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Audrius
DAMBRAUSKAS

# Film Culture in Lithuania, 1926-1944: Between Entertainment and Ideology

**SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

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VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETAS
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# Kinematografinė kultūra Lietuvoje, 1926-1944 m.: tarp pramogos ir ideologijos

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# DOCTORAL DISSERTATION SUMMARY

The history of cinema in the first half of the 20th century has not received much attention in Lithuania. There have been more scientific and non-scientific publications about cinema during the second Soviet occupation (1944-1990), but only a few dedicated to the first half of the twentieth century. Practically all of them are dedicated to the period of the First Republic of Lithuania (1918-1940), while periods of the the first Soviet occupation (1940-1941) and Nazi occupation (1942-1944) are still a blank spot in the history of the cinema in Lithuania. This work sought to fill these gaps in historiography at least partially.

This work covers the period from 1926 to 1944. Throughout this period three non-democratic regimes had changed in Lithuania. These changes happened quite rapidly. On December 17, 1926, a military coup took place in the state, during which the democratically elected government was overthrown and the first President of Lithuania, Antanas Smetona, returned to the helm of the country and soon declared himself "Leader of the Nation" ("Tautos vadas"). In June 1940 Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union and in June 1941 by Nazi Germany. In the late 1944, with the retreat of the German army in the East, the country was re-occupied by the Soviet Union and remained a part of it until the 1990.

The year 1926 in Lithuania marked an increased attention to the field of cinema – attempts to create national cinema became more prominent, the cinema theatres' repertoire became more colorful, and the number of press publications about films rose. Although political regimes and ideologies in Lithuania had been changing from 1926 to 1944, there was no shortage of improvisation and experimentation in the field of cinema. Political regimes changed faster than memories of the movies seen, faster than the people who wrote about them or made them in Lithuania in spite of the atrocities carried out in Lithuania by either Soviet and Nazi occupants – the deportations, the Holocaust.

The situation has changed significantly in 1944, at the beginning of the long period of the second Soviet occupation.

Increased focus on cinema, growing number of publications on film opens up opportunities to study the reception of different films in Lithuania. One of the aims of this work is to find out how the films made or shown in Lithuania were received by the public, why they were received the way they were received, how their reception differed from the intentions of the creators or importers. To paraphrase German film historian Karsten Witte, the work seeks to find out how films in Lithuania functioned in the context of different ideologies and political regimes.

Most attention in this work is being focused on the reception of German and Soviet films, which were shown both during 1926-1940, and during the occupations of Lithuania, accordingly Soviet in 1940-1941, German in 1941-1944. Movies of Polish and Hollywood production are also taken into account while speakinf about during the 1926-1940 period.

The study of the reception of movies in Lithuania also requires some discussion on the cinema network in the country, which enabled screenings of movies themselves, and the film press, in which the reception of movies in Lithuania was at least partially reflected.

Thus the work is chronologically split into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the cinema in independent Antanas's Smetona Lithuania, 1926-1940; the second chapter deals with the cinema under Soviet occupation, 1940-1941; the third chapter deals with the cinema under Nazi occupation, 1941-1944. The first part of each chapter is dedicated to the discussions on cinema network, film press, cinema ticket prices and attendances, movie politics in the country. The second part of each chapter is dedicated to movies and their reception in the country.

Chapter I deals with the cinema in Lithuania under Antanas's Smetona rule, 1926-1940. Section I.1.1 of the chapter is devoted to overview of the cinema network in Antanas' Smetona Lithuania. In the 1920s, the number of cinemas in Lithuania grew rapidly,

in 1922-1929 the number of cinemas in the capital city of Kaunas alone increased from 5 to 14. In 1931, 71 permits for commercial cinema theatres were issued in Lithuania (excluding autonomous Klaipėda region). Some theatres – namely military and school cinemas – operated without these permits. However, the rapidly growing number of cinemas had begun to decline from the year 1931. For this decline both external and internal causes are of importance: The Great Depression; a costly transition to sound films; stricter requirements for the establishment of cinemas (fire protection and sanitary requirements); increased tax burden on cinemas. Cinema attendance fell, some theatres went bankrupt. The cinema crisis also revealed the government's attitude towards cinemas – although cinema theatres' owners plead the government asking for financial bailouts for cinemas and tax cuts, they remained unfulfilled. The government sought to exploit film theatres financially and the owners of these theatres exploited their staff. Cinemas have been saved by the public – their attendance has again increased since 1935 and the number of cinemas had stabilized – about 60 permits were issued for commercial cinema theaters yearly in 1935-1940 (without autonomous Klaipėda region, or Vilnius region, regained in 1939).

