, uh, family here, here, here. After this assimilation and, uh, normal, you know, this is normal. Uh, what we see today in the, uh, today in the Europa and in the world, uh, this good. Uh, not. I agree. Like, uh. Okay. I agree. You like a Lithuanian or like a Polish or like a German people not agree it like a one hand percent because there's a difference in every time they hear a difference. Uh, not agree. And after this, this country like you from where? Come here. These people like, uh, just I have like, uh, Egypt or Tatarstan or another country. Not Agree... Look at these people because this is past German past Tatar. Yeah. And this guy in Lincoln see who I am and I am. Um, no. Well. If we protect this as this people and this tradition this history. OK. It is OK if you know about self, traditional self-traditions of history. OK, of course. After this, here's a look at another day and people, difference and, uh uh, uh, wood. Uh, this is, uh. Show this, uh, respected another guy at another country and other people.

THOMAS

So, um, just a formality thing. Uh, just to kind of let you know, I forgot it all the way in the beginning. Since I'm not a journalist, but a researcher or whatever. Something. Yeah. Everything. All the interviews I'm doing are completely anonymous. So, the only copy of our conversation will be on this stick and it has no access to the Internet. And I will write transcriptions. You know that word. Right. So, put it into text. I will never copy the information over onto a computer. And then when I transcribe all names, all ID will be left out. I mean, it's

not that it's a controversial subject, but it's just I have to tell you, the is so, you know, I'm but I'm also curious because there's a reason why I was saying this. I'm curious. Could you just tell me just very shortly a little bit about yourself? You're born and raised in Lithuania?

DOMANTAS

I'm born in Lithuania. I am born Mediterranean. My father and mother. What I see, my mother. Father is Tatar, you know. Of course. And, you know, this is the time I hear a time in the Soviet Union. Yeah, I read this.

THOMAS

When were you born?

DOMANTAS

Here?

THOMAS

Yeah, when?

DOMANTAS

What time?

THOMAS

Yes.

DOMANTAS

Well, I was, uh, seven eight one thousand eight hundred seven eight

THOMAS

Seven eight? Yeah. Okay.

DOMANTAS

Yeah of course. Three here at this time. And you know. And my father born here in Lithuania. And of course, my name is [deleted]. And this name. Give not. Not so. Like, uh. Okay. It is a good name, you know. It's not Tatar name and not Muslim name. Why give this name? Because, uh, this Soviet time who is have a name like, uh, is kind of like a Mustafar, or like, uh, Ibrahim. Uh, something Tatar name not have a more good chance to go to a good school. Or move to your stay in your city or get a Good. Uh, take in the good job. Because look at this one. This is

Ibrahim or Mustafar or something. Kind of after his ah is. Who is uh this one? There's a Russian name. OK. You can, you can use it.

THOMAS

So, would you say that during the Soviet period. That the Tatar community, especially from a religious point of view, kind of went a little bit into hiding?

DOMANTAS

Yeah. Yeah, of course. And you know, um, in Soviet Union, you know these true, Tatar and Russian. Not like I know some Tatar and trashy people not saying, but like a country that's our country. And then and Russia country every time we're fighting, you know. Yeah. And it's a history of fighting for fighting, you know. And of course, when I started this Soviet Union and in the head. We have a Russia. He, uh, we learned in the school and [?] that difference history. And there are, uh, Russia. Um, just a true good point. Tatar doing wrong and a mistake and not good people. Know. Yeah. And I remember I speak, which my father and mother and uncle and another two that, uh And I'm, uh, remember we every week, we fighting, you know, every week, every week we're fighting and not like children fighting, but this you are Tatar I am, uh, Russian. And you, not good. You're not good people. You're not good nation. Good nation, like it is. And I remember. And of course, you know...

THOMAS

Was it you who said that "I am Russian"? or was it your parents?

DOMANTAS

My. Where? What? When you learn in school. Yeah. Yeah. And then no school. I see. One guy come: "Ah you are Tatar". You have to tell you you're not good. Yeah. Okay.

THOMAS

Ah I see. It was someone else who was bullying you?

DOMANTAS

You know, I just what I can do is this deficiency. Okay. Go out and, uh. Yeah. This is. This is normal situation. Yeah. You know, this in Soviet Union. Because this Russia history, you know, Russia history. When Russia go to civilians and go to "cough gas", go to attack another country they would say "this is an expedition". They would not say: "We are going to the fighting and

killing people." Not say. They would say expedition, but when Tatar was expedition This is not good. And this is wrong. And Tatar is just "killing, killing, killing".

Uh, so what we have is problem, because, um, this is the, uh, Tatar here. And uh, this Tatar history must be changing and difference, uh, doing defence. This is the point in writing this diffidence, you know, in the Soviet Union, this negative to all the Tatar community into hearing, keep this in the Lithuanian, we have Soviet Union.

DISTURBANCE

[A telephone ringing shortly disturbs the interview]

DOMANTAS

And the Soviet Union, you know. And you know, in the religion. So, I remember. This is who is a teacher, like a religion, sent to, Uh, [prison?] or killed you know, this we have this time and it is not possible. Not have a possibility. And you know, this Mosque in the, uh. Vilnius destroyed and another mosque destroyed in Lithuania.

THOMAS

Yeah. I seem to remember that. I read in a book I recently bought about history in Vilnius that after when the Soviets took over, they had a tendency to destroy Tatar graveyards.

DOMANTAS

Yeah. And the graveyard Yes. Yes. Is this, uh. this is history. This is true. You know, and this is, of course, this time not just to the Muslim community Tatar Muslim girl like. I say it from religion, opinion, you know religion. Uh, say that just a not just from the Muslim and in the Christian. Not a good time in the Jewish. And, uh, you know, in the northeast and Muslim, not a good time. But of course, this is a small community we have in Lithuania small Tatar Muslim community and of course, uh uh, then, uh, killing 100 people from the Muslim community of must be, uh, go outside another country. This view. In this day here, not those people who is not known so much knew about Islam. You know, who is not so much in know about history, about culture, you know? this at this time and more people in their school than this. You're not. You're not. You must not believe in the God. I... no God, not existed. This is this room.

DISTURBANCE

[The telephone disturbs the interview again]

DOMANTAS

You know, in the, uh, this time and, uh, this is, of course, in the book and school and in Moscow. What I say is, Lithuania, uh, Lithuanian country before give possibility building this Mosque. Mosque. What is this mosque? Well, this is mean to the, um, the Tatar Muslim community. What is this? This is like a, not just a house where we are doing pray? The, uh, we can go to the mosque. We don't pray, we are looking to speak to another Tatar most to another Tatar Muslim guys or woman and where we have a relationship. And another Muslim brother, you know. And we take this. Uh, education from, uh, in the Mosque. And we take this, uh, religion education. And to give this, um, take this education about Tatar history, about everything this. But when this closing. And then, uh, uh, not give a possibility. You know, if we something doing, Uh, this education and the, uh. Uh, private much into the house. Police come and say this not go good, and looking and destroying this, uh, book destroyed this house. Or send this guy to the prison. Uh. And something. What is. This is not good. And of course, uh, when Tatar not learned much about self-history, self-religion, self-history and religion, culture. Of course, it this is little more, more, more. Not good for it. And to forget this.

And, uh, started living not like a real Islam Muslim community. Because someone for something we looking something. And that is pushing from I'm Soviet Union and looking to squeeze not forget who is not known. Not take this information about with Islam. You know, forget this. Uh, more Islamic or normal to be must doing us, pray, you know, because we have here this book there, read and write this, uh, what we must do. But something just that this is not like a detail. All right. Something like, are you okay? This deep note [?] what I am to you. To me like I am. I will do it like it is this. This is this. Okay. But the not so complete completely. This is not what we must doing because one time we, you know this comical station, but this true one point one time I go to the one family and then something doing in the mosque?

Uh, pray and all old imams. See uh, this is spray into this. Uh. Look at this. Or, uh, this CV must be you must rethink the and a voice. But I say not this. Not normal, not high voice. Therefore, I mean this. So what? What we have this? I see. No, no, no, no. This you mistake. No, no. you mistake after the safe. Fine. Think what why you say it like this is in this book was before we have it in the Tatar family. We have this book and this move. All right. What? Matt, how do you must look so pray? Right. You must read the fight for another list. This, this, but not read in the sale. So, no, I did not read the difference, you know. And this guy read this looking into this book and doing like it. This is something. Uh, you know, this is what we have said, the mistake. You know, but this is of course, this not so. Or this big mistake. But of course.

And language Tatar people. Forget this language before. I sometimes some guys say, uh, before, uh, uh, four hundred years before we forget. What are you looking for in the book of what is? Who's right? This is, uh, two hundred year ago. Mm hmm. I look at another guy looking and I. My opinion is that Tatar, forget this language, About one hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago, this that because we had a book, where Tatar people who write this religion book, in the Tatar language and the Polish language, or West-Russian, English or and Arabic language. You know this. We have this book, right. And today, just who is this? Is this book like not just, uh, you know, this religion looks like a doing marriage and precision like a and if who is then one die something people, when another knew about worth [?] of what I want What is this is etiquette? Everything is right. This walking on. This is a little from religion opinion from another opinion. This. Right. And you know, more, more, more on this point we have in today.

A second point to Tatar community, Muslim Tatar community. Come here. We came before six or seven hundred year ago, you know. And, uh, seven hundred a year ago does Tatar community, who is living in the Crimean or another Asia or now is Russian Federation place. Not. I agree. And not like a lot. Take 100 percent. This something in the Islamic world. Uh, Islam. Yeah. Uh, science. Stay at this point. Who's a stay from before religion? Before this, uh, culture, you know. And some time by the looking in the today in the, uh, Tatar religion. Like a look like a what doing this. This is not like a mistake. You know, this is, uh. But this is what I'm saying. Seven hundred years before. What is. I agree. What is to come to Lithuania and not, um. Have a great song so much. Because not so. They did not have so much of great possibility today, of course. Of course, we do. Today we have this a great possibility. You know, in Lithuania. Because we have Internet now [laugh], we can do/find everything or we can, uh, go to the [unintelligible] or Turkey or Arab country and learn this and looking can do a more, uh, Turkish, uh, people or Arab people. And another people come here and we today we, Of course, we have a more possibility. But, you know, this is, uh. situation about the Tatar Muslim community here.

Can we pause? I must pray... 10 minutes.

THOMAS

That's okay! Feel free. I'll pause this...

ACTIONS

[The recording stops abruptly]

Interview 5

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Middle-aged Lithuanian Tatar Muslim that frequents "Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre"

THOMAS

Yeah. Round two.

DOMANTAS

[chuckles] So, this is what they say. This isn't familiar. Who is? What is this mistake? This note is in the book you...

