

**The Prehistoric Goddess of the Late Twentieth Century:  
Transnational Feminist Reception, Construction and  
Appropriation of Marija Gimbutas**

By

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that no parts of this dissertation have been submitted towards a degree at any other institution, other than CEU, and that this work contains no unreferenced ideas or materials previously written and/or published by other authors.

## Abstract

This dissertation presents a transnational biography and reception history of Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) – a renowned Lithuanian-American archaeologist, and an advocate of the theory of the peaceful, egalitarian, gynocentric and Goddess-centered prehistoric civilization of “Old Europe”. Gimbutas’ utopian antimodernist vision became a source of inspiration for a variety of socio-political movements (environmentalist, feminist, neo-pagan, among others) in diverse geographical contexts, on both sides of and transgressing the “Iron Curtain”, starting with the 1970s and reaching a peak during the 1990s. This dissertation analyzes how Gimbutas’ work and persona were received, constructed and appropriated, and sometimes rejected, in diverse contexts, namely, archaeology and feminist archaeology, the feminist spirituality movement in the United States and post-socialist Lithuanian feminism. The dissertation combines historical methods with theoretical perspectives developed in feminist and postcolonial/postsocialist studies to produce a critical account of Gimbutas’ life and work, as well as to discuss how various actors have related to and made use of her ideas. In doing so, it sheds light on some questions of broader theoretical and historiographical significance for feminism and critical gender scholarship transnationally. Examining feminist activist and scholarly engagement with Gimbutas’ controversial vision of Old Europe, this dissertation reveals some of the “political ambivalence” inherent to feminism, considered as simultaneously a product and a critique of modernity. In particular, this dissertation interrogates questions of scientific objectivity, gender essentialism, and Eurocentrism, as they appear in the feminist debates and gender politics, centered around Gimbutas’ work and persona. Focusing on the figure of Gimbutas this dissertation challenges the narrative of Western feminism as “the norm”, and Eastern Europe as only a recipient of feminist ideas and politics. Instead, it proposes an alternative history, where women’s politics both in “the East” and “the West” have been shaped by the Cold War division of the world, and continue to be affected by other transnational hierarchies, divisions and encounters. Much of the interest in Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe can be understood as a symptom of the general disappointment with the traditional ideologies of the Left and Right around the time of the fall of the “Iron Curtain”, and a search for alternative moral frameworks in the period, often characterized as “postmodern” and/or “postsocialist” – the 1980s and the 1990s.

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## List of Abbreviations

*AABS* – Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies

*Civilization of the Goddess* – The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe

*DP* – Displaced people

*KGB* - Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union

*MMNL* – Martynas Mažvydas National Library

*OPUS* – Opus Archive and Research Center

*OSF* – Open Society Foundation

*SSR* – Soviet Socialist Republic

*The Goddesses and Gods* – The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images

*The Gods and Goddesses* – The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000 to 3500 BC. Myths, Legends and Cult images

*TUA* – Tübingen University Archive

*UCLA* – University of California, Los Angeles

*VDU* – Vytautas Magnus University

*VU* – Vilnius University

*VUA* – VU Archive

*VUMD* – The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library

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## Chapter 1. Introduction: The Prehistoric Goddess of Postsocialism

The approach that the mechanical world leads to happiness, that this is the real civilization, has appeared only 300 years ago, and the patriarchal system – only 5000 years ago. In the textbooks, the notion of civilization is usually related with the patriarchal, hierarchical social system, where the ruling elite controls the working class. Now the eyes are opening about the consequences of such civilization (...) I understand civilization as a culture where the moral and artistic values are being created and protected, where the social system is in balance. Where every citizen has equal rights, there is no hierarchy that would allow one part of the society to oppress and exploit the other part (as it is a patriarchal society, where humiliated women make up the half of the population). This was the case in the Old Europe and in the whole old world for a few thousand years, or maybe even a couple of billions of years.<sup>1</sup>

This is a quote from the speech that Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994), a Lithuanian-American archaeologist, gave on the occasion of receiving an honorary doctorate at her Alma Mater in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 1993.<sup>2</sup> At the moment, Lithuania, an Eastern European, Baltic country, had just recently regained national independence from the Soviet Union (which formally ceased to exist in 1991) and was struggling to become a part of “the West”, with its promise of prosperity and progress. Gimbutas, being a part of the nationalist minded Lithuanian diaspora, could not have been happier to see her country finally being liberated from what she saw as an aggressive foreign occupation and an imposed ideology. However, differently from many Central and Eastern European politicians and intellectuals, in her speech she chose not to celebrate the possibility for her country to rejoin the “Western civilization” or lament the backwardness of Eastern Europe on the imaginary road to modernity.<sup>3</sup> Quite on the contrary, Gimbutas presented, in this speech and

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<sup>1</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Profesorės Marijos Gimbutienės kalba pasakyta Vytauto Didžiojo Universitete 1993 birželio 11, suteikiant jau Garbės Daktaro vardą” [The speech by Marija Gimbutas given at the ceremony of her inauguration to the honorary doctorate at Vytautas Magnus University], in *Laimos palytėta : straipsniai, recenzijos, pokalbiai, polemika, laiškai, vertinimai, prisiminimai* [Touched by Laima : articles, reviews, conversations, discussions, letters, translations, memoirs], ed. Austėja Ikamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002), 14–18.

<sup>2</sup> Here and elsewhere all translations to English are mine.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Václav Havel, “New Year’s Day Speech,” in *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe since 1945*, ed. Gale Stokes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 249–53; Piotr Sztompka,

elsewhere, a radical critique of the notion of progress and criticized the hierarchical and exploitative character of the “Western civilization”, its militaristic tendencies, and the environmental destruction inherent in its antagonistic relationship to Nature.

Gimbutas proposed that modernity, as it developed since the Enlightenment, represented the peak of the self-destructive internal logic of the patriarchal, hierarchical social system, which was born around 5000 years ago in Europe. As it became apparent in her last works, Gimbutas saw Western capitalism and Soviet Communism as different faces of the same project of modernity. Her homeland Lithuania, and for that matter, the world at large, Gimbutas claimed, would be better off, if it would turn to the values and beliefs of the times prehistorical, before the development of patriarchy – to the matristic, Goddess-worshipping civilization of Old Europe, which she described and theorized in her archaeological works. Visiting Lithuania in the early post-socialist period, Gimbutas promoted this idea in books<sup>4</sup>, public speeches<sup>5</sup>, TV appearances,<sup>6</sup> and interviews for the press<sup>7</sup>. She became a figure of national importance,<sup>8</sup> and her works as well as her public persona had a visible impact on the ideology of the post-socialist women’s movement<sup>9</sup>.

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“Civilizational Incompetence. The Trap of Postcommunist Societies,” *Zeitschrift Für Soziologie* 22, no. 2 (April 1993): 85–95.

<sup>4</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, *Senoji Europa* [The Old Europe] (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Gimbutienė, “The speech at Vytautas Magnus University.”

<sup>6</sup> Algirdas Tarvydas, “Marija Alseikaitė - Gimbutienė. Lietuvos kronika,” documentary video, 9.40, from *Lietuvos kronika*. Vilnius: Lietuvos Kino Studija, 1993. Accessed August 28, 2019, [http://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/31010/lietuvos\\_kronika\\_1993\\_16\\_1674\\_marija\\_alseikaite\\_gimbutiene#wowza\\_playstart=0&wowzaplayduration=1184000](http://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/31010/lietuvos_kronika_1993_16_1674_marija_alseikaite_gimbutiene#wowza_playstart=0&wowzaplayduration=1184000).

<sup>7</sup> Neringa Jonušaitė, “Marija Gimbutienė: mokslininkė, kurios darbus cituoja visas pasaulis, moteris, į kurios namus arbatos puodeliui užsuka kino žvaigždės” [Marija Gimbutas: a scientist quoted worldwide, a woman visited by cinema stars], *Lietuvos Rytas*, June 25, 1993; Ingė Lukšaitė and Audrė Kudabienė, “Tiltas tarp dviejų kultūrų” [The bridge between the two cultures], *Moteris*, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Marler, “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend,” in *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania*, by Suzanne LaFont (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 113–32; Sarunas Milisauskas, “Marija Gimbutas: Some Observations about Her Early Years, 1921–1944,” *Antiquity* 74, no. 286 (2000): 800–804.

<sup>9</sup> Viktorija Daujotytė, *Moters dalis ir dalia: moteriškoji literatūros epistema* [Woman’s share and destiny: feminine episteme in literature] (Vilnius: Vaga, 1992); Karla Gruodis, ed., *Feminizmo ekskursai: moters samprata nuo Antikos iki postmodernizmo* [The currents of feminism: the concept of woman from Antiquity to postmodernity] (Vilnius:

Two years earlier, in 1991, Gimbutas gave an almost identical speech in Santa Monica, Los Angeles, to an audience of people interested in ecofeminism, women's spirituality and the contemporary Goddess worship.<sup>10</sup> Gimbutas gave this speech on the occasion of the publication of her latest book *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, where she formulated perhaps the most concise critique of the notions of "civilization" and "progress" that, she argued, leads to "extinguishing the very conditions for life on earth".<sup>11</sup> Gimbutas work had been of interest to feminists, environmentalists, neopagans and other new social movements in the United States since mid-1970s, when she published her first book dealing with the idea of the prehistoric matrilineal civilization, entitled *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000 to 3500 BC. Myths, Legends and Cult images*.<sup>12</sup> To put it in a nutshell, in this book Gimbutas argued that roughly between 7000 and 3500 years BC., so before the arrival of the Proto-Indo-European speaking people to Europe, there existed an indigenous European civilization, which she called Old Europe. Gimbutas proposed that the Old European civilization was characterized by peacefulness and egalitarianism, respect for the environment, women's leadership, equality between the sexes, and most importantly, a spirituality centered around a female Goddess Creatrix. Gimbutas argued that this idyllic civilization was eventually destroyed by the arrival of warlike and aggressive people from the East, whom she called the Kurgans.<sup>13</sup> These early colonizers, the Proto-Indo-European

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Pradai, 1995); Kazimiera Prunskienė, ed., "Lietuvos Moterų Partijos programa 1996 m. Seimo rinkimams" [The program of the Lithuanian women's party for the 1996 elections] (Lietuvos informacijos instituto Kopijavimo ir dauginimo skyrius, September 30, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Lollie Ragana, *Voice of the Goddess: Marija Gimbutas*. YouTube video. Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica City TV, 1991. Posted by "Starr Goode" on March 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k34hXty4iw&t=33s>.

<sup>11</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, ed. Joan Marler (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), vii.

<sup>12</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000 to 3500 BC. Myths, Legends and Cult Images* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> Marija Gimbutas, "The Indo-Europeans: Archeological Problems," *American Anthropologist* 65, no. 4 (1963): 815–36; Marija Gimbutas, "The Collision of Two Ideologies," in *The Kurgan Culture and the Indo-Europeanization of Europe: Selected Articles from 1952 to 1993*, ed. Miriam Robbins Dexter and Karlene Jones-Bley (Washington: Institute for the Study of Man, 1997), 343–51.

(PIE) speakers, who merged with and eventually eradicated the Old European culture, worshipped male sky gods, and had a hierarchical social structure, all of which provided a blueprint for the development of the Western civilization and Judeo-Christian religions.

This narrative of prehistory, which Gimbutas developed starting with 1974 up until her death in a wealth of articles and books, informed a feminist understanding of prehistory,<sup>14</sup> and made her into an important intellectual reference for the feminist spirituality movement.<sup>15</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, Gimbutas gradually became an iconic figure for the Goddess movement in California,<sup>16</sup> where she lived since 1963, and worked as a professor of Indo-European Studies and European Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles.<sup>17</sup> Her ideas became influential outside of feminist circles as well, providing an archaeological background for the popular works of Riane Eisler,<sup>18</sup> and inspiring the famous environmentalist, Democratic politician and vice-president of the United States, Al Gore.<sup>19</sup> Gimbutas' persona and her controversial works attracted also the interest of popular press, such as *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine* and *New Republic*, even if often this interest was colored by skepticism or anti-feminism.<sup>20</sup> Although today Gimbutas'

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<sup>14</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Charlene Spretnak, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement* (New York: Doubleday, 1982); Carol P. Christ and Naomi R. Goldenberg, "The Legacy of the Goddess: The Work of Marija Gimbutas," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12, no. 2 (1996): 29–36.

<sup>16</sup> Starr Goode, "Interview with Marija Gimbutas." *The Goddess in Art TV Series*. YouTube video. 29.28. Santa Monica, CA: Century Cable Public Access Studio. Posted by "Starr Goode", August 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxei-vuf7U8&t=1s>; Ragana, *Voice of the Goddess: Marija Gimbutas*; Joan Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas* (Manchester: Knowledge, Ideas and Trends, 1997); Donna Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*. DVD. 58:40. Belili Productions, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Ernestine S. Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," in *Archaeology and Women: Ancient and Modern Issues*, ed. Sue Hamilton, Ruth D. Whitehouse, and Katherine I. Wright (California: Left Coast Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (Cambridge Mass.: HarperOne, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance. Forging a New Common Purpose* (London: Earthscan Publications, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Leslie, "The Goddess Theory. Controversial UCLA Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas Argues That the World Was at Peace When God Was a Woman," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, June 11, 1989; Peter Steinfels, "Idyllic Theory of Goddesses Creates Storm," *The New York Times*, February 13, 1990; Mary Lefkowitz, "The Twilight of the Goddess: Feminism, Spiritualism, and a New Craze," *The New Republic*, August 3, 1992.

work is largely marginalized in the mainstream feminist historical narrative, a reference to her work recently appeared in the work of the prominent feminist and environmentalist thinker Donna Haraway, reminding of the potential ongoing relevance of Gimbutas' ideas for contemporary social movements, in the world facing an enormous environmental crisis.<sup>21</sup>

What does it mean to consider the almost identical speeches, given by Marija Gimbutas in the early 1990s in Santa Monica, the United States, and Kaunas, former Soviet Union, together? How can we understand the very different receptions of Gimbutas' ideas on the different sides of the (former) "Iron Curtain", in an integrative and transnational way? What can such a reading tell about the way feminist ideas travel and change in different contexts, traversing and sometimes reinforcing ideological and material boundaries and hierarchies? What can we learn from a critical interrogation of the effects and after-effects of the Cold War on feminist political imaginaries and ideological constructions?

This dissertation explores the transnational feminist reception and appropriation of Gimbutas' work and the construction of Gimbutas' scientific persona, focusing on the ways in which her utopian vision of European prehistory both informed and troubled feminist scholarship and activism on the both sides of the (former) "Iron Curtain". In particular I focus on three selected areas of Marija Gimbutas' reception, construction, and, in some cases, appropriation, namely: 1) in academia, with a special attention to the feminist and gender archaeology circles; 2) in the feminist spirituality movement in the U.S., especially the Goddess movement; and 3) in the early post-socialist Lithuanian women's movement. Building on feminist and post-colonial theoretical insights and a critical interrogation of the postsocialist condition, I argue that looking at Gimbutas'

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<sup>21</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and New York: Duke University Press, 2016), 186.

reception contributes to developing a new perspective to the history of feminism.<sup>22</sup> Namely, this research allows to include the often erased (post-) socialist Eastern Europe into the mainstream feminist narrative, and in this way challenge some of the Western-centric historiographic assumptions about the women's movement,<sup>23</sup> reexamining the very category of feminism.<sup>24</sup> In particular in this dissertation I show how studying the reception and interpretation of Gimbutas' anti-modernist ideas in feminist circles across the former "Iron Curtain" allows us to better understand some of the most fundamental tensions in feminism, as a movement both imbedded in the project of Enlightenment modernity and at the same aiming to form a critique of it.

Moreover, this dissertation aims to contribute to the understanding of a particular historical moment, during which Gimbutas' ideas achieved the biggest appreciation as well as the largest controversy on a transnational scale, namely, the 1980s and the 1990s. One of the underlying hypothesis of this dissertation is that the feminist interest in, as well as the controversy about, Gimbutas' theories (and their various simplified interpretations) should be understood within the context of the general disillusionment with the ideologies of the Left and Right in late modernity,<sup>25</sup> during the historical and theoretical moment conceptualized as "the 'postsocialist' condition".<sup>26</sup> The political philosopher Nancy Fraser has argued that in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet

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<sup>22</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I differentiate between talking about "post-socialism" as a historical experience relevant to Eastern Europe and other places, and "postsocialism" or "the postsocialist condition", as a conceptual term, referring to a broader ideological atmosphere both in "the East" and in "the West" around the end of the Cold War and in its aftermath.

<sup>23</sup> Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, "Women's and Gender History," in *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700*, ed. Irina Livezeanu and Arpad Von Klimó (London ; New York: Routledge, 2017), 278–321.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, "After Socialism," in *The Politics of Gender After Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay*, by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000), 1–14.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right. The Future of Radical Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

Union, the socialist ideals largely lost their credibility among the leftist social movements in the West, creating an environment of “postsocialism”. While the rise of neoliberalism increased the global inequalities and environmental destruction on a massive scale, the progressive social movements in the West, including feminism, Fraser argues, turned their attention away from the questions of political economy and social justice, losing the ideological basis for emancipatory politics.<sup>27</sup> “The ‘postsocialist’ condition” therefore can be understood as a lack of a “comprehensive progressive vision of a just social order” which would serve as an alternative to the hegemonic Western capitalist modernity.<sup>28</sup> This dissertation asks what can be learned about “the ‘postsocialist’ condition” and its effects on the discourses and practices of feminism transnationally, by shifting attention to the (post-)socialist Eastern Europe, both as an idea in the Western imagination, and as a geographical location, embedded in global political structures. I therefore analyze the interest of Marija Gimbutas’ vision of the prehistoric matrilineal civilization of Old Europe as symptomatic of “the ‘postsocialist’ condition” on the both sides of the former “Iron Curtain” – as a part of the broader search for alternative ideological and political, even epistemological frameworks for feminism after the perceived failure of the socialist alternative to the Western capitalist modernity.

In what follows I outline the main conceptual issues forming the theoretical background for this dissertation. First, I discuss Marija Gimbutas’ intellectual trajectory, starting with the Eastern European interwar environment and moving towards the American “Second Wave” feminism, as the crucial background to the unraveling, reception and appropriation of Gimbutas’ antimodernist matrilineal utopia. In particular I focus on the complicated relationship between feminism, mainly

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<sup>27</sup> Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*, 186.

<sup>28</sup> Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*, 2.

as it developed in the West, and the project of modernity, resulting in various strategies of critique, including anti-modernism and postmodernism. Second, I discuss how Gimbutas' case can be considered from a theoretical perspective informed by postcolonial insights and the critical approaches to post-socialism in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. I outline the challenges of bringing the (former socialist) Eastern Europe into the feminist historiographical narrative without reproducing the hierarchical binary imagination of the East-West difference. Then I explain the methodological issues, inherent to historical and theoretical feminist work focused on an individual figure, such as Gimbutas, but also dealing with broader questions of importance to cultural and intellectual history. The introduction ends with an overview of the archival and other primary sources that have provided material for this research and a dissertation chapter overview.

### **1.1 Feminism, modernity, and the anti-modernism of Marija Gimbutas**

Despite her refusal of the label of feminism,<sup>29</sup> Marija Gimbutas achieved an impressive feminist following, as well as criticism, especially during the 1980s and the 1990s. Gimbutas' theory of the Goddess-worshipping Old Europe received contradictory and passionate responses among feminists: on the one hand, some feminist scholars and activists, as well as artists, embraced it for providing an empowering picture of the prehistoric past,<sup>30</sup> while on the other hand, some feminists strongly resisted it due to Gimbutas' "gender essentialism", and the creation of what they saw as

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<sup>29</sup> Kazys Saja, "Geresnio gyvenimo ilgesys. M. Gimbutienė." [Longing for better life. Marija Gimbutas]. Documentary video, Lietuvos televizijos kultūros laidų redakcija. California: Lietuvos Kino Studija, 1992. LRT Aukso fondas, Lrt.lt (video removed); Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Spretnak, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*; Daujotytė, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman's share and destiny]; Carol P. Christ, "'A Different World': The Challenge of the Work of Marija Gimbutas to the Dominant World-View of Western Cultures," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12, no. 2 (1996): 53–66; Dubravka Ugrešić, *Baba Yaga Laid an Egg* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2009).



a simplistic grand narrative of prehistoric “matriarchy”.<sup>31</sup> This dissertation starts from a hypothesis that analyzing the contradictory responses to Gimbutas vision of prehistory and her critique of Western modernity can help to reveal some of the fundamental “political ambivalence”<sup>32</sup> inherent in the relationship between feminism and the project of modernity, in particular regarding questions of scientific objectivity, gender “essentialism” and Eurocentrism.

What Gimbutas proposed with her theory of Old Europe, was, essentially, an antimodernist spiritual and political vision. A critical approach to modernity has characterized her thinking from the earliest texts written in interwar Lithuania, where she was born and raised, coming of age during the Second World War, as it reached the Baltic States.<sup>33</sup> A certain anti-modernist sentiment can be traced in her articles<sup>34</sup> written during the politically complex period of the Nazi occupation of Lithuania, during which she finished university education, married and had a child, and in the texts she wrote as a displaced person (DP) while residing in post-war Germany.<sup>35</sup> While her thinking changed and evolved over time, with the critique of patriarchy becoming more and more pronounced, some of the characteristic aspects of her worldview remained substantially the same and became a part of her “Goddess hypothesis”. Namely, Gimbutas continuously argued that

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<sup>31</sup> E.g. Margaret W. Conkey and Ruth E. Tringham, “Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology,” in *Feminisms in the Academy*, ed. Domna C. Stanton and Abigail J. Stewart (University of Michigan Press, 1995), 199–246; Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė, *Lyčių drama* [Gender drama] (Vilnius: Vilniaus Universiteto Leidykla, 1998); Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Marija Alseikaitė, “Per Vilniaus krašto sodžius ir žmones [Over the hamlets and people of Vilnius region],” *Lietuvos Žinios*, VIII 1939; Marija Alseikaitė, “Vilniaus džuokose [Among the Džukai in Vilnius],” *Vilniaus balsas*, X 1940.

<sup>34</sup> Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Mūsų tėviškės ‘alkų kalnai’” [The ‘sacred hills’ of our homeland], *Ateitis*, February 27, 1943.

<sup>35</sup> Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Priešistorinių laikų ryšiai su lietuvių liaudies kultūra” [The ties between the prehistoric times and Lithuanian folk culture], *Aidai*, May 2, 1947; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Lietuviškasis lobis: šikicai apie psichines gijas tarp praeities ir dabarties” [The Lithuanian treasure: sketches about the psychological connections between the past and the present], *Aidai*, December 26, 1949.

contemporary societies carry some traces of the ancient past (either in the form of folklore or psychological archetypes in Jungian sense) and aimed to reconstruct, using interdisciplinary scholarly methods, the lost prehistoric pagan spirituality, which she saw as superior to the contemporary modern secular worldview. Prehistoric European societies had a more authentic, more natural connection to the environment and a more balanced, harmonious way of life, defined by their connection to what she, in her latest works called the *feminine principle*, embodied in the worship of the Goddess Creatrix.<sup>36</sup> This conceptualization of prehistory prompted Gimbutas to argue, especially in the works published in the 1980s and the 1990s that we can still achieve the same balanced lifestyle as our ancestors, if we could only reconnect to the spiritual values of this matristic, feminine-centered culture of Old Europe.

Given her embedment, as a young woman, in the Lithuanian national intelligentsia circles, and her education in Lithuanian and German archaeological academic environments, Gimbutas' thinking contains traces of Eastern European antimodernist ideas of the early XX century, namely the desire to restore the imaginary pre-modern social and ecological harmony, an organic and balanced society. Some historians have argued that anti-modernism is one of the most “authentic” Eastern European ideologies, a result and a response to the rapid modernization and the import of Western ideologies, which contributed to the disenchantment, on behalf of the educated elites, with the Western modernity.<sup>37</sup> As the religious scholar Robert Ellwood has noted, Eastern European anti-modernism, similarly to other forms of internal critiques of modernity, constituted an intellectual

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<sup>36</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*.

<sup>37</sup> Balázs Trencsényi, Diana Mishkova, and Marius Turda, eds., *Anti-Modernism: Radical Revisions of Collective Identity*, Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945): Texts and Commentaries (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 14.

environment favorable for the flourishing of anti-Semitism, nationalism and mysticism.<sup>38</sup> The intellectual affinity of Gimbutas' early thought with Eastern European anti-modern nationalism has prompted some critics to debate the possible connections and disconnections between Gimbutas' thought and Nazi ideology<sup>39</sup>, something that I address in more detail in Chapter 2. However, it is important to note that Gimbutas' theory of Old Europe, as developed starting with the 1970s, was significantly different from the right-wing anti-modernism. Gimbutas critique of modernity was transformed, as I show in this dissertation, due to her intellectual meeting with the new social movements in the United States, and became a distinctly feminist vision, which centered the exploitation and oppression of women as one of the key problems of modernity and was directed towards egalitarian, emancipatory and ecological goals.

Why did Gimbutas' utopian antimodernist vision of matrilineal prehistory appeal to some feminists? Mainly, I believe, because feminism has, as the cultural theorist Rita Felski argues, a "dialectical and ambivalent, simultaneously dialogic and contestatory" relationship to modernity and its values.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, the women's movement is inseparable from modernization as a social and economic process, and feminist arguments for equality are rooted to a large extent in the discursive possibilities opened up by the Enlightenment modernity with its rights discourse.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, feminists have tended to criticize modernity and have sometimes seen it as

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<sup>38</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 24.

<sup>39</sup> David W. Anthony, "Nazi and Eco-Feminist Prehistories: Ideology and Empiricism in Indo-European Archaeology," in *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, ed. Philip L. Kohl and Clare P. Fawcett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 82–96; John Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations on Archaeological Explanation. A Biographical Sketch of Marija Gimbutas," in *Excavating Women: A History of Women in European Archaeology*, ed. Magarita Díaz-Andreu and Marie Louise Stig Sorensen (London: Routledge, 1998), 259–86.

<sup>40</sup> Rita Felski, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Critique of Modernity," *Cultural Critique* 13 (1989): 33–56, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara L. Marshall, *Engendering Modernity: Feminism, Social Theory and Social Change* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

inherently catastrophic, built on the logic of domination and exploitation of nature and “the feminine”. Within modernist thinking, and, in fact, within the Western philosophy since Antiquity, as some feminists have argued, there is no place for the feminine to even exist, as sexual difference is completely obliterated by the masculine-centric worldview.<sup>42</sup> In some strands of feminism, the critique of modernity has gained a form of “nostalgic antimodernism”,<sup>43</sup> which replaces the modern progress narrative with a Golden Age vision of the prehistoric or premodern past.<sup>44</sup> Antimodernist ideas have been primarily associated, in a pejorative way, with “radical” and “cultural” feminist strands, who see Western modernity as based on masculine values and want to replace it with “gynocentric” values, thus falling into the trap of essentializing gender difference.<sup>45</sup> It is primarily this marginalized strand of feminism, that has embraced and appropriated Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe in the 1980s and the 1990s (as I show in Chapter 3) obliterating the potential broader appeal of her criticism of modernity and the Western civilization at large.

Most of the “Second Wave” feminist theorizing has been based on a careful negotiation of the questionable heritage of enlightenment modernity and its values for women and for feminism. Feminist historians have shown how, contrary to popular opinion, the transition to modernity was not a time of increasing freedom for women,<sup>46</sup> and that the modern feminist movement is in a sense trapped in the paradoxical logic of liberal democracy.<sup>47</sup> Feminist science studies have contributed

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<sup>42</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (London: Athlone Press, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Felski, “Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Critique of Modernity,” 49.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Beacon Press, 1973); Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Reissue edition (Counterpoint, 2016 [1978]).

<sup>45</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*; Elizabeth A. Flynn, *Feminism Beyond Modernism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Joan Kelly, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” in *Women, History & Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19–50; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York : [London: Autonomedia ; Pluto], 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

particularly significantly to the debates about the relationship between feminism and the Enlightenment values of objectivity, rationality and reason. They have outlined the binary gendered thinking as a part and parcel of the advancement of the modern scientific discourse, in which “femininity” became associated with passivity, weakness and irrational behavior and discussed a number of possible feminist positions in relation to these modern values.<sup>48</sup> Another significant theoretical contribution came from postcolonial (feminist) thinkers, who addressed the profoundly imperialist and exploitative nature of modern philosophy and politics and/or aimed to decenter Europe and the West as the supposed originator of modernity.<sup>49</sup> If feminists have demonstrated how the Enlightenment claims to universality have been profoundly limited by their embedment in masculine experience, the postcolonial perspective showed the parochialism of modernity, constructed from the Western, white, European point of view.

By the end of the 1980s, one of the most pervasive answers to the contradictory legacy of modernity for feminism became the radical divorce from the modern values of reason, objectivity and truth, and a flight to the radical futurity of postmodernism. One of the most prominent advocates of the postmodern turn in feminism, Joan Flax argued, for example, that the “way(s) to feminist future(s) cannot lie in reviving or appropriating Enlightenment concepts of the person or knowledge”.<sup>50</sup> Some feminist authors, however, debated the compatibility between feminism, a social and philosophical movement embedded in emancipatory politics, and postmodernism, a philosophy, which radically questioned the relationship between representation and reality, the

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<sup>48</sup> E.g. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: Male and Female in Western Philosophy*, 2nd rev. ed, Ideas (Routledge) (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>49</sup> Uma Narayan and Sandra G. Harding, eds., *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Jane Flax, “Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory,” *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 621–43, 625.

coherence of a subject, and resisted any metanarrative of history.<sup>51</sup> Others have noted the politically problematic character of postmodernism, which, in the period of the general disappointment with the Left-wing progressive politics by the end of the Cold War, provided a strategy of adapting to the “postsocialist” condition instead of suggesting a means of intellectual resistance.<sup>52</sup> In any case, the turn to postmodernism in the 1990s had an enormous impact to feminist thinking, inaugurating an allegedly radical split with modernity and the Enlightenment values. At the same time, however, the contradictions inherent in modernity, regarding the autonomy and transparency of the self, the possibility of an objective science, the universality of reason and truth, etc. continued to haunt feminism.

Marija Gimbutas formulated her theory of Old Europe already in 1974, but it was 1989 and 1991, when she wrote her most controversial books, in which she openly criticized the notions of modernity and progress, exposed the patriarchal basis of the Western civilization, condemned the Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, and praised the potentials presented by the return to “feminine” values. Gimbutas’ ideas, I argue in this dissertation, should be read in the context of “the ‘postsocialist’ condition”, as theorized by Fraser, as well as the context of feminist postmodernism. Namely, Gimbutas’ prehistoric matristic utopia can be interpreted as an anti-modernist solution to the perils of modernity, as they became apparent towards the end of the Cold War: the immanent environmental crisis, the ongoing social inequality and oppression, and the lack of progressive vision in the Left wing political movements. Due to the alleged contradiction between Gimbutas’ ideas and the mainstream feminist postmodern *Zeitgeist*, the analysis of the reception of her ideas can serve as a way to interrogate the ideological inconsistencies of this

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<sup>51</sup> Felski, “Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Critique of Modernity,” 49.

<sup>52</sup> Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*.

particular moment in feminism. In particular, in this dissertation I focus on the following moments of theoretical and political tension: the centrality of the category of “woman” to the movement and the problem of „gender essentialism”; feminist insistence on the situatedness of all knowledge, which implies a complicated and multidimensional relationship with science and objectivity; and the association of feminism with the notion of „the West“ and the European civilization, while it also claims universal sisterhood.

## **1.2 Positioning the (post-)socialist Eastern Europe**

The historians Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann have suggested, that the insights from the research into the gendered history of East Central European region have a (largely still unexplored) potential to question some of the implicitly and mistakenly universalistic assumptions of Western historiography.<sup>53</sup> In a similar vein, the anthropologist Susan Gal and the sociologist Gail Kligman have suggested that an analysis of the gendered Cold War discourses and their legacies in both “the East” and “the West” might contribute to the rethinking of the notion of feminism.<sup>54</sup> Can the research into the transnational reception of Marija Gimbutas’ works contribute to the gendered history of Eastern Europe and facilitate a renewed examination of the Cold War legacy in feminism as a discourse and practice? If yes, what are the ways, in which such research might question the universalism of the Western feminist historiography and theory, as well as the very notion of feminism? How can such research avoid reiterating the persistent gendered clichés about “the East” and “the West”, “progress” and “backwardness”, in relation to the women’s movement and the emancipatory gender politics on the both sides of the former “Iron Curtain”? Most importantly for my research – how does the position of the former socialist Europe with

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<sup>53</sup> Daskalova and Zimmermann, “Women’s and Gender History,” 310.

<sup>54</sup> Gal and Kligman, “After Socialism,” 9-10.

regards to modernization, in particular, the perceived “lagging behind” the West, can shed light on the interrogation of the ambivalent feminist relationship with the project of modernity?<sup>55</sup>

The fact that Gimbutas was born and raised in the Eastern European, Lithuanian interwar context and maintained a connection with the “Socialist Bloc” and post-socialist Lithuania throughout her life (which I discuss among other aspects of her biography in Chapter 2) does not automatically make her a case of interest for the research that aims to bring the “Eastern European perspective” into feminist research. Rather, it is Gimbutas’ consistent discursive construction of a certain gendered image of Eastern Europe in her works and public speeches, as well as her “self-fashioning”<sup>56</sup> as a representative of Lithuanian culture, that certainly makes her significant for a postsocialist/postcolonial feminist critical and transnational analysis. Gimbutas argued in her works that the peripheral parts of Europe, in particular, the Baltic culture as preserved in contemporary Lithuanian and Latvia folk traditions, can serve as the most “authentic” source of knowledge about and spiritual connection with the Old European matrilineal past. She proposed that focusing on the most marginalized European national cultures and their matrilineal aspects can help to rethink the very narrative of the Western civilization. As I argue in this dissertation, Gimbutas’ ideas and their reception, as well as the construction of Gimbutas public persona in feminism transnationally has been shaped by various forms of “orientalizing” understandings about Eastern Europe, as well as by the many faces of Eurocentrism. Analyzing the construction of Gimbutas and the appropriation of her ideas therefore helps to shed light on the “imaginary geographies”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Maria Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (2005): 140–64; Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska, *De-Centering Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Jo Burr Margadant, ed., “Introduction: Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective,” in *The New Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 2000), 1–32.

<sup>57</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).



of “the (post-)socialist East” and “the West” in feminism, with regards to the project of modernity and gendered modernization.