In section I.1.2. a deeper look of the attitude of the President Antanas Smetona towards cinema is presented. Until the year 1926 local newsreels were rarely filmed in Lithuania. The coup of December 1926 coincided with the intensified activity in the field of cinema in the country – at that time film studios and schools for movie actors were established. They were not professional, but they signified the growing nation's interest in creating national cinema industry. Antanas Smetona used this rising interest for his propaganda needs. For example, as soon as he took power, the President organized an extensive propaganda campaign trip through Lithuanian towns – some of his visits had already been filmed. At the end of the 1930s, Antanas Smetona had appeared in 1/3 of all the Lithuanian newsreels screened in the country. Nevertheless the president publicly criticized the film media. He shamed young people for being too fascinated with the

"mechanical cinema" and not with the Arts, most importantly – the theater. He claimed that foreign movies harm Lithuanian nationality and so on. The President generously supported the State Theater but not the struggling local film industry. With little local production the Lithuanian movie goers often cheered neighboring Latvian films. The popularity of Latvian films had been a concern even at the level of the state institutions – it was argued that the "unhealthy" sympathy for Latvian films emphasizes the inabilities of Lithuanian film industry. Ironically, the only time Antanas Smetona was filmed visiting the movie theater in Lithuania was during the Latvian film premiere.

Section I.1.3. is dedicated to the film press of the interwar Lithuania. There was no specialized periodical press for cinema in Lithuania until 1931. Discussions about cinema in the press were rare and articles about the films or their actors appeared mostly in tabloids. The situation changed with the magazine *Kino naujienos* (*Cinema news*), founded in 1931. Although short-lived, the journal sparked discussions about cinema in the press and soon after its first publication, specialized, regular columns dedicated to cinema appeared in the country's major newspapers. The first Lithuanian book dedicated to cinema, Vytautas' Kurnatauskas K*ino menas* (*The Art of Cinema*), was published in 1928, several more books on cinema's issues were published later, focused mainly on technical side of the movies or the life of foreign cinema stars. Although the literature or discussions on cinema's issues in Lithuania did not reach a high intellectual level, the emergence and development of these discussions marked the growing importance of cinema in the country. The same process is visible when looking at the reflections of cinema in the works of Lithuanian fiction writers. If in the early 1920s cinema was rarely mentioned in the works of Lithuanian authors, in 1930s various film issues were already discussed in fiction books, even poems dedicated solely to the cinemas were written and published.

Section I.2.1. focuses on local film production. Although the regime of Antanas Smetona did not actively support the film industry, some laws that were passed have encouraged the production of local

films. In 1932 there was issued a law, according to which each film screening in Lithuania had to start with a Lithuanian film newsreel of at least 120 meters long. The law led to the increase of the production of local newsreels, but the quality of the movies often did not satisfy the viewers. These newsreels were mocked for poor artistic and technical level, constant delays in their production, monotony. It was believed that newsreels could be improved by reducing competition – in 1935 the monopoly on Lithuanian newsreels' production was given to the Antanas' Smetona political ally Jurgis Linartas. But until the year 1940 the newsreel had still been blamed for the same problems. The film *Kareivis – Lietuvos gynėjas* (*Soldier – Defender of the Lithuania*) commissioned by the Lithuanian Army in 1928, was the only one feature film produced by the state. However, it was decided that the movie was too bad to be shown to the public, the finished movie was shelved and now is considered lost. All other feature film projects were private initiatives, most of which have never been completed. With no state's funding for film production, the exploitation of films was sought through censorship – a centralized film censorship institution was established in 1932, every film shown in Lithuania had to obtain a censorship permit. The state sought to maintain the image of Lithuania as a moden, rich country on the cinema screen, thus all the depictions of poverty had been cut from Lithuanian newsreels. However, the image of the modern state on the screen was sabotaged by poor technical quality of the newsreels themselves. Images that could have stimulated civil resistance in the country – for example strikes, riots, state coups, etc. – have disappeared from foreign films and newsreels too in order to ensure the stability of Antanas' Smetona rule.