DISTURBANCE

[From 0:13 to 0:55 DOMANTAS is distracted with other tasks and there is much random background noise - a third person enters the room]

ALI

How are you today?

THOMAS

I'm fine, thank you. How did it go yesterday?

ALI

Fine. Everything goes good.

THOMAS

Excellent.

DISTURBANCE

[A large pause as the interviewee gets ready]

DOMANTAS

This, you know, this is regular old Quran, this about two hundred year, two hundred year, Yeah? Like this Quran. You know, there's some... handwriting, yeah? This is you know; this one is not hand [written]. This is first of... first of all, this printing in the Tatarstan, first in the Khazan, um. But something. Uh, this page destroyed uh. write hand you know. And we have another, uh, like, uh, handwrite this book where. [unintelligible] Write about what. Uh uh. Spray about

this. And some of these not good, is this change. And, uh, this is in the there's like in the Lithuanian Tatar. And, uh, you know, this one book.

DISTURBANCE

[From 2:16 to 2:49 DOMANTAS looks around the room for more examples]

DOMANTAS

If you want make this copy the photo take, I can come tomorrow and shorten this another move. You know, and this is like. Uh, this. Yes, you can. This is this print. This.

THOMAS

Thank you.

DISTURBANCE

[From 3:16 to 3:31 DOMANTAS and ALI talk softly in another language]

DOMANTAS

I show another book. Do you know what is? And something. Okay. This is who Quran and another book have a like a family really can like. And this is from father to son. Go in because this is by this from coming from Tatarstan I speak which who is a danger Tatarstan the history and say it is so hard to express. This is Quran. This because first printing. And for how does this look like it is. And you know, this is. But Tatar buy this Quran and then give from father to mother to the written Quran and to. Right. What is this to the, What? Translating Quran. And why is Russia or a Polish in English this. What is writing and can-do Quran. And first of all, who is a translator? I see one case, the one guys, they say, who is trying to translate a Quran in the West-Russia language, Polish language this is Tatar, you know, it is true.

But this, why I don't like this because this language, this is what they say. Well, how I said before is official language in this country, this place. No, not if we have not an official language like Lithuanian language at this time. Dear six hundred year ago, we have a language official Lithuanian this write in Lithuanian. Not like this, but this you know, this is, uh. Well, this is a mixed country, Lithuania, Polish and West/Vice-Russia [Belarus?]. This place and today, Tatar are living in the Vice-Russia, Poland, Polish, Poland and Lithuanian, but this same because of my family living the like the West-Russia, Polish and Lithuanian and me, a living this together as this one family.

But why? What they say this is some point. Who is, uh, we see today in the like of religion you know this process? Procedural religion, procedural point. This come from seven hundred year ago from before the come and these seven points we/I can see. And you know what is like for putting water in the grave, you know? Yeah. This is from before. Before. You know why? Because we're not here. A possibility - A great possibility.

DISTURBANCE

[From 6:43 to 6:50 we are disturbed by a ringing doorbell]

DOMANTAS

To not hear or see today, because, of course, in the Russian language, Lithuanian, English and difference of Quran and Vice-Russia and the different and we possibility this religion. But of course, this is a problem today. What we hear today from a problem today, because we're not like them. You know, this is a problem like in the relationship, uh, Lithuanian community and, uh, Tatar Muslim community. We have a problem. What is the problem? This is not come from inside. We have a program. Who's come from outside, you know, outside. What is this in the TV and news? In the TV and radio? Uh, because, uh uh, so much speak about, uh, Islamic. I say to this Islamic country. But, uh, this is a terrorist country. And what, uh, this is terrorist doing to say, are these Muslims doing like this? Of course. And, uh, I feel this negative. You know, uh, in the here because if something say Muslims don't like this. I'm so Muslim. I'm so Muslim. And, of course, Lithuanian Citizen, you know, Lithuanian people say Muslim every Muslim like this.

And of course, this, uh Today what I say before a pushing Russian... this "a Tatar not good because fighting which Russia people kill, convert people"... This is pushing. And today we see like a push, ah "not Lithuanian, but, uh, outside from Lithuania...another country", or something show this Uh. Show and doing problem like a Muslim, not good, not good, not good. You know, and the more people who is starting to believe mostly more that Muslim "we are not good people". I know from one opinion, you know?

THOMAS

Would you say this has been like a gradual change? Or was it like or has there been like certain events that just makes it like change overnight?

DOMANTAS

No, not, uh, not like one day into the region. No, no, no. This, uh, this is you know, this is Islamophobia. No, this is this state. Not the one. I've got this before Uh, slowly, slowly starting. But, uh, more people. More, a year ago.

DISTURBANCE

[From 9:44 to 9:55 DOMANTAS talks with someone else in another language]

DOMANTAS

Through more a year ago and this is a negative. Uh, and feel that today. Because. Because this is what we have a good relationship with Lithuanian community here. And another people, another community here in Lithuania this. Guess what? Uh, we serve friend before. And now he's [non-Lithuanian Muslims] looking, for difference. No, not everybody. You know, this is of course, this is not every who is, uh. I mean, this is like, uh, "not Islamic. I'm not Muslim. It was me and 10 other people who is real Muslim". But this is, uh, if you go to the school, if you go to another in the job and this um, this not simply it's an empty this and "departing the [right path?] to the Islam". We feel this today, you know, here in Lithuania. But this is a problem, not the problem is, what I see, it's not coming from Lithuanian country. You know, this, uh, come from outside in the Lithuanian and Lithuanian people, uh, Lithuanian people, ehm, today Lithuanian people say, oh, "looking like this, if you speak about Muslim Tatar community, this is good". But, uh, if you speak [about] not Muslim Tatar community, "this not good".

THOMAS

Okay, so they do differentiate between the Tatars are nice but non-Tatar Muslims...

DOMANTAS

Yeah. You know, this is Lithuanians... We have a situation like this. If we speak about Muslim community, of course I not say, "Muslim communities just are Tatar". You can, uh. Can you see the Muslim? Another guy. Woman Everybody can be Muslim, but I'm not. Because in Lithuania, it is like this "Tatar who's gone seven-six hundred year, before he's protect these our/my family, this country. Ah, this is good? And good. Okay. We can and must be helping We guy must be in the good relationship. It's, uh, this community. But from another Muslim community this is different now. This is we doing a mistake. You know.

And of course, this is uh some guy. Of course, some this mistake. Uh, look, mistake not just the one I say from this Christian people or local people or another. No, uh, some. Sometimes [people will] come in Lithuania today, uh, [claiming we] not have a good [knowledge] about

Islam real, you know, and, uh, not so good. These guys, what they what they want. See, this is not about self.... I did not know about obligation, not know about rights. Yes? You hear this guy come here and say, I may write this, this, this this is this. Uh, but, uh, if this is a guy what I say before, this guy's not so.

EXPLANATION

[the speaker explains how outside influence are dictating what the speaker may or may not write and say in the name of Islam]

DOMANTAS

No, not no good about Islam. And Islam. Not just my rights, but what first about what my obligation. Islamic religion is forceful, what my obligation... after this what my right. Like it is in some way right to this. But you know. But today something gets from Muslim. Come here and say, are this my rights? But. Okay. These are your rights. But where are your Obligation. Where are you experienced? This forget.

But some guys not some guys not want won't remember about this. Right. You know, no obligation. This, sir. I not see it just at this point. This point is not good. But I agree this into from another point something some guy doing mistake. And I, what we do is speak to today. And then in the, uh, yesterday. Today we speak about something opinion. This obligation from I remember every time from if you... we go to the event, we driving. This is from left. Yeah. If you come to the Lithuania the rights, this normal. Well logical. Yeah, of course. And if you Muslim or something Muslim guy come here. Yeah. There must be. I agree. The second of course if you... This is not in conflict with Quran and the Sunnah. We agree.

Because in the Quran and in the Sunnah. Right. You must look into the local law system. Yeah. This normal to say we have had this problem kind of slow in a society like this. But this point, sometimes guys forget. And this is you know, this is conflict. We have a conflict, a little conflict. And this is conflict from one side. Some group people who is not want living together like friends. And from another group, we have the, uh, something group, people with not wanting to living together. Today we have a situation of course, every time. say, this is the. Every time. Like a religion in the religion. Like in we have every time not agree. I'm like, uh. I'm like a Muslim. Not agree with Christian. one hundred percent.

THOMAS

Yeah, of course.

DOMANTAS

And you like a Christian, not agree one hundred percent with a Muslim. Because if I agree with you, I'm a Christian. If you agree, you could come to the Islam. But if we speak about Christian and Islam, religion every time we have a not. We never agree one hundred percent. But this is like religion. must be forget just this religion. But religion, what is this? A religion of what you have in your heart. What I have in my heart? What is omit in the heart? This religion. Not fighting. Not [laugh] Fighting. And you say this is not good people. This group not good. This not good, of course.

What is it for Muslim Islamic first of all? This is first of all we must learn doing self-obligation. After this we must be looking. Right, right? But this there's something you guys could change the situation yeah? This is not good. So not good. And from Lithuanian and local people, when another, not just religion from these European people. Who is leaving the local people? So, uh, final look and say, uh, this is not on. Go, go in the seat in jihad. Okay. This. But you must agree. This is. Hmm. Tatar Muslim and you must agree. Because the difference? Okay difference. okay. And to you, difference and just the difference, you know. But, uh, this is not. Well, I can point to the fighting. Never. And all Tatar before what I say before Tatar forcible doing obligation because. Now you have a good view about Islam and first of all, what doing. Doing certain obligation. Religious. So, it is self-family.

We did we reach this country. Get. Hmm. To the look like this because fighting. Because they reject us. Protect this country, you know, die to protect this country, not to the money. This is the origin to the. If you die, you know. Was built to protect this. Well, you know, in the Russian imperial time, every time Tatar, people helped them to take this in. Uh, independence in Lithuania. Yeah. And after this, when the Lithuanian say about, we are free every time a helping Tatar. And every time if someone's fighting, you know, every time protects people what they say, what they say before when say Nemezis village, this, uh, want build this church helped to settle the dispute. You know, this obligation. This is. What?

But I say this. First of all, you must doing obligation. After this, we can look and just pray. But today, what do we forget this? Why? Because you're not have a... You know, there's some guys, but they say not agree. Like all of try to integrate these people, this guy these people into this local community. But not we're not. Must be like disintegrate. We can't okay this like we must integrate like a language. But we must be, uh, protect this community, protect this, uh, culture,

protect this religion and, uh, this people. And we must say, uh, remember to do first of all, this is a system of obligation.