As I show in the Chapter 3 of this dissertation, Gimbutas’ Lithuanian, Eastern European background has often been assumed to influence her archaeological work, by making it nationalist, or ideological and therefore not “objective” enough.<sup>58</sup> Combined with her gender, her Lithuanian background made Gimbutas an easy target for ad hominem attack by fellow archaeologists. Quite on the contrary, her Lithuanian heritage has become a point of fascination and largely mystified by spiritual feminists in the United States.<sup>59</sup> As I analyze in detail in Chapter 4, feminist spiritualists saw Lithuania as a reservoir of prehistoric matristic cultural treasures, ignoring the complicated historical relationship of the country with the Western civilization and modernity in particular. Chapter 5 discusses how, in post-socialist Lithuanian feminism, Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe helped women activists to navigate the post-socialist ideological environment, characterized by both strong disappointment by the Soviet modernity, and hopeful, yet also frightening transformation towards the Western-style capitalism and its gender order.<sup>60</sup>

In all these cases, as I show, the assumptions about “the West” and “the East” and their respective positions with regard to the project of modernity, have influenced feminist narratives, constructing certain ideas and practices as “old-fashioned”, while others as “progressive”; some as “authentic” while others some as “artificial”; some as “politically beneficial” and some as “politically

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<sup>58</sup> E.g. Ruth E. Tringham, “Households with Faces: The Challenge of Gender in Prehistoric Architectural Remains,” in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 93–131; Lynn Meskell, “Goddesses, Gimbutas, and ‘New Age’ Archaeology,” *Antiquity* 69, March, no. 262 (1995): 74–86; Chapman, “The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations on Archaeological Explanation. A Biographical Sketch of Marija Gimbutas.”

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*; Marler, “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend”; Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Gruodis, *Feminizmo ekskursai* [The currents of feminism]; Prunskienė, “Lietuvos Moterų Partijos programa” [The program of the Lithuanian Women’s Party]; Daujotytė, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman’s share and destiny].

problematic”. In what follows I provide an overview of theoretical considerations, informed by postcolonial critiques, regarding the theoretical project of “bringing the Eastern Europe in” to the Western-centered narrative of feminism.

This dissertation starts from a methodological assumption that neither “the West” nor “the (post-) socialist East” are stable categories, denoting preexisting difference, but rather are constructed in relation to each other. The political scientist Allaine Cerwonka has argued against the articulation of Eastern European “difference” as a solution to the problem of the marginalization of the former socialist experiences in the mainstream feminist narrative and, instead, proposed “transculturation” as a useful approach. According to her, the inclusion under the marker of particular cultural, national, ideological, etc., difference does not disrupt the normativity and centrality of the experience and theorization produced by Western (American or Western European) feminists.<sup>61</sup> Only when the specificity of the region is seen as embedded in the broader transnational gendered processes and feminist exchanges, it can challenge the foundational concepts and theoretical frames constructed from the unacknowledged Western standpoint.<sup>62</sup> Daskalova and Zimmermann have noted that the comparison of the Eastern European women’s activism with “the West” has produced a notion of derivativeness of feminism in “the East”, which reproduces the normativity of Western feminism. They argue that only when the global transnational context is taken into account, justice can be done to the Eastern European experiences, and the very universalizing concepts of “feminism” and “the women’s movement” can be reconsidered.<sup>63</sup> Following these insights, in this work I approach the (post-) socialist Eastern European “difference” not as fixed

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<sup>61</sup> Allaine Cerwonka, “Traveling Feminist Thought: Difference and Transculturation in Central and Eastern European Feminism,” *Signs* 33, no. 4 (2008): 809–32, 820.

<sup>62</sup> Cerwonka.

<sup>63</sup> Daskalova and Zimmermann, “Women’s and Gender History.”

and predefined, but rather as in the process of articulation, a part of broader, global processes and phenomena, and in this way – as an ongoing challenge to the Western-centric notions of feminism.

This dissertation takes “the postsocialist condition” as theorized by Nancy Fraser, as one of the starting points to bring in the Eastern European experiences to the feminist historiographical narrative through the transnational, “transculturation” perspective. This dissertation asks, what can be learned about “the postsocialist condition” and its effects on the discourses and practices of feminism, by refocusing the attention from the West to the (post-)socialist Eastern Europe, both as an idea in the Western imagination and as a geographical location, embedded in global political structures. The Soviet Union, as Fraser notes, represented an alternative to the Western capitalist modernity from the point of view of the Western leftist movements. Hence, its collapse in the 1980s created an ideological crisis among the progressive social movements, the feeling of “loss” of an utopian horizon.<sup>64</sup> As the historian Claudia Kraft has noticed, in the conceptualization of “the postsocialist condition” Fraser took into account only the experience of the “West”, and omitted the experiences of post-socialism in Eastern Europe.<sup>65</sup> However, for the post-socialist feminism in Eastern Europe, socialism represented not an utopia, but the lived experience of modernity and a historical legacy, in relation to which they aimed to establish a new identity in the after-1989 period. In this dissertation I argue for using “the postsocialist condition” as theorized by Fraser, as a potential common analytical framework, within which feminism on the both sides of the former “Iron Curtain” can be brought together to analyze the complexities of formulating an emancipatory

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<sup>64</sup> Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*.

<sup>65</sup> Claudia Kraft, “Spaces of Knowledge and Gender Regimes: From Double Marginalization to a Gendered History of Knowledge in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 117 (2018).

feminist vision in the context of late modernity and the rise of neoliberalism, without falling into the established clichés of “progress” and “backwardness”.

The understanding of Eastern European (gendered) modernity as belated, both in an economic and ideological sense, has been a popular assumption in the scholarship both in “the East” and in “the West” and only relatively recently has become an object of criticism from scholars, indebted largely to postcolonial criticisms of a similar kind. Historians such as Maria Todorova and Larry Wolff, have demonstrated, how the construction of the notion of the Eastern European “backwardness” goes back in history way before the Cold War, and coincides roughly with modernity.<sup>66</sup> Eastern Europe, as both Todorova and Wolff notice, has been constructed as a transitional space between the supposed “civilization” of the Western Europe and the “barbarism” of non-Western others. Although the discourses produced within Eastern Europe show an internalized perception of lagging behind “the West”, they also espouse strong claims to belong to Europe, even if only as a provincial and marginalized part.<sup>67</sup> This perceived “European identity” has possibly complicated the attempts to theorize post-socialist Eastern European region from a postcolonial theoretical point of view. As the literary scholar David Chioni-Moore notices, the Baltic and Central Europeans saw themselves as superior to the colonizing Russian Empire or the Soviet Union in terms of the level of civilization and culture. Hence the process of “orientalization”, which, as the postcolonial theory has shown, always accompanied the Western colonial regimes, is largely reverse in the case of the “colonization” of Eastern Europe, in particular

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<sup>66</sup> Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on The Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>67</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

during the state-socialist period.<sup>68</sup> This has contributed, argues the literary scholar Violeta Kelertas, to the current lack of popularity of postcolonial analysis from the point of view of the Baltic nations, who find the comparison with the racialized postcolonial populations “unflattering, if not humiliating, and want to be with the “civilized” part of the World”.<sup>69</sup> Eastern Europe, including the Baltic countries, in short, can be said to represent an example of “nesting orientalism”, as they participate in the discursive construction of gradations of “civilization” and “backwardness” on the periphery of Europe and beyond.<sup>70</sup>

The contemporary discourses of modernization are gendered in how they connect gender equality and sexual emancipation with “the West”, while marking the (post-)socialist Eastern Europe, as well as “the Third World”, as the places of gendered and sexualized backwardness.<sup>71</sup> As Hemmings argues, “the use of gender equality as a marker of an economic and regulatory modernity marks the subject of gender equality as Western, capitalist, and democratic”.<sup>72</sup> Simultaneously, Hemmings notices, this discourse constructs the non-western cultures and post-socialist societies as inherently traditional and conservative in terms of gender and sexuality, and in need of help from “the West” to achieve gender equality. Feminist scholars working on the issues in post-socialism have problematized the backwardness and catching up discourse, permeating the “transition” rhetoric in Eastern Europe after the fall of socialism, and pointed out its gendered elements. Gal and Kligman, for example, argued, that the transition in post-socialist Eastern

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<sup>68</sup> David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 111–28, 121.

<sup>69</sup> Violeta Kelertas, *Introduction: Baltic Postcolonialism and Its Critics*, ed. Violeta Kelertas (Amsterdam ; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (1992): 1–15; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 917–31.

<sup>71</sup> Anne Phillips, “Gender and Modernity,” *Political Theory* 46, no. 6 (2018): 837–60.

<sup>72</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

Europe has reproduced the problematic Western-centric Cold War imaginary, assuming a unified pattern of modernization and progress, also in terms of the development of women's activism.<sup>73</sup> Zimmerman demonstrated how the implementation of gender studies in Eastern Europe have come to stand for a "symbolic marker" of Westernization and progress, and went hand in hand with an uncritical embrace of Western "values" and paradigms.<sup>74</sup> As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>75</sup> Eastern Europe is often still constructed in academic scholarship as in need of "catching up" with the West in the sphere of gender equality and sexual freedom, thus portraying "the East", as lagging behind on the road of gendered modernity, allegedly due to the legacy of the socialist past.

This dissertation considers the effects that the imaginaries about "the East" and "the West" in connection to (gendered) modernization and development, as outlined above, have on feminist theory and historiography as well as women's activism. At the same time, this dissertation is cautious not to reproduce these binary images, even if in "reverse".<sup>76</sup> For that matter I do not approach Marija Gimbutas' life and work as representing the Eastern European "difference" from the West, but rather investigate the reception of her ideas on the both sides of the (former) "Iron Curtain" and transnationally, with an aim to shed light on how the conventional understandings of "the East" and "the West" have affected feminist theory and practice. In particular, I use this study as a point of reflecting on the entanglement between feminism and the project of modernity, once

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<sup>73</sup> Gal and Kligman, "After Socialism."

<sup>74</sup> Susan Zimmermann, "The Institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Asymmetric Politics and the Regional-Transnational Configuration," *East Central Europe* 34, no. 1 (2007): 131–60.

<sup>75</sup> Rasa Navickaitė, "Under the Western Gaze: Sexuality and Postsocialist 'Transition' in East Europe," in *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe: Contexts, Practices and Politics*, ed. Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpani (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), 119–32.

<sup>76</sup> Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms." 920.

the Eastern European ambiguous positioning with regards to modernization and progress, namely, the pervasive trope of “lagging behind” is taken into account.

This dissertation argues for a transnational approach to Gimbutas’ life, work and reception, at the same time as it argues also for a transnational and integrative approach to feminism, inclusive of the former “Second World”. It is only in seeing the totality of the interrelated, but also different feminist interpretations of Gimbutas on both sides of the former “Iron Curtain”, that one can understand the appeal of Gimbutas’ anti-modernist feminist utopia at the particular global historical moment of “postsocialism” at the end of the Cold War, and the theoretical moment of post-modernism. The research on Gimbutas’ ideas and her transnational reception and construction allows a reconsideration of the popular notion of cultural transfer as a one-sided movement, with feminist ideas traveling from “the West”, considered as the site of origin, to “the Rest”.<sup>77</sup> It also questions the popular progress narrative, which positions “the West” as the site of modernity and gender equality, while portraying the former socialist East and other non-Western cultures as constantly trapped in gendered, economic and cultural backwardness.<sup>78</sup> Instead, through the example of Marija Gimbutas’ reception and the construction of her persona, I argue, one can see a variety of exchanges happening between “the East” and “the West”, a mutual co-formation of gendered social and cultural phenomena, a (post) Cold War feminist hybridity in the making, which complicates the one-directional progress and modernization narrative.

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<sup>77</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); Susan Gal, “Feminism and Civil Society,” in *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics*, ed. Cora Kaplan, Debra Keates, and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1997), 30–45.

<sup>78</sup> Judith Butler, “Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 1–23; Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*.

### **1.3 Writing Marija Gimbutas into a feminist narrative: methodology and sources**

This dissertation combines historical and biographical methods with theoretical insights from feminist and postcolonial/postsocialist studies, with an aim to contribute to the rich body of feminist research on women's biographies and how they shed light on issues of a broader historical and historiographical significance.<sup>79</sup> This dissertation employs Gimbutas' life, her intellectual labor and, in particular, the various receptions, appropriations and disputes over her ideas, as a "window" to a certain historical period or phenomenon, "a prism of history".<sup>80</sup> More precisely, the examination of the contradictory feminist reception of Gimbutas' ideas about the prehistoric matrilineal civilization of Old Europe and the construction of her scientific persona serves as a vantage point from which to reconsider some of the important historiographical and political issues in feminism of the 1980s and the 1990s, taking into account the both sides of the former "Iron Curtain".

This dissertation is comparable to a few recent studies by feminist scholars, who also use the perspective of an individual person, their life and thought, to analyze issues of broader cultural and political significance. An example of such work is the research by the historian Antoinette Burton, who followed the career paths of Santha Rama Rau, a writer on India and "the East" in postwar United States, to analyze the notions of orientalism and cosmopolitanism in the Cold War and postcolonial environment.<sup>81</sup> More recently, Hemmings has engaged with the life and work of the

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<sup>79</sup> Sara Alpern et al., eds., "Introduction," in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 1–16; Barbara Caine, "Feminist Biography and Feminist History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 247–61.

<sup>80</sup> Laura Kalman, "The Power of Biography. Review of Judgment in Jerusalem: Chief Justice Simon Agranat and the Zionist Century by Prina Lahav," *Law & Social Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1998): 479–530, 481.

<sup>81</sup> Antoinette M. Burton, *The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau*, Next Wave (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).



anarchist Emma Goldman, in order to reflect on the contemporary historiographical and political issues of the feminist and queer movements.<sup>82</sup> Hemmings' work, in particular her insistence on tracing the "political ambivalence" surrounding the issues of fundamental importance to feminism, by means of tracing Goldman's thought and reception, has a particularly strong resonance with my own work. Hemming has theorized ambivalence as fundamental quality of feminist engagement with gender, race and sexuality, even though this ambivalence is often concealed by the narratives of certainty about precisely these crucial political concerns.<sup>83</sup> Similarly to her approach, in which Emma Goldman is studied as a point of various affective feminist attachments, in this work I examine Marija Gimbutas as a nodal point of various feminist (dis-)engagements.

As the theoretical overview so far has made clear, providing only a factual biography of Gimbutas is not the main goal of this dissertation. The biographical and chronological account on Gimbutas' life, as provided in Chapter 2, serves as an important historical background for understanding the intellectual and personal formation of Marija Gimbutas, and challenging the predominant simplistic representations of "Eastern Europe" and "Lithuania" in the existing biographical accounts of Gimbutas.<sup>84</sup> Building on an in-depth engagement with both Lithuanian and English language archival sources, Chapter 2 shows the complexity of Gimbutas' life in the light of global and transnational events of the twentieth century. However, this dissertation argues against the postulation of a direct causal relationship between the facts of Gimbutas' life and her ideas. In that sense this dissertation follows post-structuralist feminist insights on biography and life-writing, questioning the possibility of establishing the "truth" about the subject and instead focusing on the

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<sup>82</sup> Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman*.

<sup>83</sup> Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Joan Marler, "The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12, no. 2 (1996): 37–52; Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations on Archaeological Explanation. A Biographical Sketch of Marija Gimbutas."

representations of that subject, both by her and by others.<sup>85</sup> Marija Gimbutas as a person therefore is not so much of interest for this dissertation as “Marija Gimbutas” as an intertextual/discursive network meaning the totality of all the available textual and visual materials produced both by Gimbutas herself as well as by others about her.<sup>86</sup> The historical reconstruction of this “discursive network” and the teasing out of the main points of tension, forms the core of this dissertation in the Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

This dissertation, in particular the analysis of the academic reception of Gimbutas in Chapter 3, is also informed by feminist historical approach to the study of “scientific persona”<sup>87</sup> and the feminist analysis of discursive and material “self-fashioning” of public women.<sup>88</sup> These feminist approaches problematize the traditional biographical endeavor, normally focused on “exceptional great men” and their influence on historical events.<sup>89</sup> Feminist approaches to life-writing problematize the establishment of a coherent biographical narrative, arguing that individual lives escape such simplification. Instead, as the historian Mineke Bosch argues, the so-called feminist ‘new biography’ aims to study “the pursuit of coherence by the biographical subject in question or, to be more precise, of documenting the many diverse identities that the biographical subject has adopted in accordance with changing historical circumstances”<sup>90</sup>. In the case of writing about the lives of women scientists, of a particular interest to feminist historians is the way these women managed to employ various discursive scripts and narrative strategies to establish their reliability

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<sup>85</sup> Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>87</sup> Mineke Bosch, “Persona and the Performance of Identity. Parallel Developments in the Biographical Historiography of Science and Gender, and the Related Uses of Self Narrative,” *L’Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift Für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 24, no. 2 (2013): 11–22.

<sup>88</sup> Margadant, “Introduction: Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective.”

<sup>89</sup> Caine, *Biography and History*.

<sup>90</sup> Bosch, “Persona and the Performance of Identity. Parallel Developments in the Biographical Historiography of Science and Gender, and the Related Uses of Self Narrative.” 19.

as scholars.<sup>91</sup> As I show in this dissertation, Gimbutas presents a rich case for the analysis of the construction and deconstruction of a “scientific persona” of a female scientist both within and outside of academia, both by herself and by others.

It is often argued that one of the biggest achievements of the feminist engagement with biography and history in general is the attention given to the personal, ordinary lives of public personae, and the way gendered constraints have shaped their public ideas and achievements.<sup>92</sup> This dissertation, quite on the contrary, aims to redirect the interest in the personal life of Marija Gimbutas and refocus attention to her ideas and works and their significance in the political and academic worlds of the time. I agree with the insights of the literary scholar Toril Moi, the author of the intellectual biography of Simone de Beauvoir, that the emphasis on the personal has often been abused in writing intellectual women’s lives, in a way of reducing women’s public achievements to the realm of the personal, domestic, familial and unconscious.<sup>93</sup> This has definitely been the case with the treatment of Marija Gimbutas’ works, sometimes reducing her ideas to a mere reflection of war trauma, or even to a symptom of the menopause, as I demonstrate in Chapter 3. Therefore in this dissertation I aim not to prioritize “the personal” over “the public”, meaning also that I treat the “personal” archival sources (such as Gimbutas’ letters, diaries, etc.) on the same level of importance as her “public” texts (such as her popular and academic writings and speeches), not assuming one genre of textual materials to provide a psychological explanation for the other, or

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<sup>91</sup> Elisabeth Wesseling, “Judith Rich Harris: The Miss Marple of Developmental Psychology Elisabeth Wesseling,” *Science in Context* 17, no. 3 (2004): 293–314.

<sup>92</sup> Susan Ware, “Unlocking the Porter-Dewson Relationship: A Challenge for the Feminist Biographer,” in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women*, ed. Sara Alpern et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 51–64; Dee Garrison, “Two Roads Taken: Writing the Biography of Mary Heaton Vorse,” in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women*, ed. Sara Alpern et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 65–78; Caine, “Feminist Biography and Feminist History.”

<sup>93</sup> Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 1994.

vice versa. While the many personal accounts of people who have known her, testify about Gimbutas' extraordinary kindness, charisma and intelligence<sup>94</sup> this dissertation does not propose to present, in any way, a new account of Marija Gimbutas' personality or character. This was not the goal of this dissertation, which is rather steered towards her intellectual and political reception, and the construction of her public image in various feminist contexts.

The decision not to speculate about Gimbutas' personality and her personal life was motivated also by the desire to avoid the hagiographic approach that has been prominent in many works on Gimbutas' life so far, especially on behalf of the feminist spirituality movement,<sup>95</sup> and the nationalist Lithuanian reception.<sup>96</sup> I also wished to avoid speculations about the role that Marija Gimbutas' gender had on the specific academic trajectory and the political as well as theoretical arguments that she formulated in her works. I wanted, in other words, to avoid the approach, as taken for example, by Evelyn Fox Keller in her famous *Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock*,<sup>97</sup> which portrays McClintock's holistic approach to nature as a result of her "feminine" view in science. I do however, investigate in this dissertation the role that the various perceptions about gender had on the interpretation of Gimbutas' work, sometimes resulting in disproportionate criticism, and sometimes, in fact, providing her with unexpected sources of

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<sup>94</sup> E.g. Viktorija Daujotytė, "Praeities atodangos ateičiai [Outcrops of the past for the future]," in *Laimos palytėta*, ed. Austėja Ikamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002); Vytautas Urbanavičius, "Žvelgianti į žemę iš aukštai [Looking at the earth from above]," in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų* [Marija Gimbutas ... from letters and memories], ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 367–68; Vladas Vildžiūnas, "Jos šypsenoje didžiulė jėga [Huge power in her smile]," in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 369–72; Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda."

<sup>95</sup> Marler, "Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend"; Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

<sup>96</sup> Julija Ikamaitė, "Mūsų genties pramotė" [The ancestor of our tribe], in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 213–14; Vytautas Alseika, "Lietuvos dvasios deivė [The goddess of Lithuanian spirit]," in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 25–32.

<sup>97</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1998).

authority. By wishing not to reproduce the stereotypical understandings of the Eastern European “difference”, in this dissertation I also do not speculate on the way Gimbutas’ ethnic identity as a Lithuanian might have affected her work on Old Europe. In line with such works as Daniel Horowitz’s biography of Betty Friedan<sup>98</sup> I instead focus on the effects of the Cold War discourses and the relationships between “the East” and “the West” for both Gimbutas’ rhetoric and the reception of her works in feminism transnationally.

Biographies of unjustifiably forgotten women have been used as an important tool in feminism, to provide alternative genealogies of the women’ movement and to stress the oppressed aspects of mainstream political histories. Biographical research has played an especially important role in reviving the histories of racialized women, as well as women with political views threatening the mainstream political order, such as: abolitionists<sup>99</sup>, communists<sup>100</sup>, and anarchists<sup>101</sup>, to name but a few examples. This dissertation is different from projects of this kind, since it works with a person, who balanced between positions of privilege (as a white European, educated middle-class person) and relative disadvantage (as an Eastern European, a displaced person in postwar Europe, a woman in academia); as well as between mainstream (anti-Communist in the Cold War United States; nationalist among Lithuanian diaspora) and marginalized (women-centered thinker in academia; proponent of pagan spirituality in a Catholic-dominated environment) political beliefs. This biographical research therefore does not aim to create an icon out of Gimbutas, but

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<sup>98</sup> Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism*, Culture, Politics, and the Cold War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

<sup>99</sup> Sabrina Sojourner, “From the House of Yemanjá: The Goddess Heritage of Black Women,” in *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 57–63; Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women’s Rights and Abolition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>100</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>101</sup> Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

acknowledges both the privileged and marginalized aspects of her identity as integral elements of her as a profoundly ambivalent figure for feminism.

In order to provide the first transnational and integrative account of Gimbutas' life and, most importantly, her reception and the construction of her public persona, this dissertation deals with a range of archival and published sources in mostly two languages, English and Lithuanian, and some materials in other languages, mainly German. For the archival materials regarding Gimbutas' life and work, such as diaries, letters, lecture notes, newspaper articles, video and audio recordings, etc., I have consulted the key archives and libraries in Lithuania, the United States, and Germany (see the full list in the bibliography). Next to the archival materials I took a number of unstructured interviews with people connected to Gimbutas personally or via political and academic interests. I included in the bibliography those interviews which were informative in writing this dissertation, even if not quoted directly. Next to the archival materials and interviews, a big part of materials used in writing this dissertation consists of academic texts by Gimbutas, as well as a mass of scholarly and popular texts and video materials about Gimbutas and her ideas, written both in Lithuanian and English.

Gimbutas' life has been of interest to many (especially in the archaeological community) and has been used, in a rather reductive and problematic way, as a tool for evaluating both her personality and the scientific value of her work.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the facts about different periods of her life are scattered across different sources and texts, and there is currently no exhaustive biography of Gimbutas, written either in English or Lithuanian. The short biographical accounts written in English so far have mainly been based on personal conversations with Gimbutas and the

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<sup>102</sup> Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archaeology"; Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions."

testimonies of her friends and relatives – thus reflecting, to varying degree, Gimbutas’ perception of her own life.<sup>103</sup> Marija Gimbutas herself has narrated her life story (what I call in this dissertation her autobiographical narrative) on several occasions in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, most extensively perhaps in the unpublished conversations<sup>104</sup> (in English) with her assistant and biographer Joan Marler,<sup>105</sup> and in some published interviews, like a conversation with the author Riane Eisler, fragments of which can be seen in the documentary film *Signs Out of Time. The Story of Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas*.<sup>106</sup> The film itself is also a biographical account of Gimbutas’ life, forming a part of the tradition of the hagiographic representations of Gimbutas by the feminist spirituality movement, which I analyze in Chapter 4. Next to these English language materials, there is also a body of sources in Lithuanian language, consisting mainly of the memoirs and reflections by Gimbutas’ relatives, colleagues and friends, collected and published (in Lithuanian) by her daughter Živilė Gimbutaitė,<sup>107</sup> the Lithuanian author Kornelija Jankauskaitė,<sup>108</sup> and Gimbutas’ niece Austėja Ikamaitė.<sup>109</sup> The published materials on Gimbutas’ biography provided me with important information about Gimbutas’ life, work and her importance for different

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<sup>103</sup> Marler, “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend”; Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda”; Milisauskas, “Marija Gimbutas.”

<sup>104</sup> Joan Marler, Marija Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” November 17, 1990, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.

<sup>105</sup> Marler wrote a number of biographical sketches about Gimbutas’ life, basing her narrative on interviews with Gimbutas. See Marler, “The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas”; Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*; Marler, “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend”; Joan Marler, “Gimbutas, Marija Birutė Alseikaitė,” in *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century*, ed. Susan Ware (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 234–36. For the rest, some of these conversations remain unpublished and are held at the OPUS Archives. Marler also edited a volume in English on memoirs and reflections about Gimbutas and her works, see Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*.

<sup>106</sup> Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

<sup>107</sup> Živilė Gimbutaitė, *Marija Gimbutienė: Dienoraštis ir prisiminimai* [Marija Gimbutas: the diary and memoirs] (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 2015).

<sup>108</sup> Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė, eds., *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų* [Marija Gimbutas ... from letters and memories] (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005).

<sup>109</sup> Austėja Ikamaitė, ed., *Laimos palytėta: straipsniai, recenzijos, pokalbiai, polemika, laiškai, vertinimai, prisiminimai* [Touched by Laima: articles, reviews, conversations, discussions, letters, opinions, memories] (Vilnius: Scena, 2002).

communities. In line with my overall approach, I treated them critically, as a part of Gimbutas' transnational feminist reception, and as constructing a certain image of her persona and her works.

An important source for this dissertation was obviously also Gimbutas' own works, a massive amount of books and articles, which I will not attempt to list here. There has been a number of important engagements with her work by archaeologists,<sup>110</sup> linguists,<sup>111</sup> philosophers,<sup>112</sup> feminist theologians,<sup>113</sup> to name but a few examples. This dissertation does not aim to present a completely new comprehensive account on Gimbutas' work. Rather, it builds on and critically engages with the existing accounts, evaluations and interpretations of her works, from a postcolonial/postsocialist<sup>114</sup> feminist historical perspective. Next to the archival and published materials directly related to Gimbutas' life and work, I have dealt also with a wide range of materials, such as feminist and postcolonial theoretical literature, historical and anthropological works, that helped to contextualize Gimbutas' life, ideas and their transnational reception and interpretation.

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<sup>110</sup> Brian Hayden, "Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?," in *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean: First International Conference on Archaeology of the Ancient Mediterranean.*, ed. Anthony Bonanno (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner Publishing Company, 1986), 17–30; Ruth E. Tringham and Margaret W. Conkey, "Rethinking Figurines. A Critical View from Archaeology of Gimbutas, the 'Goddess' and Popular Culture," in *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence*, ed. L. Goodison and C. Morris (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 22–45; Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda."

<sup>111</sup> Susan Nacev Skomal and Edgar C. Polomé, eds., *Proto-Indo-European: The Archaeology of a Linguistic Problem : Studies in Honor of Marija Gimbutas* (Washington, D.C: Institute for the Study of Man, 1987).

<sup>112</sup> Naglis Kardelis, "Senosios Europos simbolių klasifikacija ir interpretavimas Marijos Gimbutienės veikaluose 'Deivės Kalba' ir 'Senoji Europa'" [The classification and interpretation of the symbols of Old Europe in Marija Gimbutas' works 'The Language of the Goddess' and 'The Old Europe'], in *Filosofija išėivijoje* [Philosophy in the diaspora] (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2015), 173–97.

<sup>113</sup> Christ, "A Different World."

<sup>114</sup> I use the shorthand „postcolonial/postsocialist“ throughout this dissertation, indicating a reference to the body of work both in postcolonial studies and the critical postsocialist studies, often inspired by postcolonial approaches, of post-socialism, in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, as a historical and political phenomenon.



## **1.4 Chapter outline**

This section provides a road map for the reader of this dissertation, shortly summarizing the rest of the chapters. “Chapter 2. The Making of Marija Gimbutas in National and Transnational Contexts: a Critical Biography” deals with Gimbutas’ life course, from her childhood and youth in Lithuania, to her experiences in post-war Europe, to her life and career in the United States and transnationally. Although her Lithuanian background and the effect it might have had on her work and ideas has been of interest to many, the speculations in this regard have been mainly based on stereotypical imaginations about Eastern Europe. For that reason I provide here a detailed account of Gimbutas early life in Lithuania and her connections with Lithuanian society both within the Soviet Union and in the post-socialist period. I include an especially detailed contextualization of some of the most complicated aspects of Gimbutas’ biography, such as her life under the Soviet and Nazi Occupations of Lithuania and as a displaced person in post-war Germany. In this way I hoped to shed light on the previously mystified or overlooked aspects of her life, work, and political convictions, moving beyond the repetitive clichés of some of the (auto-) biographical representations of Gimbutas so far. I further focus on Gimbutas’ personal and academic transformation after her immigration to the United States, the flourishing of her career since her move to Los Angeles, and the connection she kept with the Lithuanian diaspora. In this chapter I aimed to present a truly transnational account on her life as an acknowledged scholar and to show the enormous network of connections she had across Europe, North America and the Soviet Union later in her career. I demonstrate therefore, how she negotiated, throughout her life, the Cold War politics and discourses, based on her political convictions and career requirements. The detailed account of Gimbutas’ life narrative, as provided in this chapter informs the further analysis of the

most “controversial” aspects of her work and its reception, and the construction and appropriation of her persona in the following chapters.

Following the critical biography of Gimbutas, in “Chapter 3. New Archaeology, Old Europe and the Feminist Science Debates: Marija Gimbutas “Pre-Her-Story” in Academia” I move on to investigate the reception of Gimbutas’ ideas on Old Europe within the academic discipline of archaeology, including feminist archaeology. In this chapter I present the disciplinary environment of archaeology in the post-war United States and Gimbutas’ position within it, including her critique of the scientism characteristic to the dominant archaeological approach of processualism, or New Archaeology. I outline Gimbutas’ intellectual trajectory leading to her Goddess hypothesis, and summarize the women-centered perspective that she developed in her work starting with the 1970s. I then discuss the critical responses that Gimbutas’ work received in the 1980s and, in particular, the 1990s. The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate how Gimbutas’ work was academically and intellectually marginalized in at least two ways. First, her work on Old Europe was construed as “feminist” or “gynocentric” and therefore ideological by the mainstream archaeology. Second, with the appearance of gender and feminist archaeology in the 1990s, Gimbutas work was positioned as antithetical to post-structuralist feminist approaches in archaeology due to its “gender essentialism”. This contributed to the double erasure of Gimbutas’ ideas from the historiography of archaeological thought. In Chapter 3 I argue that the hostile reception of Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe within gender archaeology reveals the negotiation of power and status of feminism in academia, as well as a complex theoretical relationship that feminism has with questions of scientific objectivity. I suggest to read Gimbutas theory of the matrilineal Old Europe as a “pre-her-story” of feminist archaeology, providing a “remedial” gendered analysis of prehistory.

In “Chapter 4. Searching for Old Europe: Marija Gimbutas and the Problem of Cultural Appropriation in Feminist Spirituality”, I discuss the role that Gimbutas played in the Goddess movement and, more broadly understood, cultural/radical feminism in the United States. I discuss the connections between Gimbutas’ work and the Second Wave feminist ideas and argue that Gimbutas’ Old Europe provided the archaeological material background for the construction of the feminist image of prehistoric past. I outline the development of spiritual feminism since the 1970ies and discuss the most prominent critiques of the movement, namely Marxist and poststructuralist, as well as contemporary revisionist approaches. I conclude that the most lasting criticism of the feminist spirituality movement is that of Eurocentrism, and the cultural appropriation of the spiritual heritage of “other” cultures. I consider how the centrality of Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe, and its particular reconsideration of the history of the “Western civilization” from the European margins might affect the charges of cultural appropriation. While white feminists from the American feminist spirituality movement turned to Gimbutas’ Old Europe in search for “their” forgotten gylanic European roots, they constructed, I argue, an Orientalized picture of Eastern Europe, and portrayed Lithuania, Gimbutas’ “motherland”, as a particularly archaic nation with a special authentic spiritual connection to the Old European roots.

In “Chapter 5. The Archaeologist of Nation and Gender: Gimbutas and Post-Socialist Lithuanian Feminism”, I show how Gimbutas’ persona and her theory of the matristic Old European civilization was taken up by the emerging women’s movement in Lithuania in the 1990s. I outline the ideological context of postsocialism, focusing on the dominant narratives of “return” to the national past and “transition” to the West and show how such public discourse affected the gender order and the women’s activism. The chapter outlines the post-socialist feminist scene in Lithuania and the dominant rhetoric, which characteristically included, I argue, a critical approach to the

Soviet gender equality policies, negotiation of the nationalist narrative of re-traditionalization, as well as partial adaptation to the pro-Western narratives of modernization. I present Gimbutas' work, in particular her theory of the matrilineal prehistoric spirituality of the Balts, as it related to the Lithuanian nationalist narrative, and explain the appeal this work held for various sectors of the post-socialist women's movement. Through selected examples I demonstrate how Gimbutas' ideas and her persona were used by Lithuanian feminists in navigating the post-socialist ideological environment, with its conflicting relationship with the Soviet past and the excitement and anxiety evoked by the Western-oriented transformation, its potential economic and cultural effects.