Section I.2.2. discusses Hollywood movies and Western pop culture in Lithuania. In the 1920s, Lithuania was dominated by films from neighboring Germany, but since the 1930s, Hollywood films have surpassed them in the country by number. In the press Hollywood films were often criticized for exaggerated, mindless action and vulgar humor, while the European films were presented as more spiritual and

intellectual. It was even argued that Hollywood films cannot become popular in Europe, because Europeans are too sophisticated for them. On the other hand, it was often acknowledged that among many "inferior" films, Hollywood also gave Lithuania the best films shown in the country. Meanwhile, Hollywood films clearly impressed Lithuanian audience – they often dominated the lists of "the top 10 best films shown in Lithuania" compiled in 1930s. Western pop culture received widespread popularity in Lithuania. This is illustrated by the case study of Edgar Rice Burroghs literary character – Tarzan, his spread in Lithuania through books, movie adaptations, and other media. It is concluded, that the popularity of Western pop culture in Lithuania demonstrated the emergence of a young generation that grew up in independent Lithuania and was already alien to the cultural legacy of the tsarist Russian empire.

Section I.2.3. discusses the reception of German films in Lithuania. German films dominated Lithuania in the 1920s, till they were surpassed by the American production. Around the year 1930 German films began to be regarded more and more negatively in Lithuania. This was partly due to the influx of these films – the public wanted more films from different countries, but German film films were easily and relatively inexpensively available to cinema owners. German films were also accused of a poor artistic level and abundant militaristic propaganda. The negative attitude towards German films was also stimulated by the geopolitical situation in Lithuania – namely the growing dissatisfaction of German revanchism. Lithuanians felt threatened and insecure as Germany more loudly proclaimed its intentions to take back the Klaipėda (Memel) region, belonging to Lithuania from 1923. Therefore, even German films that did not have any militaristic tendencies were often seen as militaristic and propagandistic in Lithuania. The situation worsened in 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. Lithuanians' hopes that films made in Nazi Germany would be overly ideological and therefore not allowed to be shown in Lithuania did not come true. No attempt has been made to export openly National Socialist films to Lithuania, and

abundant German comedies, melodramas, operettas and dramas continued to reach the country. Cinema censorship could not ban these films, as there was little propaganda it them, or the propaganda tendencies were not clearly visible. On the other hand all images depicting Adolf Hitler or the German army disappeared from the newsreels shown in Lithuania. This was partly to ensure that these images did not promote German nationalism in the Klaipėda region, for example, while the images of Hitler were forbidden, scenes of Mussolini or Italian army was freely shown. Although the autonomous region of Klaipeda had the right to decide for itself what can and cannot be shown in the city's cinemas, cleverly made film import and censorship laws led to the situation, when the films, that reached Klaipeda region, had already been censored in Kaunas. But the propaganda struggle for Klaipėda's cinema screens was not won by Lithuanians. Lithuanian newsreels sent to Klaipėda were received in a very negative way, citizens even joked, that poor quality of these newsreels promotes Germany better than they promote Lithuania. These newsreels were eventually abandoned Lithuanians, living in Klaipėda, themselves. When Nazi Germany annexed Klaipeda in March 1939, the German troops in the region were met quite happily. After the annexation, the image of Hitler and the images of the German army were allowed to be shown in newsreels in Lithuania for the first time.

Section I.2.4 deals with Polish films in Lithuania. The issue of Polish films in Lithuania was determined by the Poland-Lithuanian conflict for the city of Vilnius, which dictated diplomatic relations between the two countries. Until December 1927, Lithuania and Poland was in a state of war with each other, and Polish films were not shown in Lithuania. First Polish films were shown in Lithuania in 1927-1929. But here they were greeted negatively. In 1928-1929 several Kaunas film theatres that screened Polish films were devastated by Lithuanian nationalists. In 1929, Polish films were banned in Lithuania again. However, a small portion of Polish films were shown in Lithuania disguised as Russian, Czech or other

countries production. The situation changed again after 1938, when under Polish pressure, Lithuania re-established diplomatic relations between the two countries. Polish films once again appeared in the country openly. However, they once again were greeted negatively – attacks on film theatres screening Polish films were resumed. It is ironic, that in Vilnius, after it became part of Lithuania again in October 1939, Lithuanian films were received no better, than Polish films in Kaunas. Lithuanian government pursued a strict Lithuanization policy in the city, that also affected the cinema theatres. Films could have been shown only with Lithuanian subtitles, Lithuanian newsreels became mandatory before the main feature film. These policies often ignored the needs of the main national group of the city – Poles. Cinema owners often ignored these requirements and the audience often greeted Lithuanian newsreels with shouts and whistles.

