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## Prigimtinės kultūros ratilai (Ripples of Native Culture<sup>1</sup>)

### *Summary*

*Prigimtinės kultūros ratilai* is a phenomenological study into the tradition of Lithuanian culture, which highlights its essential aspects: a close relationship with nature, firm entrenchment in the native and living space, a perception of the landscape, creativity, self-awareness, and mental and spiritual states. Drawing on her personal experience and on her expertise in literature and folklore, Daujotytė analyses the nature, singularity, and expression of native culture. In her opinion, works of Lithuanian literature are an especially important source in studying native culture and for this reason they should be re-read with the aim of examining the aforementioned intrinsic aspects.

Daujotytė wrote the larger part of the book from 2011 to 2017, when she worked at the Seminar of Native Culture, organized by the Institute of Native Culture and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. The seminar was established in 2011. It convenes twice a year and consistently addresses relevant themes in native culture, broaches on and crystallizes the concept that embraces not only the tradition of local culture that is passed on from generation to generation, but also its primary essence, its proximity to nature, the human nature and its basic needs. The themes of the seminars inspired the author and prompted the direction for the choice of the issues to be analysed. They raised questions, and Daujotytė's answers formulated a new attitude to native culture: she envisaged it not only in the field of folklore and ethnology, but also in literature, art, and music.

The book has eight chapters that encompass different dimensions of native culture.

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<sup>1</sup> The author has chosen to translate the term 'prigimtinė kultūra' as 'native culture' (because of its shared root with the word 'natal') to evoke association with birthplace, environment, and social surroundings one is born into without connoting or suggesting equivalence to Native American or indigenous political movements, which stand apart as political and cultural responses to colonialism.

The first chapter, 'Atsklanda' (Headpiece), deals with the ways and conditions of the existence of native culture and defines the phenomenon as such. Native culture has its own objects and a vast variety of means of expression (language, folklore, customs), but it does not coincide with anything: it is both the background and stands out against that background. Native culture exists between two individuals who either talk to each other or are silent, between trees or buildings that are planted or built in one way, but not the other. As long as native culture is strong, functioning and vital, it opens itself to other cultures and gives access to what corresponds to its code and manner; it also adapts, modifies, or rejects the aspects deemed unsuitable or alien to it. Having lost the powers of rejection, native culture gradually falls into decline. Creative work is the most trustworthy way of preserving culture: it refreshes culture and consolidates its survival instinct and its lifeblood.

In the second chapter, 'Isibuvimas' (Habitation), the author discusses the individual's co-existence with a place, surroundings, and the landscape. To define the relation with the surroundings she chooses the metaphor of circles in water: they spread and shimmer, from the feeling of the narrow space of the native home to the broad perception of the whole country. The circles of home are quite small, while the circles of the homestead that spread out and are limited just by the visible horizon radiate farther. The homestead does not have boundaries: beyond, there is a field, a meadow, a road, a stream, a forest, and a hollow – and the endless sky above everything. Beyond the visible, there is something implicit, a distant line of the horizon, which appears to delineate and is like a boundary to the eyes and the consciousness. It is open: the circles spread to the perception of the boundary of one's own land (the land and the boundary, one land beyond the other), of one's country, and of the Homeland. The aspect of homeland is the peak of native culture that is inseparable from the roots. The Homeland expands the sensation of oneself, broadens the space, and shapes the perception of history. One's own yet unknown agents appear in the Homeland. They are not from your village or the neighbouring one; they are not your parents or direct forebears, yet you feel they are your own.

In the third chapter, 'Žemėjauta' (Feeling the Earth), the author discusses the perception of the earth and of the world created on it, and the spontaneous identity arising from it. Lithuanian native culture has evolved from agricultural experience, and in a broader sense from the culture of the earth. Today, too, the earth is farmed, seeds sown and harvested, but the farms are increasingly mechanised: the earth is no longer farmed manually and no longer touched, and therefore the individual's direct contact with the earth is dying. However,

earth culture does not include the earth alone: it is also the culture of the sky, nature, and the universe. It is not just the culture of a rake or a sickle, but that of being on the earth in all shapes and in all states, everyday and sacred. The earth is the mother who gives birth, brings up, and accepts the dead, and this is the most general foundation. The feeling of the earth is the central constituent of world-perception where social, moral, ethical, and aesthetic moments converge and crystallize into religious images.

The innate feeling of the earth permeates the rich and realistic work of the nineteenth-century Lithuanian writer Julija Žymantienė-Žemaitė. Her writing gives the impression of tangibility. Although Žemaitė focused mostly on the daily round, she wandered somewhere else, especially into nature, and her gaze would become fixed as though asking a question: is the earth, which keeps the human eyes riveted to it, nothing else but the earth that is treaded upon, ploughed, dug, hay harvested, and weeded? No, the earth is the earth of the cosmos and of the universe.