## Chapter 2. The Making of Marija Gimbutas in National and Transnational Contexts: a Critical Biography

### 2.1 Childhood in Vilnius and Kaunas in the interbellum

Marija Birutė Alseikaitė (-Gimbutienė)<sup>115</sup> was born on the 23rd of January, 1921, in Vilnius, to the family of Veronika Janulaitytė-Alseikienė<sup>116</sup> and Danielius Alseika.<sup>117</sup> Marija's parents already had a son Vytautas Kazimieras. The parents of Marija were both medical doctors of a peasant background, the first generation in their families to receive higher education.<sup>118</sup> In the late XIX century Lithuanians were mainly peasants (93%) and city dwellers were mainly Jewish, Polish and Russian. In 1887, for example, in Vilnius, Jews formed 40% of the total population, 30% were Poles, 25% were Russians and Belarusians, and Lithuanians amounted to only 2% of city's population.<sup>119</sup> According to the historian Tomas Balkelis, the earliest national-cultural Lithuanian elites, to whom Alseikos<sup>120</sup> belonged, descendent from families of well-off Lithuanian peasants, who could afford to send their children to get educated in the imperial Russian cities or Western Europe. With the rising national consciousness towards the end of the XIX century, some

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<sup>115</sup> The surname in the parenthesis indicates the married surname of a woman mentioned, which she did not have at the time of the events described.

<sup>116</sup> In Lithuanian language female surnames are grammatically formed according to the woman's marital situation. This means that an unmarried woman will carry her fathers' surname, with an added word ending: "-aitė", "-ytė" or "-utė". A married woman will carry her husbands' name with an ending: "-ienė". Marija Gimbutas was born Alseikaitė, given her fathers' last name Alseika, she became Gimbutienė after marrying Jurgis Gimbutas in Lithuania. She had to change her surname again after moving to the U.S., due to the policy that married couples should have identical surnames, thus becoming Marija Gimbutas.

<sup>117</sup> "The Student File of Alseikaitė, Marija Birutė," 1942 1938, Student file no. 285, The Archyve of Vilnius University.

<sup>118</sup> Meilė Lukšienė, "Laimėjusioji lenktynes [She won the race]," in *Laimos palytėta*, ed. Austėja Ikamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002), 196–209, 196.

<sup>119</sup> Tomas Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania* (London: Routledge, 2009). 3.

<sup>120</sup> Since in Lithuanian the surnames of a wife and a husband are not identical, a way to refer to a married couple is by using the plural of the husbands surname, thus Alseika and Alseikienė would become "Alseikai" or "Alseikos" and Gimbutas and Gimbutienė would become "Gimbutai".

Lithuanian middle class professionals started moving to big cities with a wish to Lithuanianize them.<sup>121</sup> Vilnius, the historical capital of Lithuania since the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and a good place for the newly educated lawyers and doctors to establish themselves, became an important center of the national Lithuanian movement.<sup>122</sup> Alseikos, young professionals committed to the national struggle, decided to live and work in Vilnius, and stayed even after it was occupied by the Polish Army in 1920,<sup>123</sup> and subsequently annexed in 1922 to Poland.

Marija's mother Veronika<sup>124</sup> studied medicine in Switzerland and Germany, and was one of the first Lithuanian women to earn a PhD degree, which she did in Berlin. Veronika worked as an ophthalmologist in Vilnius. Marija's father Danielius was also a medical doctor, qualified as an otorhinolaryngologist in Tartu. In Vilnius he was experimenting with using X-rays in medical practice, and radiation exposure was a reason of his premature death in 1936. Together Alseikos started the first Lithuanian hospital in Vilnius, oriented towards the poor, and were actively involved in the cultural life of the small Lithuanian community. Politically Marijas' parents were liberal-democrats.<sup>125</sup> Characteristically for their generation of nationalist intellectuals, Alseikos, despite not being religious, had a strong fascination with the pagan pantheistic world view and were interested in the preservation and promotion of folklore, which, as they feared, was gradually "fading" from the Lithuanian countryside.<sup>126</sup> The nannies and servants employed by Alseikos, as

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<sup>121</sup> Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*. 13.

<sup>122</sup> Balkelis, 40.

<sup>123</sup> Between 1920 and 1922, Vilnius and Vilnius region were made a part of the Polish puppet-state, the so called Republic of Central Lithuania, instrumental in the subsequent incorporation of the region into Polish territory. See Alfonsas Eidintas, Vytautas Žalys, and Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998)..

<sup>124</sup> In this chapter I refer to both men and women by their first names where it is convenient, since many of the last names for women have changed during their lifetime, see the footnote above. Also I use the first name in order to avoid the confusion when the last names of a woman and a man are identical.

<sup>125</sup> Lukšienė, "Laimėjusioji lenktynes [She won the race], 197."

<sup>126</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler. 22"

Marija recalled it, introduced her to the old Lithuanian pagan beliefs and folklore.<sup>127</sup> In the autobiographical interview with Marler in 1990, Marija Gimbutas reflected metaphorically on her relationship as a child to the pagan beliefs in Fates and Goddesses: “Downstairs there were the goddesses, upstairs there were no goddesses. I was in between three types of belief systems.”<sup>128</sup> Marija here referred to Catholicism, which was the dominant religion among Lithuanians, the pagan beliefs persisting among their servants of peasant background, and the atheism that her well-educated parents represented.

The fascination with folklore and paganism in Alseikos family was not exceptional among Lithuanian elites. According to Balkelis, since Lithuanians made up an ethnic minority in the urban centers of Lithuania, the nationalist intelligentsia tended to idealize the village life of their childhood, and be skeptical of the urban modernity and the mix of cultures represented by the city.<sup>129</sup> As he writes, the Lithuanian intelligentsia of the beginning of the XX century was involved in the construction of the modern Lithuanian national culture for the future independent nation state. Peasant traditions were supposed to serve as the moral background of this project.<sup>130</sup> However, Balkelis notices, in the endeavor to preserve and promote the “authentic” peasant culture and folklore, the new intelligentsia was also shaping this heritage, homogenizing it, cleaning it from supposedly foreign elements. The educated elites saw themselves in a hierarchical relationship with Lithuanian peasants and sought to enlighten the simple people.<sup>131</sup> The philosopher Leonidas Donskis argues that the Lithuanian elites of the interwar period, similarly to those in the other East and Central European countries, were rather obsessed with the question of

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<sup>127</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 42-43.

<sup>128</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 44.

<sup>129</sup> Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, 37.

<sup>130</sup> Balkelis, 96.

<sup>131</sup> Balkelis, 96-98.

the origins of their nation, following the influence of German philosophers, such as Johann Gottfried Herder.<sup>132</sup> They found this “origin”, he argues, and thus the basis for Lithuanian national self-determination, in the Lithuanian language, spoken mainly by the peasants, and the rural culture and folklore. This orientation towards the village culture also alienated the Lithuanian nationalist intelligentsia from the Jewish culture dominant in the cities, which represented the “rootless, cosmopolitan, urban” society, so different from the romanticized rural community.<sup>133</sup>

Most of Gimbutas’ biographers have stressed the profound influence that Lithuanian folklore and myth had on Gimbutas as a child. According to the archaeologist John Chapman, for example, Marija Gimbutas spent an “idyllic childhood in nature amongst nature-worshippers” in this way formed, as he puts it, a “poetic” approach towards prehistory.<sup>134</sup> Gimbutas’ biographer Joan Marler, following closely Gimbutas’ autobiographical accounts, claimed that Marija “absorbed” the traditions of the peasants, and the prehistoric mythical imaginary that they represented.<sup>135</sup> What gets lost in these biographical accounts is the historical context of interwar Lithuania and the class factor, both crucial in understanding the relationship that a child brought up in a family of the educated urban elite must have had with peasant spirituality. While the servants at the Alseikos’ household were considered authentic believers in pagan religion (the “downstairs”, to quote Gimbutas), the parents of Marija had most likely a more detached approach to this religion (the “upstairs”) and saw it as a cultural value, which had to be protected, rescued from disappearance for the sake of the national project. Hence, while growing up, Marija observed Lithuanian peasants

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<sup>132</sup> Leonidas Donskis, “Between Identity and Freedom: Mapping Nationalism in Twentieth Century Lithuania,” *East European Politics & Societies* 13, no. 3 Fall (1999): 474–500, 475.

<sup>133</sup> Leonidas Donskis, *Identity and Freedom : Mapping Nationalism and Social Criticism in Twentieth-Century Lithuania*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 486.

<sup>134</sup> Chapman, “The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations,” 290.

<sup>135</sup> Marler, “The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas,” 38.



through the eyes of an ethnographer, as in this passage quoted by Marler, where she recalled her childhood:

The old women used sickles and sang while they worked. The songs were very authentic, very ancient. At that moment I fell in love with what is ancient because it was a deep communication and oneness with Earth. I was completely captivated. This was the beginning of my interest in folklore.<sup>136</sup>

As it is clear from this excerpt of the recollections of her youth, Marija Gimbutas remembered seeing folklore and pagan spirituality as an integral part of the idealized peasant life. Indeed, in her earliest published pieces young Marija praised the “primitivism” of the Lithuanian village, which allowed people to live in authentic connection to nature and their surroundings and urged the educated youth to collect the quickly “vanishing” folklore.<sup>137</sup> Born and raised in an educated middle-class family with a strong national consciousness, she herself was not simply “absorbing” the peasant culture uncritically (neither she lived “amongst nature-worshippers”) – she rather increasingly saw it as a phenomenon of observation and study, important in the construction of the modern Lithuanian national culture.

Although Lithuanians made up a small minority of Vilnius population when Marija was born, Vilnius was seen by Lithuanians as their historical capital, unfairly occupied by Poland during a military conflict in 1920.<sup>138</sup> Vilnius and Vilnius region remained a part of Poland until the joint Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, when Vilnius was given over to Lithuania by the Soviet Army.<sup>139</sup> The conflict over Vilnius caused a complete halt of diplomatic relations between

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<sup>136</sup> Gimbutas, quoted in Marler, 39.

<sup>137</sup> Alseikaitė, “Per Vilniaus krašto sodžius ir žmones [Over the hamlets and people of Vilnius region]”; Alseikaitė, “Vilniaus Dzūkuose [Among the Dzūkai in Vilnius].”

<sup>138</sup> Tymothy Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, 2010), 142.

<sup>139</sup> Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania : Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 31.

Lithuania and Poland in the interbellum period and caused the overt ideologization of the “Vilnius question” in Lithuania.<sup>140</sup> Marija’s father Danielius was a politically active figure, a leader of the Vilnius region Lithuanian movement, supported by the Lithuanian state (1923-1927). After the *coup d’état* in 1926, which replaced the previous democratic government of Lithuania with an authoritarian government led by the President Antanas Smetona, Danielius Alseika had to eventually give up his political position due to his pro-democratic views.<sup>141</sup> He however continued publishing Lithuanian language publications: youth magazine *Vilniaus šviesa* and the weekly *Vilniaus žodis*. He was also an amateur historian and wrote two books about the Lithuanian people, next to educational books on public health.<sup>142</sup> Due to the hostile policy towards ethnic minorities in both countries, Danielius was persecuted by the Polish government and often arrested for his cultural and political work for the Lithuanian community.<sup>143</sup> Young Marija was attached to her father and traumatized by his sudden death in 1936, when she was merely 15-years-old. In her diaries up until the 1940s, Gimbutas often addressed her deceased father with promises to continue his scientific work on Lithuanian history and folklore, and asking him to send her strength in this endeavor.<sup>144</sup> Retrospectively, she thought that her father’s premature death had motivated her to seriously take up her studies and eventually to turn her focus to the questions of death and afterlife.<sup>145</sup> Her interest in these topics was indeed obvious from the choice of the research object

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<sup>140</sup> Davoliūtė, 27-29.

<sup>141</sup> Lukšienė, “Laimėjusioji lenktynes [She Won the Race],” 197.

<sup>142</sup> Danielius Alseika, *Lietuvių tautinė ideja istorijos šviesoje : referatas, skaitytas visuotiniame Lietuvių Mokslo Draugijos narių susirinkime Vilniuje 1923 m. gruodžio 30 d.* [The national idea of Lithuanians in the light of history, a paper read at the general meeting of the Lithuanian Scientific Society in Vilnius, 1923, December 30] (Vilnius: Motus, 1924); *Vilniaus krašto lietuvių gyvenimas : 1919-1934 m.* [The life of Lithuanians in Vilnius region: 1919-1934] (Vilnius: Zorza, 1935).

<sup>143</sup> Milisauskas, “Marija Gimbutas,” 801.

<sup>144</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Dienoraštis [The diary],” in *Marija Gimbutienė: dienoraštis Ir prisiminimai*, ed. Živilė Gimbutaitė (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 2015), 78–80.

<sup>145</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 45.

for her master thesis *Laidosena Lietuvoje geležies amžiuje* (Burial Rites in Iron Age Lithuania),<sup>146</sup> and subsequently her PhD dissertation *Die Bestattung in Litauen in der vorgeschichtlichen Zeit* (Burials in Lithuania in Prehistoric Times).<sup>147</sup>

While in Vilnius, Marija's family was connected to many prominent Lithuanians of the time and maintained a strong Lithuanian cultural identity. Wilhelm Storost-Vydūnas,<sup>148</sup> a Prussian-Lithuanian philosopher and one of the leaders of the theosophical movement in the region,<sup>149</sup> and Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, a Catholic priest and a well-known writer were Alseikos family friends.<sup>150</sup> Most significantly, Danielius Alseika was close friends with Jonas Basanavičius, the medical doctor and Lithuanian political activist, who later became a cult figure in Lithuanian historiography, the so called *Tautos patriarchas* (the Patriarch of the Nation)<sup>151</sup>. Basanavičius was the editor of the first Lithuanian language newspaper *Ausra* (1883-86), the chairman of the politically important *Great Seimas of Vilnius* in 1905, which raised the question of Lithuanian autonomy within the Russian empire, as well as the signatory of the *Act of Independence of Lithuania* in 1918.<sup>152</sup> According to Marija, her father and Basanavičius were connected by their

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<sup>146</sup> "Marijos Birutės Alseikaitės aukštojo mokslo baigimo diplomas [MA diploma of Marija Birutė Alseikaitė]," June 5, 1942, Student file no. 285, Vilnius University Archive.

<sup>147</sup> "Doktors Der Philosophie Diplom Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė [The PhD Certificate of Marija Alseikaitė Gimbutienė]," September 12, 1946, UAT\_132\_61\_1946,9, Tübingen University Archive.

<sup>148</sup> "Vydūnas," in *Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija* [Encyclopedia of Lithuania Minor] (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2009).

<sup>149</sup> Theosophy is a form of Western esoterism, created in the XIX century by the Russian Émigré to the United States Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Theosophy later influenced the development of other forms of esoterism including the New Age. See Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

<sup>150</sup> Alseika, "Lietuvos dvasios deivė [The goddess of Lithuanian spirit]."

<sup>151</sup> A portrait of Basanavičius was featured on the 50 litai banknote, when Lithuanian reintroduced national currency *litai* after the rebuilding of national independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. The portrait of aforementioned Vydūnas was featured on the 200 litai note. Such symbolic acknowledgement indicates the important role of these personalities in the Lithuanian national historical narrative.

<sup>152</sup> "Basanavičius, Jonas," in *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* [General Lithuanian encyclopedia] (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 2001).

political activism around the Vilnius question and Lithuanian statehood as well as the shared interest in history and folklore. Although Basanavičius died in 1927, when Marija was merely 6 year old, she read his works as a teenager and would later stress the impact that Basanavičius had on her thinking. She would even refer to Basanavičius as her „adopted” or “spiritual” grandfather. Marija inherited his “love for the ancient times, especially folklore”, and considered Basanavičius’ book *Iš gyvenimo vėlių bei velnių* (From the Life of Souls and Devils)<sup>153</sup> to be the most comprehensive collection of ancient Lithuanian pagan beliefs and folklore.<sup>154</sup>

In general, as a young person, Marija had a loyal rather than conflictual relationship with the nationalist intelligentsia of the previous generations – represented by her father Danielius, and the earlier one, represented by Jonas Basanavičius – and desired to further their projects and beliefs. This attitude of a “dutiful daughter”<sup>155</sup> can be seen, for example, in her article from 1940,<sup>156</sup> dedicated to the 33-year anniversary of the Lithuanian Scientific Society (Gimbutas herself volunteered for LSS at that time).<sup>157</sup> LSS was established in 1907 by Jonas Basanavičius, who also served as a chairman until his death in 1927 – then the leadership of this organization was taken over by Danielius Alseika. The society had a humanities orientation and mainly worked in collecting important pieces of Lithuanian language literature, periodicals, folklore materials, archaeological artifacts, etc..<sup>158</sup> According to Gimbutas, the biggest achievement of the LSS was “to unite the strongest Lithuanian forces for common work, especially for the collection of

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<sup>153</sup> Jonas Basanavičius, ed., *Iš gyvenimo vėlių bei velnių: sakmės ir padavimai* [From the life of souls and devils: stories and legends] (Chicago: Lietuvos, 1903).

<sup>154</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler.”

<sup>155</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

<sup>156</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Lietuvių mokslo draugijai 33 metai” [33 year anniversary of the Lithuanian Scientific Society], in *Laimos palytėta*, ed. Austėja Ikamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002), 140–44.

<sup>157</sup> “Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė to Jurgis Gimbutas”, 1940 February 27, F154-8, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>158</sup> Gimbutienė, “Lietuvių mokslo draugijai 33 metai [33 year anniversary of the Lithuanian Scientific Society],” 143.

Lithuanian treasures, to encourage the consciousness of Lithuanian nation as one with the great past, with an archaic and precious language, with inexhaustible (cultural – R.N.) wealth”.<sup>159</sup> Much of Gimbutas’ earliest scientific work followed closely the outlines set by the LSS – she dedicated herself to the analysis of Lithuanian origins, history, culture and folklore. Similarly to the educated men who ran LSS, young Gimbutas saw the preservation and promotion of Lithuanian culture as the only guarantee of the continued existence of Lithuanian nation state, which was constantly threatened by the aggression of its bigger neighbors.<sup>160</sup>

While young Marija expressed intellectual indebtedness mainly to her father and her “forefathers” like Basanavičius, she would reflect in her autobiographical narrative how she learned to trust her opinion and intelligence as a woman due to the example that she saw in the family of her mother, where daughters were seen just as important and capable as sons.<sup>161</sup> Marija’s mother Veronika came from a peasant background, a family of 13 children, most of whom, despite financial difficulty (their mother became a widow while Veronika was still a child), managed to achieve higher education <sup>162</sup>. During the period of the prohibition of the Lithuanian language press in the XIX century Russian Empire (1864-1904),<sup>163</sup> their family belonged to the so called *knygnešiai*, that is, they participated in Lithuanian book smuggling from East Prussia. Book smuggling, together with clandestine education and the temperance movement were the main factors contributing to the rise of literacy (as well as national consciousness) among Lithuanian peasants

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<sup>159</sup> Gimbutienė, 144.

<sup>160</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraštis [The diary],” 54.

<sup>161</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography transcriptions by Joan Marler”; Kornelija Jankauskaitė, “Gaida, tebeskambanti iki šiol [A note that still sounds],” in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 399–438.

<sup>162</sup> Lukšienė, “Laimėjusioji lenktynes [She won the race].”

<sup>163</sup> The prohibition effectively banned the publication or dissemination of Lithuanian language publications in Latin alphabet, and encouraged instead the usage of the Cyrillic as the cultural assimilation of Lithuanians to Russia. See A.S. Stražas, “Lithuania 1863-1893: Tsarist Russification and the Beginnings of the Modern Lithuanian National Movement,” *Lituanus. Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 42, no. 3 (1996).

in the late Russian empire.<sup>164</sup> A rarity for women at the beginning of the XX century, the two sisters Veronika and Julija Janulaitytė (-Biliūnienė, -Matjošaitienė)<sup>165</sup>, had a chance to study medicine with financial support of their older brothers, which led Veronika to become an ophthalmologist, and Julija – an odontologist.

Living and practicing medicine in Vilnius, Marija's mother Veronika Alseikienė was a popular doctor-oculist among people of all ethnic backgrounds – Jews, Poles, Belarusians, as well as Lithuanians. In 1931 she separated from her husband and moved to Kaunas, the temporary capital of Lithuania at that moment, with her children Marija and Vytautas. Among the reasons for this separation were the constant persecution of their father Danielius by Polish authorities, and the wish to give their children an opportunity to attend a Lithuanian high school and university <sup>166</sup>. After moving to Kaunas with her mother, Marija became close friends with her cousin Meilė Matjošaitytė (-Lukšienė)<sup>167</sup> the daughter of Julija.<sup>168</sup> Between 1931 and 1938, Marija attended the Aušros Girls Gimnasium in Kaunas. One of her close friends there became Rimutė Jablonskytė (-Rimantienė) who was later to become a prominent Soviet Lithuanian archaeologist. Both Meilė and Rimutė stayed in correspondence with Marija for most of her life. In 1938, Marija entered Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, the faculty of Philology. She started studying English language as her main subject, but soon transferred to Lithuanian language and ethnology. <sup>169</sup> One of the most influential people during her studies was her lecturer Antanas Salys, who, according

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<sup>164</sup> Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, 7.

<sup>165</sup> Julija was a widow of Jonas Biliūnas, the prominent Lithuanian writer and humanist. Her second husband Stasys Matjošaitis-Esmaitis was a pedagogist and socialist political activist, the editor of the Pedagogical literature publishing house between 1945 and 1947.

<sup>166</sup> Lukšienė, "Laimėjusioji lenktynes [She won the race]."

<sup>167</sup> Meilė Lukšienė was later to become a prominent anti-Soviet dissident and one of the initiators of the educational reform in post-Soviet Lithuania.

<sup>168</sup> Ingė Lukšaitė, "Ingė Lukšaitė pasakoja [Ingė Lukšaitė tells]," in *Laimos palytėta*, ed. Austėja Ikamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002), 209–16.

<sup>169</sup> "The Student File of Alseikaitė, Marija Birutė."

to Gimbutas, attracted her interest to historical linguistics and Lithuanian language.<sup>170</sup> During her studies in Lithuania Gimbutas took 14 different subjects taught by Salys, both during her studies in Kaunas, and later in Vilnius,<sup>171</sup> as well as two more courses during her PhD studies in Tübingen, Germany.<sup>172</sup>

In October 1939, after the German-Soviet invasion of Poland, Vilnius was returned to Lithuanian hands by the Soviet government in exchange for letting the Soviet Union to establish military bases in the country.<sup>173</sup> The city, where only a small minority of the population spoke Lithuanian,<sup>174</sup> underwent forced Lithuanization by the new authorities, coming from Kaunas.<sup>175</sup> The Polish University of Stefan Batory was closed down in December 15, and in place of it, the Lithuanian *Vilnius University* was founded. The faculty, of whom majority were Polish, were dismissed and the students were forced to empty their dormitories. In January 1940 the university resumed academic activities with the new faculty and staff, moved from Kaunas. The majority of its 1005 students were now Lithuanian, and only 13 were Polish.<sup>176</sup> One of the new students at Vilnius University that Spring semester was Marija Alseikaitė. As apparent from her letters to Jurgis at the time, Marija rushed to Vilnius with enormous enthusiasm about the cultural and political Lithuanization of the historic capital and Vilnius University.<sup>177</sup> In 1940 she volunteered for the

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<sup>170</sup> Gimbutienė, "Dienoraštis [The diary]," 53.

<sup>171</sup> "The Student File of Alseikaitė, Marija Birutė."

<sup>172</sup> "Winterhalbjahr 1945/1946, Marija Gimbutienė [Winter Semester Courses 1945-1946, Marija Gimbutienė]," January 31, 1946, UAT\_364\_7931, Tübingen University Archive.

<sup>173</sup> Timothy Snyder, "Memory of Sovereignty and Sovereignty over Memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939–1999," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 47.

<sup>174</sup> Vilnius census (as collected by the Polish government) in 1931 registered 198,071 people out of which 66% were Poles, 28% Jews, 4% Russians and 1% - Lithuanians (Davoliūtė 2013, 43).

<sup>175</sup> Davoliūtė, 31.

<sup>176</sup> Šarūnas Liekis, *1939: The Year That Changed Everything in Lithuania's History* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2010).

<sup>177</sup> Marija Gimbutas, "Marytės laiškai Jurgiui" [Letters from Marija to Jurgis], in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 98–99.

Lithuanian Scientific Society and collected folklore from ethnic Lithuanians who had been displaced from the territories in Poland and Belarus and were housed in dormitories in Vilnius.<sup>178</sup> Reflecting on this period, Gimbutas told Marler about the “pioneering spirit” that inspired her generation of Lithuanians to move to Vilnius for studies and work.<sup>179</sup> As historians have noticed, the Lithuanian nationalist intelligentsia saw Vilnius, which embodied the medieval history of the Grand Duchy, as one of the key elements in the construction of the modern national Lithuanian culture, together with the idealized peasant village culture.<sup>180</sup> The diaries, letters and articles of young Marija Alseikaitė show, that her life and intellectual experiences in interwar Vilnius and Kaunas made her into a heir of this particular Lithuanian cultural nationalism.

## **2.2 Second World War in Lithuania: Soviet and Nazi occupations**

While the Second World War in Europe started on September 1<sup>st</sup>, with the German invasion of Poland, the breaking point in Lithuanian history was the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, 1940, when the Soviet Army invaded Lithuania. This was roughly the start of the most atrocious period in modern Lithuanian history, when the country became a part of what the historian Timothy Snyder called “the bloodlands” – the geographical area where approximately fourteen million civilian deaths took place due to the criminal acts perpetrated by the Nazi and Stalinist regimes.<sup>181</sup> As Marija described it retrospectively in 1990, on that day she was kayaking in East Lithuania with her fiancé Jurgis Gimbutas, when they saw the military airplanes. She stressed the unexpected and enforced character of the occupation, countering the narrative promoted by the Soviet Union, that the Baltic

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<sup>178</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 201.

<sup>179</sup> Gimbutaitė, *Marija Gimbutienė: dienoraštis ir prisiminimai [Marija Gimbutas: diary and memoirs]*, 201.

<sup>180</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*.

<sup>181</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*.



countries allegedly volunteered to join the U.S.S.R..<sup>182</sup> According to contemporary historical knowledge, the Soviet Union acted following the secret agreement with Germany over the geopolitical division of the independent states of Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland.<sup>183</sup> The agreement was signed by the foreign ministers of Germany and Soviet Union, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1939, and was included as a secret protocol in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the nonaggression pact between two military giants.<sup>184</sup> According to this agreement, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were “given” to the Soviet Union, which entered them in June 1940.

As present day historians and social scientists notice, the memory of these events, and especially the revealed historical information about the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, later played an important role in the ideology of the independence movements of the Baltic states in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>185</sup> Gimbutas, who narrated her biography around 1990,<sup>186</sup> at the political moment of the collapse of the Soviet Union, used, I argue, her personal life narrative to shed light to the presumed Western audience on the not so well-known aspects of Eastern European history. She stressed the aspects of the political history of the Baltic states (the Soviet occupation and the following Stalinist repressions) that were decisive in her own life trajectory as well as politically crucial for her country. Her outspoken condemnation of Stalinist crimes even resurfaced in her last archaeological works, as a part of the narrative of the Goddess civilization and its

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<sup>182</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 203.

<sup>183</sup> Saulius Sužiedėlis, “The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Baltic States: An Introduction and Interpretation,” *Lituanus: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 35, no. 1 (1989).

<sup>184</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, 116.

<sup>185</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania.*; Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė and Ainė Ramonaitė, *Sąjūdžio ištakų beiškant: nepaklusniųjų tinklaveikos galia (In search of the roots of Sąjūdis: the power of disobedient networking)* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2011).

<sup>186</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler”; Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

demise.<sup>187</sup> The uses of Gimbutas' life narrative in weaving together the modern Eastern European history with the feminist spirituality origin myth will be a part of my analysis in Chapter 4.

Due to Gimbutas' political stance, so clearly represented in her auto-biographical narrative, some authors have speculated that the experience of the Second World War and the Soviet occupation might have informed the very content of Marija Gimbutas' archaeological theories.<sup>188</sup> The archaeologist Lynn Meskell for example argues that Gimbutas' condemnation of the Soviet occupation "strongly mirrors her view of Old Europe, a creative, matriarchal and good society which was invaded by men with weapons from the East".<sup>189</sup> Following Meskell's argument, Chapman claims that due to her experience of WWII, "along with millions of other women, she [Gimbutas] would have associated the collective madness of a war fought almost exclusively between men as a dominant trait of the male psyche".<sup>190</sup> In contrast to Meskell and Chapman, this work does not aim to reduce the archaeological work or political convictions of Marija Gimbutas to an unconscious manifestation of her traumatic experiences. Instead, in what follows I aim to shed as much light as possible on the position that Marija Gimbutas took in the context of the WWII as it took place in Lithuania, and how she narrated this position – assuming that it is important to know this background, in order to understand better the ways Gimbutas constructed herself as Lithuanian nationalist and the position that she took in relation to the politics of memory of the events here described.

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<sup>187</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 319.

<sup>188</sup> Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archaeology"; Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations on Archaeological Explanation. A Biographical Sketch of Marija Gimbutas."

<sup>189</sup> Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archaeology," 79.

<sup>190</sup> Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations on Archaeological Explanation. A Biographical Sketch of Marija Gimbutas," 291.

For people of Marija' social status, the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940 was catastrophic, since the occupant regime initiated not only the transformation of the social system and the nationalization of property, but also the violent persecution of the national political and cultural elite. This persecution reached its climax after a year, in June 1941, when the Soviet government initiated the deportation of "class enemies" to the interior of the Soviet Union.<sup>191</sup> This policy targeted mostly urban dwellers of high social and educational status, affecting people of all ethnicities: Lithuanians, Jews, Polish and others. In total around 19.000 people were deported in this early period of deportations.<sup>192</sup> Marija Gimbutas reflected on the deportations as "the darkest days", when many of her relatives and friends were shipped to work camps and prisons in Siberia, the Gulag, where many would die from inhumane conditions.<sup>193</sup> She, like some other Lithuanians, avoided the deportations by hiding in the woods. The experience of the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania installed in Gimbutas loathing towards the Bolshevik regime, "the most disgusting form of government, that ever existed in world history ... the deadly threat to human culture", as she wrote in her war time diaries.<sup>194</sup>

Following this experience, Marija perceived the bombing of Kaunas by the German army on the 22 of June in 1941, as the sign of "escape from the claws of the cruel Bolsheviks".<sup>195</sup> Being aware

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<sup>191</sup> Arvydas Anušauskas, *Terror and Crimes Against Humanity: The First Soviet Occupation* (Vilnius: The International Committee for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, 2006).

<sup>192</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*, 44.

<sup>193</sup> The 476 camp complexes belonging to the Gulag system were located across the least habitable parts of the Soviet Union, including the Northern Siberia. Up to 18 million people were sent to these camps for forced labor in mines, factories and other large projects. According to rough estimates, between 1,5 and 3 million people died in Gulag from exhaustion, starvation, disease or murder, although there are few reliable records for that (Snyder 2010, 27).

<sup>194</sup> Gimbutaitė, *Marija Gimbutienė: dienoraštis ir prisiminimai [Marija Gimbutas: diary and memoirs]*, 98.

<sup>195</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, "1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai. Pradėta rašyti 1945 IV 25, Urnau Über Markdorf, Kreis Überlingen, Gau Baden, Vokietijoje" [The memoirs of war 1941-1945. Started in 1945 IV 25, in Urnau Über Markdorf, Kreis Überlingen, Gau Baden, Germany], in *Marija Gimbutienė: dienoraštis ir prisiminimai*, ed. Živilė Gimbutaitė (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 2015), 119.

of the political momentum which generated hope to reestablish the independent state of Lithuania, she and her fiancée Jurgis Gimbutas joined the so called June Uprising (June 22-29, 1941), which aimed to push the Soviet Army out of the country before the arrival of the German army and thus proclaim independence.<sup>196</sup> In her memoirs written towards the end of the war, Gimbutas reflected in the following way on her and her husband's involvement in the rebel activities<sup>197</sup>:

Lithuanian partisans managed to push out the Bolsheviks from Kaunas and many other cities and towns before the arrival of the German army. Jurgis with his friends Daniliauskas, Kovalskis, Okunis, and others, was shooting at the Green bridge in Kaunas, I was sitting at the headquarters, (I was at the house of Šauliai organization, Laisvės al. 20) listening to the announcements on the radio, I would run over street with the band of the Red Cross. We gave our car to the headquarters of the partisans and then to the (Provisional – R.N.) Lithuanian government.<sup>198</sup>

Following the successful uprising, the Lithuanian rebels declared independence and established a Provisional Government on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, one day before the arrival of the Germans.<sup>199</sup> The

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<sup>196</sup> Milisauskas, "Marija Gimbutas," 803.

<sup>197</sup> The main historical works covering the June Uprising in Lithuania are Arūnas Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva (1940-1944)* [Lithuania under German occupation] (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 1998); Arūnas Bubnys, ed., *Lietuvių tautos sukilimas 1941 m. birželio 22-28 d.* [Lithuanian national revolt, June 22-28, 1941] (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2011); Juozas Jankauskas, *1941 m. Birželio sukilimas Lietuvoje. pagrindiniai sukilimo organizatoriai, vadovai, ryšininkai Ir pasiuntiniai* [1941 June Uprising in Lithuania. The main organizers, leaders, informers and messengers] (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2010); Arvydas Anušauskas, ed., *Lithuania in 1940-1990: The History of Occupied Lithuania* (Vilnius: The Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania, 2015). None of these works mention the names of either Marija Alseikaitė (-Gimbutienė) or Jurgis Gimbutas in the context of the June Uprising, suggesting that their participation was not of central importance to the events.

<sup>198</sup> Gimbutienė, "1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai" [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 119–20.