And if you remember. Yeah. I believe we do not have a problem today. And if, In the school not pushing like this, of course then of course not pushing "your difference. Your difference", we must be showed this guy, and this is not just a closed community today. We have a globalization today. And this is if you go to wherever where you go, you can see Muslim, Christian, Jewish. Another. And different nationality. And, we must be, teacher these children to, uh, another guys to the everybody. This is this whole globalization. This is not like a, uh, Lithuanian country [for] Lithuanian people. Or Tatarstan is not just a place for Tatar people. You know, we must looking at this. Okay. This is we are living to they must living together. But we must not forget self-history, self-religion. If you're not forget, you know about your obligation. First of all, you're doing first of all your obligation. I am asking for what is my obligation after this? Uh, we speak about rights.

THOMAS

A couple of... I mean, I think you've covered most of the things that I'm really interested in... But a couple of side things that I've touched upon and that you've talked about: in Lithuania, are there a lot of Lithuanians that you know of that will convert to Islam?

DOMANTAS

Yes. Yes.

THOMAS

Is there many of them or are there a few?

DOMANTAS

No, not so many. But we have a who is a people who is uh. I'm not saying, you know, this is convert just maybe in another. But I say this. Who's come back to. There's some that my, uh, religion. But of course, this is [unintelligible]. We have a convert, but I know this guy who's come to Islam, come back to Islam and believe in Allah and doing salat... good Muslim

And when in that case, at least, Will... has he, um. Does he look to the way that Tatars practice Islam or does he conform to more...?

No, this is difference you know? this this is different, people and different. However, he's the one guy is just. This is more people who is not like I'm looking to Tatar or Turkish or Arab people just, you know, just a start to find...

THOMAS

His own way?

DOMANTAS

It's just something... not having satisfaction. And, this, what here in this new and, what he did this doing before? Uh, this, uh, before religion, you know. Uh, what? His eyes was, uh, like example. One guy say, I started like a Christian. So, after this, I go to the Buddhism. But I'm not having satisfaction, you know. And I start learning about another religion and this, uh, stay in the like a stay. And then in Islam, one guy, uh, say to me, come to me and say, uh, I ask, like, why you learn about Islam. What? You speak about Islam. What do you mean? Uh. Why? Well, uh, come to Islam... why/how he's I say I hear about Islam more and more and you get negative information. And I start, uh, learning about Islam. Is this true or not true? And then he's, uh uh. Learn I write this. Yeah, I'm looking to the Internet. Looking at another book speak after this because another Muslim, uh, guy. Okay, I say. Okay, I see this. Islam this is a true religion. And I come to the Islam.

Of course, we have a situation where when men marriage, which are not Muslim woman. Yeah and after this, a Muslim or not Muslim woman can come to the Islam and, uh. Uh, being, uh. And to live in a Muslim. But and the man is like a starting, and this is not what I can say to you. This is, uh, he has a and it's not something that I know. This is who is, uh, 60 year, but I know who is a 20 year or so and so learns about Islam, this difference. But I what I said, you know, this is this is, uh, we must be understand this is.

I never I never pushing you or something guy. "Uh, come to me. Come to Islam". No, I just did my mission just living like a Muslim. What I believe. I live like it is on a show and my life this is an example. And not fight and not pushing. No, never. You know, and something if you want something if want to learn about Islam. Okay, we have a centre. we have a... where I am here, another guy here, we can say about Islam, but never we push it. Never.

And from another point we say, uh, when uh, something guy you know, to the, I speak with Christian people I say please believe to if you say Christian if you believe please believe this in the self... heart you know? And if you believe in the heart please go to church. Please go to the.

But you must believe! You know? I say look at this. If this guy go to the church and believe or all the heart? To me enough. If believe heart, you know? Why every time. say if you. Okay. If you believe you. If you are okay, you can you go. But you must be believing in the heart. This is my opinion.

Of course. This is what they say. This is a difference. Every time we have ... in the future, we have a problem because, uh, Christian not uh. If I say I am Christian, not agree 100 percent Muslim. Because if I agree 100 Islam, he's a Muslim. If Muslim, I give 100-percent Christian. He's a Christian. You know, but what I say, we must not fight. We must together because in the Quran, in the sunnah what I say before all, it's before a year. This is the Tatar community. Not fighting, not pushing, not give problem is this. You know, just the living like a living Muslim life and forcible doing self-obligation after this speak about rights.

THOMAS

One final thing, which is more contemporary, I suppose, what is your take on the refugee situation in Lithuania? I mean, do you have any contact with some of the Syrian refugees coming to Lithuania?

DOMANTAS

Uh, we have a contact with these refugees that are living in Lithuania. You know, this is a big problem. What I say is a guy come to the Lithuania, and of course, after this negative information, this TV... nobody not want rent house to refugees. If, I see [unintelligible] this high price, high price. They [usually] say... Lithuanian guy say: "I give to you [house] in, but one-month deposit you must pay/give me." But if come refugee, they say "ah you must be giving to me five months, three months, five months, six months [deposit]." Uh, that was it. You know it is. Problem, of course, this is what they say. This, uh, these people do not understand we are living this time, this globalization thing. And this is not just in Lithuanian, not just the Lithuanian people. What is this Lithuania? This is a... multi-culture, multi-religion, not just a monoculture and mono-religion. This is difference, you know? This Lithuania not have a... never not having more mono.

DISTURBANCE

[From 31:22 to 31:30 - Someone enters the room and asks DOMANTAS a question in Lithuanian, which he answers]

DOMANTAS

Lithuania has never living like a monoculture, mono-religion. If we speak about a country like our government, you know, and you must understand is multi-culture, multi-religion, starting with which this country because the Tatar Muslim came from Vice-Russia, from Russia, from Polish, come here together and, uh, protect and doing this country, you know,

And, about refugee, of course, this refugee problem. This is, uh, more people who is, uh, not understand the situation in Lithuania. This is... in Lithuania we do not have a big budget to the given more money to these people to the day. You know? First about this program and something, guys who's come here stay here like a five, three months, four months to learn this language. [Then] they go to a professional school. This course of... finish. After this, when you go to the real life because say you must be, we not give you this house, where are you? If you are to live and you must be rent house. Find and you must be paid to your money. But this money, not enough. You know, this is, rent press high. And these guys who's coming here in this think, "I come into the European Union and this is all this beautiful life.

And, this is not secret. You know, a second guys come to the Europe like an economical refugee, not like a war refugee. But, like economical. You know, and more people who is looking for in this situation say: "I come back to the Turkey or another country", you know? And sometimes guys say, "I take this document and I go to German or French, another". But, you know, this difference and different this refugee political and political view must change. And start from the beginning, from zero, because we starting to say to these refugees, what believe in this Lithuanian country. What are you believe and what... Waiting... sorry, what waiting in Lithuania? How can you can take this money, how this situation? Because, of course, this guy says "I not have a not can have an economical like a foundation. Good station". Of course. But in the Lithuanian general situation, you know, this is not so good situation, you know. And, uh, he is I say this guy say: "ah, this is not so much you can you give to these guys and this is helping money." But this is to Lithuania, this... if you're looking this is normal money. But this is of course, this not enough to rent, uh, a house, apartment... But of course, this situation defence.

THOMAS

Okay. Thank you very much.

ACTIONS

[Recording stops abruptly]

Interview 6

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Young Lithuanian Tatar Muslim who frequents “Vilnius Mosque and Islamic Centre”

THOMAS

So now we've started. OK. So, my name is Thomas Croucher. I am a student at the University of Bergen, where I study religious studies. It's [where] you can basically study whatever kind of religion you want. But I decided that I wanted to learn more about Islam, which is why that I'm going to write a thesis based on my research here in Lithuania. Because I wanted to learn about the Muslim community in Lithuania. Before we begin. Yes, you are. It's completely anonymous. That's why I'm using this [recording device] instead of like my iPhone, because that's on the Internet, of course. So, everything I record will never leave this. And I will be trying...

ALEKSANDRAS

Just for information for you to make it all work?

THOMAS

Indeed. So, I will transcribe it into written form. But then, of course, I won't include any names, any description. You'll just be young Tatar A for example.

ALEKSANDRAS

Okay.

THOMAS

Now... my... the reason why I wanted to work with Lithuania is because in Norway... the Muslim community in Lithuania, there's been very little research done on it. And the thing that kind of fascinates me when I started reading about it and learning about it is the fact that despite being a Christian Catholic country, Lithuania, for a long, long time, Lithuania has had a Muslim community here almost as long as they've also been Catholic. And I find it quite fascinating that when I read history books, which I have concerning Lithuania and Tatars, I get the impression that the Tatar community has always been very much respected and liked and been a very central part of Lithuania in a positive, constructive way. And when I read about Lithuanians describing the Tatar community up until like recently, I haven't found so much about more recent stuff. But the impression I get is that it's a positive experience. You know that the Tatar community is definitely a part of Lithuanian society and a good and positive way.

So, I'm going to write some about that. But I'm also curious to know if at all there has been any changes since Lithuania became independent in 91, 92.

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah. Okay.

THOMAS

And in with that in mind, I was hoping that we could just shortly begin by you describing your background, who you are.

ALEKSANDRAS

About myself? Okay. So, my name is [deleted]. Uh, I am 22 years old. I'm, uh, born in Lithuania. Uh, also am Tatar as you know. So, introduce about myself. I'm studying law in Vilnius University the law studies. Yeah.

THOMAS

I'm a lawyer myself, so good for you.

ALEKSANDRAS

Nice. [laughs] you too. So, talking about the Tatars in Lithuania. And as you mention about, uh, in historical way. So, the date when Tatars come to Lithuania... I am not talking about a day, but about centuries, about the 15th, 15th century when it were when Lithuania, uh, was fighting with the... Cross Order?

THOMAS

The Teutonic Order.

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah. With them. Uh, Lithuanians was, how you say... They want to grow the power comes off for battle. And there was calling a lot of, how you say, a lot of warriors to create that power. So, with, uh, they were cooperated with the Poland Army. And also, uh, in the [Grunwald?] battle, there was a lot of form, uh, Taters, uh, our Taters was perfect knights. You know... horse riders? That's why they was, uh, called for [something] battle. And after when Lithuania and Poland won this battle, for Taters it was helped save the they get some of the lands in the, uh, in Lithuania, it was lands in the Vilnius region. That is called Nemezis. Now also where I'm living.

Nemezis is from the how to say it's translated from Poland, [gives Polish name] and means that... [not comfortable land?], but a lot of land. That was gifted for Tatars because they joined the war and helped to win it. And it's about history, historical facts and talking about, if I Tatars, was respected in Lithuania. How I know how my historical view about it. Yes, they were respected and as fact we can mention that, uh, all the Tatars that was here in Lithuania, what have the title of them? It's not the monarchs, not monarchs. But they were slightly lower... aristocrats. Lithuania it's "bajori". So, they have the titles, the titles and so on. And to all Tatars was the aristocrats, Lithuania on that time.