A world view that draws on the earth allows consideration of identity issues in the horizon of the earth by focusing attention on those processes of the consciousness through which the individual discovers oneself among others, in one way or another, simultaneously singling oneself out as a separate entity. We constantly face spontaneous things existing as such, growing, and withering. The large part of human experience is spontaneous, subject to nature that the individual neither chooses nor can change. Human growth and maturing are subject to the stimuli of identification that are incomprehensible to the individual. Attachment to the closest people also means spontaneous identification, the desire to *become attached*. Yet even in the earliest stages of human identity there is also the effort to *dissociate*, to experience oneself as a separate entity. Individuals enter a ready-formed, existing, and discovered circle of life with its ways and forms; they identify themselves with it because otherwise they would not be an inherent part of it, could not survive, live, and procreate. They would not be capable of uttering what others would accept or singing a tune that would be repeated, would take root, would be purified and consolidated. What is ethnicity, after all, if not an identity that has reached the level of consciousness? I identify myself with the earth, the earth mother from which I come, from which and in which everything and everyone that exist in any way, objects, and people evolve.

The more closed the living space, the more spontaneous the identity – like the fertile fruit trees that have undergone spontaneous selection and adapted to the environment and circumstances. The more open the space, the more obscure and more complicated the identity: it is less spontaneous, light or transparent.

Identity of native culture arises from the nature and experience, yet there exists another way, too: experience begins to deepen, expand, trespass the boundaries of native culture, and identity appears to change its form – a transformation and renewal of identity not through primary experiences but through the spirit, intellectual interests, and creativity. Identity is of two types: spontaneous and conscious.

The theme of the spontaneity of native culture and its spontaneous phenomena is further developed in the chapter ‘Savieji’ (Kin) in which the author addresses the content of the notion *kinship*. Like identity, kinship is spontaneous and natural.<sup>2</sup> It is very easy to come across it in life itself. The kin are first of all those who form the family: parents and their children. Individuals feel they are bound primarily to the people they see from their birth, the people who take care of them, and through this care they feel a mutual commitment. They share a home, no matter how small, with parents, brothers, and sisters. They share the family table while they live together, and they can sit at this table when they return home. The dishes eaten at shared meals, no matter how simple, remain delicious for the rest of their lives. They are *shared* with others. I am part of a kin along with those with whom I share common matters. The more communion there is, the more of the kin one is. The more kinship there is the more communication.

The deepest and most genuine kinship is felt almost physically: the body yearns for someone of one’s kin – longs for them, wants to hug, to snuggle. It is deep and impossible to extract root of human connection, of love, which is a created, felt, discovered, strongly attracting, and desired communion. The body feels that he or she is of one’s kin.

Language is the most important connection in human belonging. *Common language* connects, to *have common language* means that an individual is easy, fun, and beneficial to communicate with. Belonging also arises from the origin, from a common location, common time, and common cultural heritage.

In the chapter ‘Savastis kalboje’ (Identity in Language), the author pays special attention to the circle of issues related to the native language. To a nation, its language is a spontaneous thing, imperceptible like the air we breathe. Only when this spontaneity is violated, when the native language is banned or despised does the problem of language arise. Lithuanians are a nation, of offended native language: the history of the country deemed that the Polish language spread

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<sup>2</sup> In Lithuanian, the words *savieji* ‘kin’ and *savaiminis* ‘spontaneous, natural’ are etymologically related; the words *savas* ‘one’s own’ and *savastis* ‘identity, self’ also belong to the same lexical family.

through the Catholic Church, the higher estates, which led the chancellery of the state to diverge from the primary language.

Language is in our identity and self-awareness, in our gazes at the sky and the earth, at another individual, at a tree. It is in how we see and how we think even when we might not be saying anything. Our identity, too, is in our language. We speak in the manner in which we make the world and its objects our own, in the way we record ourselves, our kinship with others, and our separateness in our native language. A nation has an identity that singles it out, even if insignificantly, from others: by the temperament, postures, choices, states of mind, by the tone of speaking, the intonation, and even by the relationships of vowels and consonants, the stress and the accent in words. The language code is living and flexible. As the life, its conditions and circumstances change, language is re-coded: a certain part is hidden and kept in something like archives of consciousness, and only poetry has access to it. Part of language starts functioning according to newly emerging rules and at least partially succumbs to coercion in cases of a conquest or occupation. Language is also re-coded when a nation changes or just expands its life and lifestyle.

Lithuanian thinking and the way of sensation are inseparable from Lithuanian speaking: one manifests itself and appears as the other – thinking as language, language as thinking. The structure of the Lithuanian language is the primary foundation of the Lithuanian spirit. To us, the world and its objects manifest themselves in Lithuanian; to a Lithuanian, the world is uttered in Lithuanian.

In the chapter ‘Žinojimo pamatai’ (Foundations of Knowing), the author moves from the issues of language to mental states and reflections on the process of cognition. Some knowledge is innate, it is not reported. It can be called the knowledge of the body: of contemplating eyes, of caressing hands, or walking legs. The foundation of life is built of spontaneous things that are empowered by the instincts of life. Spontaneous knowing is as light as the air we breathe. Also spontaneously we receive the message on how to acquire knowledge that we cannot receive instinctively: how to observe and study, how to learn and absorb experience.