<sup>199</sup> The June Uprising is presented by some Lithuanian historians as a heroic event, which showed the determination of Lithuanians to fight for their independence, due to the organizational skills of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF). For example, see Jankauskas, *1941 m. Birželio sukilimas Lietuvoje*. [1941 June Uprising in Lithuania]. Other historians question to what extent LAF and the Provisional Lithuanian government, established after the June Uprising, collaborated with the German occupant government, see Bubnys, *Vokiečių Okupuota Lietuva* [Lithuanian Under German occupation]; Christoph Dieckmann and Saulius Sužiedėlis, *Lietuvos Žydų Persekiojimas Ir Masinės Žudynės 1941 m. Vasarą Ir Rudenį. The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2006). Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis point out that Lithuanian volunteers connected with LAF, wearing white armbands, were harassing and arresting Jews in Kaunas in the very first days of the occupation. While LAF frowned upon public mass killings of Jews, they were not against other measures taken against Jews "due to their pro-Communist actions and harms to the German army" (quoted in Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis 2006, 38). According to Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, there is little known factually about the relationship between the Nazi German and Lithuanian political authorities in the first days of the occupation and the initiating of the pogroms. Nazis were interested in promoting the idea that killing Jews was initiated by the

fighting on the streets of Kaunas resulted in deaths of rebels and soldiers. Marija Alseikaitė, 20-years-old at the time, was responsible, as she wrote in her diary and later told her biographer, to register the dead Lithuanians by physically recognizing them “from the pile of bodies” at the hospital, something that highly traumatized her.<sup>200</sup> On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1941, immediately after the Soviet retreat, Marija wrote in her diary that “the terror of bolshevism has left Lithuania and in its death agony it will have to strike against the higher culture brought by the German army and the cultured people formerly enslaved by bolshevism”.<sup>201</sup> As it is clear from this quote, at that moment she saw Germany as a “culturally superior” force, supposedly saving Lithuania from the Soviet regime. As the historian Arūnas Bubnys notices, differently from the Central and Western European countries, Lithuania experienced the Soviet occupation before it was occupied by Nazi Germany. This, he argues, initially turned a big part of Lithuanian society, especially its professional and educated elites, against the Soviet Union and in support of Germany, which they saw as the lesser of two evils (Bubnys 1998, 207). Some among Lithuanian elites also felt sympathy towards German expansionist policies and the Nazi racial doctrine.

As the historian Violeta Davoliūtė explains, the arrival of the German Army in June 1941 was warmly welcomed by many ethnic Lithuanians, who hoped that the Nazis would facilitate the restoration of an independent Lithuanian state.<sup>202</sup> However, the short lived Lithuanian-run Provisional Government was stripped off its authority in a matter of 6 weeks and at the end of July 1941 the country was subsumed under the rule of *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, the German civilian occupation regime. In the period of the German occupation (1941-1944), around 250 000

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local population and they would often exaggerate the “enthusiasm” of the locals in pogroms. The majority of deaths (83%) was a result of systematic mass murder by the German led forces. See Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, 40.

<sup>200</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraštis [The diary],” 98.

<sup>201</sup> Gimbutienė, 97.

<sup>202</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*, 40.

Lithuanian inhabitants were killed out of whom the majority were ethnic Jews.<sup>203</sup> To encourage the support of the local population for the Holocaust, the Nazis spread propaganda myths: that all the Jews were Bolsheviks and that the Jews were exclusively responsible for the deportation of Lithuanians to Siberia.<sup>204</sup> German occupants and Lithuanian collaborators murdered approx. 196,000 Jews, the 95% of the Lithuanian Jewish population.<sup>205</sup> Many Lithuanians, however, resisted the Nazi rule – the German authorities wanted to mobilize people in the occupied Baltic countries for military purposes, but Lithuanians largely refused and eventually sabotaged the formation of the Lithuanian SS legion.<sup>206</sup> A few hundreds of Lithuanians actively resisted the Holocaust by protecting the Jews.<sup>207</sup> During the period of the Nazi occupation ~45.000 ethnic Lithuanians were killed, ~36.500 were sent to labor camps and ~40.000 ethnic Germans were repatriated to Germany. Approximately 42.000 people escaped the Nazi persecution by fleeing to the Soviet Union.<sup>208</sup>

As her wartime diaries reflect, while initially Marija, like many other ethnic Lithuanians, was positive about the German occupation, soon she was disenchanted with the new regime.<sup>209</sup> In the diary entrance on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, Marija already wrote about the German occupation of Lithuania with irony and disappointment:

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<sup>203</sup> Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva* [Lithuania under German occupation], 500.

<sup>204</sup> Anušauskas, *Lithuania in 1940-1990: The History of Occupied Lithuania*, 178.

<sup>205</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking*, 38.

<sup>206</sup> Davoliūtė, 40; Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva* [Lithuania under German occupation], 502.

<sup>207</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*, 40.

<sup>208</sup> Davoliūtė, 39.

<sup>209</sup> Marija Gimbutas' wartime diaries, as well as the memoirs of the war period written in 1945 and the diaries from DP period were not available to me in an original form. Daughter of Gimbutas, Živilė Gimbutaitė, has published the diaries in the book *Marija Gimbutienė: dienoraštis ir prisiminimai* [Marija Gimbutas: diary and memoirs]. Gimbutaitė holds the originals in her personal library and claims that the diaries are published without omissions. In the book Gimbutaitė also notes that the following pages are missing from the diaries: between 1941 December 22 and 1942 January 23, and between 1942 March 22 and 1942 June 3 (Gimbutaitė 2015b, 16). In discussing this period I relied exclusively on published materials.

The brave German nation is “liberating” Europe. Indeed, it saved Europe from the Bolshevik horror, but where is it going further, it could not explain in a civilized way. (...) eventually, liberation of some becomes the enslavement of others.<sup>210</sup>

While just a few weeks earlier Gimbutas believed in the cultural superiority of the German regime in comparison to the Soviet Union, the experience of the Nazi occupation, its expansionist and exploitative character, rather quickly changed her mind. And then a few weeks later, in a diary entrance on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 1941, she wrote:

How terrible, how horrible is the “cultured” world today. What mass murder. Not the humanity, not the common human culture is of interest, not the spirit, but only the stomach. How huge are the appetites. How many small nations did bolshevism swallow – with its scientists, its artists. Now the same is happening with the Jews.<sup>211</sup>

Gimbutas’ diaries show a shift of attitude towards the German occupation, from uncritical acceptance to disappointment, and finally, to condemnation. In her memoirs written while hiding in a German village Urnau in 1945, towards the end of war, when the victory of the Allied forces was imminent, Marija wrote the following evaluation of the Nazi regime:

The biggest and the most cruel exploit by Germans was the extermination of the Jews, which was linked with unheard-of brutality. This mass murder of completely innocent people allows to position the national-socialist Germany as low as Bolsheviks on the scale of humanism. During a such short time – the year 1941 – Lithuania had to witness unspeakable horrors.<sup>212</sup>

In this excerpt Gimbutas quite unambiguously described the Nazi regime as equally inhuman and criminal as the Soviet regime, and condemned the Holocaust. It is quite clear from the excerpts above, that although Gimbutas saw and condemned the brutality of the Nazis and their persecution of the Jews, still, Bolshevism and the crimes committed by the Soviets in Eastern Europe remained for her the main measure for all other evils, including the Nazi crimes. It sets Gimbutas (like many

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<sup>210</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraštis [The diary],” 100.

<sup>211</sup> Gimbutienė, 101.

<sup>212</sup> Gimbutienė, “1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai” [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 119.

other Eastern European intellectuals) apart from the majority of Western public, which, according to Snyder, associate the mass murders of the Second World War exclusively with the imagery of Auschwitz, and do not wish to put the crimes committed by the Soviet regime on the same scale of comparison with the Holocaust.<sup>213</sup> In my reading, for Gimbutas, who witnessed both the Soviet and the Nazi occupations of Lithuania, the two regimes were comparable in terms of their crimes committed against the populations that they ruled, with the Soviet Union, however, providing the negative point of reference.

It is worth noticing that in her memoirs and autobiographical interviews Gimbutas never acknowledged or mentioned the implication of Lithuanians in the Holocaust. In an interview with Marler in 1990, Gimbutas illustratively told: “of course we were witnesses of how later on the Germans killed the Jews and all that. So that is another thing, but the Germans really saved us from the Soviet tortures”.<sup>214</sup> In this quote Lithuanians appear as only victims, witnesses and bystanders of the actions of the Soviet and German powers, without taking part in any crimes, which does not correspond with historical reality.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, Gimbutas reflected on the Holocaust in a detached manner (“and all that”), as it apparently did not affect her as personally as the deaths and suffering of fellow Lithuanians (“us”). Such selective memory in relation to the period of the German occupation of Lithuania is not characteristic to Gimbutas only. The historian Michael Casper, for example, writes on Jonas Mekas (a famous Lithuanian avantgarde film-maker

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<sup>213</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*.

<sup>214</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 205.

<sup>215</sup> According to Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, Lithuanian volunteers collaborated with the Nazis in harassing, arresting and murdering Jews throughout the period of the German occupation. The Lithuanian Provisional Government, which officially controlled the country in the first six weeks of the German military occupation, also did not do anything to stop the anti-semitic violence and promoted anti-semitic views. See Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews*. The extent of the collaboration of Lithuanians with the German forces in the Holocaust is a matter of ongoing historical examination and debate. The very *fact* of collaboration is however well established in the aforementioned works.



of a very similar life trajectory to that of Gimbutas) and his apparent lack of coherent memory of the Holocaust in Lithuania.<sup>216</sup> Despite living during the German occupation of Lithuania in a small town of Biržai, where 2400 Jewish people were killed in a single day in 1941, Mekas apparently had difficulty recalling the facts of the Holocaust. Casper reads it as Mekas' conscious decision to manipulate his own image in the U.S. leftist context.<sup>217</sup> I do not wish here to speculate in a similar manner regarding Gimbutas' intentions. However, it is a fact that Gimbutas, similarly to Mekas, initially supported the German occupation and lived through the period of the German occupation relatively safely, continuing her creative and scholarly activities, as I show next. Similarly to Mekas, in her autobiographical self-representations she prefers to appear only on the side of the victims of Nazism as well as Bolshevism, never reflecting publicly on the complicity of Lithuanians in the crimes committed during the period of the German occupation.

### ***2.3 Life and studies during the Nazi occupation***

Due to the Nazi racial policies, the situation of ethnic Lithuanians during the German occupation was incomparably better than that of the Lithuanian Jewish population. Marija's family situation, as she herself recalled, was relatively good financially during both occupations (the first Soviet and the German), due to her mother's popularity as a doctor. To some extent, after the events in June 1941, Marija's life returned to a normal rhythm.<sup>218</sup> On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1941, Marija married Jurgis Gimbutas, her long-time fiancée.<sup>219</sup> Jurgis, who came from a Lithuanian nobility family,

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<sup>216</sup> Jonas Mekas (1922- ) is a Lithuanian-American poet, artist and avant-garde film maker. Born in the village of Semeniškiai in Lithuania in 1922, he lived in Lithuania in the interwar period, as well as the first Soviet occupation and the German occupation, and escaped the country in 1944. After living in DP camps in Germany, he emigrated to the U.S. in 1949. Michael Casper, "I Was There," *The New York Review of Books*, June 7, 2018.

<sup>217</sup> Casper.

<sup>218</sup> Gimbutienė, "Dienoraštis [The diary]," 103.

<sup>219</sup> "Santuokos tarp Marijos Alseikaitės ir Jurgio Gimbuto metrikų išrašas, Betygalos bažnyčia [The proof of marriage between Marija Alseikaitė and Jurgis Gimbutas, Betygala church]," July 12, 1941, F154-668, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

was educated as an engineer, cultivated interest in the traditional Lithuanian village architecture, and was already a lecturer at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. Retrospectively Marija Gimbutas called her decision rushed by the circumstances of war – she and Jurgis believed at the time that married men will not be taken to the German Army.<sup>220 221</sup> Marija’s mother Veronika thought Jurgis to be “a bad choice of a husband”.<sup>222</sup> According to her, Jurgis had a traditional view on family and woman’s role, and was excessively jealous of Marija’s contacts with other men, especially her professors. The wedding between Jurgis and Marija took place in an isolated rural place in Lithuania, facilitated by the priest, Marija’s uncle Pranciškus Janulaitis, without the presence of family or friends. Telling about her wedding to Marler in 1990, Gimbutas recalled the atmosphere of overwhelming destruction around, while traveling to their wedding location: she remembered human and animal corpses on the roads.<sup>223</sup> Her diary entrances in that period, however, focused on the romanticism of the wedding ceremony and the new beginning that the marriage symbolized.<sup>224</sup> The first child of Jurgis and Marija, Danutė was born on June 15, 1943.<sup>225</sup>

In 1941-1942 Marija studied in Vilnius and lived in the students’ facilities with Elena Gimbutienė, the mother of Jurgis.<sup>226</sup> The German government suppressed education in Lithuania, especially the higher education, and humanitarian sciences in particular. In 1941, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, the

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<sup>220</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 209.

<sup>221</sup> In 1943 Jurgis was anyway conscripted to the German Army. In order “to save himself”, he instead joined the Lithuanian alternative – gen. Povilas Plechavičius Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force (LTDF), which was created in 1943 after the failed attempts at the creation of the Lithuanian SS legion. See Anušauskas 201-204. Jurgis, according to Marija, never participated in paramilitary or military activities and instead worked on a Lithuanian-German dictionary of technical terms. In Jankauskaitė and Gimbutaitė, 154.

<sup>222</sup> Veronika Janulaitytė-Alseikienė, “Vilniuje gimė dukrytė Marytė [My daughter Marytė was born in Vilnius],” in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 31.

<sup>223</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 211.

<sup>224</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraštis [The diary],” 99.

<sup>225</sup> Gimbutienė, 106.

<sup>226</sup> “Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė to Jurgis Gimbutas”, 1941 November 13, F154-8, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library. .”

Nazi government fired 98 members of faculty and staff from Vilnius University. All Jewish lecturers and Marxists were dismissed. The Nazi government aimed to promote German language and impose Nazi ideology in the educational system.<sup>227</sup> However, the German requirements were not always followed closely, so for example universities continued giving classes in Lithuanian. As Gimbutas diaries and letters from the period show, she delved into her studies at Vilnius University: “Only creative, scientific work can bring the highest satisfaction”, she wrote in in her diary in August 1941.<sup>228</sup> From her correspondence with Jurgis, who was residing in Kaunas, one can get an impression of Marija Gimbutas being a successful, hardworking student, favorite among her professors, especially close to Antanas Salys, but also mentored by Jonas Puzinas, the Professor of Archaeology and the dean of the Faculty of Humanities at Vilnius University.<sup>229</sup>

In November 1941 Gimbutas officially chose Lithuanian Archaeology as her specialization and asked to be transferred to the Department of History.<sup>230</sup> The Faculty of Archaeology was founded at Vilnius University in 1940, due to the efforts of Puzinas, the main founder of the scientific archaeology in Lithuania.<sup>231</sup> Puzinas provided students with basic knowledge about archaeological methods and introduced them mainly to the prehistory of the Baltic region. As Marija recalled it, they learned from the notes made during his lectures, since often there were no textbooks written on the subject. Puzinas was a graduate of Heidelberg university and a student of the German

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<sup>227</sup> Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva* [Lithuanian under German occupation], 464.

<sup>228</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraštis [The diary],” 101.

<sup>229</sup> “Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė to Jurgis Gimbutas”, 1940 October 10, F154-8, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>230</sup> “The student file of Alseikaitė, Marija Birutė.”

<sup>231</sup> Rimutė Jablonskytė-Rimantienė, “Pasaulis jos neužmiršta ir dabar [The world does not forget her],” in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 25–32.

prehistorian Ernst Wahle,<sup>232</sup> which made Gimbutas the “granddaughter”, as she put it, of Wahle.<sup>233</sup> In her letters to Jurgis in 1941, Gimbutas mentioned with satisfaction a visit at the university of another German archaeologist Carl Engel, influential in establishing the field of Baltic archaeology.<sup>234</sup> Marija Gimbutas graduated from Vilnius University on June 3, 1942, becoming a trained archaeologist. Her thesis dealt with the burial practices of the Iron Age Lithuania.<sup>235</sup> After finishing her formal studies, while living with her mother in Kaunas, Gimbutas started working independently on her doctoral dissertation and even handed it in to the doctoral committee for defense. The universities of Vilnius and Kaunas were however closed down in March 1943 as a punishment for Lithuanian intelligentsia for their “reluctance to participate in active military endeavors”, as the General Commissioner Adrian von Renteln formulated it,<sup>236</sup> and Gimbutas could not defend her doctoral dissertation.

In this period Gimbutas published a number of articles in relation to her research interests – seven of them in the newspaper *Ateitis* (Future)<sup>237</sup>. During the period of the Nazi occupation, only two daily newspapers ran in Lithuania: *Ateitis* in Kaunas (initially called *J Laisvę* (To Freedom))<sup>238</sup> and

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<sup>232</sup> The archaeologist Bettina Arnold writes that Ernst Wahle was one of the few German archaeologists, who managed to retain their academic positions during the National Socialist rule (1933-1945), while remaining critical of the ideological claims of Nazi archaeology and striving to keep up the academic standards. See Bettina Arnold, “The Past as Propaganda: Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany,” *Antiquity* 64, no. 244 (1990): 464–78.

<sup>233</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 48.

<sup>234</sup> “Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė to Jurgis Gimbutas”, 1941 November 7, F154-8, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>235</sup> “Marijos Birutės Alseikaitės aukštojo mokslo baigimo diplomas [MA diploma of Marija Birutė Alseikaitė].”

<sup>236</sup> Renteln, quoted in Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva* [Lithuania under German occupation], 467.

<sup>237</sup> Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Krivė [The pagan priestess],” *Ateitis*, July 29, 1943; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Kur baltų gyventa [Where the Balts lived],” *Ateitis*, October 15, 1943; Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Mūsų tėviškės ‘alkų kalnai’ [The ‘sacred hills’ of our homeland],” *Ateitis*, April 19, 1943; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Mirusiųjų deginimas priešistorinėje Lietuvoje [Cremation in prehistoric Lithuania],” *Ateitis*, May 22, 1943; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Milžinkapiai [Megalithic monuments],” *Ateitis*, August 7, 1943; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Arklių kapai Lietuvoje [Horse graves in Lithuania],” *Ateitis*, August 7, 1943; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Pjautuvas ir dalgis [A sickle and a scythe],” *Ateitis*, August 24, 1943.

<sup>238</sup> *J Laisvę* was initially published by the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), an organization that also was the main initiator of the June Uprising. The first issue, published by Lithuanians before the German occupation officially started, proclaimed Lithuanian statehood and espoused anti-Soviet and antisemitic views.

*Naujoji Lietuva* (The New Lithuania) in Vilnius.<sup>239</sup> According to the historian Ar8nas Bubnys, the editors of these publications were under a tight control by the occupant German officers and the publications served as propaganda platforms. Censorship blocked any articles considered harmful for the German rule, including arguments for Lithuanian statehood. In her memoirs Gimbutas complained about the initial censorship of her article on the prehistoric Baltic homeland, which she wanted to publish in *I laisvę*.<sup>240</sup> However, in 1943 Gimbutas did publish a number of articles in *Ateitis*, including also “Kur baltų gyventa” (Where the Balts lived), where she presented an overview of archaeological theories about the original homeland of the Baltic peoples.<sup>241</sup>

In “Kur baltų gyventa” Gimbutas carefully navigated the ideological implications of competing archaeological theories, saying, for example, that “the Balts are one of the Indo-European peoples, which were the earliest to appear independently, next to the Germanic tribes”.<sup>242</sup> She also emphasized that the Baltic peoples used to inhabit much broader territories to the East from the current Baltic states, and were “pushed” from there by the expanding Slavs, and were continuously *slavicized* throughout the centuries. This article shows most clearly the political meaning of Gimbutas’ work in this period: to demonstrate the archaic and unique character of the Baltic (including Lithuanian) people, the broad territories they used to occupy, the complexity of their old pagan beliefs, and the “high development” of their culture, making it comparable to the “Germanic tribes” while at the same time positioned strictly apart from the Slavs. By making such claims Gimbutas resisted the expansionist ideology guiding Nazi archaeology, but also at the same time followed some fundamental assumptions of nationalist archaeology, namely, the so called

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<sup>239</sup> Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva* [Lithuania under German occupation], 472.

<sup>240</sup> Gimbutienė, “1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai” [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 124.

<sup>241</sup> Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Kur baltų gyventa [Where the Balts lived].”

<sup>242</sup> Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, 3.

“Kossina’s law” which uses prehistoric artifacts to claim certain territories as belonging to the people of the same ethnicity.<sup>243</sup>

Gimbutas’ articles in this period are characterized by authoritative scientific style and, as already mentioned, the commitment to the examination of the culture of Lithuanian ancestors. Next to the seven articles in *Ateitis* she also published longer and more strictly academic articles in an ethnographic series of publications *Gimtasai kraštas* (Homeland).<sup>244</sup> It is important to note that her works do not contain any explicit political propaganda, or antisemitic remarks. However, on the pages of *Ateitis*, Gimbutas’ texts would inescapably neighbor antisemitic and anti-Soviet propaganda articles. In her memoirs of war, Gimbutas reflected, in general terms, on the publications, such as *Ateitis*, as “minuscule” (*menkučiai*) and mainly dedicated to propaganda purposes, with only some “poor-quality” articles dedicated to art and culture.<sup>245</sup> She never commented on (neither, as much as the archival research shows, was she ever asked about) her decision to publish in the newspaper dedicated to the propaganda purposes of the occupant government. However, given the content of her work, it is reasonable to read Gimbutas’ work, among other things, as a reaction to the Germanization policies in Lithuania, which were based on Nazi racial theories, in turn supported, as Marija Gimbutas was surely aware, by Nazi

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<sup>243</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Arnold, “The Past as Propaganda: Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany.”

<sup>244</sup> Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Pomirtinio gyvenimo įsivaizdavimas Lietuvoje proistoriniais laikais [The imaginary of the afterlife in prehistoric Lithuania],” in *Gimtasai kraštas. Etnografinės medžiagos rinkinys*, ed. Pelikšas Bugailiškis (Šiauliai: Šiaulių kraštotyros draugija, “Aušros” muziejus, 1942), 1–11; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Kapų tipai Lietuvoje proistoriniais laikais [Grave types in prehistoric Lithuania],” in *Gimtasai kraštas. Tautotyros vienkartinis leidinys*, ed. Pelikšas Bugailiškis (Šiauliai: Šiaulių kraštotyros draugija, “Aušros” muziejus, 1943), 1–32; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Pagoniškosios laidojimo apeigos Lietuvoje [Pagan burial rituals in Lithuania],” in *Gimtasai kraštas. Tautotyros vienkartinis leidinys*, ed. Pelikšas Bugailiškis (Šiauliai: Šiaulių kraštotyros draugija, “Aušros” muziejus, 1943), 53–80.

<sup>245</sup> Gimbutienė, “1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai” [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 124.

archaeological theories.<sup>246</sup> In short, Gimbutas provided an interpretation of the “origin of the nations”, which formed an alternative to the Nazi archaeological views and could serve (as she possibly hoped) the Lithuanian nationalist cause in the context of the German occupation. Her articles, however, in no way undermined the Nazi propaganda or German political goals, as otherwise they simply would have not been published.

The historian Violeta Davoliūtė asks how in the period of such great atrocities and crimes against humanity, Lithuanian intellectuals could continue their cultural work preoccupied mainly with the ancient origins and folk culture, seemingly detached from political realities.<sup>247</sup> Comparing Nazi occupied Lithuania with Vichy France, she argues that such preoccupation was a way of mentally escaping the political conditions: “The pastoral bliss appeared to insulate wartime Lithuanian culture from the horror of the Holocaust”.<sup>248</sup> Gimbutas reflected in her autobiography, in a somewhat similar line, how her research on Lithuanian folklore and ancient beliefs supported her psychologically in the circumstances of the Second World War in Lithuania. While the reality “twisted her like a little plant”, her academic research was the only stable thing in her life, a refuge: “my work was continuous in one line and I was going the right way all the time”.<sup>249</sup> However, it is questionable if the Lithuanian nationalist cultural production in the period of Nazi occupation could possibly be seen as merely a tool of mental escape. This production, including Gimbutas’ works, can also be interpreted as political in at least two ways: as a continuation of the interwar political project of the creation of Lithuanian national culture, and as an attempt at nationalist-

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<sup>246</sup> Gimbutas was familiar with the landscape of archaeology at the time, as well as the political context. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War she showed clear awareness of the impact that the Nazi ideology has played in the archaeological research in Germany and in Lithuania. See Marija Gimbutas, “Atsakymas į P.J. Gabrio repliką” [An answer to the remark by P.J. Gabrys]. *Aidai*, December 9, 1947.

<sup>247</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*, 43.

<sup>248</sup> Davoliūtė, 42–43.

<sup>249</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 220–21.

cultural resistance to Germanization. Gimbutas did not replicate the ideological arguments of Nazi archaeology, not least because their expansionist character contradicted the Lithuanian claim to statehood. However, it is important to ask, how much the archaeology that she represented was entangled within nationalist logic that connected people with the land by virtue of their ethnicity, and idealized the imaginary ancestors of the nation.

In 1943-1944 Marija Gimbutas and her one year old daughter Danutė lived with Marija's mother in Kaunas and sometimes in their summer house in Pažaislis, next to Kaunas. In his memoirs, Jurgis Gimbutas recalls that his mother-in-law Veronika Alseikienė was hosting two Jewish women, as she "decided to help the persecuted, despite the high risk not only to her, but also to Marija and me".<sup>250</sup> The women were disguised, according to him, as evacuated Russians from Leningrad. Marija Gimbutas also mentioned these women<sup>251</sup> in her war time memoirs from 1945 and in her autobiographical narrative decades later.<sup>252</sup> Besides from her mother Veronika, other relatives of Marija Gimbutas were also involved in protecting the Jews. In 2002, Kazys Lukšas, the husband of the cousin and close friend of Marija, Meilė Lukšienė, together with Marija's aunt Julija Biliūnienė-Matjošaitienė, were both awarded the official Lithuanian state award "The Cross for Saving the Dying" for saving Jewish people from the Holocaust.<sup>253</sup> Only a few hundreds of

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<sup>250</sup> Jurgis Gimbutas, "Pasitraukimas 1944 metais" [The flight in 1944], in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 120–21.

<sup>251</sup> The women are not named in the memoirs of either Marija or Jurgis Gimbutas, only referred to by their nicknames to as "babuška" and "Rita" (who was also said to be a wife of a certain doctor "Ginkus"). It is unclear if the women hid their identities from Jurgis and Marija, or the two decided not to disclose the women's identities.

<sup>252</sup> Gimbutienė, "1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai" [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 127; Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 198.

<sup>253</sup> Rasa Sperskienė, "Vytauto Didžiojo universitete ir dirbant gimnazijos mokytoja" [At the Vytautas Magnus University and teaching at gymnasium], *Meilės Lukšienės 100-osios gimimo metinės. Virtuali paroda* [The 100 year anniversary of Meilė Lukšienė. Virtual exhibition], 2013, accessed October 29, 2018, <http://www.mab.lt/M.Luksiene/vdu.html>.



Lithuanian risked their lives at saving the Jews during the German occupation, saving approximately 3000 people.<sup>254</sup>

## **2.4 The flight from the Soviet occupation**

The question of fleeing Lithuania became very urgent for Gimbutai family in summer 1944 when the Red Army started making advances on the Eastern front and approaching the Baltic states. According to Marija Gimbutas, given Jurgis' participation in June Uprising, staying in Lithuania during the repeated Soviet occupation would have meant for them a guaranteed deportation to Siberia and/or death.<sup>255</sup> Historians evaluate that in the summer and autumn 1944, between 100.000<sup>256</sup> and 120.000<sup>257</sup> Lithuanians sought refuge in the West for similar reasons. The fear of deportation to Siberia was based on the experiences during the first Soviet occupation in 1940 and was indeed well-grounded: in total, between 1945 and 1958, around 200,000 Lithuanian citizens were forcefully sent to Gulag in the interior of the Soviet Union. Out of the deported, around 20,000 (10%) died from starvation, exhaustion, forced labor and disease, while for political prisoners the death rate was even higher – 50%.<sup>258</sup>

According to the historian Daiva Dapkutė, for those in the Baltic countries fleeing the approaching Soviet forces “there was the only way to escape, i.e., together with the Germans who were moving

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<sup>254</sup> Arvydas Anušauskas, ed., *Lietuva 1940-1990. Okupuotos Lietuvos Istorija* [Lithuania 1940-1990. The History of Occupied Lithuania] (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2007), 227.

<sup>255</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Iš Marijos Gimbutienės užrašų 1945 04 25 Vokietijoje, Urnau kaime, Kreis Überlingen, Württemberg: 1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai [From the notes of Marija Gimbutienė, written in 1945 04 25 in Germany, Urnau village, Kreis Überlingen, Württemberg: memories of war 1941-1945],” in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 154.

<sup>256</sup> Vincas Bartusevičius, *Lietuviai DP stovyklose Vokietijoje 1945-1951* [Lithuanians in DP camps in Germany 1945-1951] (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2012), 31–32.

<sup>257</sup> Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*, 39.

<sup>258</sup> Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliūtė, eds., *Population Displacement in Lithuania in the Twentieth Century. Experiences, Identities and Legacies* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 11.

to the West”.<sup>259</sup> Many saw the retreat to “safe” territories (which for them were territories under German control, not yet occupied by the Soviet Union) as temporary, only until the end of war, when they could come back to their country of origin. However, due to the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries this became impossible or undesirable for most of the refugees. According to the official documentation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) there were around 60.000 Lithuanian displaced persons (DP’s) registered in DP camps in Western Europe in 1946. Out of them, 58.805 were in Germany and 6500 in other countries. Many more did not register at the DP camps. The exact number of those who died while fleeing, due to bombings or other reasons is unknown.<sup>260</sup> The majority of Lithuanian DP’s were young people with families, “educated and middle-class people who (previously – R.N.) held relatively high positions as government officials, artists, scholars, politicians, journalists, teachers and writers”.<sup>261</sup> Besides from the new DP’s there were already many Lithuanians in Germany: repatriated from the Klaipėda region (~20.000), forcedly mobilized for work (~75.000) and German army (~50.000); as well as prisoners in concentration camps (~30.000 Lithuanian citizens out of which ~10.000 ethnic Lithuanians).<sup>262</sup>

The massive flight took place in the period between July and October 1944, during which the Soviet army occupied the whole country, starting with Vilnius on July 13.<sup>263</sup> In his memoirs, Jurgis Gimbutas wrote that their journey to the West started on a barge on Nemunas river in Kaunas, July

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<sup>259</sup> Daiva Dapkutė, “Lithuanian Diaspora: From Displaced Persons to Diaspora Politics,” in *Population Displacement in Lithuania in the Twentieth Century. Experiences, Identities and Legacies*, ed. Tomas Balkelis and Violeta Davoliūtė (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 239.

<sup>260</sup> Bartusevičius, *Lietuviai DP stovyklose Vokietijoje 1945-1951* [Lithuanians in DP camps in Germany 1945-1951], 32.

<sup>261</sup> Dapkutė, “Lithuanian Diaspora: From Displaced Persons to Diaspora Politics,” 242.

<sup>262</sup> Bartusevičius, *Lietuviai DP stovyklose Vokietijoje 1945-1951* [Lithuanians in DP camps in Germany 1945-1951], 31–32.

<sup>263</sup> Bartusevičius, 30.

8, 1944. The three of them (Marija, Jurgis and Danutė) first went to Jurbarkas, to a place belonging to Jurgis' parents, where they changed to a horse-driven carriage. As the Eastern front was stable at that time, they stayed in Western Lithuania for some time and got more food supplies for the travel. After staying with Jurgis' relatives until the end of summer, they crossed to Klaipėda region and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September boarded an overcrowded train in Šilutė, which took them to Vienna, via Poznan and Wrocław.<sup>264</sup> Marija's mother Veronika stayed in Lithuania.<sup>265</sup>

According to Marija Gimbutas, they left in a hurry and were badly prepared for a long travel with a small child. Some of their baggage got stolen in the crowded train. Upon the arrival in Vienna on September 17, their living conditions were very poor. For a few weeks the family slept at homeless shelters, cafes, and on the street. Gimbutai eventually rented a room in the Hietzing suburb of Vienna with a well-off family of a factory owner.<sup>266</sup> In Vienna they met many other Lithuanian refugees, among them also Marija's brother Vytautas.<sup>267</sup> The city was often under bombings during this period, however, many services, like shops and restaurants were available, and Gimbutai lived on their savings and food stamps. Marija even attended the lectures at the University of Vienna, where the prehistorian Oswald Menghin<sup>268</sup>, among others, was teaching archaeology.<sup>269</sup> Lithuanian refugees would regularly meet at the Catholic mass and self-organized cultural events in Vienna, and Marija and Jurgis participated in these events eagerly.

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<sup>264</sup> Gimbutas, "Pasitraukimas 1944 metais" [The flight in 1944].

<sup>265</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 198.

<sup>266</sup> Gimbutienė, "1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai" [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 134–35.

<sup>267</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 127–28.

<sup>268</sup> Menghin was later acknowledged as a war criminal due to serving at the Seyß-Inquart government during the Anschluss, but was not punished for unclear reasons and escaped to Argentina. See Philip L. Kohl and J. A. Perez Gollan, "Religion, Politics, and Prehistory: Reassessing the Lingering Legacy of Oswald Menghin," *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 4 (2002): 561–86.

<sup>269</sup> Gimbutienė, "1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai" [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 135.

In October and November 1944 the Eastern front was approaching Austria, and the intensified bombings often left the city without energy supplies. Due to decreasing living conditions and the rising fear of the Soviet assault of Vienna, Gimbutai wished to move further to Western Austria. Eventually, the family decided to move to Innsbruck – there Jurgis could find a job at the textile factory, thanks to the recommendation letter from their landlord in Vienna. The family moved to Innsbruck on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, right after two days of massive bombings of the city – they were not aware that the air raids appeared to be even more frequent in Innsbruck as compared to Vienna. In order to avoid the bombs, Marija Gimbutas would often take her daughter to the mountains nearby.<sup>270</sup> At this time the victory of the Allied forces against Germany was becoming obvious, despite continuous propaganda from the Nazi government. Gimbutai participated actively in the life of Lithuanian emigrant community of Innsbruck (which was growing with the constant influx of new refugees) and organized the celebration of the February 16<sup>th</sup> – the commemoration of the declaration of Lithuanian Independence in 1918.<sup>271</sup> Marija Gimbutas started translating her doctoral dissertation (which she had written already in Lithuania) to German and attempted to graduate from a PhD program at the University of Innsbruck. She got in touch with Leonhard Franz, the Professor of Prehistory and Early History,<sup>272</sup> who supported her, and Gimbutas started attending lectures and preparing for doctoral exams. She however, could not proceed with the exams without the permission from Berlin, which did not come in time, as the city was preparing for the Soviet offensive.

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<sup>270</sup> Jurgis Gimbutas, "Austrijoje, Vokietijoje" [In Austria and Germany], in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 134.

<sup>271</sup> Gimbutienė, "1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai" [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 146.

<sup>272</sup> Andreas Lippert and Gerhard Tomedi, "Ordinariat Leonhard Franz (1942-1967)," *Geschichte des Innsbrucker Institutes für Ur- und Frühgeschichte*, 2017, accessed August 15, 2018, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/urgeschichte/institut1/geschichte.html>.