Section I.2.5. is dedicated to Soviet films in Lithuania. In September 1926, in preparation for the signing of the non-aggression pact between Lithuania and the USSR, the Soviet film *Battleship Potemkin* was shown in Lithuania. The film provoked the first discussion on film propaganda in the history of Lithuania. The liberal and socialist press considered the film a tremendous success, a real work of art; the catholic and right-wing press called it a pile of Soviet lies and communist agitation, and argued that movies like this should be banned in Lithuania. In part, the film also helped the coup of December 1927. Although Antanas Smetona received funding from Soviet diplomats in Lithuania for publication of his Tautininkai party press, the official explanation for the coup given to the public was a threat of communist revolution in Lithuania. After the coup, Soviet films were officially not shown in the country for some time, but they soon came back to the cinemas again. Public opinion about Soviet films remained fragmented throughout all the 1930s. Although part of the society demanded that Soviet films should be banned as propaganda, this was not done in order to maintain good international relations – the Soviets supported Lithuanian position on the Vilnius

issue. Soviet films, on the other hand, were actively censored to reduce their propaganda potential, but this could not be done effectively – Soviet films were too ideological. Therefore, viewers who defended Soviet films were outraged that censorship only "destroyed Soviet works of art". The number of Soviet films in the country was small, but Soviet comedies and musicals like the *Tractor Drivers* (1939) or *Circus* (1936), received wide public and media attention. In a way this phenomenon has shown, that a part of Lithuanian movie-goers were still attached to Russian culture (Soviet film were often advertised as having Russian songs, or theatre artists). However, the attempts to justify Soviet propaganda, to present propaganda image as a representation of real Soviet day to day life, also reflected, that a part of Lithuania was dissatisfied with social and economic situation in the country and susceptible to Soviet propaganda.

Chapter II deals with the cinema under Soviet occupation in 1940-1941. Section II.1.1 discusses a new form of film screening in Lithuania. Although the garrisons of the Soviet soldiers were established in Lithuania already in October 1939, at that time they were forbidden to maintain relations with Lithuanian civilians. After the occupation in June 1940, the situation changed. In the squares of cities and towns Soviet soldiers began to hold free screenings of Soviet films in the open air. It was a new way of showing films in Lithuania, it gained a lot of popularity, which was exploited and often exaggerated in the press. These film screening were aimed at maintaining Lithuanian optimism during the occupation and improving the image of the occupiers in society. This was partly successful, Soviet film propaganda influenced how parts of the audience viewed the life in USSR. The most active screenings of open-air films took place in July-August 1940, before the final annexation of Lithuania. In February 1941, such screenings were banned by law – the propaganda campaign was over and viewers had to pay for the films.

Section II.1.2 deals with the network of cinemas and their nationalization. On July 26, 1940 the plan of nationalization of

Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian companies and banks was approved in Moscow. Thus, nationalization of Lithuanian movie industry had begun even before the country officially became one of the republics of the USSR. On October 28, 1940, the Law on the Nationalization of Cinemas, Movie Rental Offices and Mobile Cinemas was promulgated. However, nationalization took place even before the promulgation of this law – film rental offices were actually nationalized in August 1940, when only USSR films were allowed to be shown in Lithuania; some cinemas were also taken from their owners before the nationalization of cinemas was announced. Thus, even under Soviet law, nationalization was carried out illegally. The consequences of nationalization were not positive – in October 1940, 79 commercial cinemas were nationalized in Lithuania, and after a few months only 62 cinemas operated in the country. Meanwhile the press lied about the growing number of cinemas. State officials emphasized the greater need for cinemas in the provincial parts of Lithuania, a centralized network of mobile cinemas had started to be organized in Lithuania, but during the short period of the first Soviet occupation, wider achievements could not be achieved here either. The public even cried, that under Antanas Smetona rule cinema visited Lithuanian provincial towns more often than under the Soviet rule, who claimed that cinema is "the most important of the arts".