ALEKSANDRAS

And now, even if you can... if you have the evidence that you are true Tatar, you also can get the documents that you are aristocrat because you are a Tatar. That that's why. Because we wanted a title. Yeah. In that way that the old Tatars was, uh uh. All Tatars was, uh, aristocratic. Uh, as you know, in every country. The Aristocrats is like that people that, uh, was so, uh. What's more closer to the culture. Yeah. It's to know about. The aristocrats come to the aristocrat's families was having the best um and best education and so on. So, on that time, uh, when Vytautas us, the Vytautas us was, um, not the king, but the ruler of the, uh, Lithuania. On that time, the main language of the, uh, country was the say Belarussian and Poland language. It was mixed. But, uh, the old the Russian language at it was the language of the aristocrats. And "bajori" was talking on that language and the others, the other people like, how you say... other/regular/common people was talking Lithuanian, Lithuanian language. Now Lithuanian in Lithuanian country is the formal language, official language, national language.

That's why that's why now; most part of the Tatars. Uh, that would be, uh, still living in Lithuania are talking in the Russian language Belarussian language and so on. You know, in the in the Poland more uh, more than in Lithuanian. Because from the, it happens that for the for the aristocratical... eh... aristocratical bonds from the, uh, family to family was, how you say, broken and that's why, uh. If I need to describe about Tatars in Lithuania, I can say that the Lithuanian language is not very not say how proper but a small count of people are talking Lithuanian from the oldest one. I want to say that the ones who was brought in the Soviet Union. That people are more talking in Russian language, but talking about now about the youth. Between the Tatars. A lot of people are a lot of people are also like my age and to younger, maybe more elder, but they are too studying Lithuania, in Lithuanian schools and so on. Also, they can mention about the um, I have to say about the nationality of Tatars sent to one of the

qualities about them that that they know all Tatars are studying very good. I'm talking about the results and so on. I don't know well why, but I know the fact. That's why I, uh, all my friends, the people that they know that belongs to Tatar nation and is quite good at it. Also, they are good at sport and so on.

It's like about, uh, in the political way how to say I'm talking about Tatars now I can say that the, uh, Tatars like nation is very close to the Islam. If we're talking about Tatars, I cannot say that "these two Tatars. are not Muslims."

That's why. Talking about Islam, Lithuania at all. It's our growing from the if you're talking about the period from Soviet Union, when Lithuania have the independent, uh, from that time come to from that time the Islam in Lithuania is still growing. It's becoming more popular, how you say, but at the same time there are a lot of people that come from the other countries. Uh, for all the, how to say, for all reasons. But they're still living here... nothing helps in living here... not for a very long term. But still we can say that they're are quite big number of the Muslims but the majority of them [Muslims] is still Tatars. And if talking about the, authority, the Tatars have the biggest authority and like in the Lithuanian government eyes. Because we have a very rich history in here. Lithuanian Tatars. Uh, our history is about 600 years. You know. if you're counting from the 15th century. So that's my opinion about it.

THOMAS

Yeah. I mean, I seem to recall that not too long ago. Even the Lithuanian parliament actually organized, I think it was earlier this month, the Lithuanian parliament organized a conference about Tatars, and it was more specifically about Tatars in Crimea. But it was very it again, I didn't I couldn't attend. But it was it seemed quite obvious to me, based on the description of the conference, that because of Lithuania's history with Tatars, it seemed like the politicians here wanted to make a conference in solidarity with other Tatars belonging to other regions.

ALEKSANDRAS

You know, it's a very political thing it's no more for the you know, to have to like I see the situation. I know about what you're talking about. And I see it's not like, you know, the Tatars. One Tatars, Lithuanian tatars want to communicate with the Crimea Tatars. We have a lot of, how you say, a lot of way have to communicate. One of them is that our I can see the festivals... you know "Sabantuy"?

THOMAS

Yes, I think so.

ALEKSANDRAS

And you know what? What is it? It is a festival. The celebration, when, just the above from Tatars and other nations like who are who belongs to the Muslims and so on. Um, it's really the celebration to be to communicate with the Muslim, so on. I have some, some fun, and so on. But, uh, now in Lithuania in this year, there will also be Sabantuy be you know, in the 1st of July. It's in this Saturday.

THOMAS

This Saturday. Okay. All right.

ALEKSANDRAS

I think it would be good information for you. Maybe if you still will be in Lithuania.

THOMAS

Yeah, it would be very good. But it's just that I haven't completely gone home. But where is it?

ALEKSANDRAS

I don't know. They're really there.

THOMAS

It's not in Minsk, right?

ALEKSANDRAS

No, no, no.

THOMAS

That's the thing. Because I am... this weekend, I'm going to Minsk. So that's a shame. But yeah. Tell me more about the festival.

ALEKSANDRAS

Talking about the festival. It's, how you say, it is the way you have to like a national... Like a national celebration like in Norway that you were talking about? You know, so national and national songs and so on. So, it's the same thing. But all countries that are Muslims like Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and so on. Have the, uh, have the celebrations. It's called Sabantuy. But all of them have their own traditions. Talking about the Tatars, their tradition for making, you

know, food from the rice, meat and so on. Uh, to have some traditional games like and so on. Uh, like wrestling. There are some ... wrestling. Uh, I don't remember how it's called now, but still and so on. There are a concert are coming a lot of guests from the other countries for singing, and so on. But the way that all Tatars can communicate, because there are Tatars that are going from Russia, you know, from the city Kazan there are a lot of Tatars. They have a big Tatar community.

And also, it is, how to say, it's got that about historical way where Lithuanian Tatars come from there are a lot of discussions. One of them is saying that Lithuanian Tatars belong for... Kazan Tatars come from Russian in the region of the Altai and to the Ural Mountains. There was say it was created that community, that grown where it was a [beacon son?]. Other way, others say that the Lithuanian Tatar belong from the Crimea Tatars that came for Lithuania, and it's also quite interesting thing.

But in my opinion, we are more that we are belong for Crimea Tatars, for the culture, for the if we will compare them. How was speaking Lithuanian Tatars? The speech, the writing and so on. We will see that it's more similar to Crimean Tatars. And for the culture and so on. Um, that's why you're talking about the conference that you mentioned. Um, I think, yeah, it's could be the way you have to have to see how we Lithuanian Tatars could meet and support the Crimean Tatars. But also, I think that it was more dedicated for the, uh, situation in Crimea and the situation in how Crimean Tatars is, what their opinion of Crimean Tatars about Crimea occupation still.

THOMAS

OK.

ALEKSANDRAS

So maybe the support and so, you know.

THOMAS

Interesting.

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah. How I understand it.

THOMAS

Yeah. Yeah. Fair enough. Do you think you could tell me more about faith in the Tatar community? Partly historically, but more maybe now, because when I was here sometimes last week when I first, uh, got in contact with some of the, um, because the Turkish embassy has a couple of Imams here.

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah. Yeah.

THOMAS

And I was talking to some of them and I kind of I got the impression from them that there is a certain ehm, no there is a very definite kind like difference when it comes to Islamic practice between non-Tatar Muslims in Lithuania and the Tatar Muslims in Lithuania. I mean, what's your view on that?

ALEKSANDRAS

Non-Tatars and Tatars?

THOMAS

Yeah. I mean, how does that the Muslim, the Tatar, community, how is the Muslim, Muslim or Islamic faith for them relative to how, for example, the Turkish Muslims and the Pakistani Muslims and the Syrian Muslims?

ALEKSANDRAS

You're talking about the faith aspects?

THOMAS

Yeah.

ALEKSANDRAS

I don't see the faith and the...

THOMAS

Well, maybe more practice and traditions.

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah okay, but stuff from the basics. Yeah. Uh, you know that Islam is what is the basic of Islam. It is the believing in the God love believing in the Prophet Muhammad, alayhi as-salam.

And it is the basics. There are two or four things that that are dedicated for it. But you know, the believing in the angels in the same books. [Belief] in the sea [thinking] the last day, how would say you...

[a long pause where he considers translations, until he looks it up] Now find this transcription [more consideration until] ... Final judgment will the judgment at the end of the world. And so on, and the, uh, your destiny. That, uh, that is the six basics about talking about the faith.

Uh, and are our always the same. That I'll see to that. Uh uh. I have to say Quran is the like the law by you by which everyone could. No. Could understand what is good, what is bad, what is forbidden, what is to say they obey what they need to obey and so on. Uh, but talking about the traditions in faith. So, um, like us example. Um, my grand my great grandfather was Imam in the Nemezis, in the Nemezis Mosque.

There was, uh, like, um, like special too. No. No. There was no special traditions. But one of them that they were swinging from the small books Where they can, uh. That's small books was considered from the prayers. You know, that that people was writing by hit by them by the hand. How to say they was communicated with the other peoples. Oh. With our writers from the other countries and so on. Would they care fun find? And there was writing the, uh uh, prayers for all the situation in the life. No. If you have studying you was reading some special prayer that it would be a good result and so on. If you're going to war, you are reading some special a prayer that will help in the war. If someone dies and so on. That is the how you might say maybe tradition. It is called the "haramjo". And it's also quite interesting because now there are people that are collecting them because it's really very old books all written by the hand, because in that time you can, uh, cannot find them other way. And so on.

The next tradition, maybe that I know that, uh, in our Mosque, I know. How about others it was tradition to, how you say, to say the prayers. Loud, not loud. But you say not for yourself, but collectively. How many members sing order the prayers? And we was kept that tradition for till now. Uh, we were we trying to read it loudly by the all. Jamaat. Jamaat is the people that are praying. You know, um. So, it's one of the traditions that we can mention in the talking about the faith, if topic are faith. And that's one that's why I'm talking about the other people that from [unintelligible] want maybe Pakistan's, uh, there are helping for us. Because they are arriving and teaching our kids, our youth, uh, how to read Quran how to, what, uh, about the basic of

Islam? What prayer we need to know and so on. And that's how they make, how you say, in how they invest in our culture. Uh, in the, uh, Islamic life of Tatar community.

THOMAS

Would you say that you, has there ever, to your knowledge, been any sort of disagreements between Tatar Muslims and non-Tatar Muslims about, like maybe something that you feel is fine and they don't or vice versa.

ALEKSANDRAS

You know, there are a lot of schools. Uh, talking about it. None of the schools have especially ideas. Have I how to say, uh, have some of the base is the same. But you know, they have some, specifically, eh, aspects. Our school, the Turkish school and our are more related to the Hanafi school. I recommend for you to know about it more. I don't. I can not talk about it because my knowledge is not very big about it. But you can, uh, I recommend for you to find some information about Hanafi school and then all you can find some more information that will be related and can help for your work.

THOMAS

Okay. Yeah. I'm just curious because I was, uh, I always, uh, find it fascinating that after six hundred years being part of, uh, a non-Muslim majority country, whether or not that in any way had kind of affected the way that, uh, the faith was being practiced.