With the advances of the Red Army in Austria and Germany, thousands of Lithuanians moved further to the West, hoping to avoid staying in the territories occupied by the Soviet Union at the end of the war.<sup>273</sup> By April, they decided to move to Baden-Württemberg in Germany, Gimbutas wrote in her diary, in order “to meet the Allied powers”<sup>274</sup> as soon as possible, and to escape from hunger, because “you cannot gnaw a rock” when in the mountains”.<sup>275</sup> Jurgis found them a place to stay at the presbytery at the Urnau village, where food was abundant in comparison to Austrian cities – they arrived there on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April. Gimbutas had to convince the priest that they had no connection with the Nazi authorities – so that after the arrival of the Allies they would not be a source of problem for his household.<sup>276</sup> In a few weeks the village was peacefully taken over by the French Army. On May 7<sup>th</sup> the war was officially over in Europe. Gimbutai, just like thousands of other Lithuanian and other Baltic refugees were left in a state of limbo, with their countries occupied by the Soviet Union, one of the victorious powers.

## **2.5 DP in Germany**

In summer 1945, while in Urnau, Marija and Jurgis Gimbutas discussed various future options for themselves: return to Lithuania in case of the restoration of independence; move to Switzerland for studies; emigration to countries outside of Europe.<sup>277</sup> However, for the time being they were locked in Germany together with other 9,6 million non-German refugees.<sup>278</sup> At the end of war Germany was in a lamentable state, with 10% of the whole population dead (7.8 m.), 2 million

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<sup>273</sup> Gimbutienė, “1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai” [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 145.

<sup>274</sup> For Gimbutas “the Allied Powers” referred only to the armies of the Western powers.

<sup>275</sup> Gimbutienė, “1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai” [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 150.

<sup>276</sup> Gimbutienė, 154–55.

<sup>277</sup> Gimbutienė, 166.

<sup>278</sup> Bartusevičius, *Lietuviai DP stovyklose Vokietijoje 1945-1951* [Lithuanians in DP camps in Germany 1945-1951], 43.

people disabled by war, and 13.5 million internally displaced from the Soviet occupied Eastern Germany to the Western territories.<sup>279</sup> The country was divided into four military occupation zones, and underwent demilitarization and denazification. Gimbutai family found themselves in the French occupation zone, Württemberg-Hohenzollern. In search for job and study opportunities, as well as connections with other Lithuanian DPs, Jurgis and Marija moved to Tübingen at the end of August 1945.<sup>280</sup> In the French zone Lithuanians and other Balts were not forced to live in DP camps and they had relatively more freedom than in the British and American zones. Lithuanians eventually gathered around bigger cities: Freiburg, Tübingen, which were also famous university towns, and Ravensburg.<sup>281</sup>

According to the historian Vincas Bartusevičius, Lithuanians had unusually broad autonomy to create their political and cultural institutions in the French controlled zone.<sup>282</sup> This was due to the fact that the director general of Culture and Education department in the French controlled zone was Raymond Schmittlein, who had lived in Lithuania before the war and worked as a professor at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. Schmittlein had friendly relationship with many Lithuanians residing now in Germany.<sup>283</sup> Many people representing the interwar Lithuanian cultural elite ended up moving to the French controlled zone. Gimbutas' former professors from Vilnius University, linguists Antanas Salys and Pranas Skardžius for example, started lecturing at

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<sup>279</sup> Bartusevičius, 35.

<sup>280</sup> Gimbutienė, "1941-1945 metų karo prisiminimai" [The memoirs of war 1941-1945], 167–68.

<sup>281</sup> Bartusevičius, 94.

<sup>282</sup> Bartusevičius, *Lietuviai DP stovyklose Vokietijoje 1945-1951* [Lithuanians in DP camps in Germany 1945-1951].

<sup>283</sup> Gimbutas has later called him a "well-known friend of Lithuanians", in Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, "Naujo veikalo apie aisčius proga [On the occasion of the new manuscript on Aisčiai]," *Aidai*, February 2, 1951. Due to favorable circumstances in the French occupation zone, *Vyriausysis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas* (The Highest Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania), an organization that was founded in 1943 in Lithuania as an anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet national resistance organization, was moved to Pfullingen (Reutlingen) and served as an unofficial government in exile. Lithuania did not have an official government in exile due to internal disagreements, something that obstructed the advocacy of Lithuanian independence during the long period of occupation. See Bartusevičius, 397.

the Eberhard-Karls University of Tübingen, where even a new Baltic Institute was established,<sup>284</sup> All these conditions made the circumstances favorable for the academic work and social activities of Marija Gimbutas – after moving to Tübingen, and after the end of war, she finally started living a “meaningful, worthwhile, interesting life”.<sup>285</sup>

With a relative normalization of life, personal problems became predominant again in Gimbutas’ diary. In December 1945 she complained how the responsibilities of mother and wife, as well as her work on the dissertation made her constantly overburdened:

I am working and working, running and running, dancing a wild dance between the pot and the book. Three jobs: Danutė, cooking, and publishing the dissertation, fill up my day completely.<sup>286</sup>

Most importantly to her, in Tübingen Gimbutas finally got an opportunity to obtain a PhD degree and get her dissertation published. She was accepted to the University of Tübingen for the winter semester 1945/1946, and followed lectures by Peter Goessler<sup>287</sup> and Antanas Salys.<sup>288</sup> Since her dissertation was already written and translated to German, Marija Gimbutas could successfully defend it already on March 29, 1946.<sup>289</sup> She published her dissertation *Die Bestattung in Litauen in der vorgeschichtlichen Zeit* (The Prehistoric Burials in Lithuania) the same year, with the help

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<sup>284</sup> “Salys, Antanas,” 1945, UAT 126a417, Tübingen University Archive.

<sup>285</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Dienoraščio tęsinys: 1945 XII. 2. Tübingenas [The continuation of the diary, started on the 2nd of December, 1945, in Tübingen],” in *Marija Gimbutienė: Dienoraštis ir prisiminimai*, ed. Živilė Gimbutaitė (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 2015), 171.

<sup>286</sup> Gimbutienė, 169.

<sup>287</sup> Arnold mentions Peter Goessler among the archaeologists who resisted the Nazi control of the archaeological discipline in Germany and therefore were dismissed from academic positions until the end of war and NS rule in 1945. See Arnold, “The Past as Propaganda: Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany.”

<sup>288</sup> “Winterhalbjahr 1945/1946, Marija Gimbutienė [Winter semester courses 1945-1946, Marija Gimbutienė].”

<sup>289</sup> “Doktors Der Philosophie Diplom Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė [The PHD Certificate of Marija Alseikaitė Gimbutienė].”

of her husband.<sup>290</sup> In 1946 Gimbutas also became a member of the Women's Committee of the Lithuanian Red Cross organization in Tübingen.<sup>291</sup>

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1947, Marija's gave birth to their second daughter Živilė. After a couple of weeks, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, 1947, she moved to the DP camp in Pfullingen with her daughters.<sup>292</sup> The DP camp was referred to by its inhabitants as the *Schloss* (a castle), as it was located in an old castle-like building. The *Schloss* became a meeting point for many highly educated Lithuanian refugees, and Gimbutas had a chance there to immerse herself in the self-organized academic activities – the so called Thursday club.<sup>293</sup> Retrospectively, Gimbutas remembered her life at the DP camp in Pfullingen as the “happiest days”, when she had a private room, there was never a lack of babysitters for her children, and she constantly had intellectual stimulation.<sup>294</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1947, the mother of Jurgis, Elena Gimbutienė, joined the family in Germany, after an escape from Lithuania.<sup>295</sup> Since 1946, Jurgis held a job as a lecturer at the UNRRA University for displaced persons in Munich<sup>296</sup>, and left Marija with their daughters and Elena alone in Pfullingen. The correspondence between Marija and Jurgis from the period show rising tension between them, disagreements over the arrangement of their relationship.<sup>297</sup> Marija Gimbutas expressed dissatisfaction with the limits set by the role of a wife and mother, and was constantly seeking

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<sup>290</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Die Bestattung in Litauen in Der Vorgeschichtlichen Zeit” [Prehistoric Burials in Lithuania] (1946).

<sup>291</sup> Bartusevičius, *Lietuviai DP stovyklose Vokietijoje 1945-1951*, 141.

<sup>292</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraščio tęsinys” [The continuation of the diary], 173.

<sup>293</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 24.

<sup>294</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 24.

<sup>295</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraščio tęsinys” [The continuation of the diary], 172.

<sup>296</sup> This short lived university, created by highly educated DP's of various ethnicities, was defined as “a new kind of educational institution, dedicated to reviving humanism and internationalism”. In Anna Holian, “Displacement and the Post-War Reconstruction of Education: Displaced Persons at the UNRRA University of Munich, 1945-1948.” *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 2 (2008): 167–95.

<sup>297</sup> “Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė to Jurgis Gimbutas”, 1948 August 15, F154-8, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.



academic activities and public acknowledgement. While at Pfullingen, Gimbutas continued her scholarly research, traveling to the libraries in Heidelberg, Freiburg and Munich, collecting materials for a new book about the Lithuanian past.<sup>298</sup> The book was later published in English as *Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art*<sup>299</sup>.

While in Germany, Gimbutas published a number of science popularizing articles, mainly in the cultural magazine of Lithuanian diaspora, *Aidai* (Echoes).<sup>300</sup> The red thread connecting her articles in this period is the ancient past, in particular the pagan spirituality, as a resource of contemporary Lithuanian national culture.<sup>301</sup> Gimbutas argued that Lithuanian nation is one of the most “archaic” in Europe, that it had an exceptionally strong, uninterrupted connection with its pagan past and changed little throughout the ages.<sup>302</sup> Besides from articles, Gimbutas presented her ideas also in the context of the DP camp in Pfullingen. In a letter to Jurgis from that period, she wrote joyfully about the reception of her work, and reflected how she could imagine her whole *Lebenswerk* (life’s work)<sup>303</sup> to move in a similar direction.<sup>304</sup> It is reasonable to think therefore, as others have pointed

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<sup>298</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 88; Gimbutienė, “Dienoraščio tęsinys” [The continuation of the diary].

<sup>299</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art* (Philadelphia Penn: American Folklore Society, 1958).

<sup>300</sup> The magazine was founded in 1944 in Munich and published between 1946-1948 in Augsburg (ed. Kazys Bradūnas). From 1949 the publishing of the magazine was taken over by the Lithuanian Franciscans in the United States. Currently the magazine is published in Lithuania under the title “Naujasis židinys – Aidai” Benediktas Jurčys, “Apžvalga” [Overview], 2009, accessed September 8, 2018, <http://www.aidai.eu/>.

<sup>301</sup> Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Priešistorinių laikų ryšiai su lietuvių liaudies kultūra” [The ties between the prehistoric times and Lithuanian folk culture]; Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Liaudies meno šaknys” [The roots of folk art], *Aidai*, May 14, 1948; Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Lietuviškasis lobis: šikiai apie psichines gijas tarp praeities ir dabarties” [The Lithuanian treasure: sketches about the psychological connections between the past and the present].

<sup>302</sup> This was the first time that Gimbutas formulated her ideas about the special “threads” connecting the ancient pagan past and the contemporary reality. In her later works Gimbutas would come to employ the idea of archetypes by Carl Jung to understand these “psychological threads”.

<sup>303</sup> In this period Gimbutas would use occasional German words in her Lithuanian letters and memoirs.

<sup>304</sup> Gimbutas, “Austrijoje, Vokietijoje” [In Austria and Germany], 149–50.

out, that some of the principles already visible in her work during the German years, later guided also her work on the Goddess religion and the Old Europe.<sup>305</sup>

Gimbutas' writings from the German period are marked by unapologetic cultural nationalism: the connection with the past seemed to be based, in Gimbutas' understanding, on ethnic belonging, transmitted only within the boundaries of a certain national culture, so that the riches of the Lithuanian pagan culture could only be of use in the work of Lithuanian artists and thinkers. This must be understood in the context of the Lithuanian DP community, which was in general characterized by a very strong connection to the lost homeland, and felt it their responsibility to preserve ethnic culture. The exaltation of Lithuanian artistic and cultural treasures was seen as a part of the work of exile towards sustaining the international interest in (or the awareness of the existence of) the Lithuanian nation and thus preserving the hope of national independence.<sup>306</sup>

Between 1947 and 1948, Jurgis and Marija exchanged letters not only in Lithuanian, as usual, but also in English, hoping in this way to improve their English language skills before the potential migration to the U.S.<sup>307</sup> Since 1947 Gimbutai were seriously considering the move to the U.S. and received an official invitation from a distant relative, the so called affidavit, in 1948.<sup>308</sup> According to the historian Daiva Dapkutė, Lithuanians started emigrating from Germany (where the majority was located after the war) to third countries around 1946. Only a small part of the DPs stayed in the war-destructed Europe. The biggest group chose to move to the U.S. (~30,000 people) and the rest moved to other countries: Canada, Australia, South Africa and various countries in South

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<sup>305</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 89.

<sup>306</sup> Dapkutė, "Lithuanian Diaspora: From Displaced Persons to Diaspora Politics," 250.

<sup>307</sup> "Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė to Jurgis Gimbutas", 1948 August 15, F154-8, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>308</sup> Gimbutienė, "Dienoraščio tęsinys" [The continuation of the diary], 175–78.

America.<sup>309</sup> As Dapkutė notices, while emigration was the path to find employment in the countries not destroyed by war, for many of the Lithuanian DPs this was also a path of decline in their social status, a move from professional positions that many of them held in Lithuania, to blue collar jobs. Understanding this, Marija Gimbutas perceived the emigration to the U.S. both as an opportunity to improve their living conditions as a family, but also as a threatening prospect of a future defined by manual labor and dictated by the “dollar”.<sup>310</sup> Her diaries from the period show her concern over the lack of possibilities to make an academic career as a woman and as a migrant in a foreign country.

According to Marija Gimbutas, her husband Jurgis believed that in order to emigrate to the U.S., they needed to be based in the American controlled zone in Germany, and argued for them to move to Munich, where he already had a teaching job. In May 1947 Marija was evaluated as eligible for the protection by the UNRRA care and referred to a DP camp in Munich, emigration section.<sup>311</sup> In her autobiographical narrative decades later, Gimbutas told Marler that they had to wait for the permission to emigrate to the U.S. for 18 months, while staying at the DP camp in Munich.<sup>312</sup> According to her diaries, however, she moved there only in autumn 1948, and thus actually could have lived there only a half a year before the emigration.<sup>313</sup> The conditions in Munich were much worse than in Pfullingen and Marija Gimbutas remembered this period as “the most miserable time in my life”.<sup>314</sup> In the massive building (previously SS barracks) that made up the DP camp, she and her two children had to share a room with 150 people and had almost no access to a kitchen. Their

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<sup>309</sup> Dapkutė, “Lithuanian Diaspora: From Displaced Persons to Diaspora Politics,” 246.

<sup>310</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraščio tęsinys” [The continuation of the diary], 178.

<sup>311</sup> “Referral slip: for Marija Gimbutas to be reported to Luitpold Kaserne emigration section,” May 22, 1947, F154-41, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>312</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 27.

<sup>313</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraščio tęsinys” [The continuation of the diary], 178–79.

<sup>314</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 27.

bed-neighbor – an Estonian refugee – hanged himself in the common room.<sup>315</sup> One of the most demeaning aspects of living in this DP camp was the behavior of American officers who interrogated people hoping to identify former Communists. For people like Gimbutas, who “escaped the Russians in very difficult conditions” this added insult to injury.<sup>316</sup> Moreover, the inhabitants of the camp were forced to receive compulsory vaccinations,<sup>317</sup> without explanation about what shots they were given – something that especially frustrated Gimbutas, at least retrospectively. Reflecting on her experience with Americans at the DP camp, Marija Gimbutas compared it with the experience of the Soviet occupation, to underline the suffering they had endured:

We escaped... a terrible regime ( of the Soviet Union – RN), but then we met these people, Americans, who were of a very low intelligence. Extremely. It was frightening. <> We were treated really like animals.<sup>318</sup>

This unpleasant experience came to an end on March 10, 1949, when Marija Gimbutas finally embarked on a ship to New York with her husband Jurgis, daughters Danutė and Živilė, and mother-in-law Elena Gimbutienė.<sup>319</sup>

## ***2.6 The United States: the Harvard years***

The fragmentary diaries of Marija Gimbutas from the first years in the U.S. show her struggling to adapt to the “melting pot” of nations and, especially, to the slip down the social ladder. Gimbutas expressed alienation from the new circumstances of her life in the U.S., especially the

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<sup>315</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 28.

<sup>316</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 30.

<sup>317</sup> “Vaccination documents of Marija Gimbutas, Funk Caserne Munich,” February 1949, F154-41, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>318</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 30.

<sup>319</sup> “Embarkation cards to Jurgis, Marija, Elena, Danutė and Živilė Gimbutas. ‘Ernie Pyle’ ship, Hamburg - New York.,” March 10, 1949, F154-41, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

“materialism” and “positivism” of the postwar American society and a strong longing for her homeland, as well as the intellectual life from which she was separated.<sup>320</sup> As Gimbutas’ daughter Živilė tells in her memoirs, after the arrival to New York on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1949, the family stayed with distant relatives for a few weeks, while Jurgis went on to Boston. He found a job as a draftsman at a construction company in a matter of a few days and stayed in the same company for 34 years, eventually being promoted to the position of an engineer. His salary alone was, initially, not enough to support 5 people, thus after moving to Boston in April, Marija had to take up menial jobs.<sup>321</sup> First she worked as a maid at a hotel in the city center and later found a job at an orange juice factory. Marija’ Gimbutas’ mother-in-law Elena, who was herself an agronomist and university lecturer in Lithuania, stayed at home taking care of the kids.<sup>322</sup> In 1954, Gimbutas gave birth to the third daughter – Rasa Julie.<sup>323</sup>

Despite the struggle which the life of the new emigrants implied, Gimbutas very resolutely continued following her academic career plans and adapting to the new environment. Already in the Fall 1949 Gimbutas decided to approach the American School of Prehistoric Research at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, looking for an academic position. By that time Gimbutas had a PhD from a prestigious European University and a number of publications (none in English however), not to mention her knowledge of languages, which appeared to be her biggest asset. Gimbutas started off as a research assistant, translating Eastern

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<sup>320</sup> Gimbutienė, “Dienoraščio tęsinys” [The continuation of the diary], 186.

<sup>321</sup> Jurgis Gimbutas, “Kelionė Amerikon Ir įsikūrimas Bostone 1949 metais [The trip to the United States and settling in Boston since 1949],” in *Marija Gimbutienė: Dienoraštis Ir Prisiminimai*, ed. Živilė Gimbutaitė (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 2015), 190.

<sup>322</sup> Gimbutas, 191.

<sup>323</sup> Jurgis Gimbutas and Živilė Gimbutaitė, “Bostonas. Živilės Gimbutaitės prisiminimai ir ištraukos iš Jurgio Gimbuto ‘Dienoraštinės autobiografijos’” [Boston. The memoirs of Živilė Gimbutas and excerpts from the ‘Diary style autobiography’ of Jurgis Gimbutas], in *Marija Gimbutienė: Dienoraštis ir prisiminimai*, ed. Živilė Gimbutaitė (Kaunas: Naujasis lankas, 2015), 197.

European excavation reports, working for Hugh Hencken, an archaeologist of the Iron Age in Western Europe, and Hallam Movius, a prominent researcher of the Paleolithic, among others.<sup>324</sup> For the first few years Gimbutas did unpaid research work at Harvard, and continued doing manual jobs on the side to support her family. As Gimbutas told later, in this period she “felt like a drowning person”,<sup>325</sup> meaning possibly both her struggle for scholarly acknowledgment and the families financial difficulties. It was only from 1953 that Gimbutas started receiving funding for her own research – first the Bollingen (1953) and then the Wenner-Gren (1954) foundation grants, which supported the writing of the *Prehistory of Eastern Europe*,<sup>326</sup> her first English language monograph. In 1955 Gimbutas became the Fellow of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University.<sup>327</sup>

In a video interview, featured in the documentary *Signs Out of Time*, Gimbutas told how she, as a female staff member of Harvard in the 1950s, could not join the Faculty Club unescorted by men, and could not access two libraries, which were explicitly closed off to women.<sup>328</sup> Gimbutas, who had been navigating the male-dominated academic and intellectual contexts both in Lithuania and Germany with relative ease, “couldn’t stand, hated” the situation in Harvard.<sup>329</sup> The archaeologist Ernestine S. Elster, a student and long-time colleague of Gimbutas, also stressed that Marija found Harvard “exploitative” and snobbish. Basing her observations on the conversations with Gimbutas later in her career, Elster wrote that Marija Gimbutas “did not feel treated or accepted as an equal”

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<sup>324</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 90.

<sup>325</sup> Gimbutas, quoted in Marler, “The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas,” 41.

<sup>326</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe Part 1: Mesolithic, Neolithic and Copper Age Cultures in Russia and the Baltic Area* (Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1956).

<sup>327</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 92.

<sup>328</sup> Harvard had a separate “annex” for women’s education since 1879 (renamed Radcliffe college in 1894) and started introducing mixed-sex classrooms only during the Second World war, when most of the male faculty and students were taken to army. See President and Fellows of Harvard College, “Our History,” Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2019, accessed June 10, 2019 <https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/about-us/our-history>.

<sup>329</sup> Gimbutas, in Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

in the male-dominated context of the Ivy League.<sup>330</sup> This could have been connected with Gimbutas' changing status from an undergraduate and then graduate student to, at Harvard, an aspiring young scholar, who was not only seeking knowledge and approval of older male faculty, but was aiming to become "one of them". Also, as the historian Patricia Albjerg Graham has noted, in the context of the higher education system in the United States, the Ivy League institutions had been historically the most elitist and discriminatory towards women: Harvard appointed the first female to a tenured professorship only in 1956, Yale University in 1959, and Princeton University – only in 1969.<sup>331</sup> Moreover, the 1950s was also probably the least favorable period for the career-oriented women in the United States due to the general postwar environment of restrictive gender roles. The number of female graduates in the 1950s plummeted to the record low 23.9% of all graduates and middle class women were not expected to pursue any other goals besides from becoming the role-model housewives.<sup>332</sup>

While in the American Ivy League context Gimbutas was disadvantaged as a woman, she also had a certain privilege that came with her being a white European. She had the cultural capital provided by her experience and connections in the European academic environments and an insider perspective to Eastern European archaeology. Thanks to these advantages, and, doubtless, her personal character features, the 15-year-long stay in Harvard was very fruitful for Gimbutas as a scholar. In this period Gimbutas created an impressive international academic network and gained insights into the workings of the North American academic system that helped her afterwards.<sup>333</sup> Since Harvard would often invite high level academics, specialists in European archaeology, such

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<sup>330</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 90.

<sup>331</sup> Patricia Albjerg Graham, "Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 3, no. 4 (1978): 767.

<sup>332</sup> Jerry A. Jacobs, "Gender Inequality and Higher Education," *Annual Review of Sociology* 22 (1996): 156.

<sup>333</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda."

as Christopher Hawkes and Stuart Piggot, Gimbutas established many important personal contacts and friendships.<sup>334</sup> Joan Marler and Marija Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” November 17, 1990, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.. Probably the most important connection that she made during her Harvard period was that with Roman Jakobson, a famous Russian-American linguist and literary scholar,<sup>335</sup> who eventually became quite instrumental in promoting her career. All in all, during her Harvard years, Gimbutas proved herself as an academic woman able to navigate the masculinist and elitist environment of the postwar U.S. scholarly-archaeological circles.

Possibly the biggest academic task that Gimbutas faced after entering the American academia, was to move away from being an expert in the narrow field of Baltic archaeology and Lithuanian folklore, which was at her research focus thus far, and towards becoming a scholar with a much broader perspective – an expert in (Eastern) European archaeology. This gradual process of expanding scholarly horizons can be traced in her publications. Gimbutas published her first English language academic article in 1952 in the *American Anthropologist*,<sup>336</sup> where she dealt with the question of the origin of Indo-European speakers in North Europe.<sup>337</sup> Her first English language article was thus also an article where she for the first time did not confine her work within the borders of the Baltic archaeology exclusively. However, a big part of the article was dedicated to the appropriateness of the usage of the term “Balto-Slavic” – a term denoting an allegedly coherent group of Indo-European language speakers. Gimbutas’ argued against the usage of the term

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<sup>334</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 51–52.

<sup>335</sup> Jakobson held the position of the Samuel Hazzard Cross Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, and General Linguistics in Harvar. See The Harvard Crimson, “Roman Jakobson Retires at 71,” The Harvard Crimson, 1967, accessed September 10, 2018, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1967/7/21/roman-jakobson-retires-at-71-proman/>.

<sup>336</sup> Marija Gimbutas, “On the Origin of North Indo-Europeans,” *American Anthropologist* 54, no. 4 (1952): 602–11.

<sup>337</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 91.



“Balto-Slavic culture”, and against the implied reasoning that up until the beginning of the Christian era, Baltic and Slavic languages speaking people formed one linguistic and cultural unit. Gimbutas argued instead that the Baltic and Slavic cultures should be seen as separate linguistic and cultural units, differentiated as early as before 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.<sup>338</sup> This shows that some of the problems that were important in her earlier work, namely, the relationship between the prehistoric Slavs and Balts and the contemporary political importance of different interpretations of this relationship, still penetrated her first English language works in the U.S.

The choice of this theme for her first English language publication cannot be seen purely as a result of Gimbutas’ scholarly expertise or problematics dictated by the field – it was also partially a result of her broader political interests. As the historian Dapkutė argues, the majority of the Lithuanian émigrés who fled the Soviet occupation of their country 1944, became highly involved politically in their new countries, and saw the national independence of Lithuania as their main life goal. The scholarly work was often also seen by émigrés as a path to a better intellectual and social position from which to argue for the Lithuanian national cause.<sup>339</sup> Being embedded within highly political and nationalist-minded Lithuanian diaspora, Gimbutas most likely took it as her duty, being an archaeologist, to enlighten the Western (academic) public about the ethnogenesis of the Balts and the distinctiveness of the prehistoric Balts (the ancestors of Lithuanians) from Slavs (the ancestors of Russians, among other nations). Therefore, Gimbutas’ argument for the usage of separate “Baltic” and “Slavic” terms in archaeological research must be read in the historical context of the incorporation of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union – as not ‘purely scientific’, but also a political argument in the context of the Cold War. Later in her career Gimbutas also published two

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<sup>338</sup> Gimbutas, “On the Origin of North Indo-Europeans,” 603-609.

<sup>339</sup> Dapkutė, “Lithuanian Diaspora: From Displaced Persons to Diaspora Politics,” 250–53.

separate monographs, *The Balts*,<sup>340</sup> and *The Slavs*,<sup>341</sup> for the Thames & Hudson *Ancient Peoples and Places* series, as if fortifying the separation of these two peoples with her scholarly authority.

The Baltic-Lithuanian nationalist interest formed the red thread in Gimbutas' early scholarly work. However, for the sake of her academic career, she had to move away from the issues of national importance and towards establishing herself as a Europeanist. Her articles from the 1950s show her broadening interests beyond the Baltic region, as well as the development of some of her ideas that would later define her work: namely, the strong distinction between the pre-Indo-European and the later Kurgan cultures in Europe, and, more generally, the reinterpretation of the European prehistory from a woman-centered perspective.<sup>342</sup> At the conference in Philadelphia, in 1956, Gimbutas introduced for the first time her Kurgan hypothesis,<sup>343</sup> which postulated that the original homeland of the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) speakers must have been located in the Pontic-Caspian steppe.<sup>344</sup> Already in this paper Gimbutas used gendered descriptions to distinguish between the European cultures of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC (what she later called the Old Europe) and the Kurgan culture.<sup>345</sup> The gendered narrative was however, not yet central to her work, and Gimbutas enjoyed growing acknowledgement among her colleagues. Her first major English language monograph, *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe*,<sup>346</sup> established her authority in the field,<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Balts*, Ancient Peoples and Places. Vol. 33. (New York: Praeger, 1963).

<sup>341</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Slavs*, Ancient Peoples and Places ; Vol. 74 (New York NY ; Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1971).

<sup>342</sup> Marija Gimbutas, "Battle Axe or Cult Axe?," *Man* 53 (1953): 51–54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2794736>; Marija Gimbutas, "An Ancient Art of Hunters and Fishers," *Archaeology* 8, no. 4 (1955): 268–77; Gimbutas, *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe Part 1*; Marija Gimbutas, "Culture Change in Europe at the Start of the Second Millennium B.C.: A Contribution to the Indo-European Problem," in *Men and Cultures. Selected Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*, ed. Anthony F. C. Wallace (Berlin, Boston: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960).

<sup>343</sup> Gimbutas, "Culture Change in Europe at the Start of the Second Millennium B.C."

<sup>344</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 92; Marler, "The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas," 42.

<sup>345</sup> Gimbutas, "Culture Change in Europe at the Start of the Second Millennium B.C.," 541–45.

<sup>346</sup> Gimbutas, *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe Part 1*.

<sup>347</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda."

to the extent that when she went to an academic conference in Hamburg, West Germany, two years later, Gimbutas seemed to be positively surprised by her new fame. “A new period has started. I could feel how well-known my name was. I didn’t need to sit in a corner!”, she wrote in a joyful letter addressed to her family in Boston.<sup>348</sup>

## **2.7 Relationships with the Lithuanian diaspora and Soviet Lithuania**

While Gimbutas was leading an increasingly productive academic life and building her reputation in the scholarly community of archaeologists, she simultaneously continued her active involvement in the cultural life of the Lithuanian diaspora community. During the 1950s Marija and Jurgis alternately chaired the Lithuanian Culture Club in Boston and kept in touch with many other prominent Lithuanian émigrés, among them Birutė Pukelevičiūtė, Vytautas Kavolis, Algirdas Landsbergis, Juozas Girnius and others.<sup>349</sup> Marija Gimbutas continued writing on Baltic prehistory in the Lithuanian-language diaspora press, such publications as *Lietuvių kelias* (Lithuanian Road), *Vienybė* (Unity), *Draugas* (Friend),<sup>350</sup> and, most notably, continued contributing to the conservative cultural magazine *Aidai*.<sup>351</sup> If in the American and international scholarly community she was increasingly acknowledged, her articles on the pagan Lithuanian culture often provoked criticism within the Catholic dominated Lithuanian intellectual sphere. What was seen as Gimbutas’ liberal leanings, and especially her unorthodox views on religion, did not fit in easily within the dominant conservative narrative of Lithuanian diaspora.

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<sup>348</sup> “Marija Gimbutas to Jurgis Gimbutas,” 1958 August 28, F154-41, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>349</sup> Gimbutas and Gimbutaitė, “Bostonas” [Boston], 202.

<sup>350</sup> “Gimbutas Collections Box 107. Early Publications.,” 1950, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.

<sup>351</sup> The publishing of *Aidai*, moved together with the editorial team from Germany to the U.S. in 1949.

Pointing out this tension, a left-leaning Lithuanian émigré Bronys Raila wrote a letter to Jurgis and Marija Gimbutai, expressing his disappointment with their contributions to the “clerical” press, when they themselves are so “liberally minded”:

Many times I would almost start crying reading your articles in *Aidai*. I would be so sorry that you contribute to the publication of the clerical stream, which is trying to dominate our political and cultural life in such a medieval way.<sup>352</sup>

Throughout the 1950s however, there was no significant liberal equivalent to *Aidai*, and Marija Gimbutas continued writing for this and similar publications.

The connecting red thread in Gimbutas’ articles from the period was the “defense” of the image of Lithuanian paganism. Gimbutas was outraged to see people using the word “paganism” as a synonym to “barbaric” or “primitive”, or as a descriptor for Bolshevism and Nazism.<sup>353</sup> Such negative connotations with paganism did not do justice, she wrote, to the true nature of the ancient Lithuanian pagan spirituality. Gimbutas wished to present instead a different and positive image of the pagan past – as something to be proud of, as the basis of the authentic Lithuanian culture, a “fireplace” of the nation.<sup>354</sup> Such a picture of Lithuanian paganism and its contrasting with Christianity evoked a number of responses, which blamed Gimbutas for a romanticized representation of the pagan past,<sup>355</sup> or for her alleged lack of scientific methodology.<sup>356</sup> The prolonged scholarly exchange and continuous *ad hominem* attacks were clearly unpleasant for

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<sup>352</sup> “Bronys Raila to Jurgis and Marija Gimbutai,” 1954 January 9, F154-590, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>353</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Pagonybė, stabmeldystė Ir mūsų protėvių religija [Paganism, idolatry and the religion of our ancestors],” *Vienybė*, May 30, 1952, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.

<sup>354</sup> Gimbutienė.

<sup>355</sup> Antanas Musteikis, “Dėl kelių į Senąją lietuvių religiją [Regarding the roads to the Old Lithuanian religion],” *Aidai*, November 9, 1953.

<sup>356</sup> Jonas Balys, “Mokslas religijų istorijoje [Science in the history of religions],” *Aidai*, January 1, 1954.

Gimbutas, as it can be seen from her correspondence with the editors of *Aidai*.<sup>357</sup> She, however, did not change her conviction about the importance of the pagan spiritual past for Lithuanian culture.<sup>358</sup> Defending her arguments from critics, she framed her interpretation of symbolism in a broader scholarly context, referring back to the works by J.J. Bachofen as well as psychoanalytic theories by Freud and Jung.<sup>359</sup> Later Gimbutas synthesized her views on Lithuanian pagan spirituality and symbolic representation in a English language monograph *Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art*.<sup>360 361</sup> She ceased publishing in *Aidai* in 1958 and in the following decades published in the newly established liberal-leaning publications of the Lithuanian diaspora.

Up until 1954 Gimbutas had no contact with her mother Veronika, who stayed in Kaunas after the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. Gimbutas was afraid that establishing correspondence could compromise the security of her relatives in the repressive postwar Stalinist regime.<sup>362</sup> After the death of Stalin in 1953, however, Soviet Union underwent political reforms which included a relaxation of state repression. In the early 1950, Gimbutas decided to send a letter to her mother undersigned with a pseudonym “Sullivan”, and thus established correspondence.<sup>363</sup> In her

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<sup>357</sup> “Marija Gimbutas to the editors of *Aidai*,” 1954, F154-337, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>358</sup> Just a year later Gimbutas added fuel to the discussion with her article in *Draugas*, a Chicago-based Lithuanian diaspora newspaper of Catholic orientation, where she argued that the characteristic Lithuanian wooden crosses and wayside shrines are in fact of a pre-Christian origin. See Marija Gimbutienė, “Lietuvių kryžių ir koplytstulpių kilmės klausimu [On the origin of Lithuanian crosses and wayside shrines],” *Draugas*, May 28, 1955.

