DIVE-IN **2025**, **5**(**2**): 39–59
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2785-3233/25791

DIVE-IN
AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ON DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

After the clash of empires: Women's stories from Soviet-occupied Karafuto and Lithuania

Gunde Dauksyte
Universität Heidelberg

Abstract Building on the concepts of mediation and multidirectional memory, this paper offers a comparative analysis of two memoirs written by women who, at the end of WWII, found themselves in Soviet-occupied territories—Sakhalin in the east and Lithuania in the west. The analysis revolves around two questions: how do the authors understand and construct femininity in their texts and how does this shape their narratives of war and Soviet occupation? Even though both were writing at a time when women's experiences of the (post)war were marginalized, by aligning their narratives with the ideological demands of the Cold War, the authors could speak publicly about sexual violence and other forms of gendered trauma. By focusing on memory and femininity, this article connects the distant stories of a Japanese settler and a Lithuanian partisan, showing how historical actors recall being liberated from one empire only to be swept away by the next.

Keywords multidirectional memory; Soviet occupation; gender; Japanese repatriation; Stalinist repressions.

1. Introduction

Recent English-language scholarship on WWII has challenged many aspects of the earlier narratives about the conflict. Not only has it shown that the conventional periodization of 1939–1945 is short-sighted, Eurocentric, and ill-fitted, it has also reframed the conflict from a simplistic narrative of victory of democracy over fascism to a "clash of empires" (Overy 2021; Bass 2023). From this more recent perspective, the two "world wars" are viewed as one larger struggle, not only between states but also inside them, and the Allied powers—with the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union (USSR) at the center—are not merely the saviors and liberators, but also modern empires in their own right.

This article is an exploration of what happened after this clash of empires. More specifically, it is an analysis of how two women, who ended up in the

© 2025 The Author(s)
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons BY License.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

territories taken over by the USSR, remembered and mediated what happened to them and in their surroundings. The territories in question are German-controlled Lithuania and Japanese-controlled southern Sakhalin, both of which, despite being on the opposite ends of the Soviet empire, ended up being swallowed by it in 1945. As the land under their feet changed hands, to borrow Sherzod Muminov's phrase (2022: 7), Elena Juciūtė and Shibano Toshie found themselves alone, separated from their families and unable to leave the USSR. However, their life stories reveal a more complex picture of war and its legacies, than the one suggested by their shared identity as civilian women caught in a war and trapped under an authoritarian regime. Shibano was an agent of Japanese settler colonialism while Juciūtė was a staunch nationalist, involved in the postwar anti-Soviet guerilla resistance, complicating any straightforward connection between war, women and victimhood.

Although the life trajectories of Shibano and Juciūtė never crossed, the similarities in their biographies are striking. Both were interned in the Soviet forced labor camps, managed to leave the USSR at a time when it was not easy to do so, and both chose to immediately put their experiences down on paper. Thus, their texts predate the outpour of war and repatriation memoirs in Japan in the 1980s (Buchholz 2003: 132) and the post-Soviet "return of memory" in Lithuania (Davoliūtė 2014: 175). Soon after the Soviet invasion, both found themselves separated from their parents and siblings by the Iron Curtain and, with the exception of Shibano's short-lived marriage of convenience, both remained unmarried and childless. This differentiates their texts from similar memoirs written by Japanese women repatriates and Lithuanian women deportees, whose stories were frequently shaped by their identity as mothers (Fujiwara 1949; Armonas 1961; Rūkienė 1968; 1970; Women's Division of Sōka Gakkai 1986). Finally, the texts of both Shibano and Juciūtė are shaped by their anti-Soviet outlook and strong patriotic feelings towards Japan and Lithuania respectively. This often turns into outright hatred towards the Other; specifically, Shibano's hatred towards Koreans and Juciūtė's antisemitism (Juciūtė 1974: 9, 191-193). Their depictions of Russians, too, are not unbiased and should be read as reflections of the authors' views, not historical reality.

As an analysis of two women's autobiographical texts, this article owes a considerable intellectual debt to former similar research, especially in the field of study of camp literature (Jolluck 2002; Kurvet-Käosaar 2003; Budrytė 2017; Artwińska 2019). Previous studies in the field have shown that women's experiences of war are markedly different from men's (Kurvet-Käosaar 2003: 314) and that, in order to uncover them fully, researchers often have to straddle

several disciplines and engage imperfect sources, such as memoirs. As has been argued by Artwińska, the value of these texts "does not lie in providing tangible evidence of verifiable information on limit-experiences, but rather in combining a subjective perspective with information" (2019: 233–234). Thus, by focusing on the gendered subjectivity of Shibano and Juciūtė, this analysis adds to our understanding of how women experienced and mediated the war and its aftermath. Crucially, neither of the two memoirs offers a simple notion of femininity, painting instead a complex intersectional image, where the actions of the protagonists often challenge their own words.

Methodologically, this article draws from the field of memory studies, where interactions between individual and collective memory, history, and art have been studied most rigorously. More specifically, I build this analysis on the concepts of mediation and multidirectional memory. Mediation, in the context of memory, allows us to see memoirs critically, not as a medium that provides direct access to the past but as a social institution with its own genre conventions, produced at a particular time and in a particular societal discourse (Radstone 2005; Morris-Suzuki 2005). Multidirectional memory was developed as a tool to think through historical traumas, such as the Holocaust and the transatlantic slave trade, 'in parallel' rather than 'in contrast' with one another (Rothberg 2009). In the context of this article, it allows us to look at two memoirs written in different languages and published in different countries, as texts that nonetheless share aspects worthy of comparison. Approaching memory as multidirectional, encourages us to think beyond the nation as the default methodological standard and invites us to challenge the notion of container-cultures—the idea that the world is made up of distinct cultural units, pure, self-sufficient and perfectly isolated from one another (Erll 2011; De Cesari & Rigney 2014).