Judging from the extant words and their forms, knowing in Lithuanian native culture was multi-tiered – from simple finding of way in life to the deep secrets of existence. The deeper an individual’s power of knowing, the more it was appreciated and cherished. The highest tier of knowing was that of *žynys* (a sage; from the Lithuanian word *žinoti*, ‘to know’), a priest of the ancient Lithuanian religion. The highest knowledge is about what cannot be and is impossible to know but must be at least inferred. In its turn, knowing cannot be separated from faith expressing trust in what is or might be in some way.

A separate layer of knowing is addressed in the sub-section 'Mirties žinojimas' (Knowing the Death). In it, the author maintains that awareness of your own death imparts depth to culture and stimulates reflections and creativity. The states of loss and death are experienced by individuals not only when they bury and pay their last respects. These states are as though vigilant in individuals and emerge from the awareness of the fact of their own death and that of their next of kin. An individual is alive and lives in the presence of death. The tension between life and death, existence in a certain *in-between* provides depth to the soul and eventually opens it to beauty, which is as fragile as human life. Lyrical poetry is a type of literature most permeated by death.

Awareness of death is the source of funeral rituals, while the treatment of the deceased and behaviour towards them are passed on from generation to generation. Even in more recent times, the wake involved ritual movements, dances, or games.

In the chapter 'Šventosios būsenos' (Sacred States) the author discusses special states recognisable in native culture: the experience of sacredness and the quiet existence that cannot be described in words (sub-sections 'Šventumas: aukštųjų būsenų sauga' (Sacredness: Ecology of Higher States) and 'Tylinčiosios būties dalis prigimtinėje kultūroje' (The Share of Silent Existence in Native Culture)). *Sacrum* is what goes beyond the boundaries of direct experience and which we can only encounter through the sensations and manifestations of sacredness. The sacred arises and unfolds through various contents from the spiritual beginning. It is the limit of human possibilities to step over the threshold of physical existence. At the same time it is the effort to mark what is not permanent and sustainable, what survives on states and sensations. It is the states of sacredness that are the highest states accessible to individuals and experienced by them. Sacredness imparts meaning to life; it seems to enshroud one in some protecting and defending dome. We realize that we cannot attain what we sometimes feel, that it comes from something we are incapable of knowing.

Another special state is the silent experience of existence, the phenomenon of the silent existence. In certain situations the speakers remain silent, as if they lose the gift of speaking and are no longer capable of saying what they want. Native culture, which emerges from life and co-existence with the earth and nature, is basically silent culture: the sounds it emits do not disturb or destroy the sounds of nature. What disturbs nature disturbs culture, too. The aspiration towards harmony and co-existence is indispensable. Silence plays a role in this aspiration. Those incapable of a deeper silence are also incapable of deeper speaking. The silent states are akin to meditation. That very deep beginning or

foundation makes it possible to connect the silent states and meditation. These states are linked by common beginnings. They are *a priori* beginnings that evolve from human existence – not only from individuals meeting other individuals or the Other, not only from coming into contact with nature and with those who live or lived, but also with oneself as a separate entity. Encountering oneself, an individual as though remembers himself and also what is important to him or her as a separate entity of existence. We are directed to the silent existence – which is bespoken to the individual by the silent sky, the silent earth, silent mountains, and waters – by experiences which we cannot separate from analysis. In thinking about it we can lean only against what we managed to understand from early experience and its current perception.

The book closes with reflections on the cultural tradition, its continuation, and the ways of its regeneration. These ways are discussed through the use of the metaphors of paths (*takai*) and channels (*prataikai*). Winding, intersecting, branching off and converging paths of the earth never come to an end. They connect spaces and preserve a stable flow of time – it is the direct continuation of the tradition. In this case, native culture can be referred to as traditional culture. However, there is another mode of existence of native culture that resembles water channels pulsating in spurts. These are powerful yet discontinuous cultural and creative outbreaks, which fold and layer distant dimensions of space and time. A look at the twentieth century will show two prominent leaps: one was the modernisation of Lithuanian culture in the 1930s activated by open European contexts. Having realised the originality folk art, sculpture, fabrics, and carvings of their own country and used it as new means of expression in professional art, Lithuanian graphic art made a sudden leap forward. Another surge took place in the 1960 with the pagan avant-garde of Bronius Kutavičius in music and the work of modern archaic style of poets Sigitas Geda and Marcelijus Martinaitis. An individual shaped by native culture steps over its threshold and reaches the universal level of culture. It is on this level that more inclusive processes of modernisation begin, and they can only happen when certain moments are rendered archaic again. The circles of native and universal (global) culture meet thanks to individual creative efforts.

Native culture expands beyond the boundaries of traditional culture. *Paths*, or what is on the earth and what is visible, are more important for the perception of traditions, while *channels*, or what flows past even when invisible, that which penetrates the consciousness even through the thick layers of time, which can suddenly revive or germinate, are indispensable for the understanding of native culture. Traditional culture is *analysed* elsewhere with methods tried out by others; native culture is probed *by experience*, and its imprint in the consciousness is essential.