<sup>359</sup> Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, “Lietuvių liaudies meno simbolių klausimu [Regarding the problem of Lithuanian folk art symbols],” *Aidai*, October 8, 1955.

<sup>360</sup> Gimbutas, *Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art*.

<sup>361</sup> In the 1960s the book was unofficially translated to Lithuanian and circulated as samizdat among intellectuals and artists in Lithuanian SSR, see Algimantas Švažas, “Mūsų pažintis atspindi mano darbuose” [Our meeting is reflected in my works], in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 353–60. It was officially published only in 1994 as *Marija Gimbutienė, Senovinė simbolika lietuvių liaudies mene* [The ancient symbolism in Lithuanian folk art] (Vilnius: Mintis, 1994).

<sup>362</sup> In postwar Lithuania, as well as other Soviet republics, minor “misdemeanors”, like keeping in touch with the relatives in the capitalist West, were considered as valid reasons for a person to be detained or deported to Siberia Anušauskas, *Lithuania in 1940-1990: The History of Occupied Lithuania*.

<sup>363</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 182; “Marija Gimbutas to Veronika Alseikienė,” 1954, F154-10, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

memoirs, Marija's daughter Živilė remembers her mother reading out loud the letters from Soviet Lithuania at the dinner table in their house in Boston, and explaining the "coded information", hidden from the eyes of the potential state censor.<sup>364</sup> In 1960, hoping to create a possibility to see her closest relatives, Gimbutas applied to the 25<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow.<sup>365</sup> Her mother Veronika and cousin Meilė, who were informed about Marija's visit, came to Moscow from Lithuania and managed to meet Gimbutas a few times. They attempted to keep the meetings secret, being afraid of the repercussions back in Lithuania.<sup>366</sup> However, Gimbutas was under surveillance, with an assigned guide which followed her activities.<sup>367</sup> Despite their fears, the meetings did not lead to repressive measures against Gimbutas' relatives back in Lithuania, possibly due to Khrushchev's policy of Thaw. After the conference in Moscow, Gimbutas was also permitted a two-day visit in Soviet Lithuania.

In a report on her short visit to Soviet Lithuania in 1960, written immediately after the return, Gimbutas described the russification of the country, repressions against writers, persecution of anti-Soviet cultural workers and the pervasive censorship. She characterized the overall atmosphere as "lacking oxygen".<sup>368</sup> In her autobiographical narrative, told to Marler in 1990, Gimbutas portrayed her first visit to the Soviet Union as permeated with fear – having fled the communist regime 16 years ago, she was cautious about her security and that of her relatives.

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<sup>364</sup> Gimbutas and Gimbutaitė, "Bostonas" [Boston], 198–99.

<sup>365</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler."

<sup>366</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 183.

<sup>367</sup> The practice of assigning a spy-guide was a common practice for supervising foreign guests in Soviet Union. See for example the recent book by Solveiga Daugirdaitė, about Jean Paul Sartre's and Simone de Beauvoir's visit to the Soviet Union, including Lithuania, in 1965. Solveiga Daugirdaitė, *Švystelėjo kaip meteoras: 1965-ieji su Simone de Beauvoir ir Jeanu Pauliu Sartre'u* [Flashed like a meteor: 1965 with Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre] (Vilnius: LLTI, 2015).

<sup>368</sup> I quote from the draft stored in an archive, it is unclear if the text was eventually published. Marija Gimbutas, "[spūdžiai iš vizito Lietuvoje, 1960]" [The impressions from a visit to Lithuania, 1960], F154-205, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

Through Gimbutas' eyes, the Soviet Union appeared to be a repressive apparatus of surveillance – Gimbutas believed that the state had information on every step that she took while visiting the Soviet Union. “That is the system ... You have to live through that to imagine that it is a real thing”, reflected Gimbutas in her autobiographical narrative decades later.<sup>369</sup> In her conversations with Marler she did not only emphasize the hostile and uncanny nature of the Soviet regime, but also presented it as foreign to Western audiences.<sup>370</sup> Gimbutas herself, on the other hand, had a sort of familiarity with the workings of the Soviet Union – via her relatives who stayed there, and her own personal experience of occupation and displacement, as well as her few visits. This positioned her, just like other Eastern European exiles as a sort of “mediator” between the Soviet Union and the West, a “translator” of the character of the Soviet Union for the Western audiences.<sup>371</sup>

The authoritative tone of a mediator between the Soviet Union and the West is characteristic also to Gimbutas' review articles on Soviet archaeology written in the 1950s.<sup>372</sup> As a specialist in Eastern European archaeology, working in American academia, she had an intimate understanding of the archaeological works produced in the Soviet Union. At the same time, Gimbutas also emphatically positioned herself as ideologically opposed to Communism. In one characteristic

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<sup>369</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 183.

<sup>370</sup> Joan Marler penciled some comments in the margins of the transcript of the interviews with Gimbutas. One of them, placed next to words “Soviet Union”, illustratively read “the giant monster”. In Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler.”

<sup>371</sup> One can think of the Polish writer Czesław Miłosz and his anti-Stalinist book ‘The Captive Mind’ (1953) or the Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his “The Gulag Archipelago” (1973), which publicized the crimes of the Soviet prison complex.

<sup>372</sup> Marija Gimbutas, “The Earliest Culture History of the Northern Part of the European USSR: A Review Article,” *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 19, no. 1 (1953): 108–15; Marija Gimbutas, review of *Review of Archaeology in the U.S.S.R.*, by Mikhail Miller, *The Scientific Monthly* 85, no. 4 (1957): 207–8.

review of a book (*Archaeology in the U.S.S.R* by M. Miller)<sup>373</sup> Gimbutas wrote, aligning herself with the anti-Communist opinions of the author of the book:

[The author- R.N.] has shown very clearly how archeological studies in the U.S.S.R. were inseparable from the general domestic and foreign policy of the Soviet empire; how they pulsated in the same rhythm; how they changed their colors regardless of scientific logic, regardless of truth.<sup>374</sup>

Condemning the Soviet archaeology as ideological and deeply politicized, Gimbutas also praised the author of the book for providing a story, which “will undoubtedly lead the Western scholars to a greater appreciation of the free thought which they enjoy”.<sup>375</sup> Through statements like this Gimbutas constructed herself as, at the same time, an expert on the Soviet archaeology and a staunch anti-Communist. Moreover, by encouraging her Western colleagues to enjoy and value the freedom of thought – something that the Soviet regime has obstructed – she constructed herself as a moral authority, able to compare and judge the two systems.

A strong anti-Soviet and pro-Western stance of Gimbutas was a necessary requirement for Gimbutas academic success and social mobility in the 1950s environment of McCarthyism, more so because she was herself an émigré from the Soviet occupied Lithuania. As the historian Laura A. Belmonte argues, the refugees from the countries occupied by the Soviet Union, and the Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe were useful for the American anti-Soviet propaganda purposes. The United States Information Agency (USIA) often employed the facts and numbers of refugees fleeing from “behind the Iron Curtain” as a proof of inferiority of the Communist system to the capitalist democracy that the U.S. represented. The personal stories of the most successful migrants to the U.S. were especially useful as a tool for depicting the American society as the most

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<sup>373</sup> Mikhail Miller, *Archaeology in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956).

<sup>374</sup> Gimbutas, “Review of *Archaeology in the U.S.S.R.*,” 207.

<sup>375</sup> Gimbutas, 208.



beneficial context for the “flourishing” of individual talents and reaching of personal goals.<sup>376</sup> It was in this Cold War context that Gimbutas, almost immediately after her return to the U.S. from the conference in Moscow, in November 1960, received an award from the Boston Chamber of Commerce and The World Refugee Committee as the 'Outstanding New American'.<sup>377</sup> Ernestine Elster interprets this award as a symbolic acknowledgment of Gimbutas’ “efforts in publicizing the plight of Lithuania under the Soviets”.<sup>378</sup> Gimbutas’ narrative of escape from the Soviet Union and her exemplary integration and success in the United States also made her into a role-model, beneficial for the American Anti-Communist propaganda purposes.

While Marija Gimbutas was achieving success in academia and public life, her marriage with Jurgis was deteriorating. Given the general atmosphere in post-war U.S., with its cult of domesticity and conservative gender roles, which confined middle-class women at home,<sup>379</sup> Gimbutas’ academic and career ambitions were rather unusual and her family was apparently unwilling to accommodate them. In her autobiographical narrative, narrated to Joan Marler in 1990, Gimbutas blamed the dissolution of marriage mainly on her husband <sup>380</sup>. She explained that, her work at Harvard, especially as initially it was not giving any financial gain, was met with skepticism and disapproval by her husband and the mother-in-law, who lived with them in Boston. As Marija was becoming increasingly successful in her career, both Jurgis and Elena became “jealous” of her, she told Marler.<sup>381</sup> In retrospect, Gimbutas thought of her marriage with Jurgis as unhappy. She was very critical of Jurgis’ character and his behavior towards her – according to

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<sup>376</sup> Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia Penn: Penn State University Press, 2010), 113–14.

<sup>377</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 109; Marler, “The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas,” 43.

<sup>378</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 109.

<sup>379</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010 (1963)).

<sup>380</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler.”

<sup>381</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 96.

Marija, he held conservative views about marriage and was possessive and controlling towards her. In Marija's interpretation, their relationship started falling apart when she became more known and successful when he was, as it caused increasing jealousy and sometimes even violent reactions from him.<sup>382</sup>

The aforementioned Roman Jakobson, with whom Gimbutas had not only a professional, but also a romantic relationship,<sup>383</sup> played quite an important role both in Gimbutas' academic mobility and her increased independence from her husband. While according to Gimbutas, many friends advised her to seek divorce from her husband, it was Jakobson, who suggested her to consult his attorney, since she had no finances to do that independently.<sup>384</sup> Moreover, being supportive of Gimbutas' academic ambitions, he helped her to receive a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS), at Stanford University, where she spent the academic year 1961-1962, writing *The Balts*.<sup>385</sup> Gimbutas enjoyed the opportunity to do her research without disruptions, and fell in love with Californian nature, which she even compared to the landscapes of her native Lithuania in the foreword of *The Balts*:

At certain moments here I have visualized the hills and slopes shrouded with green oaks as seen from the castle hill of Gediminas in Vilnius, my native city in the heart of the Baltic lands, from which I am separated by almost twenty years. The Californian sand dunes, at Carmel, remind me of the pure white sands of Palanga, where I used to collect handfuls of amber; and the sunsets in the Pacific, of the peacefully sinking sun as it disappeared into the Baltic Sea, beyond where, to the west, my forefathers thought was the cosmic tree, the axis of the world, holding up the arch of the sky.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 229.

<sup>383</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 63.

<sup>384</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 61.

<sup>385</sup> CASBS, "Past Fellows, Research Affiliates, and Visiting Scholars," Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, 2018, accessed September 10, 2018, <https://casbs.stanford.edu/people/past-fellows-research-affiliates-and-visiting-scholars>.

<sup>386</sup> Gimbutas, *The Balts*, 11.

This romantic description of Californian nature, enmeshed in Gimbutas' text with a nostalgic image of her native Lithuania, expressed her growing attraction to the "Golden State", where she would eventually settle down. In her daughters memoirs, Gimbutas is portrayed as excited about her independent life at Menlo Park near Stanford and enjoying the company of new colleagues.<sup>387</sup> At Stanford Gimbutas became acquainted, among other people, with a prominent anti-Communist philosopher Sydney Hook, who was a fellow at the CASBS at the same time. She also established a good relationship with Czeslaw Milocz, a Polish-Lithuanian writer and poet, who had just recently emigrated to the United States and was starting his professorship at the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>388 389</sup> The result of Gimbutas' fellowship at the CASBS was a number of articles,<sup>390</sup> and the finished monograph on *The Balts*.<sup>391</sup>

After the productive year at the CASBS, Gimbutas came back to her work at Harvard in the position of a lecturer at the Department of Anthropology.<sup>392</sup> Gimbutas was increasingly realizing, as she narrated later, that at Harvard she could only stay as a research fellow and a lecturer, but would have almost no chance of becoming a professor, in her view simply because she was a woman.<sup>393</sup> At the same time, Gimbutas was "in love with California" and wished to return for an academic position.<sup>394</sup> It was then Jakobson again, who recommended Gimbutas to a former student of his, professor Dean Worth, at the Department of Slavic languages at the University of California,

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<sup>387</sup> Gimbutas and Gimbutaitė, "Bostonas", 211–15.

<sup>388</sup> Gimbutas and Gimbutaitė, 215.

<sup>389</sup> Roman Jakobson is also mentioned in the memoirs of Marija's daughter, as he apparently was still residing in Stanford in summer 1961, although he was a fellow of CASBS between 1958-1959 and 1960-1961. See CASBS, "Past Fellows, Research Affiliates, and Visiting Scholars."

<sup>390</sup> Gimbutas, "The Indo-Europeans"; Marija Gimbutas, "Masterpieces of Neolithic Art from Rumania," *Archaeology* 16, no. 1 (1963): 54–56; Marija Gimbutas, "European Prehistory: Neolithic to the Iron Age," *Biennial Review of Anthropology* 3 (1963): 69–106.

<sup>391</sup> Gimbutas, *The Balts*.

<sup>392</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 92.

<sup>393</sup> Gimbutas, in Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

<sup>394</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 62.

Los Angeles (UCLA).<sup>395</sup> In Spring 1963, Gimbutas was suggested an appointment as a visiting lecturer, to teach Lithuanian and Slavic folklore and Slavic Peoples and Cultures at the UCLA.<sup>396</sup> After receiving a telegram with this suggestion, Gimbutas, replied positively “within one hour”.<sup>397</sup> As she told in her autobiographical narrative, Gimbutas left Boston secretly from her husband.<sup>398</sup> Marija and Jurgis formalized their divorce in 1964.<sup>399</sup>

## ***2.8 Career at the UCLA, excavations, and the turn to Goddess theory***

In Los Angeles, Gimbutas and her daughters (Dovilė 21-years-old at the time, Živilė – 17, and Rasa – 10) changed a few apartments until finally settling in Topanga mountains, a short drive from Santa Monica beach.<sup>400</sup> The house remained Marija’s main home for the rest of her life and saw many visitors, mainly visiting colleagues from abroad. Gimbutas remembered the start of her career at the UCLA and life in Los Angeles as “extremely pleasant” and “very smooth”.<sup>401</sup> In July 1964, Gimbutas was suggested an appointment of the Professor in the Department of Classics, recognizing, as the official letter said, her “outstanding qualifications” and the trust of the UCLA, that Gimbutas would facilitate the “advancement of this institution to the highest ranks of the academic community”.<sup>402</sup> Appreciated by the institution she was working in and respected by her new colleagues, Gimbutas in the next decade-and-a-half lived through the most productive and professionally successful period of her life. “I was suddenly happy at the UCLA and I felt future

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<sup>395</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 110.

<sup>396</sup> “Jaan Puhvel to Franklin D. Murphy” 1963, Marija Gimbutas Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.

<sup>397</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 62.

<sup>398</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 62–63.

<sup>399</sup> “Marija Gimbutienė to Jurgis Gimbutas”, 1964 May 19, F154-8, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>400</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 63.

<sup>401</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 64.

<sup>402</sup> “Franklin D. Murphy to Marija Gimbutas,” 1964 July 24, F154-637, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

in front of me, I was thinking of possibilities, what I should do, and what could be created. This was a very good moment”, she told in an interview in the 1990s, emphasizing the positive change that the move to Los Angeles brought her.<sup>403</sup>

According to her student and, later, colleague Ernestine Elster, Gimbutas enjoyed the academic environment at UCLA, because it was more liberal and egalitarian than her previous experiences on the East Coast and in Germany.<sup>404</sup> Gimbutas herself retrospectively noted the importance of the political moment in shaping this environment: the governor of California at that moment was the Democrat Pat Brown (1959-67), known for his progressive reform of the higher education system, while the chancellor of the UCLA was also a progressive, Franklin D. Murphy (1959-68). The “golden era”, as she called it, was terminated by the election of the Republican Ronald Reagan to the governors position in 1967 and the subsequent cuts to higher education funding.<sup>405</sup> The chancellor Murphy, in Gimbutas’ opinion, was especially important in facilitating interdisciplinary research and academic freedom at the UCLA in the 1960s. She admired him as a person and received similar admiration back from him.<sup>406</sup> In fact, a decade later, Gimbutas even dedicated her book *The Gods and Goddesses*, the book which launched her Goddess hypothesis, to “the inspiration of Franklin D. Murphy, Chancellor of UCLA 1959-1968”.<sup>407</sup>

An exhaustive account of the academic activities of Gimbutas in the UCLA period is given by the archaeologist Ernestine Elster, Gimbutas student and then colleague.<sup>408</sup> In her biographical sketch

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<sup>403</sup> Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

<sup>404</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 93.

<sup>405</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 64.

<sup>406</sup> “Franklin D. Murphy to Marija Gimbutas,” 1966 August 8, F154-637, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>407</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000 to 3500 BC. Myths, Legends and Cult Images*.

<sup>408</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda”; Ernestine S. Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Old Europe, Goddesses and Gods, and the Transformation of Culture,” *Backdirt: Annual Review of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA*, no. December (2015): 94–102.

“Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda” (2007) Elster tried to remedy what she perceived as a disproportionate public interest in Gimbutas’ Goddess theory and her relationship with spiritual feminism. This fascination had obscured, in Elster opinion, Gimbutas’ extraordinary scientific achievements and contributions to archaeology.<sup>409</sup> In Elster’s account therefore, Gimbutas appeared, first and foremost, as a distinguished scholar and “agenda setter” in archaeology, a prolific researcher and writer, but also as a “charismatic”, charming, popular person among students and colleagues.<sup>410</sup> Given her close involvement in Gimbutas’ work in the period described, Elster provided a unique account of Gimbutas as an archaeologist working in the American academic environment. Elster’s article is thorough and sympathetic, and largely avoiding the most pervasive biographical clichés about Gimbutas’ personality that I will analyze in the following chapter, especially Chapter 3.

From Elster we learn that Marija Gimbutas was one of the initiators of the establishment of the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Archaeology (1971) as well as the Institute of Archaeology (1973) at the UCLA.<sup>411</sup> Although Gimbutas was first associated with the Department of Classics, after the establishment of the Institute of Archaeology she became the Professor of European Archaeology and Indo-European Studies. She was one of the founders of the *Journal of Indo-European Studies* and served on the board of the *Quarterly Review of Archaeology* and UCLA’s series *Monumenta Archeologica*. Gimbutas lectured on a broad spectrum of topics, from archaeology of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, Indo-European studies, to Baltic and Slavic folklore and mythology.<sup>412</sup> She was also bestowed with the title of the Charles Eliot Norton

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<sup>409</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 105–7.

<sup>410</sup> Elster, 93.

<sup>411</sup> Elster, 110.

<sup>412</sup> Marija Gimbutas, “Marija Gimbutas’ UCLA course descriptions, lecture notes, examination materials (1969-1983),” 1969, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

Lecturer for the Archaeological Institute of America in 1966 and 1975-77, and taught her research findings across North American universities.<sup>413</sup> At UCLA Gimbutas also continued her publishing career. In 1965 came out her second monograph *The Bronze Age cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*,<sup>414</sup> which, according to Elster, is relevant to archaeologists up until today.<sup>415</sup> In 1971 appeared her book *The Slavs*,<sup>416</sup> not to talk about dozens of articles and book reviews. Gimbutas had an impressive record of attracting funding, her research was supported by the following prestigious organizations: the National Science Foundation, American Council for Learned Societies, American Philosophical Society, National Endowment for the Humanities, Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Ahmanson Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution, etc.<sup>417</sup> She participated in numerous conferences and organized a few, both in the U.S. and in Europe.

From Elster we also learn about Gimbutas' impressive work in the field: next to her activities at the UCLA, Gimbutas (co-)conducted 5 major archaeological excavations in South-East Europe between 1967 and 1979.<sup>418</sup> The first of Gimbutas' excavations took place in Obre, Bosnia (1967-69) in collaboration with Alojz Benac from the Zemalski Museum in Sarajevo.<sup>419</sup> The second excavation in Sitagroi, Greece (1969-70) was jointly planned by Gimbutas and Colin Renfrew from Sheffield University.<sup>420</sup> According to Elster, Sitagroi was the first excavation where

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<sup>413</sup> AIA, "Charles Eliot Norton Memorial Lectureship," Archaeological Institute of America, 2018, accessed September 15, 2018, <https://www.archaeological.org/giving/endowments/244>.

<sup>414</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965).

<sup>415</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 92.

<sup>416</sup> Gimbutas, *The Slavs*.

<sup>417</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 92.

<sup>418</sup> For exhaustive details on the sources for funding, permits, communication and collaboration with UCLA colleagues and local archaeologists and governments, details and debates over findings, etc., see Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda." Here I only present a short summary for the purposes of this chapter, using Elster's article and Gimbutas' autobiographical narrative.

<sup>419</sup> Marija Gimbutas, "Obre, Yugoslavia: Two Neolithic Sites," *Archaeology* 23, no. 4 (1970): 287-97.

<sup>420</sup> Colin Renfrew, Marija Gimbutas, and Ernestine S. Elster, *Excavations at Sitagroi: A Prehistoric Village in Northeast Greece* (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, 1986).

Gimbutas' attention got attracted by the omni-presence of the female shaped figurines (200 in total) from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Already on the site she held a seminar with invited archaeologists, explaining her interpretation of the figurines, which would be developed later in the *The Gods and Goddesses* (1974). The third excavation was co-executed with Milutin and Draga Garasanin from Stip Museum and took place in Anza, close to Stip, Macedonia (1969-1970).<sup>421</sup> The dig revealed the remains of an earlier Neolithic period than Obre and Sitagroi, and provided Gimbutas with enough material to develop the theory of the autochthonous European culture of Old Europe.<sup>422</sup> The fourth excavation took place in Achilleion, Thessaly, Greece (1973-74)<sup>423</sup> and was conducted by Gimbutas in collaboration with Dimitrios Theochares from Thessaly.<sup>424</sup> Achilleion was found to be contemporary with Çatalhöyük and was rich in pottery and figurines, which, in Gimbutas' understanding, confirmed further her ideas on Old Europe and the Goddess spirituality. The last excavation that Gimbutas co-conducted took place in Italy, at the Scaloria Cave, Manfredonia (1978-79) with Santo Tiné from the University of Genoa.<sup>425</sup>

According to Elster, Gimbutas' excavations from the very beginning relied on the most progressive technological and methodological achievements in her field, producing top-quality research.<sup>426</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, the field of archaeology, especially in the United States was dominated by processualism, which aimed to make archaeology more scientific and precise, by focusing on systematic processes that drove culture change in the past. This new approach was positioned by

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<sup>421</sup> Marija Gimbutas, "Anza, ca. 6500-5000 B.C.: A Cultural Yarstick for the Study of Neolithic Southeast Europe," *Journal of Field Research* 1, no. 1/2 (1974): 26–66.

<sup>422</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 96–97.

<sup>423</sup> Marija Gimbutas, Shan M. M. Winn, and Daniel Mitsuo Shimabuku, *Achilleion: A Neolithic Settlement in Thessaly, Greece, 6400-5600 B.C.* (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, 1989).

<sup>424</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 107.

<sup>425</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 98.

<sup>426</sup> Elster, 94–95.



its proponents as an antithesis to the previous “unscientific” culture-historical approach and was thus called the “New Archaeology”.<sup>427</sup> Elster noted that Gimbutas was not a “new” (meaning processualist) archaeologist, but had been influenced by the ideas characteristic to this approach, via her connections with, for example, Lewis Binford, who was a Professor of Anthropology at UCLA (1966-69) and the British archaeologist Colin Renfrew, who was a visiting researcher at the UCLA in 1967 and later Gimbutas’ close collaborator on excavation projects.<sup>428</sup> Still, Elster claimed that Gimbutas remained essentially faithful to her early education in Europe, and was not significantly affected either by processualism, or post-processualism, or any other trends that affected American archaeology in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>429</sup>

In her biographical essay Elster focused on Gimbutas primarily through the prism of her academic work and left aside her political and social engagements, claiming that they had little influence on Gimbutas’ archaeological work. She therefore did not speculate about the reasons behind the shift in Gimbutas’ work from the Indo-European question to the problematics of Old Europe and the Goddess theory. It is clear however, that in the 1970s Gimbutas moved radically away from the Bronze Age and towards working with the question of European cultures before the arrival of Indo-Europeans, their social and spiritual structure. In 1974, most importantly, Gimbutas published her *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000 to 3500 BC. Myths, Legends and Cult images*,<sup>430</sup> later republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.: Myths*

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<sup>427</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*.

<sup>428</sup> The collaboration between Gimbutas and Renfrew is well represented in a number of work related and personal letters, in “Correspondence between Marija Gimbutas and Colin Renfrew,” 1965-92, F154-644, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>429</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 107.

<sup>430</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*.

*and Cult Images* (1982).<sup>431</sup> Throughout the 1970s Gimbutas not only obtained new archaeological materials which allowed her to define the period more precisely, as seen in the title, but also gained more confidence in placing exceedingly strong emphasis on the centrality of women and Goddess spirituality in what she called Old Europe. Other articles from the 1970s and early 1980s also show the development of Gimbutas' hypothesis of the omnipresent Goddess-oriented spirituality in the prehistoric Europe.<sup>432</sup> In discussing Gimbutas' hypothesis of Old Europe and the pantheon of goddesses and gods, Elster lamented that Gimbutas "leaves a questioning reader behind because she does not fully expose the path that led to her conclusions... we must accept the pantheon on faith".<sup>433</sup> Otherwise admiring Gimbutas' scholarly abilities, Elster saw the "goddess theory" as a mistake and a lack of better judgement in the otherwise prolific and excellent researcher.

What could be possible explanations of the shift that Gimbutas made in the 1970s from the research on Bronze Age Europe – the research that essentially brought her academic acknowledgement – towards the Goddess hypothesis, which proved to be so controversial and damaging for Gimbutas' authority in the long run? Some authors have suggested that Gimbutas was directly affected by the countercultural political movements of the 1960s in the United States, namely radical feminism and the anti-war movement. The archaeologist Chapman suggests that living in California, the hotbed of what he calls the "flower power" and "hardcore feminist groups", Gimbutas must have been somehow influenced by their philosophies, which accentuated "mother earth and fertility".<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>432</sup> Marija Gimbutas, "The Mask in Old Europe from 6500 to 3500 B.C.," *Archaeology* 27, no. 4 (1974): 262–69; Gimbutas, "Anza, ca. 6500-5000 B.C.: A Cultural Yardstick for the Study of Neolithic Southeast Europe"; Marija Gimbutas, "The First Wave of Eurasian Pastoralists into Copper Age Europe," *The Journal of Indo-European Studies* 5, no. 4 (1977): 277–338; Marija Gimbutas, "The 'Monstrous Venus' of Prehistory of Goddess Creatrix," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 7, no. 7 (1981): 1–26.

<sup>433</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 103.

<sup>434</sup> Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations," 300.

This line of argumentation is attractive to the extent that Gimbutas indeed moved to California, the very epicenter of the countercultural activism in the mid-1960s, at the time when the ideas of gender equality, sexual freedom and non-violence were on the rise. There is, however, nothing to suggest in terms of archival sources, that Gimbutas had any direct relationship with the feminist or anti-Vietnam-war groups active on the West Coast in the 1960s, or that the philosophy of these movements affected Gimbutas more than tangentially. There are also reasons to explain that: the countercultural movements of the 1960s were mainly popular among students, the generation born after the Second World War. Gimbutas in this period was already a member of the university faculty, a professor, which implied a different status and possibilities for expressing dissent towards the state.<sup>435</sup> Moreover, due to her embedding in the Lithuanian diaspora circles, Gimbutas had established herself as a strong anti-Communist, which might have made her wary of participating in Left-wing movements.

In contrast to the narrative proposed by Chapman, Gimbutas herself embraced a narrative, that denied any influence of political movements or ideologies on her Goddess hypothesis. According to Gimbutas, she arrived at the concept of Old Europe, as well as the elaboration of the Goddess spirituality purely through her long archaeological work and the examination of excavated materials.<sup>436</sup> Joan Marler in her interviews with Gimbutas, asked her if she had ever had any contact with the women's studies department at the UCLA, to which Gimbutas answered that she never got introduced to them and that they essentially had different interests: while, according to Gimbutas, women's studies mainly dealt with contemporary politics, her interest was in the ancient

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<sup>435</sup> Gimbutas' writings already in the 1970s became known among radical feminists in California, something I discuss in Chapter 4. It was rather that Gimbutas' ideas influenced the development of feminism, rather than vice versa, as I argue later.

<sup>436</sup> Gimbutas, quoted in Joan Marler, "Introduction," in *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas* (Manchester: Knowledge, Ideas and Trends, 1997), 20.

past.<sup>437</sup> In general, retrospectively Gimbutas strongly denied that the women's movement or any kind of political ideology had any influence on her work and findings in relation to the Goddess hypothesis, but also claimed being satisfied with the effect that her ideas eventually had on the women's movement.<sup>438</sup> Marler, who remained faithful to this narrative in her biographical articles on Marija Gimbutas, argued that it was Gimbutas' qualities as a scholar that led her to the development of her ideas. As the narrative goes, while the archaeology was restricted to the functionalist "New Archaeology", Gimbutas insisted on working with interdisciplinary insights from linguistics, mythology and folklore studies (what she called the *archaeomythology*), and, having an exceptional talent for broad analysis and synthesis came up with an idea that was beyond the reach of most of her colleagues, who were too specialized and narrow-minded to achieve the same conclusions as she did (Marler 1997, 21). The Goddess hypothesis in this narrative, cultivated by Marler, is presented as a result of superior intellectual insight, purified from any political or socio-psychological influences from outside the archaeology.

I suggest that the answer to the question of Gimbutas' motivation to turn to writing about the Goddess at the very climax of her career lies somewhere between these two contradictory narratives: not purely a result of the contextual pressures, but also not purely a product of academic labor, isolated from the political surroundings. In addressing this issue I will turn in Chapter 3 to the concept of "scientific persona", as elaborated by feminist historians and historians of science.<sup>439</sup> Without going deeper into this issue here, I only want to note that while embracing her academic success at the UCLA, Gimbutas also turned into somewhat of a celebrity and public figure in Los Angeles. Her popularity increased even more in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and went beyond

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<sup>437</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 67.

<sup>438</sup> Marler, "Introduction," 20.

<sup>439</sup> Bosch, "Persona and the Performance of Identity."

California, as I will show in the following chapters of this dissertation. Starting roughly with the 1960s, the concept of the “goddess” and female spiritual power was starting to become a part of Marija Gimbutas’ public representation. This can be seen for example in Gimbutas’ self-presentation during the 1968 *Los Angeles Times* “Woman of the Year” awards, where she was awarded together with 12 other women<sup>440</sup>. According to the *LA Times* journalist, upon receiving the award Gimbutas,

drew the applause from the audience with this: “I thank the goddess of fate who created me a woman – a creature superior to man.” But she added tactfully, “We women still need the help of wise men.”<sup>441</sup>

While at the time Gimbutas was not yet known for her research in prehistoric goddesses, in this public utterance she chose to play with the imaginary of female power and female goddess, in constructing her public persona. Later, in the hands of spiritual feminists and Lithuanian nationalist circles alike, the imagery of female goddess would become an apparently inescapable metaphor to describe her personality.<sup>442</sup> Returning to the main task of this chapter –Gimbutas’ biography – in what follows I present the various academic, social and political contexts in which Gimbutas operated, starting with the 1960s, as an already acknowledged scholar and a public figure.

## **2.9 Relationship to Europe, the Soviet Union, and the Lithuanian diaspora**

In the 1960s and 1970s, while serving as a professor at the UCLA and living through one of her most productive academic periods, Gimbutas also spent a large part of her time in Europe. Mostly she would travel to South-East Europe during the summer to conduct excavations, or to participate in conferences, and then would also use the occasion to travel across the continent for her own

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<sup>440</sup> Among them also Nancy Reagan, the wife of then the governor of California, Ronald Reagan.

<sup>441</sup> Ursula Vils, “Thirteen Receive Awards as Times Women of the Year,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1968.

<sup>442</sup> Ikamaitė, *Laimos palytėta*; Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*.

research and personal purposes. Gimbutas enjoyed being in Europe and even when she wouldn't be able to go to Lithuania, she had expressed that by merely staying in Europe she felt as if being "closer to home".<sup>443</sup> On one occasion she also stayed over winter in Europe, after receiving a fellowship at the *Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study* (NIAS) in Wassenaar, the Netherlands (1973-74). The Netherlands was also where she wrote *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*.<sup>444</sup> As she told in her autobiographical narrative, Gimbutas' loved the Dutch style of living, admired the "openness" of society and made friends here, for example, with the linguist Eugenius Marius (Bob) Uhlenbeck at Leiden University and Ivan Gadourek, a Czech-Dutch sociologist at Groningen University. She received a suggestion to work at the University of Leiden, but made a decision to return to UCLA. In Europe Gimbutas also lectured broadly, in Amsterdam, Paris, Stockholm, and other places.<sup>445</sup>

Gimbutas, however, did not restrict her travels to Western European countries – she also crossed the "Iron Curtain", going to Eastern European countries, as well as the Soviet Union. Retrospectively Gimbutas narrated the differences between the state-socialist East and the capitalist West to the advantage of the later. For example, remembering her winter visit in Czechoslovakia in 1973, she told Marler, how poor and run down the country looked, and how good it was to go back to the West, to Bremen in Germany, where, "after Czechoslovakia, it looked so beautiful. And so cozy, so rich."<sup>446</sup> Gimbutas would often mention the lack of political freedom, persecution of political opponents, as well as poverty in her recollections from the visits to state-socialist countries. Gimbutas was also among the first from the Lithuanian diaspora intellectuals

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<sup>443</sup> "Marija Gimbutas to Jurgis Gimbutas," 1958 August 28, F154-41, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>444</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*.

<sup>445</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 144–46.