The history of 'repatriation' or, more aptly, end of empire migration (Bull 2023: 13–14) offers many opportunities to rethink nations, cultures and identities as homogenous and ethnically pure. In recent years, many scholars have tackled these topics in the context of the Japanese Empire more broadly (Watt 2009, Morris-Suzuki 2010, Katō 2020, Paichadze & Bull 2023) and the island of Sakhalin more specifically (Paichadze & Seaton 2015, Nakayama 2019). However, comparative perspectives are still relatively few (Araragi, Kawakita & Matsuura 2019). The comparative study at hand is an attempt to add to the existing research on end of empire migration by paying special attention to gender. But more importantly, by looking at Japanese and Lithuanian case studies side by side, I hope to offer a new perspective which

connects the history and memory of Japanese repatriation with similar stories in the Soviet periphery.

The article is divided into two sections. The first one offers a brief historical overview, with a particular focus on Karafuto/Sakhalin and Lithuania. The second section is an analysis of the memoirs, followed by a short conclusion. The comparative analysis revolves around two questions: how do Shibano and Juciūtė understand and construct femininity in their texts and how does this, in turn, shape their narratives of war and Soviet occupation. Through a close reading it becomes clear that even though Shibano and Juciūtė were writing at a time when women's experiences of the (post)war were marginalized, by aligning their narratives with the ideological demands of the Cold War, both women could speak rather openly and publicly about the matters of sexual violence and other forms of gendered trauma.

2. Historical background

After defeating the Russian Empire in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, the Japanese Empire acquired the southern half of the Sakhalin Island and established the Karafuto prefecture and established a colonial government on it in 1907. The defeat was one of many factors that sent its adversary, the Russian Empire, into a crisis, which was one of the contributing factors behind the civil war in 1917. The Bolshevik Revolution provided an opportunity for many nations under Russian imperial rule to declare their sovereignty, and one of them was Lithuania, established in 1918. Their independence, however, was short-lived as in 1939, the USSR forced the three Baltic states to sign mutual assistance treaties and, in the following year, presented them with ultimatums, demanding the stationing of an unspecified number of Soviet soldiers and premature elections of new governments in the three states. After a fraudulent election, the new pro-Soviet Lithuanian government petitioned Moscow to be accepted into the Union. Consequently, in 1940, Lithuania lost its sovereignty and became a client state: the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) (Lane 2001; Vardys & Sedaitis 2018).

Changes in territorial control coincided with the mass movement of people. By the 1940s, on the other end of the Eurasian continent, the Japanese population of Karafuto had reached more than 380,000, vastly outnumbering all other ethnicities there (Nakayama 2015: 26). This was the result of Japanese settler colonialism, actively promoted by the Japanese state not only in Karafuto but also in other Japanese colonies at the time. Thus far, the Japanese military

advances had been mostly successful as it expanded the reaches of the Empire. One exception was the 1939 Battle of Khalkhin Gol, also known as the Nomonhan Incident, in which the Soviets defeated the Imperial Japanese Army. This was one of the factors that lead to the signing of a neutrality pact between the two countries in 1941, allowing the Japanese military to focus on other fronts. Meanwhile, in the LSSR, the Soviet government engaged in the first mass deportations from the Baltic states to regions in Siberia, meant to displace all segments of the population that might harbor anti-Soviet sentiment and act on it. The operation was no sooner complete when Nazi Germany attacked the USSR and swiftly took over the Baltics, triggering some of the worst pogroms and the destruction of the local Jewish population to the extent that is considered some of the worst in Europe at this time (Eidintas 2003).

For a while, the Axis powers seemed to be on track for victory, but the tide soon turned as the leaders of the "Third Reich" and the Japanese Empire found themselves unable to sustain their offensives. As it was pushing back the Wehrmacht, the USSR took back the territories that it had previously held, including the Baltics, reestablishing the former Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). Thousands of people tried to escape not only the frontline, but also the return of Joseph Stalin's regime. An estimated 120,000 people escaped from Lithuania to the West in 1944 (Anušauskas 1996: 404). The return of the Soviet rule launched a guerrilla anti-Soviet resistance in the Baltics which lasted until 1956. Elena Juciūtė, too, joined the resistance in 1946, while her family, unbeknownst to her, escaped to the West.

Three months after reaching Berlin, the Soviet army joined the war against Japan, breaking the neutrality pact and taking over the Japanese-controlled northeastern China, northern Korea, southern half of the Sakhalin Island and the Kuril Islands. As in Lithuania, on Sakhalin, too, civilians tried to escape the encroaching Soviet army. On August 23, about 77,000 children, women and the elderly were evacuated to Hokkaido and between August 20, 1945 and September, 1946, at least 24,000 people were smuggled out of the island (Nakayama 2015: 28–29). As the Allies scrambled to subsume the remnants of the defeated empires, the USSR expanded both eastward and westward.

In 1946, the US and the USSR reached an agreement regarding the repatriation of Japanese from Sakhalin and by the summer of 1949, nearly 300,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians were repatriated to the main Japanese islands (Bull 2018). The remaining 23,000 Koreans who had moved to the island before 1945 and 1,400 Japanese were prohibited from returning to Japan or leaving the Sakhalin Oblast until the restoration of Soviet-Japanese diplomatic

relations in 1956 (Nakayama 2015: 29). This allowed for the repatriation of 2,300 Japanese and Koreans from Sakhalin between 1957 and 1959 (Din 2015: 181). Shibano Toshie was one of them.