ALEKSANDRAS

I have to say, bro, Turkey. Turkey is considered an Islamic country. It's not officially is to say like Saudi Arabia, that it's you are a big country, but still. We all know that in Turkey, there a majority people are, uh. Big person. The people are Muslims. And the, how to say. Oh, me. We can say we can say structure of Turkey as for example, is, uh, they're, um, make a lot of things that would be easier for Muslims. Like there are a lot of Mosques in the old village. We don't talk now about the cities because they were city. You can find not one Mosque, but a lot of in one area or the one kilometre. You can find a lot of the Mosque as well. And so, there are like, uh, praying rooms where you can make the, uh, faith time, you know, that the Muslims are praying for famine day [Ramadan?] so they can, uh, find where to make it there. They're in all Mosque. They are reading as. And so, you always know when you there is calling for prayer, you know, when you need to do it and so on. Uh, talking about Lithuania there is more difficult

for it because there are only five Mosques that are working... or four. Yeah. [he sums up all the Mosques still open]

Yeah. In Klaipeda of that, they're like there the [unintelligible] room. Uh. And it is the old places were dedicated for... they're specialised on that where you can go like for the um for the Saint place and to make a prayer uh. So, if you compare between named Turkey in that way. Yeah. Uh, for Lithuanians who as example is more difficult to take the. Uh, ... was requesting help to will be in English. Ramadan month, Ramadan month...

THOMAS

Ramadan month?

ALEKSANDRAS

Fasting and so on.

THOMAS

Yeah. You fast? Yes.

ALEKSANDRAS

Fasting can fasting. The fasting in Lithuania is more difficult than in Turkey. Now, it's not that difficult, but there are very small number of Tatars we can say compared to Lithuania from that the number of Lithuanians. Yes, there are quite small number of the Lithuanian Tatars that are Muslims. Yeah. And the people that are really praying and trying to live by the Quran, there are very little think of it of them. For example, uh, now the third day of the Ramadan month, uh, celebration. You know? And there was the holy month talking about myself. I was fasting all days and I was going to all prayer therapy, you know, special treatment for the Ramadan month. And, uh, as the them the man that was fasting, I can say that Lithuania it is more difficult from the other way that we're living in the Christian society. So that all thing that is dedicated first for Islam is more some more difficult, difficult for herself in the moral way. There's a theological way because all the people that are out, others also surrounds you. It's not related for Islam, so you need to accommodation maybe moments in in your power to make it to in the good way. You had how it's written in Quran. So, I don't know any more questions?

THOMAS

Uh, yeah. I mean, I think you just mentioned that not all Tatars were necessarily... did you just say that not all Tatars were necessarily Muslims or practicing Muslims?

ALEKSANDRAS

You know, uh, a lot of Tatars, have accommodated with to other people. You know, Tatars was living in the society in about especially talking about the Soviet Union where all was equal. You know? And there was a lot of families that was created with the Christians. And a lot of Tatars have lost their religion. And so, they have had a lot of [their] childhood that was not to the religion of Islam. And that's where the number was lost on some, but now it's more, more and more of the culture of Islam is where I think Lithuania, so it's quite a good way.

THOMAS

Um, what was the other question I was thinking of... uh, the non-Tatar population... Muslim population of Lithuania.

ALEKSANDRAS

Tatars?

THOMAS

Yeah. So non-Tatars. Is it... are we? How many non-Tatar Muslims are there in Lithuania?

ALEKSANDRAS

I can say the uh the number, but uh, I would say first of all the intention is there that they are growing of that number. Now, if talking about the [unintelligible] that now there are quite a lot of refugees that came from the Syria you know. If talking about the political situation. There are a lot of commoners from the Asian countries and so on like from [unintelligible] countries because going for a better life in Europe and so on. So, there are a lot of students that are studying here, uh, to trying to study in Europe to get better education and so on. I can't say about the correct number, but no I can't say about numbers. We can find the statistic. Now, if you want to you can find try to find it in the Lithuanian immigration website. And I think you will really find the, um, you the information that you need in the English language and so on.... You... I can, I will, I think that you will find it.

THOMAS

OK, what about, uh, converts? Are there a lot of Lithuanians that... or not a lot necessarily, since it's a small community in general, but are there Lithuanians who have, uh, become Muslim, embraced Islam?

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah. It's not a phenomenon. It's quite... Not very usual, but, uh, it is. practised in Lithuania. How we know about. I personally know about them, Lithuanians, that have chosen the, um, Islamic Islam religion. So, talking about them. Uh, like, you know, they're happy that they choose the Islamic religion. First of all, for the people that are though, they're Muslims because, you know, uh, Islamic people are trying to help each other.

THOMAS

Yeah, I know. I definitely got that experience when I came here the first time it was very easy to just go in the door, meet new people, everyone says hello. They invited me and I did join in for food because it was... I was there in the evening. So, it was right before they were going to break the fast.

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah, the hospitality is the basics of the, uh, good relationship between Tatars, not just the Tatars, but between the Muslims. Tatars are saved that tradition and still practise it. But, uh. Yeah. [It] is the positive things.

Talking about negative things, Uh, I cannot, uh, to mention all of them. Because... how to say... they're not. Not all of them. And I don't, uh. I'm helping in the way with them. So, like that.

THOMAS

Fair enough. Um... What was it like? So, you're 22. So, you were born in 95?

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah... 95. Yeah.

THOMAS

So, what was it like growing up in Lithuania as a Tatar or as a Muslim?

ALEKSANDRAS

Uh, as a Muslim, let's say, um, in our family, we were educated and not the kid, but our parents. So, for us, the, uh, when we was growing like, uh, like all other children we was not... how you say... I [first] understood that I am Tatar and Muslim in the year when I was about 16 years old in, how to say, I know that I am Tatar. I know that we have our religion, our traditions. And so, but I don't. I was not feeling myself like a special one.

THOMAS

Okay.

ALEKSANDRAS

I was a common kid. That was in good relationship with the other ones and the other ones was in good relationship with us. Uh, still, you know that, uh, the Christian and Islamic religions are quite... very different. Uh, Christians say that Islamic religion is quite more strict. You know? Especially in the all the topics like and in the family life... how we are talking about faith. And so, I'm talking about the Sharia... the law for the relationship between the peoples. Yeah. Talking about myself. I can mention that. It was something special. Uh, I was going to let common kids. And my brothers, too, I have two brothers, the younger and two younger brothers. And they can see to it. They can say that there was no some special things about it.

THOMAS

So, would you say that based upon your own personal experience growing up in the 2000s, and also after like 2010 and up until today. Would you say that you have noticed any kind of change in opinion amongst non-Muslim, uh, non-Muslims... towards Islam?

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah... about, uh, opinions? The people that know something about Islam, they... know about it. But people that do not know they are believing in that way that they are taught for them from television, mass media and so on. So, we can say that the information that [is out] there now is equal for zero, because they don't know nothing about it. Uh, talking about it myself, I was told I was communicating with some people that know about it or trying to know about it because in our village where I was living, not the ... but the region, maybe the district and so on. There are a lot of people. That's right, for other nations like Poland, Belarussians and so on... Lithuanians also. In our school there was three language, there was then you can choose. You can study in the Lithuanian class, in the Poland class. And also, as I remember earlier, but not now, you can choose the Russian language as your national. So, there was no problem about it, but talking about, uh, city centre of the Vilnius... Uh, the Taters, not the Taters, but the people that believed that Muslims is quite exotic... I think earlier, I'm talking about for a thousand years, but now there are still, uh, people are accommodated for it and it's not a big phenomenon. So, the ways not changed very much because the people just getting started to know more about it. Earlier there was information that you cannot get it that amount that you can get it now. To have it now.

THOMAS

So, if I understand it right... it's getting better now because people are getting more informed.

ALEKSANDRAS

I think that it's getting better getting more informed. And we also are like examples. Because if you were choosing the Christian religion and so on, other people would think that helped save your boring Muslim. Then you are going to be Christian and nothing, nothing better of it. But no, we are trying to save our culture. And that's why I think that it's more it's even a respectful thing in this society. So, I think that the opinion of other people is getting better and better by the time. I hope it. That's my personal opinion.

THOMAS

All right. So, yeah, and it's like summary you I got the impression. Just so I can get a yes or no answer. Yeah. I got the impression that you did notice that there was a period because of media that things kind of got a bit worse...

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah, you know the 11th of the September and so on... things the, uh, phenomena of the terrorists that altered some dedicated for the Islamic culture. Now you can understand that Islamic culture and so on. There are... terrorists and Islam is two different things. And some more... game of politicians, more than the part of the culture.

THOMAS

Do you, based upon people you... Muslims that you know that are non-Tatars, do you get the impression that Tatar Muslims in Lithuania are treated differently from non-Tatar Muslims in Lithuania or is it more or less the same?

ALEKSANDRAS

Tatars of Lithuania have more respect, are more respected because they're living in, how I have to say, in the "regular way". Other people are coming for the how I mentioned before for all reasons. You know? To create family, to create the business, some relations, not to work, to get education and so on. And they're not living there in the a small number of them is living in here in the regular way. Tatars have their own Tatars of Lithuania have their own history. Have their own, how I say, fundamentals and so on. That's when they're more respected. But also, we are respecting all of the nations like the Lithuanians. And so, they [non-Tatars] are guests in the

country. We [Tatars] are like part of the country, you know, of the nation. That's why there are. I think that and the people that are coming from... the non-Tatars, I thinking in the same way.

THOMAS

Okay.

ALEKSANDRAS

That's right.

THOMAS

Okay. Uh. Right. I don't really think I have any more questions. So, unless you have anything else you feel maybe should be included in this conversation.

ALEKSANDRAS

I have some questions for you. Talking about Norwegian, but I don't know if it's you need to.

THOMAS

Yeah, maybe we don't have to have that on the recording. But, yeah feel free to ask me questions. but OK. Thank you very much for answering my questions.

ALEKSANDRAS

You were always welcome.

THOMAS

And, uh, yeah, I'm pretty sure there's going to be good stuff there for me to use. Right... how to turn this off...

ALEKSANDRAS

Now maybe some recommendations when you will try to know when you ask me a question about, uh, the faith in Lithuania and about all the other countries that other nations like Turkish and Pakistan. So, uh, one of the recommendations will be that it please find some information about the school of the, uh, Islamic way that Hanafi, Shafi and so on. There are four of them. But in the world, they like and know there are common only to have Hanafi or Shafi and you will find the some, uh, say, uh, some aspects that are similar and different. And on that difference, you can base how with could to get some no and know how it affected.

THOMAS

And both the Lithuanian Muslims are Hanafi together with Turkey?

ALEKSANDRAS

Yeah. Hanafi is more common for us. Uh. And in that way, you could make I think uh. Quite interesting and now you can find quite interesting aspects for yourself maybe for a work that will definitely help for you.