<sup>446</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, 118.

to return to Soviet Lithuania and she even give lectures at the university of Vilnius, which she did already in 1968,<sup>447</sup> as an exchange professor via the American Academy of Sciences.<sup>448</sup> Gimbutas then returned to Soviet Lithuania in 1981 for a longer lecture series as a Fulbright scholar, and visited Lithuania again in 1985 and 1988.<sup>449</sup> Her three months long visit to the Soviet Union in 1981 included also a 10 day travel to Siberia, where she visited archaeological sites, met with Soviet archaeologists and delivered lectures.<sup>450</sup> In the official report to the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, Gimbutas stressed that the students at the University of Kemerovo were more interested in learning about the American university system than about the recent archaeological discoveries, and that she “noticed wide-open disbelieving eyes when I mentioned the variety and the freedom of choice”.<sup>451</sup> Retrospectively explaining her wish to travel to Siberia, Gimbutas argued that she wanted “to see the country were our people were deported,” referring to the Stalinist deportations of Lithuanians and people of other ethnicities during the Second World War and decades after.<sup>452</sup>

In her representations of her visits to the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries, Gimbutas constructed herself as a representative of the West and a critic of the Communist system. In her autobiographical narrative, these trips became also discursive opportunities to stress her strong identification with the Baltic states and the feeling of historical injustice done by the Soviet occupation, as described earlier in this chapter. The Lithuanian-American diaspora community in

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<sup>447</sup> “Jonas Trinkūnas to Marija Gimbutas,” 1991 October 2, F154-469/650, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>448</sup> Marler, “The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas.”

<sup>449</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 89–91.

<sup>450</sup> Marija Gimbutas, “Fulbright Exchange Lecturing Tour to Lithuania and Siberia, March 1 - June 1, 1981,” *AABS Newsletter* V, no. 3 (19) (September 1981): 1–5.

<sup>451</sup> Marija Gimbutas, “Final Report on Teaching and Other Experiences in Vilnius, Lithuania, and in Siberia. Addressed to the Council for International Exchange of Scholars,” 1981, 5, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.

<sup>452</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 89.

general frowned upon exiled intellectual establishing any kind of relationship with the Soviet Union. Conservative Lithuanian-Americans saw any visit or an intellectual exchange with the Soviet Union, including Soviet Lithuania and its society, as giving legitimization to the Soviet regime and the occupation of the Baltic States. Gimbutas personally came under attack by some members of this community due to her relatively frequent travels “behind the Iron Curtain”.<sup>453</sup> This was probably the reason why in her autobiographical narrative Gimbutas often appeared to be justifying her travels to the “Eastern Bloc” by emphasizing her “patriotic” intentions. Gimbutas, however, strongly disagreed with the conservative approach of boycotting Soviet Lithuania, and instead, was an advocate of the liberal diaspora attitude called *Veidu į Lietuvą (Facing Lithuania)*. The latter approach, which insisted on keeping the cultural ties alive with Lithuanians living in Soviet Lithuania, was characteristic to the liberal minded Lithuanian diaspora group in the U.S., *Santara-Šviesa (Concord-Light)*.<sup>454</sup> Following this approach, Gimbutas saw it crucial to maintain contacts with Lithuanians who stayed in the Soviet Union, to inform them about the activities in diaspora, encourage exchange and facilitate social change, in this way sustaining the hopes for restoring the national independence.

Roughly starting with the 1960s Gimbutas, due to her political attitudes, became an active participant in the academic activities organized by the liberal strand of Lithuanian diaspora, such

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<sup>453</sup> Tomas Venclova, “Galvoju apie tuos, kurių nebėra [Thinking about those, who are not here anymore],” in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 299.

<sup>454</sup> Vytautas Vepštas, “Marija - santarietė,” in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005).



as influential *Tabor Farm* seminars,<sup>455</sup> and *Metmenys*, the journal of society and culture.<sup>456</sup> Being older than most of the *Santara-Šviesa* activists – *santariečiai* – Gimbutas from the very beginning of her involvement held the position of a mentor, using her academic contacts to support the initiatives of her younger colleagues.<sup>457</sup> Already in 1957, while still working at Harvard, she was elected an honorary member of the diaspora youth organization *Santara*, which later merged into *Santara-Šviesa*. Later, after becoming a professor at UCLA, Gimbutas helped inviting the “big names”, such as Czesław Miłosz to the *Tabor Farm* seminars and supported younger Lithuanian scholars in their careers. She mentored, for example, Vytautas Kavolis, a sociologist, culture historian, and eventually a well-known name in the field of comparative studies of civilization. Being one of the organizers in *Santara-Šviesa* and the editor of *Metmenys*, Kavolis often invited Gimbutas to give public lectures, also about her Goddess hypothesis.<sup>458</sup> Kavolis admired Gimbutas’ work and was one of the most positive Lithuanian scholarly reviewers of her work, also acknowledging her contribution to feminist thought.<sup>459</sup> Gimbutas also invited, for example, the famous Lithuanian dissident, poet and writer Tomas Venclova to get a teaching position at the UCLA at the end of the 1970s, when he was expelled from the Soviet Union.<sup>460</sup> Despite being

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<sup>455</sup> Among people who attended these academic seminars were some of the future political leaders in Lithuania in post-socialist times, including Valdas Adamkus, an active member of *Santara-Šviesa*, who later served as the President of Lithuania, 1998-2003 and 2004-2009. Adamkus was once also personally responsible for bringing Gimbutas to the Tabor Farm. See “Raimundas Mieželis to Marija Gimbutas” 1963 August 8, F154-282, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>456</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Europos civilizacijos pradžia Ir Indo-Europiečių antplūdis [The start of the European civilization and the Indo-European invasion],” *Metmenys* 11 (1966); Marija Gimbutienė, “Matristinė Europos kultūra prieš siaubingų karų laikus” [Matristic European culture before the period of horrible wars], *Metmenys* 53 (1987).

<sup>457</sup> Vepštas, “Marija - santarietė.”

<sup>458</sup> The exchange between the two is documented in “Correspondence between Vytautas Kavolis and Marija Gimbutas,” 1975, Marija Gimbutas Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center; and “Correspondence between Marija Gimbutas and Vytautas Kavolis,” 1954, F154-361, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>459</sup> Vytautas Kavolis, “Civilizacijos atradėja, darbo ir džiaugsmo žmogus [The Discoverer of a new civilization, the person of work and joy],” in *Laimos palytėta*, ed. Austėja Iškamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002), 187–90.

<sup>460</sup> Venclova, “Galvoju apie tuos, kurių nebėra [Thinking about those, who are not here anymore].”

perceived as someone of a higher status, older and more prominent than the rest, Gimbutas considered herself an intrinsic part of the liberal wing of diaspora activism.<sup>461</sup>

In general, since becoming a professor at the UCLA, Gimbutas used her academic authority and institutional position as much as possible to promote Lithuanian culture and draw attention to the question of Lithuanian national independence. In 1966 Gimbutas became, next to her professorship, also the Curator of Old World Archaeology for the Museum and Libraries of Ethnic Arts and Technology, what is now Fowler Museum of Cultural History at UCLA.<sup>462</sup> As the curator, in 1966 she took the chance to organize the Lithuanian folk art exhibition, with materials received from Soviet Lithuania.<sup>463</sup> At her home in Topanga she would organize annual Lithuanian summer solstice celebrations for the Lithuanian community – *Joninės*. In 1976 Gimbutas invited a Lithuanian sculptor Vladas Vildžiūnas to come to the United States, where he produced a sculpture “Bird Goddess” for the UCLA sculpture garden.<sup>464</sup> Between 1980 and 1982 Gimbutas also served as the director of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), an organization active in promoting research related to the Baltic (Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian) contexts and issues.<sup>465</sup> Members of *Santara-Šviesa* remember Marija Gimbutas as friendly and open “to both women and men”, but also as an imposing personality:

And here comes Marija with a long dress from a single piece of cloth, looking like toga, spreading her hands widely by way of greeting us. At that moment a beam of sunlight falls

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<sup>461</sup> Vepštas, “Marija - santarietė.”

<sup>462</sup> “Franklin D. Murphy to Marija Gimbutas,” 1965 December 28, F154-637, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>463</sup> Bronys Raila, “Review of an Exhibition at UCLA,” *Dirva: Tautinės Atminties Lietuvių Laikraštis*, December 2, 1966, 129 edition, F154-26, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>464</sup> Vildžiūnas, “Jos šypsenoje didžiulė jėga [Huge power in her smile],” 369.

<sup>465</sup> AABS, “About,” AABS: The Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, 2019, accessed July 6, 2019, <http://aabs-balticstudies.org/about>; Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 110.

straight to her chest. She really looked like a goddess. And she knew how to talk in a very enchanting way.<sup>466</sup>

It is unclear from these memoirs, published in 2005, if the “goddess” image was added to Gimbutas’ persona retrospectively, or if already in the early 1980s her public persona was associated with women’s spirituality. It is however, likely, that Gimbutas had quite an exceptional position in Lithuanian diaspora intellectual circles, first, by being a woman in the environment dominated by young male intellectuals and second, by being senior and an acknowledged scholar. Moreover, since her speeches at Lithuanian gatherings often touched upon the prehistoric women-centered religion and the matristic culture of Old Europe, this provided a certain repertoire of images from which to construct her public persona.<sup>467</sup>

As it was already mentioned, Gimbutas combined her excavations and research in Europe with visits to Lithuania, Soviet Union, where already in 1968 she read a lecture at Vilnius University. She was one of the first Lithuanian diaspora scholar from the West to lecture in Soviet Lithuania and, as Gimbutas stressed in her retellings of this visit, attracted enormous interest. Gimbutas’ work was known to some people already, as in the early 1960s her book *Ancient Symbolism of Lithuanian Folk Art* was unofficially translated to Lithuanian and circulated underground.<sup>468</sup> Gimbutas reflected in her correspondence with other diaspora intellectuals at that time, how enthusiastic the young Lithuanian students were to greet the guest from abroad: “they looked at me with excited eyes, almost as if wanting to touch me”.<sup>469</sup> According to Jonas Trinkūnas, the

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<sup>466</sup> Vepštas, “Marija - santarietė,” 286.

<sup>467</sup> Gimbutienė, “Matristinė Europos kultūra” [Matristic European culture].

<sup>468</sup> Švažas, “Mūsų pažintis atspindi mano darbuose” [Our meeting is reflected in my works].

<sup>469</sup> Jonas Trinkūnas, “Baltiškė Marijos Gimbutienės tyrinėjimai - gyvybės versmė” [Marija Gimbutas’ research on the Balts - a source of life], in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 345.

leader of the neopagan movement *Ramuva*,<sup>470</sup> the 1960es in Lithuania and other Baltic countries saw the rise of interest in national culture, folklore, and ethnic traditions, including the old pagan religion. Gimbutas, who came at the very high point of this wave of interest and delivered a lecture on Lithuanian mythology, had a great impact on folklore and mythological studies and the revival of paganism in Lithuania.<sup>471</sup> In the late 1970s, the ubiquitous Soviet Lithuanian Encyclopedia dedicated considerable space to Marija Gimbutas and her scientific achievements making the information about her life and work accessible to virtually every household in the Lithuanian SSR.<sup>472</sup>

Possibly even more influential was her later visit to Soviet Lithuania in spring 1981, funded by the Fulbright exchange scholarship and involving also a visit to Russian universities and archaeological sites in Siberia.<sup>473</sup> In a report for the *Newsletter of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies* (AABS), Gimbutas described the “crowds” of people gathering to hear her lectures at Vilnius University, where she was eventually assigned a classroom with 500 seats<sup>474</sup>. In 1981 Gimbutas was not treated with as much suspicion as during her earlier visits, and, in fact, received a lot of attention from the official cultural institutions of the Lithuanian SSR. During her visit, Gimbutas, for example, gave an interview to the magazine “Tarybinė moterys” (The Soviet Woman), where she had an opportunity to explain the concept of Old Europe, and what can archaeology tell about the period, “when Europe was ruled by women”.<sup>475</sup> While in

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<sup>470</sup>The movement *Ramuva*, a neopagan religious community, was founded during the Thaw period in Soviet Lithuania and masqueraded first as an organization for the protection of cultural heritage. It was officially registered after the Lithuanian independence. See Kavaliauskaitė, Jūratė, and Ainė Ramonaitė. *Sąjūdžio ištakų paieška* [In search of the roots of Sąjūdis].

<sup>471</sup> Trinkūnas, “Baltiškieji Marijos Gimbutienės tyrinėjimai - gyvybės versmė” [Marija Gimbutas’ research on the Balts - a source of life], 344.

<sup>472</sup> “Gimbutienė, Marija,” in *Lietuviškoji Tarybinė Enciklopedija* (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1978).

<sup>473</sup> Gimbutas, “Fulbright Exchange Lecturing Tour to Lithuania and Siberia, March 1 - June 1, 1981.”

<sup>474</sup> Gimbutas.

<sup>475</sup> Elena Sliesoriūnienė, “Į Vilnių - įkvėpimo” [Looking for inspiration in Vilnius], *Tarybinė moteris*, 1981.

Lithuania, Gimbutas was inquired by the publishing house “Mokslas” (Science) about the possibility of an official translation and publication of *The Balts*. In 1985, her book was indeed published in Lithuanian as *Baltai priešistoriniais laikais: etnogenezė, materialinė kultūra ir mitologija* (The Balts in Prehistoric Times: Ethnogenesis, Material Culture and Mythology).<sup>476</sup> The same year, the Lithuanian science popularizing magazine *Mokslas ir Gyvenimas* (Science and Life) published an article by Gimbutas,<sup>477</sup> where she developed her ideas on the proto-script of Old European civilization, something that she elaborated on later in *The Language of the Goddess*.

Gimbutas reflected, retrospectively, that overall her work on the Goddess-oriented Old Europe was well received in Soviet Lithuania.<sup>478</sup> Nevertheless, Gimbutas and her biographers would often emphasize that her works were censured in Soviet Lithuania and point out the difficulties that she had to go through in order to visit her homeland.<sup>479</sup> While the “Iron Curtain” indeed precluded Gimbutas from potentially being more-broadly known and acknowledged in Lithuania, and possibly translated and published earlier, it is clear, from what I had outlined above, that her visits had a lasting influence within the intellectual circles in her home country well before independence. While most of her biographers so far wished to portray Gimbutas’ visits to Soviet Lithuania as an unquestionably “dissident” activity, from what I have shown it is clear that the relationship that she had with the Soviet authorities was not so black and white. As the historian Odeta Rudling argues, since the 1960s, the Communist authorities of Soviet Lithuania encouraged

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<sup>476</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, *Baltai priešistoriniais laikais : etnogenezė, materialinė kultūra ir mitologija* [The Balts in Prehistory: Ethnogenesis, Material Culture and Mythology] (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1985).

<sup>477</sup> Marija Gimbutas, “Senujų europiečių raštas,” *Mokslas ir gyvenimas*, 1985.

<sup>478</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, “Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler,” 85–87.

<sup>479</sup> Marler, “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend”; Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda”; Adomas Butrimas, “Tyrinėtoja” [The explorer], in *Marija Gimbutienė ... iš laiškų ir prisiminimų*, ed. Kornelija Jankauskaitė and Živilė Gimbutaitė (Vilnius: Žaltvykslė, 2005), 331–41.

and supported the interest in the prehistoric Baltic culture, beliefs and rituals.<sup>480</sup> Similarly, the cultural critic Nerija Putinaitė claims that the Soviet authorities saw the interest in neo-paganism and the particular fascination with the Lithuanian folk culture as politically non-threatening and even essentially compatible with the Soviet ideology.<sup>481</sup> These reasons might have contributed to the relative acceptance of Gimbutas' works in Soviet Lithuania.

## **2.10 Goddess theory, spiritual feminism, and independent Lithuania**

In 1981, after returning from her trip to the Soviet Union, Gimbutas soon learned that she had lymphoma – a form of cancer that affects the body's immune system. Despite her disease, Gimbutas continued lecturing at the UCLA,<sup>482</sup> and publishing broadly, mainly on the topic of the feminine representations in archaeology and the Old European hypothesis,<sup>483</sup> but stopped organizing or participating in excavations. After retiring from the UCLA in 1988,<sup>484</sup> and while

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<sup>480</sup> Odeta Rudling, "The Cult of the Balts: Mythological Impulses and Neo-Pagan Practices in the Touristic Clubs of the Lithuanian SSR of the 1960s and 1970s," *Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 6, no. 1 (2017): 90–92.

<sup>481</sup> Nerija Putinaitė, *Šiaurės Atėnų tremtiniai, arba Lietuviškosios tapatybės paieškos ir Europos vizijos XX a.* [The deportees of Northern Athens: a search for Lithuanian identity and European visions in the XX century] (Vilnius: Aidai, 2004). Nerija Putinaitė developed her criticism of the Soviet folklore movement as a part of her analysis of the role of Jonas Basanavičius, the so called Lithuanian Pater Patriae, in the Lithuanian historical narrative. There she accused Basanavičius for propagating apolitical, idealistic and utopian ideas about the Golden Age of pagan Lithuania. She saw Marija Gimbutas as influenced by Basanavičius' ideas. Putinaitė, 29-30. It has to be kept in mind however, that Putinaitė's criticism towards neo-paganism is formulated from an intellectual perspective, which sees neo-paganism as antithetical to Christian culture and politically detrimental to Lithuania.

<sup>482</sup> "Marija Gimbutas Notes for the Courses Delivered at the UCLA: Indo-European Studies 132, 1969 / 1982 Spring; European Archaeology, the Bronze Age, 1983 Winter; Baltic and Slavic Mythology, 1979 Winter / 1982 Fall; Foklore 1980 Fall," 1983, F154-708, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>483</sup> Gimbutas, "The 'Monstrous Venus' of Prehistory of Goddess Creatrix"; Marija Gimbutas, "Primary and Secondary Homeland of the Indo-Europeans: Comments on Gamkrelidze-Ivanov Articles," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (Spring-Summer 1985): 185–202; Marija Gimbutas, "Pre-Indo-European Goddesses in Baltic Mythology," *Mankind Quarterly* 26, no. 1–2 (Fall-Winter 1985): 19–25; Marija Gimbutas, "The Earth Fertility of Old Europe," *Dialogues d'histoire Ancienne* 13, no. 1 (1987): 11–69; Marija Gimbutas, "Implications of The Chalice and the Blade for the Relation of Archaeology to Social Science," *World Futures* 25, no. 3–4 (1988): 289–95; Marija Gimbutas, "The Indo-Europeanization of Europe: The Intrusion of Steppe Pastoralists from South Russia and the Transformation of Old Europe," *Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York* 44, no. 2 (1993): 205–22.

<sup>484</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda."

struggling with health issues, Gimbutas focused her energy on publishing her last two books: *The Language of the Goddess*<sup>485</sup> and *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*.<sup>486</sup> Being less restricted by the requirements of her discipline, or career plans, Gimbutas wrote the books for broader than the specialist audience, addressing the society at large and making strong ideological claims. In these books Gimbutas discussed the spiritual and political implications of reimagining the prehistory of Western civilization. *The Language* systematized in particular the symbolism (proto-script) related to Goddess worship and described religious beliefs as they could be reconstructed with the help of folklore and mythology. *The Civilization* was mainly focused on the social developments and the spiritual system of the Neolithic Europe and the transformation in the Bronze Age, again dedicating a lot of space to prehistoric Goddess-oriented spirituality. The books were received critically if not outright dismissively by academic archaeologists, blaming Gimbutas for the lack of scientific rigor and her strongly political or even “prophetic” language.<sup>487</sup> The reception of Gimbutas’ work in academic circles in the 1980s and the 1990s, in particular the ambivalent reception of Gimbutas’ theory of the Old European civilization by feminist archaeologists will be at the core of my analysis in Chapter 3.

In the late 1980ies and early 1990ies Gimbutas established a close relationship with many people active in the feminist spirituality movement: ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak, writer and psychotherapist Patricia Reis, Buddhist teacher Joan Iten Sutherland (editor of Gimbutas *The Language of the Goddess*),<sup>488</sup> Joan Marler (editor of *The Civilization of the Goddess*, Gimbutas

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<sup>485</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989.

<sup>486</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*.

<sup>487</sup> Brian Fagan, “A Sexist View of Prehistory,” *Archaeology* 45, no. 2 (March-April) (1992): 14–15, 18, 66; Brian Hayden, “An Archaeological Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm,” *Pomegranate* 13, no. 6 (1998): 35–46.

<sup>488</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989.

personal assistant and biographer),<sup>489</sup> mythologist Miriam Robbins Dexter (editor of the posthumously published *The Living Goddess*)<sup>490</sup> and others. Spretnak described the relationship between the feminist spirituality movement and Gimbutas in the following way: “we visited her, held gatherings to wish her well, expressed our gratitude, and offered other acts of friendship,”<sup>491</sup> making it clear that Gimbutas was not a member of any of the Goddess worshipers groups, but rather an honorable guest and an iconic figure. Her work was a big inspiration for the movement, and Gimbutas, in the last decade of her life, became somewhat of a celebrity in the feminist, spiritual, environmentalist circles and beyond. Gimbutas was invited to give talks at the Goddess worshippers meetings,<sup>492</sup> appeared on radio and TV shows,<sup>493</sup> in dozens of articles of the counter-cultural publications,<sup>494</sup> and mainstream newspapers, such as Los Angeles Times, New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, etc.<sup>495</sup> In 1991, the presentation of her last book *The Civilization of the Goddess* was organized at a church in Santa Monica, and Gimbutas received standing ovations after a ceremony reminding more of a religious ritual than of a usual presentation of an academic book.<sup>496</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s Gimbutas established correspondence with the mythologist Joseph Campbell and the cultural historian Riane Eisler, both influential authors in countercultural circles.<sup>497</sup> The special role that was assigned to Gimbutas by the feminist

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<sup>489</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*.

<sup>490</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>491</sup> Charlene Spretnak, “Anatomy of a Backlash: Concerning the Work of Marija Gimbutas,” *The Journal of Archaeological Mythology* 7 (2011): 1–27.

<sup>492</sup> Joan Marler, *Marija Gimbutas. Women and the Goddess Weekend, Interface, Appreciations, Ritual, Sudbury*. (Sudbury, Mass, 1992), Audio Cassette, Marija Gimbutas Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.

<sup>493</sup> Starr Goode, *The Goddess in Art: An Interview with Marija Gimbutas*, VHS video (Santa Monica, CA, 1983).

<sup>494</sup> More precisely such publications as *ReVision*, *East-West*, *Snake Power*, feminist magazine *Ms*.

<sup>495</sup> “Various Press Clippings,” 1994, Marija Gimbutas Collection, OPUS Archives and Research Center.

<sup>496</sup> Ragana, *Voice of the Goddess: Marija Gimbutas*.

<sup>497</sup> Joseph Campbell, “Foreword,” in *The Language of the Goddess*, by Marija Gimbutas (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), xiii–xv.



spirituality movement, and the influence of her work in these circles, as well as their influence on her thinking are analyzed in Chapter 4.

At the same time on the other side of the “Iron Curtain”, the end of the 1980ies and the beginning of the 1990s was marked by a major economic and political transformation and social unrest. This resulted in the restoration of the national independence of Lithuania, among other countries in Eastern Europe, in Spring 1990.<sup>498</sup> While Gimbutas was well-known in the intelligentsia circles already in Soviet Lithuania, the liberalization of the cultural sphere with *perestroika* since roughly 1987 created new and broader possibilities for her to visit Lithuania and communicate her ideas in the society undergoing a massive ideological transformation. Gimbutas stayed in close contact with many people in Lithuania (starting with the Soviet period already) and was well informed about the political events and social developments of the transformation period. She had an especially strong bond with some of her relatives who lived in Vilnius and Kaunas, like her cousin Meilė Lukšienė,<sup>499</sup> and brother Vytautas Alseika,<sup>500</sup> and corresponded with them frequently. From the letters it is clear that Gimbutas supported many of her family members financially, by sending food, medicine and clothes, especially during the economic blockade by Russia in 1990. In personal communication she expressed strong anti-Soviet sentiments and a desire for the restoration of national independence.

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<sup>498</sup> Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania Awakening* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>499</sup> Meilė Lukšienė was a dissident during the Soviet period, removed from a university position due to her political views. In the post-socialist period she was involved with the educational reform. Lukšienė and Gimbutas kept closely in touch, as documented in “Meilė Lukšienė to Marija Gimbutas,” 1978-1993, F154-388, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>500</sup> “Marija Gimbutas to Vytautas Alseika,” 1992-1993, F154-540, Marija Gimbutas’ Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

Gimbutas also held a strong bond with Lithuanian scholars, such as her long-time friend, the prominent archaeologist Rimutė Rimantienė,<sup>501</sup> the anthropologist Gintautas Česnys,<sup>502</sup> and others. Gimbutas often used her academic status and contacts to facilitate visits abroad for Lithuanian scholars, including, for example, the visit of Vytautas Landsbergis to the United States in the 1980s.<sup>503</sup> Gimbutas became the honorary member of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in 1990,<sup>504</sup> and was awarded the honorary doctorate from the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas in 1993.<sup>505</sup> In 1994, already after Gimbutas' death, Vilnius University held a conference *The Indo-Europeanization of Northern Europe. In memoriam Marija Gimbutas*.<sup>506</sup>

Besides from her academic fame and personal connections, in post-socialist period Gimbutas acquired somewhat of a celebrity status in Lithuania. She had a few television appearances,<sup>507</sup> and was featured in popular magazines and newspapers.<sup>508</sup> An interview with Gimbutas, published in *Lietuvos rytas* (Lithuanian morning), one of the biggest Lithuanian dailies, started with the journalist asking if Gimbutas feels like “the most famous Lithuanian woman in the world”.<sup>509</sup> The academic appreciation was in fact even slightly behind the popular fame of Gimbutas in post-

<sup>501</sup> “Rimutė Rimantienė to Marija Gimbutas,” 1978-1993, F154-436, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>502</sup> “Gintautas Česnys to Marija Gimbutas,” 1982-1994, F154-282, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>503</sup> “Vytautas Landsbergis to Marija Gimbutas,” 1981 December 12, F154-380, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library. He was to become the first *de facto* head of state of the independent Lithuania in 1990.

<sup>504</sup> “Juras Požėla to Marija Gimbutas,” 1991 January 7, F154-428, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>505</sup> Gimbutienė, “The Speech at Vytautas Magnus University.”

<sup>506</sup> Vilniaus Universitetas, *The Indo-Europeanization of Northern Europe: International Conference, Vilnius, Lithuania, September 1-7, Vilnius : In Memoriam Marija Gimbutas*. (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 1994).

<sup>507</sup> Saja, “Geresnio Gyvenimo Ilgesys. M. Gimbutienė. [Longing for better Life. Marija Gimbutas]”; Tarvydas, “Marija Alseikaitė - Gimbutienė. Lietuvos kronika.”

<sup>508</sup> Jonušaitė, “Marija Gimbutienė: mokslininkė, kurios darbus cituoja visas pasaulis” [Marija Gimbutas: a scientist quoted worldwide]; Lukšaitė and Kudabienė, “Tiltas tarp dviejų kultūrų” [The bridge between the two cultures].

<sup>509</sup> Jonušaitė, “Marija Gimbutienė: mokslininkė, kurios darbus cituoja visas pasaulis” [Marija Gimbutas: a scientist quoted worldwide].

socialist Lithuania. It was only in 1996, already after her death, that the Lithuanian version of Gimbutas' last books on Old Europe and the Goddess civilization, called *Senoji Europa* (Old Europa) was published.<sup>510</sup> Some of her earlier books were also published in Lithuanian translation,<sup>511</sup> as well as articles, that appeared in cultural journals.<sup>512</sup> While during the Soviet times Gimbutas' ideas were tolerated, in the post-1990 period they found a fertile soil to flourish and made Gimbutas into a national icon. In Chapter 5 I examine what made her work and persona so appealing for the post-socialist Lithuanian audience, including both the nationalist mainstream and Lithuanian feminists.

Marija Gimbutas died in 1994 February 2, at the UCLA medical center from the complications of Hodgkin's disease, a type of lymphoma. Her body was cremated and the ashes were transported to Lithuania.<sup>513</sup> In Lithuania, her ashes were buried at the Petrašiūnai cemetery in an official ceremony, with the presence of high political figures, including the president Algirdas Brazauskas.<sup>514</sup> The funeral was stylized according to the Lithuanian (neo)pagan spiritual aesthetic (her ashes were held in an owl-shaped urn, for example) and rituals. The ceremony took place both in Vilnius and Kaunas, was massively attended and televised.<sup>515</sup> Gimbutas papers from her office at the UCLA were eventually housed at the OPUS Archives and Research Center, Pacifica

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<sup>510</sup> Gimbutienė, *Senoji Europa [The Old Europe]*.

<sup>511</sup> Gimbutienė, *Senovinė simbolika lietuvių liaudies mene* [The ancient symbolism in Lithuanian folk art]; Marija Gimbutienė, *Senovės lietuvių deivės ir dievai* [The ancient Lithuanian gods and goddesses] (Vilnius: Lietuvių rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2002).

<sup>512</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, "Senosios Europos mitiniai įvaizdžiai" [Mythic images of Old Europe], *Krantai* 10 (1990); Marija Gimbutienė, "Pirešistorės 'Monstriškoji Venera', arba Deivė Pramotė" [Prehistoric 'Monstrous Venus', or the Goddess Grandmother], ed. Algirdas Julius Greimas, *Baltos Lankos: Tekstai Ir Interpretacijos* 8 (1997): 68–88.

<sup>513</sup> "Marijos Gimbutienės Palaikų Disponavimo Dokumentai" [The Documents on the Transportation of Marija Gimbutas' Remains], April 8, 1994, F154-769, Marija Gimbutas' Collection, The Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library.

<sup>514</sup> Marler, "The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas," 47.

<sup>515</sup> Algirdas Tarvydas, "Atsisveikinimas su Marija Gimbutiene" [Farewell to Marija Gimbutas], a documentary video, 19.44, from Lietuvos kronika. Lietuvos Kino Studija, 1994. Accessed August 28, 2019, <http://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/30095#wowzaplaystart=0&wowzaplayduration=580000>.

Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, California, dedicated to research and teaching in psychology, mythology and other humanities programs. Her personal library is currently held there together with the library of Joseph Campbell. According to Ernestine Elster, this choice about the location of Gimbutas' archive was made both due to the bureaucratic problems with UCLA, as well as Gimbutas' closeness, in the last years of her life, to the feminist spirituality circles.<sup>516</sup> A part of her papers were preserved at the Manuscript Section of Vilnius University Library.

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<sup>516</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 112.

## Chapter 3. New Archaeology, Old Europe, and the Feminist Science

### Debates: Marija Gimbutas “Pre-Her-Story” in Academia

Marija Gimbutas made an impressive scholarly career and became known for her research also beyond the archaeological and scholarly circles. However, her scientific authority has been subject to much debate both within and outside of academia, especially in the last decades of her life. Gimbutas’ work on the civilization of Old Europe, starting with her monograph *The Gods and Goddesses* in 1974, was puzzling, to say the least, to many of her colleagues, as it did not seem to follow the established norms of the discipline. Neither did her later work fit within the postmodern and feminist approaches, as they entered the discipline in the 1980s and the 1990s. In *The Gods and Goddesses* and her later works, Gimbutas told a coherent story about the social and spiritual structure of the prehistoric Old European civilization, as matristic, peaceful and egalitarian, which questioned the pervasive androcentric narratives of (pre)history. Gimbutas was criticized by other archaeologists for promoting a view of prehistory based on ideology and fantasy, advocating ideas that contradict the “common sense” and/or lacking scholarly rigor in her analysis. In fact, in the late 1980s and the 1990s there appeared so much criticism of her work that some of Gimbutas’ advocates from the feminist spirituality movement argued that there has been an “orchestrated” attempt to destroy her academic reputation.<sup>517</sup> Gimbutas’ ideas faced such a strong backlash from the academic establishment, argued the feminist theologian Carol P. Christ in 1996, because they posed a dangerous threat to the underlying logic of the “patriarchal Western hegemony”.<sup>518</sup> The

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<sup>517</sup> Spretnak, “Anatomy of a Backlash,” 29.

<sup>518</sup> Christ, “A Different World,” 56.

feminist spirituality movement largely embraced an opinion that Gimbutas was “demeaned and dismissed” from mainstream archaeology due to her ideological affiliation with feminism.<sup>519</sup>

According to Charlene Spretnak<sup>520</sup>, writer and eco-feminist, the allegedly orchestrated backlash against Gimbutas was organized by the archaeologist Lord Colin Renfrew, who was a close colleague and collaborator of Gimbutas’ in the 1970s and the 1980s. Renfrew, argued Spretnak, was interested in dismissing Gimbutas’ work, because of his wish to promote his own theory of Proto-Indo-European migration to Europe from Anatolia.<sup>521</sup> However, Renfrew, who has indeed been one of the main scholarly opponents of Gimbutas’ Kurgan hypothesis<sup>522</sup> and a critic of her Goddess hypothesis<sup>523</sup> recently gave a public lecture aiming to redeem Gimbutas’ academic authority. In this lecture Renfrew argued that the most current DNA research<sup>524</sup> in fact supports Gimbutas’ Kurgan hypothesis and contradicts his own theory of the Anatolian ancestry of the Indo-Europeans. According to Renfrew, these newest findings made Gimbutas reappear on the archaeological landscape as a “triumphant” figure, at least with regard to her Kurgan hypothesis.<sup>525</sup> Yet in the 2017 lecture and in other instances Renfrew’ approach to Gimbutas’ hypothesis of Old

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<sup>519</sup> Spretnak, “Anatomy of a Backlash,” 1.

<sup>520</sup> Spretnak wrote to article on the “backlash” against Gimbutas. See Charlene Spretnak, “Beyond the Backlash: An Appreciation of the Work of Marija Gimbutas,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12, no. 2 (1996): 91–98; Spretnak, “Anatomy of a Backlash.”

<sup>521</sup> Spretnak, “Anatomy of a Backlash,” 30–31.

<sup>522</sup> Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>523</sup> Donna Read and Starhawk, “Behind the Screen Interview with Colin Renfrew”. YouTube video. 29.03. From *Behind the Screen: The Uncut Interviews*. Belili Productions, 1999. Posted by “pagaian”, March 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h-cLClI8Ko>

<sup>524</sup> Using DNA from the bones of the ancient inhabitants of Europe, this research proposed that the origin of Indo-European languages could have most likely been located in the steppe region of present day Russia, thus supporting Gimbutas’ proposed Kurgan hypothesis. See Wolfgang Haak et al., “Massive Migration from the Steppe Was a Source for Indo-European Languages in Europe,” *Nature* 522 (June 11, 2015): 207–11.

<sup>525</sup> Colin Renfrew, *Marija Rediviva: DNA and Indo-European Origins (Marija Gimbutas Memorial Lecture)* (University of Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2017). The fact that Renfrew chose to use only the first name “Marija”, instead of “Marija Gimbutas” in the title of his lecture, speaks volumes about the politics of gender in academia.