As Japanese settlers were repatriated out of Sakhalin, Lithuanians under the suspicion of harboring anti-Soviet sentiment were herded into the camps and special settlements of Siberia. During the postwar Stalinist period, about 118,000 were forcefully displaced to remote regions in Siberia and more than 140,000 were sent to the Gulag camps (Anušauskas 1996: 403). The Baltic states remained under Soviet rule until the late 1980s. Lithuania declared re-establishment of independence on March 11, 1990, which was met with an economic blockade and military intervention from Moscow in January, 1991. After these final throes, the Soviet empire was dissolved and replaced with more than a dozen sovereign nations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia whereas Sakhalin remains part of the Russian Federation with a majority Russian population.

2. The case studies of Shibano Toshie and Elena Juciūtė

Shibano Toshie, was born in 1929 and moved with her family to Shirutoru, Karafuto in 1933, at the age of four. She was sixteen when Karafuto became the Sakhalin Oblast and was only repatriated to Japan in 1958, much later than the majority of Japanese repatriates from the island. She managed to write and publish her nearly 250-page memoir, titled *Tsundora no onna* (Woman of the tundra) in the same year. From July to September, 1958, the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, one of Japan's major newspapers, ran advertisements for the book, claiming the author received more than 11,300 letters from her readers (*Yomiuri* 1958, 2). Despite the attention, Shibano did not publish any other book, article or give any interviews, effectively disappearing from the public eye.

Shibano's identity as a woman is front and center of her memoir from the beginning. The author's view of womanhood, however, is strictly defined by virtue and marriage. On the first page of her foreword, she writes: "Born a woman, is there anyone who does not desire marriage and a happy family life?" (Shibano 1958: 3). This undertone dominates the first half of her memoir, as Shibano is overwhelmingly concerned with her chastity, fearing that losing it will diminish her chances of getting married. The obsession with chastity inversely leads to a continual thematic return to sex throughout the text. At every turn Shibano describes the voracious gaze of men, the insatiable libido of Russian women, the loud intercourse that Russians would allegedly have, and

the multiple attempts of rape that she narrowly escapes (discussed below). It also leads to a fear and disgust towards men which, combined with her homoerotic experiences later in the text, draws her declared heterosexuality into question. Thus, Shibano's identity as a woman is not only at the center of the memoir, it also defines her experiences and how she recalls the thirteen years of her life on Sakhalin.

Shibano begins the memoir in 1943 with her graduation from higher elementary school at fourteen, after which she works as a telephone operator for a year and then as a nurse in Shisuka. She depicts herself as a "young girl" (*musume*) of sixteen, who gets flustered when she has to deal with wounded soldiers, such as changing their bandages and helping them relieve themselves (12). The fact that they are men, a gendered Other, seems more important to the author than their identity as Japanese or as imperial soldiers who were meant to protect Japanese civilians like herself, which is a theme that is important in other repatriate memoirs (Fujiwara 1949).

In Shisuka, Shibano hears of the Soviet invasion and tries to escape the approaching frontline by going back to Shirutoru, where she is reunited with her family. There she joins a group of her peers who spend their days in hiding from Soviet soldiers. The refuge is organized by the adults who make sure the girls hide during the day and only come out at night, instilling a sense of uneasiness and fear in the young women.

Shibano claims they were too young and naïve to know what "a man can do to a woman" (31), and thus the three girls arrange to escape their hideout and go see the Soviet soldiers from afar. Driven by curiosity to see Russian men for the first time in their lives, they cut their hair short, dress up as boys, and paste on fake beards to their faces. This is a common theme in accounts by women repatriates, who often mention disguising their gender in order to move about safely (Women's Division of Sōka Gakkai 1986: 44, 61). When Shibano and the others come face-to-face with the Soviet soldiers, who regard them with amused curiosity, the girls freeze from fear until a Japanese elderly man tells them to run away because the Russians will take their "most prized possession" (Shibano 1958: 34), i.e., their virginity. This experience seems enough to instill fear in Shibano but once she returns to her father, the message is driven home through violence. After learning that his daughter tried to approach the soldiers of her own volition, despite her pure intentions, self-admittedly absurd precautions, and a fortunate outcome, the father beats her to the point that Shibano starts fearing for her life (35). This experience instills in Shibano a

sense that it is better to die than to be "defiled" by a man, which is expressed explicitly later in her memoir.

Soon after this incident, Shibano was once again hired as a telephone operator, due to her previous experience. For her new role, Shibano learns Russian, which proves detrimental to her repatriation to Japan since, due to her valuable skills, the authorities refuse to let her go. In an attempt to be made redundant, Shibano gets into a scuffle with a Russian co-worker, accidentally throws acid at her and is sentenced to three years of forced labor under Article 74 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). During her time in the prison camps of Sakhalin, Shibano's father and siblings are repatriated to Hokkaido, leaving her alone on the island at eighteen years old.

Although Shibano has a clearly delineated view of what every woman must desire most in life—namely, marriage and family—during her time in a women's prison camp she witnesses several challenges to heteronormativity and the binary view of sex. According to the author, she is imprisoned with two intersex individuals whom she describes with curiosity and pity. According to Shibano, they cannot be held in a men's prison because they would be abused and likely raped, but they cannot fit in in a women's camp either (65). Shibano goes on to depict their naked bodies as observed in a bathhouse (67), and how they would have loud intercourse with women prisoners (66). While in the camp, Shibano also witnesses homosexual relations between other women, which she describes without shock or judgement (70). As brief as Shibano's time in camp was, it offered opportunities to widen her understanding of sex and sexuality. Shibano nevertheless views intersex bodies as a misfortune bestowed upon the poor souls she encounters, and furthermore that homosexual relations are born out of necessity, not something desirable under normal circumstances. The existence of same-sex relations in the Soviet camps is by no means a new discovery, discussed recently and at length by Rustam Alexander (2021, 23–50). Of note here is Shibano's willingness and candidness in depicting them, which is not common in camp testimonies, begging the question what role nonheteronormativity plays in the text. On the one hand, it adds to her characterization of Russian women as the cultural Other, driven by sexual desire to the extent that is presented as foreign to Shibano. On the other, from a literary perspective, it foreshadows the narrator's own shifting desires later in the text.