THOMAS

Thank you very much. I will definitely follow that recommendation.

ACTIONS

[The recording stops abruptly]

Interview 7

—

Middle-aged Lithuanian Tatar Secular Muslim with community influence

THOMAS

OK, please.

PAULIUS

This is interesting our history because we are living here six hundred years. And for two or three hundred years, we have had no relation with the rest of the Islamic world. We lived here alone with our traditions, customs etc. etc. So, this may be our Islam is different from this traditional Islam in another country. So, our community, for example, small example for you, Muslim, must pray five times a day, yes?

THOMAS

Yeah.

PAULIUS

In our tradition, we prayed one long prayer on Friday, Muslim holy day. Two to baby hours or two and a half hours, so we would collect all our prayers into one big prayer and the pray. One-time big prayer. One time in a week, so it's very interesting.

THOMAS

Yes, I agree.

PAULIUS

But in our history, it also Tatars when they spoke about themselves... very often they mentioned not like Tatars themselves, but like Muslims like. This is important in Polish language. You don't understand Polish language. So, I will not repeat it. But they mentioned themselves like firstly, like Muslims, not like Tatars, but like Muslims. But after an 19th century, I think it was. Historically, a very interesting process because nationalists start serious theory in Europe and other places. So, it is this national factor that became very important for all people, that I think for Tatars also. So, they remembered to use tribal history. So, from 19th century, I think this Lithuanian or Lithuanian-Polish and this in Polish and Belarussian Tatars. They become came this scientific area man mentioned like Tatars. So, it's very interesting history because I see it now in European Union. We are the oldest community... Muslim community in the European Union because it is a community who is living here like minority for a long time. This is... all this old history.

I think we can find another example, for example, in Bosnia. But Bosnia is not too perfect European Union, because someone can come, can tell say me "How about Spain?" But Spain for after Arabs. It's not up time. It was Islamic State's first, but perhaps it's just normal Catholic states. This how you say because it was interrupt. But here in Grand Duchy of Lithuania, it's very interesting because we came here in this time when Lithuania it was Pagan and it's only it's only started to change to Christianity. For example, [Lithuanian term], I don't know how it's in English. In English is part of Lithuania, maybe I will write for you. It was the same time in [Lithuanian term] they became the Catholics ones Islam came here to Lithuania. So, in this case, we are a traditional religious in Lithuania and rule about both religious men mention us like traditional Muslim, Muslim, Sunni religious selects, a different religious group. This is very interesting example. Not only the I think, for this part of Europe, but it's a global interest to all of Europe.

THOMAS

Yeah, I agree that's that was the single most... that was the draw for me when I decided that this was what I wanted to do write about it was that to me a relatively unique situation of a very, very old Muslim community, living continuously with their own religion and quite well respected in a Catholic country.

PAULIUS

Yes.

THOMAS

Yeah, and I don't think you find a lot of other the examples, but as you said, there are maybe some, but again I think even. I mean, you have to correct me here, if I'm mistaken, that even in the Bosnian case I didn't get the impression that the community there was living with the same kind of respect and influence. Because the Tatars here in Lithuania, they weren't just here, they actually played a quite central part of society.

PAULIUS

So, what we had here are not always very good times. For example, in the beginning of 17th century, we had the troubles with you know religion things because it was big pressure from Catholics to Protestants. And in this time also it was pressure against the Protestants, the Jewish people, against the Muslims here in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and in the Trakai they burned the Mosque by crowd of fanatics... they burned the Mosque. And it was one example.

Another example the Lithuanian rulers maybe... it was short, too short time for darkness. Yes, it was 16th-17th century. It was prohibited to build new Mosques and for Tatars they have permission to build only Mosques from wood, but not from stone, but from wood. And what you say why? You see for obvious reasons.

THOMAS

I suppose that will decay and go away faster.

PAULIUS

Because the wood is not very, very long material, or very strong material like stone yes. And bishops, and maybe kings to thought maybe Tatars after a Mosque is ruined. They will people, they will start to [be] like Catholics. Yes? They change their religious, but of course Tatars they had to put a brave, strong fight. So, this Islam from which you see the brought with its own from all from [Orda?]. It's very interesting because first, the first Mosque from Stone, it was built in Minsk. 1909 in Minsk, and another only in 1933 in Kaunas. In another we had from wood, but only if you will visit the Mosque in "40 Tatars village"... [names two other Mosques/villages], you can see this traditional Tatar Mosque from wood.

Of course, you sent message from you who visited Belorussia. Yes?

THOMAS

Yes.

PAULIUS

So, you maybe you met with Tatars?

THOMAS

Unfortunately, I didn't meet Tatars, but I did... you know, I have a look around and tried to get a get a feeling that I was unable to get in contact. The language barrier became more of a challenge in Belarus compared to Lithuania I must admit. But I mean, the focus of my essay is in the Lithuanian context. And of course, Belarus and Poland, for that matter. I mean, the definitely relevant because I mean, if you go far back in history, many of these areas were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. But for the most part, the focus is on the community here in Vilnius. So, there wasn't that big of a deal if I wasn't able to...

PAULIUS

It's very interesting history out Vilnius Mosque. Yes? Because here it was the first one, I think is the most important one of the most important places for Tatars here in Vilnius always here central in Vilnius. We got off the streets, you know, who in Soviet times it was broken to destroy it, etc. etc. What I what I was in Vilnius. We have to the was a famous place, but years of Vilnius. Also, we had in some small villages. The Tatar population is near the River. It was the settlements near the walking river. So, it is the one place I am living, actually, now years at walking river. So, I come back to talk to my roots for a long time. I was born in [local] district, near the in Mosque. I came into Vilnius 30 years ago. So, here's Vilnius, of course. The most important place here it was Tatar location here. It was a small wooden mosque. I will send this for you. You will see the material only to read it in here. We had also small Tatar cemetery.

Of course, another place for us very important is Trakai. Because, in this castle of Trakai "born" of founder of Crimean Khanate in 1397, so it's very interesting to historians. The ruler of Crimean state, he was born here in Lithuania. The first ruler of independent Crimean state... Crimean Khanate.

THOMAS

I know, I know a couple of weeks back I visited Trakai and went into the museum there and I did notice that there's an old part of the Trakai museum that's dedicated to Tatars.

PAULIUS

But this small, small corner.

THOMAS

It's very it was relatively small. But I was pleased to see that there was at least something there. And there was some text to read and there was a display with them in like traditional kind of outfits. But they didn't mention I don't think they mentioned that because I can't seem to remember that I read that particular piece of information. So that is interesting. I know that the parliament here not too long ago had a conference about Crimean Tatars.

PAULIUS

Two year, two years last year and this year, we've arranged this conference, for Crimean Tatars. If you're interested in this, I can send you link comes here in English also.

THOMAS

Yes, please. That would be very interesting. Was the conference a success?

PAULIUS

Yes, but it was only by political. About politics, of actual politics, about Crimean Tatars about the Crimean peninsula is also about the occupation of Russia and to some people and the chairman of the constitutional court with it was the parliament with us, most of us wondering is of the first cut Lithuanian states to do so effectively, the minister of foreign affairs at Lithuania. Very, very interesting.

THOMAS

I seem to recall that one of the other people that I interviewed earlier mentioned that there is a bit of a... historians can't completely agree where the Lithuanian Tatars had their roots from. That some claim that your roots are from Crimea for that area. And others are saying that it was Kazan by the Ural Mountains?

PAULIUS

You see in time when we arrived here our ancestors, it was the big city of Golden Horde. Yes? After Genghis Kahn yes? It was very big area, I see maybe 5, 4, 6 or 7 million square kilometres. It was very it was very big... And from that time, it was, of course, a lot of tribes and maybe hundreds and hundreds to different tribes lived in this state. Not just with Turkish tribes, but I think when our ancestors came first, the Vytautas they came maybe from promises, big, big, big, big state. But in 16th and 17th century, big emigration was the biggest emigration. It was from Crimean Peninsula. So, in this case, I think we are as we can, we can we can say: "Yes, we are the people we have a big relation with Crimean Tatars", because in 16th or half of 17th

century people came here from Crimea. So, I think in Lithuania here we are mixed of many Tatars, ethnic Tatar tribes and, of course, 400-600 years we are here, we like different ethnic groups, Lithuanian Tatars. Was good for Crimean people. Of course, it is possible, possible.

Because you see, when I was in Constanta, Romania two years ago, I will go to this is this year also because September is able to help with a conference in 17th century, when I mentioned this religion pressure after this, in this pressure time in beginning of 17th century, part of Tatars who lived in Grand Duchy of Lithuania they immigrated to Ottomanic ... the Turkish/Ottomanic Empire and as they settled in Dobruja. Dobruja, now this region is divided between Bulgaria and Romania. The biggest part belongs to Romania as the smallest part belongs to Bulgaria. So, in Romania part about the job of 30000 Tatars, Bulgarian part about seven thousand Tatars. Part of this Tatars who's living in Romania now they came from Crimea, but in 17th century they went from that part of Lithuania. So, we are maybe partly we are the same the same communities again, because I don't know how many people migrated up time, but when I was in Romania, I saw a similar dish. We have in our cuisine. So, I thought Romanian Tatars also similar. Very interesting but very interesting to me.

THOMAS

Could it Would it be possible for you to give a brief sort of summary about yourself?

PAULIUS

About myself?

THOMAS

Yeah. What you do, where you grew up...

PAULIUS

I grew up I grew up 100 hundred kilometres from here. It was just a very interesting place [names hometown] close... near five kilometres from [mentions other village] Tatars past two decades. It was a famous place ... and my parents in 1978... 1979, sorry, they changed [moved] to [another village] was near the Polish border, so I grow up in this town and I started my studies in Vilnius for the pedagogical university ... or that time institute and I went to [unintelligible] ... near St. Petersburg in Russia. Because I studied the Russian language and literature, so I spent one year in [place close to St. Petersburg]. And after I came back to Vilnius and I finished to Vilnius Pedagogical University and soon after a few years, I started my PhD in Poland, [goes on to name a specific university] in Poland, but not in pedagogically, but in [political science].

I am pedagogically, but I have a PhD that tells us about the political system in Lithuania. Yes, it was in Polish language. It was in 2003, and now I am working at Mykolas Romeris University for 7 years and professor at this university and my topic is, is comparative politics, so... of course, very interesting because... I was saying I think of myself personally as a poet, not a [political scientist]. I, this year, wrote two poetry books about ... lyrics. So, but it's very interesting. This my poetry is in Russian language so also it is very interesting. I have some translations to Polish language... of Tatar language, and now three weeks ago. I had sent from Poland for Poland book with my poetry, it was translated to Polish language. For me it's good.

THOMAS

Yes, of course. What kind of poetry?