Section II.1.3 discusses attempts to make cinemas a place for communist ideological indoctrination. In Soviet-occupied Lithuania cinemas were divided into categories according to quality of their equipment, no Lithuanian cinema was given the highest, the first category. Thus there were no truly representative cinemas in Lithuania. The audience also often complained about poor service in cinemas, high ticket prices that did not decrease after the Soviet occupation. Some cinema's names were changed to ideological ones ("Red Star", "The young communist" etc.), but this firstly affected the smallest, provincial cinemas, which operated without distinctive names before the Soviet occupation. "Red corners" – places to read Soviet literature and educate oneself ideologicaly, were being

established in various cinemas. Often by announcing the "socialist races" between different cinemas for the establishment of these corners. However, even the press acknowledged that the "red corners" failed in most of the cinemas – they looked representative for a short period of time, but soon they were abandoned, littered, had no new press displayed and became the gathering points to smoke cigarettes. Changing the face of cinemas turned out to be a more difficult task than expected, especially when there were no more cinema owners, and they belonged to the "working people".

Chapter II.2.1 discusses the cinema repertoire. Until August 4, 1940, films from abroad – mostly the USA, Germany and Poland – had still been shown in Lithuania. Then Lithuania was declared one of the USSR republics, and only Soviet films were allowed to be shown in the country. During Antanas' Smetona presidential years, Lithuanian cinema-goers were accustomed to 400-600 feature film premieres every year, when only Soviet movies remained on cinema's screens, only 1-2 unseen films appeared every week on screens. First, people were lured to cinemas by promoting the screenings of full copies of films that previously were censored or banned by Lithuanian film censorship. However, eventually that was not enough. The movie-goers resented the monotonic and outdated cinema repertoire. Although the press reported that Soviet films were very much loved by the public, the attendance of cinemas fell sharply. A lot of films were shown without Lithuanian subtitles, which alienated from cinemas non-Russian speaking public. When there were Lithuanian subtitles, there were often many mistakes left. The preparations to dub some Soviet movies with Lithuanian language also had begun, but no such dubbed films were shown in the country till June 1941. Eventually, the poor situation of the film repertoire had been saved with abroad film production, made in capitalist countries. In March 1941, foreign films returned to the screens: Chaplin's *Modern times* (1936), Hollywood musical *One Hundred Men and a Girl* (1937) and biopic *The Great Waltz* (1938) were shown with great success. In only one year, the public got fed up with Soviet films.

Chapter II.2.2 discusses the relationship between children and films. Soviet propaganda claimed that during Antanas' Smetona reign, Lithuanian children were abandoned cinema-wise, there was a lack of children films and screenings for children. Children often visited films labeled "adult-only"; made noises, brawled and generally behaving badly in a movie theaters. It was said that this was no longer the case in Soviet Lithuania. However, the lack of films for children, and special film screenings for children was obvious. The dissatisfaction with child behavior at cinema theatres was bigger than ever. And "adult-only" movies were as easily accessible for children as they used to be. The Soviet rule did not change a lot in this regard, save the propaganda slogans.

Chapter II.2.3 discusses film journalism in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. After the Soviet occupation, the number of published newspapers and magazines in Lithuania dropped significantly, from 159 titles in 1938 to 34 in 1941. The number of publications on cinema also decreased in the same way. Most of the cinema related publications were translated to Lithuanian language and reprinted from the Russian-language press; a new kind of publications were translations of lyrics from famous Soviet movie songs. There was a lack of original publications, written by Lithuanian authors. Partly due to the decline of printed press, but also due to the fear of criticizing Soviet films – there was also a lack of critical publications on literature or theatre. Due to the lack of original publications in the press the first film festival in the history of Lithuania, which took place in April 1941, went almost unnoticed. The only publication dedicated to the festival, complained about the lack of publications about the festival. Though it was not a big loss, the festival showed only Soviet films, all of them had already been screened in Lithuania during months of occupation.