Shibano is released upon appeal, after spending just six months in camp, and she finds herself homeless, unemployed and with just 53 rubles to her name.

She soon meets a seemingly kind Korean man who takes her to an acquaintance, an older Korean man, telling her she can live with him for a while, until she finds a job and a home. To her surprise, the narrator wakes up in the middle of the night being fondled by the acquaintance who, as it turns out, had purchased Shibano as a wife. The author manages to escape unscathed and eventually lands with another pair of kind strangers, who arrange for her to become a barber's apprentice. The barber, again, a Korean man, tries to have sex with her but backs down when Shibano resists. When she later arrives at the Korean barber's home, Shibano finds out that instead of being sent for an apprenticeship, she was once again sold to the barber as a wife (Shibano 1958: 80–106). The importance of these two encounters is twofold. First, it highlights the effort Shibano put into preserving her chastity, often putting her own life in danger, just to escape the unwanted advances of men. This speaks directly to the anxieties of the postwar Japanese society about the "bodily contamination" and loose morals of women repatriates (Watt 2009: 111–125). Second, it challenges the image of the Soviet soldier as the main perpetrator of sexual violence against Japanese settlers. As such it functions within the "postwar literary treatments of repatriation," where "Koreans become a source of anxiety" (156).

These two experiences add to the author's negative attitude towards Koreans, who are described as "smelling of garlic" (Shibano 1958: 82, 97), which was a common Japanese stereotype about Koreans. Korean characters in her text also speak with an accent, as the author uses small mistakes and typos to render how Koreans allegedly sound when speaking Japanese. By far the most formative experience that solidified Shibano's general attitude into a definitive hatred was her four-year marriage to a Korean man named Go. Shibano agrees to get married, despite not knowing the man, for two reasons: her friend's claim that the man is also a virgin, like Shibano, and the hope that it would make her life easier, as becoming a housewife is her view of a perfectly fulfilled woman's life (143–144). Shibano describes in detail the first sexual experience of her life, repeatedly emphasizing that it happened within the confines of marriage (147). Thus, even though she had finally given up her "most prized possession," she remained a virtuous woman by only allowing her rightful husband to "take" it. As Go turns out to be addicted to gambling and prone to violence, Shibano comes to regret her decision to get married and, perhaps even more importantly, to give up her virginity. Go's gambling and beatings push his young and industrious wife to pursue her own income and a means of escaping the marriage. Shibano joins a group of local wives who pick

wild grapes in the mountains for making alcohol and selling it on the black market. The author claims that the domestic situation of most women in the area was the same; thus, the small outings were an opportunity for the women to vent to each other, suggesting a sense of female solidarity (157). This proves to be safe space for Shibano, not least because it is occupied entirely by women. Go eventually finds the little money Shibano manages to save, which results in a violent confrontation and an end to the unhappy marriage.

Her loss of virginity and a failed attempt at domestic bliss mark the beginning of a shift in Shibano's personality and identity as a woman. Driven by a sense of loss and disappointment, she throws herself wholeheartedly at her new job at a railroad factory, noting that in the USSR women doing such demanding labor is nothing out of the ordinary (170). One day while working, however, she witnesses a horrific accident as a group of her coworkers are crushed by an oncoming train, and Shibano barely escapes death herself. Unable to cope with the trauma or see any possibility of a brighter future, the narrator decides to commit suicide. After a failed attempt at stepping in front of a train, Shibano tries to drown herself but, hearing a group of fishermen calling to her, she gets scared and runs away from the coast. The author remarks how even though she did not fear death anymore, the idea of getting "defiled" by men felt worse than dying (186).

Having failed to kill herself, Shibano turns to a different form of self-harm—heavy drinking. One evening, she confides her troubles to a Russian female friend, who brings vodka and the two decide to drown their sorrows. Shibano writes, "That night, our bodies grew so hot that we both got naked and, while embracing each other, we fell asleep with no memory of what had happened" (187). The author claims that this sort of drinking and passing out (and perhaps the physical relationship with her friend, although it is not stated explicitly) continued for several days until the friend finds her a job with a building company. What lifts Shibano out of her lowest point is the disgust she feels towards men's bodies, which indirectly prevents her from killing herself by enabling her relationship with a Russian woman, who offers physical intimacy and tenderness as well as a stable job.

Her new position is even more physically demanding than her last one, thus, Shibano abandons femininity and tries instead to fend for herself without having to rely on others. She describes how her body changes due to her work, shifting from supposed feminine ideals to strength and functionality, aspects that Shibano considers manly (189). She also starts wearing trousers instead of a skirt, changes her speech to use more masculine pronouns *ore* (I, me) and

omae (you), continues to drink heavily, and takes up gambling as a hobby, which is dominated by men. After her disappointment with domestic life, Shibano seems to dispense with her feminine identity and thus lays bare to her reader the performativity of gender. Through small changes to her speech, clothes, fitness, mannerisms, job, and hobbies, Shibano claims to have become almost entirely like a man. Her sexuality also seems to be in flux since, after her drunken embrace with her Russian friend and her transformation towards masculinity, Shibano's view of Russian women's bodies changes, too—from offputtingly fuzzy and lumpy objects of disgust (44), as described at the beginning, to "voluptuous and soft" (213) objects of desire. She describes taking dancing lessons together with her coworkers, during which the women pair up with one another, and as she is dancing with her Russian coworkers, Shibano confides, "I thought if I were a man, I would surely be tempted" (213). The narrator has similar thoughts later, while observing the naked body of her Russian friend Marusya, as they visit the washhouse together (217). Yet, in Shibano's world of Japan and the USSR in the mid-twentieth century, lesbian relations are only seemingly permitted in the prison camp and drunken stupor, not under normal circumstances or in public life. That is despite the fact that, throughout her lifetime, lesbian relations were not criminalized in Japan or the USSR, unlike male same-sex relations which were criminalized in the USSR in 1934 (Alexander 2021, 10).