PAULIUS

This is lyrics about love and ... [he goes on to shortly explain his poetry, but it was clear that he would rather not go into detail]

I have a colleague [name of] University because he also wrote a PhD after the visitation, I don't know if visitations is normal in your country or not, but in Polish and Germany, we have the first level of PhD, second level [unintelligible] is the highest level.

THOMAS

Ah, okay...

PAULIUS

So, he. They're prepared to two dissertation PhD and [unintelligible]. He also is Polish Tatar and now two or three week ago he by Polish president he was mentioned like the Polish ambassador to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. So, I so I see it the sort Tatars start to also serve in very high positions possible like states, like state servant like ambassador for first time ... very interesting.

THOMAS

Are the Tatar communities in Belarus, Lithuania and Poland close?

PAULIUS

Yes, but we are close. But you see Lukashenko times, 25 years rules. We have visa system with our states as if some sort something, but it was at one time, difficult to go to Belorussia, which was... invitation or something stupid. In Soviet times, it was different because we belong to

Soviet state, Soviet Union both here in Lithuania and Belorussia so we visited each other without any problems, but with Poland there were some problems. Because Poland was different state. But now the situation changes with Poland, we are in the European Union. We are sovereign and we have sometimes. Some Tatar get together, [organise] some events, we make ... so Belarus it's now very difficult to reach people that you spoke for, for example, from Vilnius to [a place] only 90 kilometres from Vilnius to Minsk one hundred and seventy kilometres. It is very close to here. But is not more possibilities to communicate because it's strange ... the system?

But of course, we are close to. When we arrange something here in Vilnius, we have guests for Poland and from Belorussia community so, but of course, not very big amount of guests, but good to see some guests. We have from Belorussia every type.

THOMAS

What was it like, for Tatars, growing up in the Soviet Union, especially with regards to your religion?

PAULIUS

You know, is here in Lithuania it was maybe not very difficult, but one special thing. In Soviet times, it was the was a struggle with religion. With Catholic, Protestant... So, this struggle was also with Islam. For example, in Lithuania in that time we have almost three of these, they were closed. If only one, it was open. You can still work to [a place] about one hundred kilometres from here near the Polish border. Of course, maybe you know maybe this history, Russian and Russian history. Very strange. They talked about Tatars, defenders etc. etc. for two hundred and sixty years. The Russian. [Unintelligible]

The Russian people, it was... it was traditional to ... they don't like Tatars like nation, for example, [Russia had multiple wars with Tatars] and even the same was in Belorussia. But here in Lithuania, we have no problem from the people from the government, but from authorities. We have to cooperate with the authorities because the most communist system. It was for example, if you are a member of Communist Party, it was prohibited to visit Mosque. If you if you belong to the Komsomol organization, Komsomol, it was the young communist organisation. It was also prohibited to visit churches and mosques, et cetera. So, in this case, it was very strange. This was very difficult, but special pressure, I think? We had no special pressure except for one thing: in Soviet times they ruined the Muslim cemeteries. I don't know

why? But in Vilnius region, it was it was destroyed. One, two, three, four, five, ... five Muslim cemeteries in Vilnius in these districts were destroyed. I don't know why. They built farms on the cemeteries. On one they built swimming pool.

In another district they destroyed, maybe, two or three cemeteries, I don't know why. Maybe it was this kind of politics of I meant because they destroy it also Jewish, too, Jewish-German cemeteries, also. It was very popular. For example, if you see in [names street], near the Protestant church, it was opposite a very big cemetery, but now they made a park. [Name another place] there was also a very big cemetery are also is park. I don't know why they changed cemeteries very often to parks.

THOMAS

So generally, throughout Lithuanian history, we like more like generally. I know you mentioned earlier that there have been specific episodes where Lithuanians fanatics were anti anything which wasn't Catholic Church, but more like in generally throughout the centuries, the Tatars have been here. What would you say that Lithuanians attitudes toward Tatars have been like?

PAULIUS

Now?

THOMAS

No, historically,

PAULIUS

Historically, I think it was normal that we live together. We respect each other, for example ... for example, even this beginning of Soviet time, we worked for Catholics when they had Christmas Day, and they work for Muslims when we had Ramadan, for example, or other religious days. They respect each other. It was normal, I think. Before it was important, and modern nationality, but it was important to religious and I think the local Muslim community they were respect here environment of Christian community, and I think you can be example for Europe, how to survive in peace Islam and Christianity for such a long time. I think maybe, maybe as in such a way I can answer. Only a few episodes we can mention ... pressure. But generally, if we will, we'll read historical documents. We can read a lot of about Tatars, about Muslims they are very positive. For example, Lithuanian [unintelligible], if you will, read in the Lithuanian [unintelligible] very often Tatars they are mentioned in these metrics [?] so you can read very positive, in positive way about our community here.

So very interesting. I've mentioned the ... do you know [mentions name] this Polish poet? A very grate poet. His brother [mentions another name] he mentioned Tatars in a poem of Belorussia in very positive way. Been very, very positive way. So, I think also [mentions a third name] he lived here for many years. A great Polish writer and also, he mentioned Tatars in very, very positive way. So, I think I think it's not very big problems with our community and why we have we have very good name here Yes? I think in these long centuries, is our history, maybe our ancestors, they took place in all wars, in all uprisings here... in Lithuania-Poland some they supported they... it was struggle for freedom. Not strange land, but let's but just this land which live our relatives... graves, etc., etc... I forget the word. Oh, how is the English? "Motherland" maybe?

THOMAS

Yeah.

PAULIUS

Yeah. So, something. So, this land Lithuania-Poland. For us, they are very important and to historically. You can read about it in fiction and historical wars, documents of that time.

THOMAS

And would you say it's still like that today?

PAULIUS

I think yes, I think yes. You see... you see... nowadays, it's very, very dangerous factors is terrorism... terror. But it's very primitive. If we will speak about Islamic terror or terrorism, it will be in a very primitive way. Because these people who speaks they are Muslim and they work in terror, [they are] 0, 00001 percent of a very big global Muslim community. Yes? In this way, we can... we can't speak about Islam and terror because it's different things. But of course, the journalist, they put the very simple texts to Internet, to papers, to say for... it [forms] minds about Islam, about believers of Islam, like about negative people. Yes? But it start not today. I think it start to look maybe 10, 20, 30 years before speaking about Islam... in like about... negative? In simple people or in simple man or woman opinion, it will be, I think they maybe can make some mixture of about this about refugees about... So maybe they can do something ... [long pause to think] not separate, not separate these people Tatars, I think. What they want to say.

But generally, I think the young generation of Lithuanians and Polish people, Polish and Polish society, especially these who are good educated. I think seems they understand and maybe, maybe this from universities they can they have more information about how it's looks, Islam community in the world. Of course, maybe, maybe some information or more information about Tatar community here in Lithuania-Poland etc. etc., so but of course if you ask the street people they can say for you "I don't know" about which people you are speaking about which Tatars you are asking, because it's possible that simple people's they have no idea about Tatars another ethnic or religious minorities in Lithuania. It's also possible.

THOMAS

Okay, because I was about to ask this, since you were talking about education, if the Lithuanian primary education system, when they are teaching Lithuanians about history, Tatars usually are not mentioned?

PAULIUS

Yes, but there are few centres [?] in the textbooks only... few sentences. I think it is it must be changed in the future and [they] are trying to go to schools, and to directly speak with pupils, and discuss about the Tatar community... about Islam and... one months ago, personally, I have conducted such a lesson in school in the town where I am living. So, we are trying to change something more, to give knowledge about our community. But of course, for 27 years from Lithuanian official education system, I think it's not enough information about ... national minorities about religious, maybe only about Jewish community because this was Holocaust... there is more information in textbooks, but about others there is very [little].

THOMAS

In more recent years, I suppose, I think we touched upon it. But in more recent years, the non-Tatar Muslims have been starting to come more to Lithuania. And I think I kind of got the impression that a quite a lot of those are from Turkey. The Turkish presence at the Islamic centre at least was quite big.

PAULIUS

Because Islamic centre... it was bought to support Turkish Ministry of Religion, and money for the Mufti... you know Mufti yes? Some people from business they bought this Islamic centre, but I think it is mostly for foreigners, not for Tatars. Because if you visit you will see only very few Tatars visit.

THOMAS

Yeah. That weren't many.

PAULIUS

Mostly foreigners from students, business, refugees maybe. I don't know. But from Turkey, from Pakistan, from Arab area.

THOMAS

OK. Well, I mean, when? What's your impression of how foreign Muslims... what's the word I'm trying to find...? What's your impression of how they regard the way that Tatars practice Islam in Lithuania? Since you were saying that there are some big differences.

PAULIUS

You see, we are thinking in the future it will be a very big problem with newcomers and our old community. Because these newcomers come up with our Mosques. And this is very dangerous for us. For example, you know, in Kaunas Mosque, it's about 90 percent believers is not Tatars, but newcomers from different countries. And I think it's very difficult... very dangerous for us when they make the critical mass, they will take the control of this Mosque. I think this is, for us, it will be really dangerous because even when we talk to our state authorities about this and sometimes, yes, they are Muslim, we have the same religion. But we have a totally different culture. For example, to Syria or Pakistan or Arabs, [unintelligible] closer. They are different, totally different of how we [unintelligible] this case it's not possible to make one Muslim community here. I think in different ways we will speak with each other; I don't know. But my opinion if newcomers will dominate for us, it will be end of our culture here.

Because we, like I mentioned, we have some interesting Islam. For example, our books, all books in three languages and old Belarussian, old Turkish language and old Polish language. But it's very interesting, Slavonic languages, the old Belarussian and old to Polish language is a written by our Arabs in Arabic script, which is unique is unique. This only two examples in the world in Bosnia in Lithuania you [find] Slavonic texts these scriptures with Arabic letters. It's very interesting.

THOMAS

Yeah, I did. Kind of when I was talking to some of the worshippers at the Islamic centre. It was some of the. Yeah, it was as you said, it was a couple of people who was sent from this ministry in Turkey. I did get the impression that ... That they were [admitting] to trying, through schools

and contact and things, to try and have a positive influence on the way that Tatars were practicing their religion and maybe kind of like help the Tatars.

PAULIUS

Obviously, this is not support this.

THOMAS

From their perspective, they were like... they were saying that they were helping the Tatars.