Section II.2.4 discusses local film production. On November 13, 1940, a law was promulgated establishing the Newsreel film studio of Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, although factually it had actually been operating for some months already. The film studio was

built on the foundations laid in independent Lithuania – the "Lietuvos filma" ("Lithuanian film") company founded in 1940, this company had to take over the monopoly on the creation of newsreels in Lithuania. The newly established film studio took over the equipment and staff of this company. A number of cinematographers and directors from the USSR came to the country to "help" Lithuanian filmmakers already on the first days of the occupation. They taught to "correctly" portray the social changes taking place in the country – rallies, parades and performances of Soviet soldiers were featured in the first Soviet newsreels made in the country. Cinema was also used to advertise the candidates of the staged People's Seimas (The People Parliament) elections – it was the first time the film was used in election propaganda in Lithuania, and so on. Although the press announced significant achievements of Soviet Lithuanian cinema in comparison with the Antanas' Smetona period, it has not progressed far in terms of quantity. During one year of occupation, about 40 newsreel journals were made and several documentaries created – similar film output was reached in late 1930s. On the other hand, there was still no shortage of complaints about the quality of the film chronicle, and viewers even complained that many cinemas did not show Lithuanian newsreels at all. These problems also plagued Lithuanian cinemas in late 1930s. More ambitious ideas – moving film studio to Vilnius, making a feature film – remained only unfulfilled plans.

Chapter II.2.5 discusses the relationship between films made and shown in Soviet occupied Lithuania and reality. It is argued that the image Lithuanians have built of USSR through Soviet films shown in Antanas' Smetona Lithuania, or the first months of the occupation, drastically changed when the country was exposed to the daily life under the Soviet regime for the longer time. While the propaganda slogans claimed, that Soviet films depict real life of the USSR, the first film newsreel created in Soviet-occupied Lithuania already openly falsified reality. It was stated that this newsreel showed the real escape of Antanas Smetona from Lithuania, when it was just a cheaply staged

event. Cinematographers from the USSR taught Lithuanian filmmakers how to "correctly" falsify reality – for example, Lithuanians arrested by the Soviets in newsreels could become communists liberated from the prisons of Antanas Smetona. The Soviet reality shown in newsreels went far beyond the facts of everyday life. Both filmmakers and viewers realized that. It could be argued that convincing the public, that Soviet films really depicts the true life, was no longer a goal, after the country had already been occupied by USSR. Instead the Soviet films served as an example of new Soviet vocabulary and forms of adaptation to the regime.

Chapter II deals with the cinema under Nazi occupation in 1941-1944. Section III.1.1 discusses the plans of the Lithuanian Provisional Government in the field of cinema in 1941. In June 1941, Germany launched a war against the USSR. With the outbreak of war, an uprising broke out in Lithuania, Lithuanian fighters helped marching German soldiers in the expulsion of the Soviet forces from the country. On June 23, 1941, Kaunas Radio announced the restoration of Lithuania's independence. The established Provisional Government of Lithuania began to promulgate laws. Some of them also concerned cinema. On July 22, 1941, the denationalization of industrial enterprises was announced – cinemas had to be return to their owners, except when these owners were Jews or communist collaborators. The restored pre-war company "Lietuvos Filma" ("Lithuanian film") was to be the main producer of newsreels and films in the country. The establishment of a Ministry of Propaganda, which would also take care of cinema issues, was discussed. However the passed laws were not put in effect. The fate of Lithuania was decided in Germany. Germany did not even consider the possibility of an independent Lithuania – in the war plans the country had to be exploited economically and eventually colonized. At the end of July 1941, German administrative rule was introduced in the country – the work of the Lithuanian Provisional Government was terminated. A new occupation began.