The narrator depicts the three years she spent working at a construction company, unbothered by feminine ideals, enjoying the company of her female coworkers, as the most peaceful out of her thirteen years on Sakhalin (234). However, when a call for repatriation to Japan is announced, Shibano wastes no time in applying and, thus, she once again starts worrying about her virtue and marriage opportunities. After having her application rejected once, the narrator realizes that married couples are given priority (Din 2015: 181), and thus she agrees to form a fictitious marriage with another Korean man on condition that they never engage in any acts of physical intimacy and live separately while they wait for the repatriation ship to arrive (Shibano 1958: 239). Upon boarding the ship, however, Shibano exclaims to the authorities that she does not know the man and he is forced to disembark, as the narrator openly admits that she hates all Koreans and felt no remorse for tricking and using the man for her own gain (245). According to Shibano, the Japanese ship crew and journalists on board praise her for being single and not married to a Korean (245–246). Her three years in Naibuchi notwithstanding, Shibano is once again concerned solely with her virtue and marriage prospects, not only

shunning the Korean man but also rejoicing at the fact that she is able to return to Japan before she turns thirty, while she is still supposedly of marriable age. Despite the relative happiness and freedom from restrictive gender roles that Shibano is able to achieve during the Khrushchev's Thaw and her last years in the USSR, once an opportunity to repatriate arises, she seizes it. As she puts it, she wants to live in a place with "only" Japanese people, where "only" Japanese is spoken, despite the fact that she admittedly has no memory of her homeland (*sokoku*), having settled on Sakhalin when she was four (235). The imagined ethnic homogeneity is a stronger motivator even than the desire to reunite with her family members who were repatriated earlier.

At this point, Shibano's imagined audience more obviously shapes the content of her memoir. Lori Watt (2009) has shown that repatriates to Japan were faced with all kinds of discrimination from their compatriots who had spent the war on the home islands (*naichi*). Specifically, women, who had returned from China and other territories liberated/occupied by the USSR, were viewed with suspicion in terms of their chastity. This was in part shaped by "prewar and wartime metropolitan perceptions of Japanese women abroad," who were associated with prostitution, a line of work that was legal in both the colonies and the home islands but, nonetheless, relatively stigmatized (Watt 2009: 101). In this context, Shibano's continual focus on chastity in her memoir is not only based on fear instilled in her by her father's violence, but also a response to the Japanese discourse about repatriates. Likewise, her desire to live in an ethnically homogenous Japan stems from the need to prove her loyalties. Having lived almost her whole life in the "outer territories" (*gaichi*) and, in the last thirteen years, having learnt Russian, mingled with Koreans, Russians, Jews, the Tatars, and the Roma, Shibano aims to convince her reader that, still, she wants nothing more than to live surrounded by her compatriots. In the discursive context surrounding repatriates in 1950s Japan, Shibano's memoir is less a subjective recall of an individual's experiences, and more of a response to the fears and suspicions regarding "bodily contamination" and "racial purity" of the postwar Japanese society (Watt 2009: 111–125). As she decides to become a member of it, she returns to her previous feminine self, defined by hopes of marriage and domesticity, abandoning the self-reliance and gender fluidity that defined her three years in Naibuchi. The memoir ends with Shibano disembarking in Maizuru in 1958 and reuniting with her sister.

From a certain perspective, Shibano's and Juciūtė's stories are diametrically opposed—the former was a settler who left Japan to live on the island of Sakhalin while the latter stayed in Lithuania and saw Russian settlers

come live in the LSSR. Likewise, after thirteen years on Sakhalin, Shibano became a 'repatriate,' a returnee to her supposed home country that she had no memory of, whereas Juciūtė became an 'expatriate,' she left her home, which she could barely recognize by the 1960s, to go live in the US. Essentially, both women ended up displaced by the Soviet regime that they perceived as a foreign invading force which, over the years, made their surroundings unrecognizable. Despite these significant differences, the ways that Juciūtė and Shibano remembered their time in the USSR reveal striking similarities which are worth exploring in more detail. I now turn to the memoir of Elena Juciūtė.

Juciūtė was born in 1911 in what was at the time the Kovno Governorate of the Russian Empire and was seven years old when Lithuania became a sovereign state. When the first Soviet occupation came, she was thirty, working as a teacher and, according to her own account, led a quiet life during the ensuing German occupation. Juciūtė's memoir begins in the summer of 1944 as the frontline advances through the country. At the time, Juciūtė lives separately from her mother and sister, both of whom, unbeknownst to her due to wartime disruption of communications, escape to the West. Juciūtė later finds out that her mother died in Germany, likely in a displaced persons camp. As Soviet institutions return to Lithuania, Juciūtė gets involved in distributing illicit pro-Lithuanian press and in 1946, she secretly joins the guerilla resistance for which she starts producing anti-Soviet literature. Three years later, at the age of thirty-eight, she is caught by the Soviet authorities and sentenced to ten years in forced labor camps under the infamous Article 58 of the RSFSR Criminal Code. After spending seven years in various camps in Siberia, Juciūtė is amnestied and returns to the LSSR in 1956, at the age of forty-five. Ten years later, in 1966, she is finally allowed to leave the country and go live with her sister in the US. Her memoir ends as she arrives in Boston and is reunited with her sister after twenty-two years apart.