PAULIUS

Then you see this very, very big problem because it became in Poland, when they came with Arabs to Poland maybe 10 to 30 years ago and talked to the local Tatar community. These newcomers from Arab states, former students for example, who came to Poland like students after they and maybe various Polish movements, etc. etc. now they are living in Poland. So, these people... community it's about 20 or 30 thousand people and it's become very big problem with this in the relationship between Tatars and Arabs. Very often Arabs say on official space "Tatars, they are not Muslims". Yes, it's very dangerous because they sent letters to authorities in Arab countries, et cetera, et cetera, about Tatars and they say "Tatars, they are not Muslim". But this, of course, is not true. Because Tatars maybe they are better Muslims than they are, because we preserved our Islam for six hundred years, in a Catholic environment. So, it's very interesting, if you will check, for example, on the Internet you can find out about conflicts [between] Arab community and Tatar community in Poland. I think in Lithuania here we have this conflict, but in this case we have here a small Arab community, but in Poland is really, really big. For example, [in Poland] a Mosque was occupied by one Arab, he was the imam of this Mosque, but after Tatars ask him to "leave this Mosque, it was better before".

So, it's can be some misunderstanding. For example, we now in our time when people's moving [globalisation?]. Peoples in mixed together etc. etc. So, it's sort of dangerous for our small community.

THOMAS

I seem to remember that in one of my previous interviews, someone told me that up until the Soviet times the Tatar community had... people used to generally marry in their own community, but during the Soviet times, quite a few Tatars started marrying non-Tatar Lithuanians.

PAULIUS

Not only in Lithuania, but also Russian women, Polish women, even Ukrainians, Belarussian, etc etc. The biggest problem I see gets these mixed marriages, the children they are not Muslims, but they are Christians. So only on the few examples I can mentioned it is different. I know two or three of mixed families in which the children they reserved [?] like Muslims, but 90-95 percent is different, totally different to situation. If mixed family, so children usually they are not Muslims. This is a big problem. And it's all, of course it started in Soviet times and in the 60s, maybe and before, of course you in my book, you can read about Tatars [with] mixed families in 17th century, 18th century, but it was nobility. It was nobility, not simple people, but it was nobility. Dukes, etc., etc. so you can read it, but \simple people start mixed [marriages] after Second World War on the... in Soviet times. Because the Tatars community in [mentions several villages] was homogeneous. You know, it's like... no different peoples no mixed with another people. They is a close... lived a closed life. Of course, it was not closed like Jewish community. But it was a preserved tradition and it was no mixed marriages. Because that time is even. Even before Second World War it was very, very, very small percent of these marriages of mixed marriages. And now this is big problem.

This is a big problem. For example, a very interesting example of our community, for example, the president of Kaunas community, [gives name of community]. He's mixed Tatar and Lithuanian and he's Tatar, but he is chairman of Tatar community of Kaunas. Also, it's very interesting.

THOMAS

Indeed.

PAULIUS

And he's from a mixed family. And he is the chairman of Kaunas community. Tatar Kaunas community. And he's very active because his mother was Tatar father was Lithuanian. And also, very interesting example is this family, his older brother is Muslim, and he [the chairman] is Catholic. Two brothers, and they have two different religions.

THOMAS

Now, that is very interesting. How big is the Lithuanian Tatar community?

PAULIUS

It's about 3000 people or so.

THOMAS

Two?

PAULIUS

Three.

THOMAS

Three thousand. Okay.

PAULIUS

You see in Soviet times in 1989, it was official statistical... statistical... what is it in English? Statistical... review? Yes?

THOMAS

Yeah yeah.

PAULIUS

They say that time five thousand one hundred. But you see the intent of Soviet era it was a lot of Tatars here from [mentions place], officers, for example, engineers who worked in atomic plant in Klaipeda, in big factories after Second World War. Yes? But when Lithuania became the independent state, he moved back to Russia, to Tatarstan, etc. etc... In this case, about two thousand people went back. So, from 5000 to next statistical review into what it was in 2001 and 2011. So, you say about now in Lithuania, about 3000 Tatars.

THOMAS

And I think you mentioned that the Polish community was quite a lot bigger.

PAULIUS

Polish? Which Polish?

THOMAS

The Tatar Polish...

PAULIUS

The Tatars in Poland?

THOMAS

Yeah.

PAULIUS

You see, officially, it's also, it's a very strange situation because the official statistics in Polish statistics [claims] there are only 500 Tatars [that] live in Poland. But not official, it's about three thousand ... three a half thousand. But it's very interesting because in the official way they checked only 500 Tatars. But they not mentioned in these papers about all community. Maybe you know why... maybe one of... When it was statistical review, they asked about. native language, if you say, "my mother language is Polish", so you are not Tatar, but you are Polish maybe. I don't know. Maybe. But of course, in Lithuania we have the same problem because we lost our language 400 years ago. We can't speak Tatar language, but we speak the local languages. Here in Lithuania we speak Lithuanian, in Belorussia it's Russian, Polish language in Poland. Polish language in Belarus, a Belarussian and Russian language. So maybe here is the problem in Poland. I don't know. I mean, maybe if you are your mother language is Polish. So, you are Polish and maybe. It was difficult to say...

THOMAS

I think you answered most of the questions that I that I was curious about. I'm hoping that maybe if something else comes up ... my deadline for finishing my master's is the beginning of December, I think.

PAULIUS

This year?

THOMAS

Yes, this year. So, I'm hoping that maybe if I have any more questions, maybe I can send you I sent you a message with my email.

PAULIUS

Yeah, you sent me a message with your e-mail, and I will resend you my politics book about Lithuanian Tatars history. So, you will find big historical articles, one and second and after you will see famous Tatar's biographies, small, small about two hundred and sixty biographies.

THOMAS

Fantastic. Thank you. For the formality's sake, due to methodology in everything, I will... I would like to inform you of that this interview and my referencing to the interview in the masters. It will be anonymous. So, the only copy of this will be on this [sound recorder]. I won't put it online or anything like that. So, it's completely anonymous.

PAULIUS

No problem is you can use my name. So, there is no problem. [Unintelligible] You know, I am man, 53 yes? I was born when it was Soviet regime. Your time in schools we have. It was very difficult. It was English. But they don't teach you perfectly. And it was it was a strange situation because even when you finish secondary school or university it was problems, which was problem communicate in English to people. Maybe, maybe it was special. So sorry for my English.

THOMAS

Please, your English has been excellent. I have had no issues at all.

PAULIUS

Because my English I learned by myself when I was 35 before 40 years. From listening to the radio, from reading books, etc. etc., but not from not from school. In Soviet times it was very difficult to. To get good education to speak foreign languages. It was maybe you can in special schools, maybe, for example, in Moscow, I don't know. But like in the village in which I lived in Soviet era; it was English lessons. But it was no possibility to speak English. It is strange, no?

THOMAS

I suppose it's getting easier and easier now after being part of the EU and everything going on. It must be. Yes. And I mean, to this, I get the impression that every year there's more tourists coming to Vilnius, and most of them, I suppose, try to talk in English. So...

PAULIUS

But you check only young generation ... the young generation, you can speak English. With older people like 60 years or 70 years you can't communicate in English because it's like in Belorussia. They don't understand.

THOMAS

Yes. I did notice in Belarus. It was. It was a lot more difficult. I mean, the best way to do it there was definitely if you knew Russian. Belarussian, of course, as well. But yeah, Russian would have made it easier.

PAULIUS

But you see it. It's very unique. A unique place here. Because we can speak in different languages and understand different languages, for example, in my case, yes? I can speak fluent Russian, and I writing poetry in Russian. Another language for me is Polish language, yes? It's very interesting important also because we are growing in Polish culture. Another language, is Lithuanian language, yes? Also, we can understand Belarussian language is this case. We can understand Ukrainian language. We can because it is Slavonic Group. When I was in Bosnia and Herzegovina last year, I understood the Bosnian language. So, it's problem with global languages, yes? But we can understand the Slavonic group. It's very interesting. So Ukrainian is not a problem, Belorussian is not a problem. Maybe Czech language... Czech language we can understand. Even Bosnian and Bulgarian language. So, it's very interesting.

THOMAS

Most definitely and very useful.

PAULIUS

I think every language I think is very useful because this is easier to travel, yes? But you can you can communicate in Russian to [old people] in the territory in the old Soviet Union. So... the Middle-Asia, in Caucasus, the Baltic states, in Ukraine, and Moldova. So, I don't know. You can probably get a collection of notes.

THOMAS

No, not Russian, I'm afraid, although I would really like to learn. I would definitely like to learn this. I mean, it's been one of the it's the language barrier has probably been the biggest challenge for this particular master. I suppose I was very ignorant and naive thinking. How far? I mean, I've done reasonably well, but I... but I thought I could get away easily by using English. And it does work, it definitely does, but I think the biggest issue is you mentioned it in the beginning. There's so much good... so many good sources on this topic, but most of them are in Polish.

PAULIUS

Most of these groups of topics is in Polish language and Russian language. Even in Lithuanian language, but good, good text in English, I don't know. Maybe, maybe [he mentions a couple of names] at the universe you can find it in English. Maybe... maybe... [mentions new name]. But I don't. I don't know. Maybe.

You see, in Poland is a lot of famous historians, people who write about Tatars, but this text in Polish language. So, Stanislaw Kaczynski, who lived before Second World War, also wrote a

famous text, is in Polish language. I think we need to translate these in English. One, only one text, simple text, which are, you know, in English language is [mentions name] it was before Second World War. It was brochure about maybe 40 pages long. Short history of Tatars in Poland and Lithuanian-Poland. Yeah, it was maybe possible to reach. I had it in my home, but I don't [remember] if I have don't have, but I think in an upside it is possible to find [name]. Tatar community in Poland something. I don't know, other sources from what you see... in Russian language, Polish even Ukrainian now. But in English... ah! The first ... maybe the first book with which it will be published in English, it will be actually our book because we issued two additions of our books. It was in Russian and Lithuanian language after it was translated to Polish language. Now we will publish it in English. So, you will find short, short article about Tatar history from circa 97 to our days in our book. But it will be not in religious way. You know, that is it will be historical. Short essay about Tatar history.

THOMAS

Yeah. And that is. That is perfect. I mean that with the more religious angle is one of the reasons why it was important for me to do interviews because the history is there. I have had I forget the name of the author, but it's I do have this book which is called The History of Lithuania. It's from 2004. It's kind of like a green cover. I can find you the name of the author, but I forget it now.

PAULIUS

The issue here in Lithuania?

THOMAS

Amongst other things, yes. I mean, I remember in the foreword of that book the author did, like, emphasized that there was so few history books about Lithuania in English that he wanted to publish something. But it wasn't about Tatars, it was about history in general. It was just history in general. And the Tatars were mentioned every now and again.

PAULIUS

If you will have time, you can visit the Lithuanian Historical Institute. [He describes how to get there]. They is... this institute has bookshelves. You come; you can find text very cheap for 1-2 euros about Lithuanian history in English. If you do have time, you can I recommend you can just. Lithuanian History Institute and looked about these books. Sometimes you can find very interesting texts translated to English.

THOMAS

Yes. Definitely. I'll look into it. OK.

PAULIUS

Thank you.

THOMAS

Thank you. Can I? Yeah. I'll turn this off now.

ACTIONS

[Recording stops abruptly]