Section III.1.2 discusses the cinema network in Nazi-occupied Lithuania. In the first weeks of the war, cinemas did not work, in Vilnius and Kaunas they started to open their doors only in the middle of July 1941. Cinemas were taken care of by the German Army's propaganda division (Propaganda-Staffel Litauen). In November 1941, Central Film Company for the Eastern territories (Zentral-Filmgesellschaft Ost) was founded in Berlin, the company was responsible for all the film issues in the occupied eastern territories. Subsidiary divisions of the company were established for the different regions of Occupied East territories So Ostland Film Company (Ostland Film GmbH) with its headquarters in Riga was founded. The company was responsible for the cinema network in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In Lithuania it had its offices in Kaunas and Vilnius. During the war, the Lithuanian cinema network suffered significantly – part of the cinema equipment was damaged, several cinemas burned down. The number of cinemas in Lithuania dropped to 46 in April 1942. During the years of occupation this number did not grow rapidly, only at the end of the occupation, several new cinemas were opened in Vilnius. Although the Lithuanian Provisional Government announced the denationalization of companies, including cinemas, the Nazi administration was not going to carry it out. Denationalization was only considered when German army began to lose the battles in the East. At that time, the promise of denationalization was used to encourage Lithuanians to fight for German interests in the East. From November 1943, Lithuanian cinemas were returned to their former owners. The return of property to the owners was widely advertised by propaganda, but many Lithuanians understood that this was only a blatant attempt bribe them into working with Nazis more closely. Such an attempt might have worked better in early days of occupation, but not in late 1943, when the society was already dissatisfied by the German rule, and the German loss in the war seemed imminent. Nevertheless, the denationalization of cinemas did bring some good news – it was reported, that the quality of cinema improved (minor repairs were made, film theatres became cleaner), for the first time

during the war mobile cinemas appeared again in Lithuania. However, this situation did not last long, as after less than a year Lithuania was occupied by the Soviets again, and cinema owners were deprived of their property once more.

Section III.1.2 discusses the situation in cinema theatres. The new occupation has made cinema tickets more expensive again. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of visitors to cinemas – it was reported that even with the decrease in the number of cinemas, the number of cinema visitors increased by one third compared to the years of Soviet occupation. This was not a lie – there were queues at cinemas, films were often shown in crowded halls, and cinema tickets became a valuable commodity in the black market, where their prices could have risen as much as 10 times the official ticket price. Such a situation would have seemed impossible in Soviet times, as films had been shown in half-empty cinemas. Cinema tickets were mostly resold by teenagers at the cinema entrances – these became a dangerous place. Numerous complaints about frequent thefts, harassment of passers-by, and hooliganism near the cinemas appeared in the press. Nevertheless, the audience was determined to pay a higher price and endure humiliation in order to enter the cinemas – which spoke in favor of German films.

Section III.2.1 tries to explain the popularity of German films in Lithuania in 1941-1944. The screens of Nazi-occupied Lithuanian cinemas were closer to the ones in independent pre-war Lithuania then those during the years of Soviet occupation. While during Soviet occupation films were advertised as significant ideological works and tremendous pieces of art, during the years of Nazi occupation the feature films often invited the viewers to relax, have fun and forget the reality of war. Films were regarded as entertainment, and this attracted Lithuanian viewers to the cinemas – cheap comedies, like *A Play in the Summer Wind* (*Spiel im Sommerwind*, 1939) in Lithuanian cinemas financially surpassed much more expensive, Third Reich propaganda films with famous actors. Cinema reflected the wider realities of society – for example circus shows flourished in Nazi-occupied

Lithuania, "light" stage productions (operettas, melodramas) were abundant in theaters; and even the tabloid press returned. In this tabloid press short fiction and poems by Lithuanian authors praising cinema and movie stars once again appeared – something lost during the Soviet occupation. However, entertaining films often had hidden propaganda tendencies in them, and even if there was none of them, they could still serve to benefit the Nazi regime. Zentral-Filmgesellschaft Ost believed that cinema must entertain the audience, so they could forget the war for a short while and then go back to work on the same wars industry with the renewed strength. In this way, even completely non-ideological films in Lithuania served to benefit the occupiers.

Section III.2.2 deals with Nazi film propaganda. The Nazi propaganda films in question were directed towards Britain. Already the first feature film shown in Nazi-occupied Lithuania – *Uncle Kruger* (*Ohm Krüger*, 1941), was a blatant attack on Britain. An expensive propaganda film depicting the Boer war, war highly regarded by Nazi ideologists, it was the first film in Germany to receive newly created "Film of the Nation" ("Film der Nation") distinction. However, the film did not appear in most of the other Nazi-occupied lands. It was thought that the screening of the film in Poland or Norway could reinforce anti-German sentiment, as the British imperialism shown in the film could have been linked to the Nazi occupation policy in these countries. However, an exception was made for Lithuania (as well as Latvia and Estonia). The Lithuanian press called for this film (and other German films "unmasking" British imperialism) to be associated not only with British imperialism, but also with the recent aggression against Lithuania by the USSR. But that was a mistake. As early as September 1941, statements appeared that the anti-British films shown by the Germans in Lithuania were not associated with the recent occupation of the USSR, but with the new Nazi occupation. In Lithuania, there was a strong support for the United States and Great Britain, while the support for the Nazi fight

against communism was only seen as a lesser of the two evils (Germany and USSR).