According to the foreword, Juciūtė started writing her memoir the same year she left the USSR and completed her more than 500-page text, titled *Pėdos mirties zonoje* (Footprints in the death zone) in 1971. Since the author faced financial difficulties in having her Lithuanian-language text published in the US, only 1,500 copies of her memoir were published three years after the completion of the manuscript. During the 1980s, Juciūtė published two more Lithuanian books for the diaspora community—a study of Lithuanian farmers under Soviet occupation and a co-authored memoir of a former deportee to Siberia. In 1986, Juciūtė died at the age of seventy-five in Boston.

Based on her biography and memoir, it seems that, unlike young Shibano, Juciūtė did not show any particular interest in marriage and domesticity. She seems to have devoted her early adulthood to becoming a mathematics teacher and her later years, after the Soviet invasion, to the Lithuanian nationalist cause. More than anything, however, she remained devoted to her Catholic faith, which defined her views on morality and propriety. When trying to get a Lithuanian bureaucrat to sign her paperwork for departure to the US, Juciūtė jokingly calls herself a *davatka* (509), an old unmarried zealously religious woman; an image that is strikingly different from Shibano as she departs Sakhalin—fretting about turning thirty, lamenting her lost chastity, and pushing her second Korean husband almost literally overboard. Although Juciūtė has a strict opinion on what is appropriate for a woman—the sort of clothes one is supposed wear, work one is supposed to do, and activities one can engage in—it does not involve the duty to become a good wife and homemaker, which in turn allows her to devote herself to her faith and nationalist cause.

Perhaps the most immediate and apparent difference between Shibano's and Juciūtė's texts is the age difference between the authors. At the beginning of her memoir, Juciūtė is more than twice the age of Shibano is at the beginning of hers. Shibano was twenty-nine when she wrote and published her testimony while Juciūtė started writing at fifty-five and saw her text published when she was sixty-three years old. Completely absent in Juciūtė's memoir are any concerns about chastity or marriage that feature so prominently in Shibano's text. As an older woman, Juciūtė does not present herself as someone who was in constant danger of sexual violence while in the USSR, having to fend from the unwanted stares and touches of men. Moreover, while we witness Shibano gradually grow out of her gullibility, we never see Juciūtė getting tricked by ill-meaning men or women, testifying to her relative maturity from the beginning.

That being said, Juciūtė still attaches great value to virtue, like Shibano, but her understanding of it is based primarily on her Catholicism and sense of propriety. For instance, during a full-body search after her arrest, when she has to strip naked in front of a guard, Juciūtė expresses a sense of relief that the guard is a woman and later—when she is sent back to her cell with all buttons, clasps, laces, and rubber bands removed—an implied sense of shame that male guards witness her in such state (Juciūtė 1974: 60). Later in her memoir, Juciūtė states explicitly that she "had strict views on morality" (309).

Unlike Shibano, Juciūtė does not mention being at the constant risk and fear of sexual violence herself. Instead, anything sex-related usually happens to other women in the narrator's surroundings. For instance, when describing the

wartime chaos, Juciūtė mentions that two of her cousins were raped by Russians, resulting in unwanted pregnancies (24). She also briefly depicts the mass rapes of German women committed by Soviet soldiers as well as the establishment of special camps where locals were forced to have sex with the Red Army soldiers (23).[1]

After arriving at a camp, Juciūtė describes in more detail how female prisoners would use sex as a type of currency. They would form relationships with camp guards, officers, and male prisoners with some sort of privilege, such as a job in the kitchen, warehouse, or who could receive packages from home and could give something in return for sexual favors. Depictions of these relations appear repeatedly throughout her memoir and Juciūtė's attitude towards them varies. At the beginning, she claims that these arrangements were mostly made out of necessity, with some exceptions of women who did it out of choice (127). As the memoir progresses, however, Juciūtė depicts it in increasingly ethnic and exotifying terms, stressing that it was only Russian women who tried to keep up feminine looks under abysmal camp conditions in order to seduce the guards and camp chiefs. At first, she speculates that this sort of behavior—clearly unbefitting of women from her perspective—was the outcome of poor living conditions in Russia (149) or the suppression of Orthodox Christianity. Eventually, like Shibano, Juciūtė also decides that the apparently insatiable libido of Russian women is a matter of national character (259). By subsequently stressing that her own relationships with men in the camp were limited to prayer with incarcerated priests and messages of support between Imprisoned resistance members, Juciūtė aims to show her readership that she remained a virtuous woman, devoted to her religion and her nationalist cause. Unlike Shibano, Juciūtė does not mention any lesbian relationships in the camp, either because she did not witness any or, possibly, due to a religious stigma against homosexuality.

Apart from matters pertaining to sexuality, gender also comes into focus whenever the author describes the hard labor that she and other women in the camp were forced to perform. Juciūtė describes the "equality of the sexes" bitterly, and mockingly when she writes that her cohort of female prisoners are given rough and heavy shovels, pickaxes, and sledgehammers and ordered to do hard physical work on a patch of railroad (166–167). In her eyes, the cruelty

---

[1] A group of Japanese women repatriates have spoken about their experience of being pressured by the leaders of the settler community to regularly have sex with the Soviet soldiers, so that the soldiers would not harass the community until repatriation (Hirai 2022). This is not entirely dissimilar from what Juciūtė is describing.

and absurdity of forcing women prisoners to perform such physically demanding labor is symptomatic of communist ideology, which she loathes. For Juciūtė, ideological differences can be easily extrapolated into matters of culture and ethnicity. She claims that Russian women specifically were better adapted to hard labor, such as felling trees and breaking rocks, while women from the Baltic states were better at needlework and other such supposedly feminine tasks (181). Here, again, Juciūtė reaffirms her femininity along ethnic lines, aiming to convince the reader that despite being put in an environment with no space for feminine hobbies or ideals, she and her compatriots held on to their feminine identity.

There is no appeal for Juciūtė, it seems, in gender equality more generally, since all it means is the loss of femininity and the obligation to perform physical labor. Unlike Shibano, who finds a certain level of freedom in rejecting gender roles, Juciūtė sees only loss, despite the fact that her own biography poses several challenges to gender norms. Juciūtė also turns a blind eye to aspects within the Soviet system that do not align with her views on gender equality. For instance, when describing camp rules, Juciūtė mentions that a discovery of a knife among prisoners' possessions would be met with ten days in solitary confinement if the owner was a man and five days if the owner was a woman (251). The author does not use this example as an opportunity to question Soviet gender equality more broadly. She later describes how in a trial case against Lithuanian resistance fighters, the men are sentenced to death while the only woman in the case is sentenced to ten years of forced labor in camps. Juciūtė speculates that the woman got a lighter sentence because she claimed to be in love with one of the men, i.e., not committed to the anti-Soviet cause. The author concludes that the Soviet justice system was more lenient towards drunkards and lovers (299), and does not entertain the possibility that the defendant's gender might have affected the outcome of the trial.

Overall, whenever discussing matters related to gender—whether it is the relative egalitarianism of the USSR or gender-based violence during the war—Juciūtė makes sure that it aligns with the religious and patriotic beliefs that she holds herself and assumes in her audience. For instance, whenever depicting sexual violence in her memoir, Juciūtė focuses on Russian perpetrators and their non-Russian victims, seamlessly reaffirming the image of Soviet Russia as the aggressor; an image that likely resonated with her main readership—the anti-Soviet and pro-American Lithuanian diaspora in the US. Likewise, instances of gender equality in the USSR are presented by Juciūtė as absurd and cruel--as potentially beneficial ideas that were taken to an extreme in the Soviet

system. This, too, allows the author to discuss her gender-specific experiences without any suggestion that, as a woman, Juciūtė might have benefited from this system outside of her Gulag experience in any way. By presenting us with the odd image of feeble women doing hard labor, Juciūtė aims to reassure us of her own ideological beliefs and align her text with the ideological and gender-based expectations of her audience.

5. Conclusion

This article has presented an examination of two memoirs written by women about the Soviet occupation of Lithuania and Karafuto/Sakhalin at the end of WWII. Through a focus on female identity, it has revealed that both texts, despite being published in environments that were relatively unreceptive to female war experience, were able to mediate it in quite some detail. In their publications, the two authors address the concerns of the societies that they were writing to, thus, making their harrowing stories acceptable. By repeatedly mentioning her efforts at preserving her chastity and warding off men, Shibano challenges the view of Japanese women repatriates as "sullied" or promiscuous. Moreover, her critical stance towards Soviet socialism and longing for an ethnically homogenous Japan are meant to reassure the audience that despite returning from the ideological enemy, the author is as ideologically pure as she is virtuous. Likewise, Juciūtė's unwavering anti-Soviet, pro-Catholic and nationalistic opinions that permeate her text, allow the author to mediate her experience to an audience that might otherwise be unwilling to listen to a single woman's tale.

The multidirectional approach to memory taken here also reveals significant differences between the mediated experiences of Shibano and Juciūtė. The most apparent difference is the age gap between the authors, wherein the older woman focuses less on her chastity, marriage prospects and the constant danger of sexual violence while nevertheless upholding her own feminine ideals of modesty and morality. Another important difference is religion which plays a much more significant role in Juciūtė's text than in Shibano's. As such, it highlights the differences between the Lithuanian context, where Catholicism played an important role in the anti-Soviet resistance and self-definitions against Orthodox Russia, and the Japanese context, where religion did not play an important role in its relations with the Russian Empire or the USSR.

Despite their ideological alignment and willingness to address the concerns of their audiences, under a close inspection, both memoirs pose certain challenges to societal norms. Shibano, a settler of the Japanese Empire, writes openly not only about sexual violence but also about her gender fluidity and attraction towards Russian women. Juciūtė, too, an unmarried and childless woman, recounts how she joined the anti-Soviet resistance, willing to fight and do anything but kill for her nation. The extraordinary postwar conditions in the margins of the Soviet empire enable both women to step out of the gender roles that they might have otherwise wholeheartedly complied with under different circumstances. However, in order to mediate these 'unfeminine' experiences to their audiences, Shibano and Juciūtė have to repeatedly reassure their readers that they continue to uphold appropriate (feminine) values, such as chastity, marriage, morality, patriotism and religion. Most importantly, both are vehemently anti-Soviet and anti-communist, allowing their stories to briefly enter the Cold War discourse only to be completely forgotten today.

References

Alexander, Rustam. 2021. *Regulating Homosexuality in Soviet Russia, 1956–91: A Different History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Anušauskas, Arvydas. 1996. *Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas, 1940–1958 metais* (Soviet destruction of the Lithuanian nation, 1940–1958). Vilnius: Mintis.

Araragi Shinzō, Kawakita Atsuko & Matsuura Yūsuke (eds.) *Hikiage, tsuihō, zanryū: Sengo kokusai minzoku idō no hikaku kenkyū* (Repatriation, expulsion, staying behind: Comparative research of postwar international ethnic migration). Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2019.