Section III.2.3 discusses anti-Semitic German film propaganda and film propaganda against communism. At the beginning of the German-USSR war, anti-Soviet films did not appear in Lithuania, although copies of anti-Soviet films such as *Dorf im roten Sturm* (a wartime re-release of the film *Friessenot*, 1935) reached the country, they were shown only to German soldiers and not to Lithuanian civilians. There was a lack of feature anti-Soviet films and their copies in Germany, they were firstly allocated to the frontlines, so Lithuanian civilians did not see them until 1942. Meanwhile, anti-British films were screened, while presenting them in anti-Soviet context. Wartime anti-Soviet production, like film *GPU* (1942), was poorly met by the propaganda minister Goebbels, and this film was not even screened in Lithuania, although the plot partly took place in the country. Anti-Soviet propaganda spread more efficiently through the newsreels and other channels – press, radio, exhibitions. The anti-Semitic image of the Jewish bolshevism, that was responsible for the start of Second World War and the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, was actively supported through this propaganda. Lithuania was a favorable environment for the spread of such propaganda images. Here the myth of Jewish bolshevism was already prominent in in late 1930s, it became especially popular during the years of Soviet occupation. During Nazi occupation historical anti-Semitic film dramas, such as *Die Rothschilds* (1940) or *Jud Süß* (1940), were put in the context of Soviet occupation and Jewish bolshevism in the press articles that accompanied these film premiers in Lithuania. Some anti-Semitic films, such as *Jud Süß*, had become very popular in Lithuania. But this film's popularity can't be explained by the abundance of anti-Semitic beliefs in the country alone. Other anti-Semitic films, such as the "documentary" *Der ewige Jude* (1940), did not gain such popularity, although the press blindly lied about how popular this film was in the country. The success of the films like *Jud Süß* also rested on their entertainment value – the film was an

expensive production with beautiful costumes and well-known actors, it was popular even in Nazi occupied lands with no hard anti-Semitic feelings, like Denmark. It is unclear if anti-Semitic films shown during Nazi occupation period could have encouraged some Lithuanians to participate in the Holocaust, but it can be argued, that these films certainly could give an "excuse" for those, who already participated in it. Anti-Semitism, the image of the Jewish bolshevism, and anti-Soviet propaganda are particularly evident in the only film made in Lituania during the Nazi occupation with the help of Lithuanian filmmakers. This film was a Lithuanian version of the Latvian film film *Red Mist* (*Roter Nebel*, 1942; Lithuanian version – *Raudonoji migla*, 1944). The Lithuanian version of the film was supposed to encourage Lithuanians to fight against the Soviets, but the film version did not fulfill its full propaganda potential – it appeared in the country too late, only in March 1944, and the screening took place only in Vilnius and Kaunas. The graphic scenes of Soviet violence shown in the film motivated not to fight the oncoming Soviet soldiers along with the Germans, but to flee from them.

The conclusions of the work state that although in 1926-1944 three different political and ideological regimes changed in Lithuania, in the field of cinema all three of them suffered greater or lesser defeats. Cinematic propaganda in the country did not function as the country's hosts wanted at the time, and the ideological functions of motion pictures were often outweighed by their entertainment value.

## SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES ON THE THEME OF THIS DISSERTATION:

1) Audrius Dambrauskas. Newsreels and Censorship in Antanas Smetona Lithuania, 1926-1940 in: Culture Crossroads. 2017, vol. 10. P. 8-18. ISNN 2500-9974. Online: http://www.culturecrossroads.lv/pdf/222/en

2) Audrius Dambrauskas. The representation of the Great War on Lithuanian cinema screens, 1918-1940 in: Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis. Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla. 2017, T. 34. P. 125-146. ISSN: 1392-4095. Online: http://briai.ku.lt/en/publications/acta-historica-universitatis-klaipedensis/volumes/volume-34/

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