Armonas, Barbara. 1961. *Leave Your Tears in Moscow*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.

Artwińska, Anna. 2019. "A Communist Woman in the Gulag: Gender, Ideology, and Limit-Experience in Ginzburg and Budzyńska." In *Narratives of Annihilation, Confinement and Survival: Camp Literature in a Comparative Perspective*, edited by Anja Tippner and Anna Artwińska. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Bass, Gary J. 2023. *Judgment at Tokyo: World War II on Trial and the Making of Modern Asia*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Buchholz, Petra. 2003. *Schreiben und Erinnern: Über Selbstzeugnisse japanischer Kriegsteilnehmer* (Writing and remembering: On the testimonies of Japanese war participants). Munich: Ludicium Verlag.

Budrytė, Dovilė. 2017. "Gendering 'History of Fighting and Suffering': War and Deportation in the Narratives of Women Resistance Fighters in Lithuania." In *Narratives of Exile and Identity: Soviet Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States*, edited by Violeta Davoliūtė & Tomas Balkelis, 103–117. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Bull, Jonathan. 2018. "Karafuto Repatriates and the Work of the Hakodate Regional Repatriation Centre, 1945–50." *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 4 (October): 788–810.

Bull, Jonathan. 2023. "Japanese-language historiography about end of empire migration: Revising the extruded history of repatriation and *hikiagesha*." In *End of Empire Migrants in East Asia: Repatriates, Returnees and Finding Home*, edited by Svetlana Paichadze & Jonathan Bull, 13–29. London: Routledge.

Davoliūtė, Violeta. 2013. *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War*. London: Routledge.

De Cesari, Chiara & Ann Rigney. 2014. "Introduction." In *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, edited by Chiara De Cesari & Ann Rigney, 1–28. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Din, Yulia. 2015. "Dreams of returning to the Homeland: Koreans in Karafuto and Sakhalin." In *Voices from the Shifting Russo-Japanese Border: Karafuto/Sakhalin*, edited by Svetlana Paichadze & Philip A. Seaton, 177–194. Abingdon: Routledge.

Eidintas, Alfonsas. 2003. *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*. Vilnius: Versus Aureus.

Erll, Astrid. 2011. "Travelling Memory." *Parallax* 17, no. 4: 4–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570.

Fujiwara Tei. 1949. *Nagareru hoshi wa ikiteiru* (The shooting stars are alive). Tokyo: Hibiya shuppansha.

Hirai Miho. 2022. *Sorenhei e sashidasareta musume tachi* (Young girls sacrificed to the Soviet soldiers). Tokyo: Shūeisha.

Jolluck, Katherine R. 2002. *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union During World War II*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Juciūtė, Elena. 1974. *Pedos mirties zonoje* (Footprints in the death zone). New York: L.Š.S.T. Simo Kudirkos kuopos specialus komitetas.

Katō Kiyofumi. 2020. *Kaigai hikiage no kenkyū: Bōkyaku sareta "Dai Nihon teikoku"* (Research on Overseas Repatriation: The Forgotten 'Empire of Japan'). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Kurvet-Käosaar, Leena. 2003. "'Other Things Happened to Women': World War Two, Violence, and National Identity in 'A Sound of the Past' by Käbi Laretei and 'A Woman in Amber' by Agate Nesaule." *Journal of Baltic Studies* 34, no. 3: 313–331.

Lane, Thomas. 2001. *Lithuania: Stepping Westward*. London: Routledge.

Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. 2005. *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*. London: Verso.

Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. 2010. *Borderline Japan: foreigners and frontier controls in the postwar era*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Muminov, Sherzod. 2022. *Eleven Winters of Discontent: The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nakayama, Taisho. 2015. "Japanese society on Karafuto." In *Voices from the Shifting Russo-Japanese Border: Karafuto/Sakhalin*, edited by Svetlana Paichadze & Philip A. Seaton, 19–141. Abingdon: Routledge.

Nakayama Taishō. 2019. *Saharin zanryū Nihonjin to sengo Nihon: Karafuto jūmin no kyōkai chiikishi* (Japanese who remained in Sakhalin and postwar Japan: Borderland history of Karafuto residents). Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin.

Overy, Richard. 2021. *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War, 1931–1945*. London: Allen Lane.

Paichadze, Svetlana & Philip A. Seaton (eds.). 2015. *Voices from the Shifting Russo-Japanese Border: Karafuto/Sakhalin*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Paichadze, Svetlana & Jonathan Bull (eds.). 2023. *End of Empire Migrants in East Asia: Repatriates, Returnees and Finding Home*. London: Routledge.

Radstone, Susannah. 2005. "Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 59 (Spring): 134–150.

Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Rūkienė, Stefanija. 1968. *Vergijos kryžkeliuose: Sibiro tremties užrašai, pirma dalis* [In the crossroads of slavery: a record of Siberian exile, part one]. Cleveland: Viltis.

Rūkienė, Stefanija. 1970. *Grįžimas į laisvę: Sibiro tremties užrašai, antra dalis* [Return to freedom: a record of Siberian exile, part two]. Cleveland: Viltis.

Shibano Toshie. 1958. *Tsundora no onnna* (Woman of the tundra). Tokyo: Nihon shūhōsha.

Vardys, V. Stanley and Judith B. Sedaitis. 2018. *Lithuania: The Rebel Nation*. London: Routledge.

Watt, Lori. 2009. *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.

Women's Division of Sōka Gakkai, ed. 1986. *Women against War*. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Yomiuri Shimbun. 1958. "Tsundora no onna" ("Woman of the tundra"). 13 September 1958.