Europe remained sceptical, although he acknowledged that Gimbutas' work "helped foster the current debate [in archaeology – R.N.] on gender roles".<sup>526</sup> After a few decades of radically conflicting evaluations of Gimbutas' role in the development of archaeology, currently her image still ranges from a "mythic figure"<sup>527</sup>, to someone whose work is "now criticized"<sup>528</sup>, to scant mention.<sup>529</sup>

Although the archaeological "mainstream" of the 1970s and the 1980s indeed met Gimbutas' work on matrilineal Old Europe with scepticism, it was the developing gender and feminist approaches in archaeology, that have provided the most elaborate critique of Gimbutas' work. In the 1980s and in particular the 1990s, the decades of increasing self-reflexivity about the impact of sociopolitical factors in the production of archaeological knowledge, Gimbutas was cast, by some feminist archaeologists, as an example of ideologized research. Her work became a sort of a "boundary marker", beyond which science became not science anymore, but a subjective fantasy, an utopian vision. In this chapter, I build on the insights from the feminist science studies concept of "persona",<sup>530</sup> in order to investigate how Gimbutas initially built and later lost her scholarly reputation. The notion of "scientific persona" in particular allows to theorize the self-presentation of a scholar as a "nodal point between the idiosyncratic particularity of the individual life and the social institution of science".<sup>531</sup> Employing this concept allows to shed light on the ways that Gimbutas negotiated the gendered social and political context of her time, as well as the constraints of the discipline of archaeology. It also allows to analyze the shapes that the reception

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<sup>526</sup> Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology Essentials: Theories, Methods, Practice*, 3rd edition (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 32.

<sup>527</sup> Milisauskas, "Marija Gimbutas," 800.

<sup>528</sup> Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology Essentials: Theories, Methods, Practice*, 172.

<sup>529</sup> Gimbutas is not mentioned at all in, for example, Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*.

<sup>530</sup> Bosch, "Persona and the Performance of Identity."

<sup>531</sup> Wesseling, "Judith Rich Harris: The Miss Marple of Developmental Psychology Elisabeth Wesseling."

of Gimbutas took within academia, as a result of a complex interconnection of scholarly and political interests.

In this chapter I propose that feminist archaeologists, struggling to make gender a legitimate topic of interest within the discipline of archaeology, eagerly distanced from Gimbutas' work, which represented, for them, the bias of old-fashioned and "essentialist" feminism. This resulted in the double marginalization of Gimbutas, both from the mainstream and from feminist science historiographies. This chapter suggests to revise such approach to Gimbutas, by considering her work as "remedial feminist study",<sup>532</sup> or, as I propose to call it – a "pre-her-story". By this I mean that Gimbutas' hypothesis of Old Europe exposed and tackled the androcentrism of archaeology of her day, even if it did so by reversing the gendered binary in the understanding of prehistory, rather than "disposing" of it completely. Such approach, I argue, allows a properly historicized and reflexive reinterpretation of Gimbutas' input to the gender question in archaeology as well as the science question in feminism, without idealizing her work or her persona.

### ***3.1 New Archaeology meets Old Europe***

The rather crucial decades in Gimbutas' academic career were the 1950s and the 1960s, the decades when the processual archaeology (or the so called New Archaeology) became the dominant paradigm to the study of prehistory within the U.S. academy.<sup>533</sup> Gimbutas worked shoulder to shoulder with some prominent names of New Archaeology. One of the curators of the Peabody Museum, where Gimbutas worked for more than 13 years, for example, was Philip

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<sup>532</sup> Tringham, "Households with Faces: The Challenge of Gender in Prehistoric Architectural Remains," 115.

<sup>533</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*.



Phillips, one of the proponents of New Archaeology.<sup>534</sup> At the UCLA Gimbutas was colleagues with Lewis Binford – probably the most prominent pioneer of New Archaeology.<sup>535</sup> Finally, Gimbutas’ colleague and collaborator in the 1970s and the 1980s, Colin Renfrew was and is one of the best known British proponents of processual archaeology.<sup>536</sup> New Archaeology, as the name indicates, aimed at a radical break with the previously dominant Culture-Historical approach towards prehistory, which, they thought, only preoccupied itself with the establishment of chronologies and the description of past cultures. The invention of the radiocarbon dating technology in the late 1940ies and other technical aids to the study of unearthed materials made archaeologists increasingly confident in their ability not only to describe, but also to explain the cultural developments in the past. New Archaeology therefore turned towards scientific explanation of the archaeological record, based on the hypothetico-deductive method of analysis.<sup>537</sup> Archaeologists from then on aimed to discover general rules governing social processes, like sociologists or economists, and not simply describe the peculiarities of the past like historians did.<sup>538</sup> In short, archaeology had to become, in the opinion of processual archaeologists, a strictly scientific discipline.

According to the philosopher of science Alison Wylie, the turn to the rigorous adherence to scientific methods in archaeology was driven by the desire, first, to enhance the scientific credibility of the field, and second, to protect scholars from biased interpretation, in this way

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<sup>534</sup> Philip Phillips and Gordon R. Willey, *Method and Theory in American Archaeology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>535</sup> Lewis R. Binford, “Archaeology as Anthropology,” *American Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (1962): 217–25.

<sup>536</sup> “Correspondence between Marija Gimbutas and Colin Renfrew”; Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*.

<sup>537</sup> Colin Renfrew and Paul G. Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice*, 2nd ed (New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 36–37.

<sup>538</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 313.

achieving “genuine (i.e., objective) knowledge of the cultural past”.<sup>539</sup> This was especially important in the post-war era, since during the Second World War the reputation of archaeology was tainted due to its association with Nazi racist militarist goals.<sup>540</sup> The advocates of processualism stressed the self-reflexive qualities of New Archaeology which, they hoped, will help to produce a more sophisticated and holistic understanding of the past,<sup>541</sup> and arrive at a deeper understanding of the prehistoric social organization.<sup>542</sup> Critics however, pointed out that the emphasis in New Archaeology on the general laws and structures of human behavior and societal development can be retrospectively seen as a part of American scientific imperialism of the post-war era.<sup>543</sup> According to the historian of archaeological thought Bruce Trigger, processualists aimed to provide “objective, ethically neutral generalizations that were useful for the management of modern societies”, disregarding the importance of national cultures and histories, thus working in accordance with American ambitions of global domination.<sup>544</sup> Human behavior was best understood, processual archaeologists thought, as an adaptation to their changing natural environment, forced by necessity. Such an understanding fed in to the American post-war rationalism and positivism, minimizing the agency of prehistoric people and embracing the

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<sup>539</sup> Alison Wylie, “The Engendering of Archaeology Refiguring Feminist Science Studies,” *Osiris*, 2nd, 12, no. Women, Gender, and Science: New Directions (1997): 80.

<sup>540</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*; Arnold, “The Past as Propaganda: Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany.”

<sup>541</sup> Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology*, 39.

<sup>542</sup> Binford, “Archaeology as Anthropology.”

<sup>543</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, “Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist,” *Man*, New Series, 19, no. 3 (September 1984): 366.

<sup>544</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 407.

narrative of inevitable progress.<sup>545</sup> Processual archaeology largely dismissed the role of symbolism, spirituality or social norms and values.<sup>546</sup>

It is in this general atmosphere of New Archaeology, that Gimbutas was accepted by the academic community as a “fine researcher”<sup>547</sup> and made quite a remarkable career, as I have shown in Chapter 2, from an unpaid research assistant in Harvard to a university professor at UCLA. This was greatly facilitated by Gimbutas’ ability to adopt the positivist scientific methodology that was supposed to prevent any subjective interpretation on the side of an archaeologist. In her work Gimbutas was an enthusiastic promotor of the usage of the radiocarbon dating technique and dendrochronology, which supported her hypothesis of Old Europe.<sup>548</sup> She used “hard data”, extracted by the careful usage of scientific methods that enabled the establishment of prehistoric chronology.<sup>549</sup> Gimbutas was known for her careful descriptions of material evidence and synthesis of information about enormous amount of artifacts. She mastered many Eastern European languages,<sup>550</sup> which enabled her to access information unavailable for other U.S. researchers, and would often make a point about relying only on the primary sources. She became one of the first experts on Eastern European archaeology in the West after the Second World War,<sup>551</sup> and took up the topic of the origins of Indo-European speaking people, which, due to its association with Nazi

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<sup>545</sup> It was not until the late 1980ies and early 1990ies that the hegemony of the New Archaeology was shaken by post-processualism, inspired by postmodern ideas about the relativity of knowledge (see, for example Ian Hodder, *Reading the Past* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)), and feminism, with its exposure of androcentric bias (see for example Joan M. Gero, Joan and Margaret W. Conkey. *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991)).

<sup>546</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 443.

<sup>547</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 103.

<sup>548</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*, 13–15.

<sup>549</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 103.

<sup>550</sup> Different sources claim Gimbutas being able to use in her work “most Eastern and Western European languages” (see Marler, “Introduction.”), or “at least 20 to 25” languages (see Leslie, “The Goddess Theory. Controversial UCLA Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas Argues That the World Was at Peace When God Was a Woman.”).

<sup>551</sup> Renfrew, in Read and Starhawk, *Behind the Screen Interview with Colin Renfrew*.

archaeology, had been somewhat abandoned in archaeological circles.<sup>552</sup> Most of the appreciative collegial memoirs<sup>553</sup> about Gimbutas stressed her discipline and devotion to science, her synthesizing mind, vast education, knowledge of languages, etc., constructing an image of her, as Joan Marler put it, as a “Great Woman of Science”.<sup>554</sup>

It was, however, not only Gimbutas’ individual characteristics and talents that enabled her to climb to the position of authority of one of the most positivist and objectivist social sciences of the day. Gimbutas also established a successful “scientific persona”,<sup>555</sup> as I will elaborate later, that allowed her to navigate the hierarchical and androcentric discipline of archaeology while being a woman scientist. In a discipline still highly structured according to gender lines<sup>556</sup>, Gimbutas took up what was perceived as “unfeminine” endeavors: excavations and big theory making. The exclusion of women from excavations, as the feminist archaeologist Joan M. Gero noticed, has long been one of the invisible gendered divisions of labor in archaeology. Women archaeologists (or as Gero ironically calls this phenomenon, “women-at-home-archaeologists”) were expected to work indoors, in the museums or laboratories, sorting out the materials provided by excavations.<sup>557</sup> Excavations, on the other hand, were seen as masculine endeavors, because they were seen as requiring “active, exploratory, out-of-doors, dominant, managerial, and risk-taking work,” associated with male scholars.<sup>558</sup> Contrary to the expectations of the discipline, between 1967 and 1979 Gimbutas directed five major excavations in South East Europe.<sup>559</sup> Again untypically for

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<sup>552</sup> Renfrew, *Marija Rediviva: DNA and Indo-European Origins (Marija Gimbutas Memorial Lecture)*.

<sup>553</sup> Marler, “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend”; Kavolis, “Civilizacijos atradėja, darbo ir džiaugsmo žmogus [The Discoverer of a new civilization, the person of work and joy]”; Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda.”

<sup>554</sup> Marler, “Introduction.”

<sup>555</sup> Wesseling, “Judith Rich Harris”; Bosch, “Persona and the Performance of Identity.”

<sup>556</sup> Joan M. Gero, “Socio-Politics and the Woman-at-Home Ideology,” *American Antiquity* 50, no. 2 (1985): 342–50.

<sup>557</sup> Gero.

<sup>558</sup> Londa L. Schiebinger, *Has Feminism Changed Science?* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 141.

<sup>559</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda.”

female archaeologists of her time, Gimbutas focused in her research on the question of the origins of the European peoples – the question of ‘origins’ being prestigious in archaeology and facilitating the academic success.<sup>560</sup> Despite the institutionalized sexism in archaeology on the socio-political level and androcentrism on the epistemological level, she became accepted among the “old boys”<sup>561</sup> of this conservative discipline.

It was therefore unexpected to the scientific community, when in mid-seventies Gimbutas, already an established and respectful scholar, decided to break some of the unwritten and written rules of the discipline with her *The Gods and Goddesses* (1974), and later continued to further elaborate her women-centered hypothesis of European prehistory. The archaeologist Ernestine Elster, a student and colleague of Gimbutas, summarized, writing in 2007, the controversy that the publication of *The Gods and Goddesses*<sup>562</sup> created in the archaeological community in the following way:

Here was one of the leading, if not the leading scholar of prehistoric southeast Europe with enormous control over a voluminous, international database. It was known she had a great respect for the scientific community and systematically included palaeozoologists, palaeobotanists, geographers, lithic analysis, *etc* as specialists in her projects. She was not a ‘fringe’ thinker, but a fine researcher who was publishing her ideas on a prehistoric pantheon and its role in religion and symbolism (eg, Gimbutas 1973a; 1974c) an agenda with which prehistorians at that time were most reluctant to engage. Moreover, her vision of prehistory was expressed in a kind of storytelling. Even though it was about excavation, and she always used hard data (<sup>14</sup>C dates, palaeozoology, *etc*), the prehistoric world was presented in a powerful narrative, complete and unquestionable.<sup>563</sup>

As seen in the excerpt above, Gimbutas’ turn to the question of religious symbolism of pre-Indo-European cultures, and her narrative style of presenting archaeological material by way of

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<sup>560</sup> Margarita Díaz-Andreu and Marie Louise Stig Sorensen, *Excavating Women: A History of Women in European Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>561</sup> Schiebinger, *Has Feminism Changed Science?*, 9.

<sup>562</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*.

<sup>563</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 103–4.

“storytelling”, was all the more puzzling to her colleagues, because she was already accepted within the discipline as a reliable and rigorous scientist.

In many ways *Gods and Goddess*, and even more so, the following Gimbutas’ works on Old Europe, went beyond the accepted boundaries of science of her time. Although Gimbutas, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, achieved fame outside of academia,<sup>564</sup> the hypothesis of Old Europe was first met with silence within archaeology, and later became a target of criticism, as I show later in this chapter. Also researchers in other disciplines, such as linguistics and comparative religions, which have in particular appreciated Gimbutas’ earlier work on Indo-Europeans,<sup>565</sup> were rather skeptical of her work on Old Europe.<sup>566</sup> Although Gimbutas was unconventional in both the choice of her research object and her rhetorical style, what might have been the most challenging for the discipline was possibly the fact, that starting with *The Gods and Goddesses* Gimbutas interpreted prehistorical artifacts in an explicitly gendered and women-centered way. The sudden “feminist” shift in her work also affected her “scientific persona” as I will show later on, attracting attention to her gender and her life experiences, and further exposing her to *ad hominem* critiques.

### **3.2 Gender in Gimbutas’ work**

The gendered aspects of Gimbutas’ archaeological work always went hand in hand with the importance she placed on explaining the prehistoric spirituality and religion. Already in Gimbutas’ early English-language archaeological monographs one can notice her interest in the gendered

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<sup>564</sup> Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*; Jennie Klein, “Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s,” *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 575–602.

<sup>565</sup> Skomal and Polomé, *Proto-Indo-European*.

<sup>566</sup> Leslie, “The Goddess Theory. Controversial UCLA Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas Argues That the World Was at Peace When God Was a Woman.”

dynamics of the prehistoric societies.<sup>567</sup> In her book *The Bronze Age Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe* (1965) Gimbutas elaborated her famous Kurgan hypothesis<sup>568</sup> which postulated that the Proto-Indo-European speakers, or Kurgans, arrived to Europe from the Eurasiatic steppe around 2300-2200 B.C..<sup>569</sup> Among other things, she repeatedly noted the gender oppression and social hierarchy characteristic to Kurgan cultures. Gimbutas emphasized for example that the grave goods suggested the ritual sacrifice of a woman after the death of her husband.<sup>570</sup> In another early book *The Balts* Gimbutas identified the custom of the immolation of the widow with masculine domination, and noted the persistence of this tradition among various cultures into modern times.<sup>571</sup> Already in these early works Gimbutas hinted at the existence of a different, more gender egalitarian, indigenous European culture (what she later called the Old Europe), which was, in her view, eradicated and partially assimilated by the Kurgan invaders.<sup>572</sup> In another article from 1960 Gimbutas noted the prominence of female symbolism in the Neolithic European art, possibly indicating the Goddess cult. She further hypothesized that “the importance of a female deity and portrayals of woman in art allow the assumption that women had a significant role in religion and in society”.<sup>573</sup> Gimbutas’ addressed the question of gender in prehistory in close relation to spirituality, assuming a correlation between the prominence of women-centered religious

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<sup>567</sup> Gimbutas, *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe Part 1*; Gimbutas, *The Balts.*; Gimbutas, *The Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*.

<sup>568</sup> Kurgan hypothesis was almost universally accepted by archaeologists until at least the 1980s (Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda”). In the 1987, Gimbutas’ colleague Colin Renfrew proposed an alternative solution to the problem of the Indo-European origins, see Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language.*, suggesting that Anatolia was the homeland of PIE speakers. However, recently, in 2017, Renfrew gave a lecture at the University of Chicago, where he acknowledged that the most current DNA research supports Gimbutas’ Kurgan hypothesis and largely contradicts his own Anatolian hypothesis. Renfrew, *Marija Rediviva: DNA and Indo-European Origins (Marija Gimbutas Memorial Lecture)*..

<sup>569</sup> Gimbutas, *The Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*, 21.

<sup>570</sup> Gimbutas, *The Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*, 264–65, 285, 545, 617.

<sup>571</sup> Gimbutas, *The Balts.*, 42.

<sup>572</sup> Gimbutas, *The Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*, 23.

<sup>573</sup> Gimbutas, “Culture Change in Europe at the Start of the Second Millennium B.C.,” 542.

symbolism (which she thought she saw in the shapes and figures represented on the archaeological artifacts) and the importance of females in prehistoric societies.

While her interest in gender and spirituality is evident already in her earlier works, the book *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000 to 3500 BC. Myths, Legends and Cult* marked a break in Gimbutas' writing, with the Goddess-centered prehistoric spirituality becoming central to her analysis.<sup>574</sup> In *The Gods and Goddesses* Gimbutas ventured further back into prehistory, leaving behind the Bronze Age, her area of expertise thus far, and presented a careful and detailed gendered reading of the archaeological artifacts from the Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites in South East Europe. In *The Gods and Goddesses* she explicitly formulated her hypothesis of Old Europe, which, to put it in a nutshell, proposed, that before the arrival of Kurgans with their hierarchical social system around 3500 BC., Europe enjoyed the flourishing of a peaceful, egalitarian and women-centered civilization – what she called Old Europe.<sup>575</sup> Starting from the observation that the female Goddess symbolism dominates the early figurine art, she placed this symbolism at the center of her analysis of prehistoric religion and social structure. In total in *The Gods and Goddesses* she analyzed around 30 000 artifacts from 3000 sites of Neolithic-Chalcolithic southeast Europe, reading the majority of these artifacts as representing some elements of the Goddess-oriented spirituality.<sup>576</sup> Wishing to signal the prominence of woman-oriented spirituality in Old Europe, Gimbutas initially wanted to publish her book as *The Goddesses and Gods*, however, the publisher – University of California Press – apparently opposed her suggestion.<sup>577</sup> In 1982 the book was republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images*.<sup>578</sup> indicating not only the

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<sup>574</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*.

<sup>575</sup> Gimbutas, 17.

<sup>576</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*.

<sup>577</sup> Renfrew, Read and Starhawk, *Behind the Screen Interview with Colin Renfrew*.

<sup>578</sup> Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.*



updated chronology, which narrowed the period of the existence of the Old European civilization, but also the changing gender politics in academia, which allowed to put “Goddesses” first.

### 3.2.1 The reinterpretation of the prehistoric “Venus”

In *The Gods and Goddesses* Gimbutas proposed that the civilization of Old Europe was Goddess-worshiping and women-centered and she actively countered the scholarly assumptions about the prehistoric Europe being “primitive”.<sup>579</sup> Gimbutas argued that Old Europe had a cosmology which was radically different from the modern worldview. Therefore, she said, the surviving Old European artifacts deserved an interpretation which would not be based on modern prejudices. Most importantly, she argued against interpreting the early figurine art as a result of the lack of technical ability, or a “barbaric” lack of aesthetic judgement. The figurines had to be seen instead as “abstract symbolic conceptual art”, a product of the spiritual tradition of these people.<sup>580</sup> Gimbutas took upon herself the task to systematically reinterpret the female figurines – the so called “Venuses” – which constituted the majority of artifacts from the Neolithic-Chalcolithic, as well as Paleolithic sites, but have so far been accorded only sporadic scholarly interest. Habitual male-centered interpretations of the so called “steatopygous”<sup>581</sup> figurines depicted them as representations of prehistoric obese female bodies. This led to the dismissal of them either as “ugly” and primitive, or as an erotic object for the satisfaction of the prehistoric male. Countering such androcentric interpretations, Gimbutas argued that these images were not merely naturalistic, but were universal and symbolic, fusing abstract representations of human, bird and the

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<sup>579</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*, 38.

<sup>580</sup> Gimbutas, 37.

<sup>581</sup> *Steatopygia* is defined by the Meriam-Webster dictionary as “an excessive development of fat on the buttocks that occurs chiefly among women of some African peoples and especially the Khoisan”. A good background for understanding the development of such terms in the context of the XIX century scientific racism is contemporary research on the life of Sarah Baartman, the so called “Huttentot Venus”, see for example Clifton C. Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

cosmogenic egg in one figure, representing the Great Goddess in one of her many manifestations.<sup>582</sup> Those figurines did not reflect the androcentric modern worldview, she wrote, but a matristic worldview of Old Europe, hence they had to be interpreted accordingly.

Gimbutas' interpretation, however, was counter-intuitive in the broader context of acceptable scholarly discourse about prehistory. A revealing example is an article – the opening piece of the first issue of the journal *Art History*, published in 1978 – by historians Desmond Collins and John Onians.<sup>583</sup> The article discussed the earliest human art, that is the female figurines and cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic (33.000-32.000 b.c.). According to them, the prominence of certain female bodily areas (breasts, buttocks, vulvas, bellies) in this earliest human art was due to the erotic function that these figurines served for the prehistoric male. As Collins and Onians meticulously laid out in their analysis, it was the female body parts that would be the most important for the male tactile experience during the “preliminary phases of love-making”,<sup>584</sup> that deserved the greatest attention of the prehistoric artist and were carved or engraved in such a manner that touching them would remind of “the swelling curves of a real woman”<sup>585</sup> or “nice rounded pair of buttocks”<sup>586</sup>. Their presumption that the prehistoric artist was male was based on a hetero-sexist tautology, which postulated that since “love-making” must have been on the mind of someone who made these female-looking figurines, hence, it must have been a male. Articles like the one by Onians and Collins were far from aberrations – they rather illustrated the “male

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<sup>582</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*, 106–7.

<sup>583</sup> “The Origins of Art,” *Art History* 1 (1978): 1–25. The margins of Gimbutas' private copy of the article by Collins and Onians, held at the OPUS archives, shows the silent debate that she had with the authors of the article, as the margins were filled with penciled question marks and notes such as “nonsense” and “man again”. The article did not refer to Gimbutas' work, published 4 years earlier.

<sup>584</sup> Collins and Onians, 12.

<sup>585</sup> Collins and Onians, 14.

<sup>586</sup> Collins and Onians, 15.

gaze” that permeated the scholarly understanding of prehistory and that came under systematic scrutiny by feminist archaeologists in the 1990s.<sup>587</sup>

Before the feminists made more noticeable inroads to archaeology, Gimbutas explicitly answered to the eroticized and belittling interpretations of the female body shaped figurines. For example, her article “The “Monstrous Venus” of Prehistory of Goddess Creatrix” was dedicated to the problem of the archaeological interpretation of prehistoric figurines.<sup>588</sup> In the article she argued for interpreting the continuous repetition (across the period of around 25.000 years) of the representation of certain female body parts (vulvas, breasts, buttocks, pregnant belly) as signifying the symbolic importance of these body parts for the spiritual beliefs of the prehistoric people. The symbolic significance of vulva, also connected with an image of a seed or a grain, Gimbutas wrote, was continuous across Europe for around 30.000 years, and represented the regeneration of nature as a whole. The female body symbolism in this ancient human art, Gimbutas argued, had to be seen as “philosophical, rather than sexual or pornographic”.<sup>589</sup> In her last book, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, Gimbutas continued the polemic with the earlier interpretations of the prehistoric “Venuses”, and wrote:

For the most part, these images have been viewed through the lens of 20<sup>th</sup> century bias. One explanation of the “beginning of art” is that manual love play – the touching of vulvas, buttocks, and breasts – stimulated art creations some 30,000 years ago. To conclude that these Paleolithic symbols were objects created for the erotic stimulation of males completely ignores their religious and social context.<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Margaret W. Conkey, “Has Feminism Changed Archaeology?,” *Signs* 28, no. 3 (2003): 867–80.

<sup>588</sup> Gimbutas, “The ‘Monstrous Venus’ of Prehistory of Goddess Creatrix.”

<sup>589</sup> Gimbutas, 9.

<sup>590</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 223.

Gimbutas, as seen above, argued for analyzing the prehistoric figurines through the lens of the cultural system which produced them – the female-centered culture of Old Europe, as she understood it – and not from the contemporary patriarchal lens.

Although in *The Gods and Goddesses* Gimbutas did not yet engage in an explicit polemic with the male-centered interpretations of the prehistoric “Venuses”, in this work she already presented a radically alternative, women-centered reading of these ubiquitous artifacts. She continued elaborating her theory of the Goddess-centered Old Europe up until her last works in the early 1990s. Countering the archaeological mainstream of her time (before feminist and postmodern criticisms), Gimbutas’ did not assume that the figurines were made by men or for men’s purposes and desires. Rather, in her work Gimbutas argued that women and femininity were central both in the prehistoric artistic creation and the religious and social structure. Instead of seeing the exaggerated bodily areas, represented on the Neolithic figurines, as eroticized or ugly, she interpreted them as symbols of feminine power. This power, according to Gimbutas, was not only connected with women’s ability to give birth, but rather, the female Goddess of Old Europe was the “supreme Creator” in a more general sense, creating all life and nature out of her omnipotence.<sup>591</sup> In creating such a picture of prehistory, Gimbutas certainly mirrored similar pioneering developments in the radical feminist circles in the United States, that challenged the androcentrism of the Western religious, scholarly and philosophical mainstream,<sup>592</sup> something I elaborate upon in Chapter 4.

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<sup>591</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*, 196.

<sup>592</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*; Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism : Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974); Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: A Harvest / HBJ book, 1976).

### 3.2.2 Challenging the hierarchies

Gimbutas, starting with her *Gods and Goddess* (1974) explicitly targeted some of the most pervasive assumptions and biases about the hierarchies of value, inherent in the Western science – hierarchies that contrasted masculinity with femininity, progressive with primitive, beautiful with ugly, etc. While Gimbutas argued that the spirituality of Old Europe was not gender-polarized, in a sense that female or male principles were not subordinate to one another, in fact she inverted the modern Western scholarly assumptions about masculinity as “active” and femininity as “passive”.<sup>593</sup> Gimbutas attributed the “creative and active” characteristics to the female goddesses of the Old European pantheon, and argued that male gods were supplementary, that they „strengthened“ the female goddess:

The male divinity in the shape of a young man or a male animal appears to affirm and strengthen the forces of the creative and active female. Neither is subordinate to the other by complementing one another, their power is doubled.<sup>594</sup>

In this interpretation she not only implicitly questioned the male bias of the tradition of modern Western science, but also reversed the traditional Judeo-Christian patriarchal religious understanding of gender “complementarity”, where female divine is interpreted as being in service to the male divine.<sup>595</sup> As the feminist theologian Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has argued, “traditional academic scholarship has identified humanness with maleness and understood women

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<sup>593</sup> Emily Martin, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles,” in *Feminism and Science*, ed. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 103–17. The role of gendered assumptions in science has been an object of much brilliant analysis by the feminist science studies scholars since the 1980s. See for examples, Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*; Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*; Schiebinger, *Has Feminism Changed Science?*; including also archaeology, for example Margaret W. Conkey and Janet D. Spector, “Archaeology and the Study of Gender,” *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 7 (1984): 1–38; or Wylie, “The Engendering of Archaeology Refiguring Feminist Science Studies.”

<sup>594</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*, 237.

<sup>595</sup> Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 143.

only as peripheral category in the human interpretation of reality”.<sup>596</sup> Reversing this orthodoxy of Western scholarship, as well as the patriarchal religious dogma, Gimbutas placed female as the central category for the prehistoric human spirituality, and male as peripheral, while claiming that the female could express the universality.

In her last and most controversial manuscripts, namely, the *Language of the Goddess*<sup>597</sup> and *The Civilization of the Goddess*<sup>598</sup>, Gimbutas further elaborated her theory of Old Europe. In these works she aimed to better categorize and explain the Goddess symbolism, and explain in more detail the social and spiritual structure of this prehistoric civilization. She also broadened the temporal and geographical limits of the women- and Goddess-centered civilization, theorizing not only the Neolithic-Chalcolithic, but also the whole Paleolithic as characterized by women’s leadership, and finding the signs of Goddess-worship not only in the South East Europe (her primary area of fieldwork), but across the whole Europe. In the *Language of the Goddess*, she introduced her interdisciplinary methodology of “archaeomythology”, which meant employing the study of folklore and mythology in the interpretation of archaeological remains.<sup>599</sup> Gimbutas argued that the folklore and traditions of the peripheral and for a long time rural European nations, such as “Basque, Breton, Welsh, Irish, Scottish, and Scandinavian countries, or where Christianity was introduced very late, as in Lithuania” can serve as the best sources for the reconstruction of the prehistoric beliefs.<sup>600</sup> Being removed from the main transformations of the Western civilization, she argued, these marginal cultures had preserved the treasures of Old Europe the best.

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<sup>596</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “In Search of Women’s Heritage,” in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 35.

<sup>597</sup> *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989.

<sup>598</sup> *The Civilization of the Goddess*.

<sup>599</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, xviii.

<sup>600</sup> Gimbutas, xvii.

In this way, Gimbutas reversed another hierarchy of archaeological and historical scholarship, making the peripheral European nations central in her own re-narration of the European prehistory. This also allowed her to make the folklore of her own homeland Lithuania a key element in the interpretation of the prehistoric Old European findings.

Differently from the *The Gods and Goddesses*, the two last books of Gimbutas showed clear signs of her familiarity with the interests and ideas of the women's spirituality movement. First, she made much broader ideological statements, clearly implying that her archaeological work should serve as a material for socio-political purposes. For example, in *The Civilization of the Goddess*<sup>601</sup> Gimbutas proposed that the very notions of "progress" and "civilization", should be rethought, and that the humanity could benefit from turning back to the values embodied by the Goddess-worshiping Old European civilization. Second, she also employed a different vocabulary than in her earlier works. Gimbutas, for example, borrowed the term "gylany", from the author Riane Eisler,<sup>602</sup> to describe the social system of Old Europe as a system based on the values of partnership between the sexes.<sup>603</sup> Moreover, she started using the words "Creatrix" and "Regeneratrix" to describe the Great Goddess of the Old European pantheon, instead of the formerly used "Creator" and "regenerator", thus changing the masculine grammatical form of these words of Latin origin to an alternative feminine form. In short, Gimbutas books published in 1989 and 1991 can be seen as elaborations of her theory of the civilization of Old Europe, with visible influences from the feminist spirituality movement. They included an increasingly open challenge to some of the

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<sup>601</sup> *The Civilization of the Goddess*.

<sup>602</sup> Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*. Eisler has relied extensively on Gimbutas' earlier work when writing her popular *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, where she proposed an interpretation of human history as a story of competition between the two systems: partnership and domination.

<sup>603</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 324.

inviability biases of the archaeology of Europe, namely its prioritizing of the androcentric and one-dimensional narrative of the development of the Western civilization.

To sum up, writing her *The Gods and Goddesses* in the early 1970s, Gimbutas became one of the pioneers of a critical engagement with the androcentric assumptions of the Western scholarly tradition, especially as it dealt with the study of prehistory. These hierarchies and related biases came under serious feminist scrutiny in the 1970s and 1980s, with the growing influence of feminist approaches in the American academia. These were the decades of the emergence of feminist theology and religious studies,<sup>604</sup> feminist science studies,<sup>605</sup> as well as feminist criticisms in many other disciplines, including anthropology and history. Feminist archaeology was quite late to develop, in comparison to related disciplines, and did not produce more substantial work until the late 1980s and the 1990s<sup>606</sup>. Preceding these developments, Gimbutas addressed the gendered biases in the interpretation of the archaeological materials already in 1974, implicitly countering what the philosopher of science Alison Wylie has called “the projection onto prehistory of a common body of presentist, ethnocentric, and overtly androcentric assumptions about sexual divisions of labor and the status and roles of women”.<sup>607</sup>

The women-centered analysis in Gimbutas’ *The Gods and Goddesses* countered the unwritten rules of her discipline, and echoed the feminist interventions in other disciplines characteristic to the 1970s. As Hester Eisenstein defined it, the “woman-centered analysis or perspective”, which

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<sup>604</sup> Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising. A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); Rosemary Ruether, “Goddesses and Witches: Liberation and Countercultural Feminism,” *The Christian Century*, no. September 10-17 (1980): 842–47.

<sup>605</sup> Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*; Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino, eds., *Feminism and Science* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>606</sup> Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey, *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>607</sup> Wylie, “The Engendering of Archaeology Refiguring Feminist Science Studies,” 82.



characterized the work of such feminist thinkers as the historian Gerda Lerner or the poet Adrienne Rich, meant a belief that “female experience ought to be the major focus of study and the source of dominant values for the culture as a whole”.<sup>608</sup> Gimbutas did exactly introduce such a women-centered approach to the study of European prehistory by introducing her theory of Old Europe, which essentially rewrote the usual archaeological narrative of the development of European societies from a female perspective. She further developed her ideas in her last works, published in 1989 and 1991, however, already in a changing feminist environment, where the focus on women was gradually replaced by the wish to deconstruct gender. How this affected her reception by feminist archaeologists I will show later in this chapter.

### **3.3 Gimbutas’ scientific persona**

Despite the fact that her work on Old Europe challenged the androcentrism and other power hierarchies of mainstream archaeology, Gimbutas denied any connection with feminism, and did not consider her work to be an example of gender or feminist archaeology, neither in the early 1970s, when writing her groundbreaking *The Gods and Goddesses*, nor in the early 1990s, when her name already became associated with feminism. Gimbutas consistently argued that her works were inspired not by any political ideology or movement, but by the archaeological findings themselves, and by her wish to do justice to the interpretation of human prehistory. In short, she claimed that her work on the Goddess-centered prehistory arose out of her desire to do better science, and not in order to serve feminist ideological goals. How did Gimbutas navigate the competing academic and feminist pressures in the formation of her public persona, starting with

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<sup>608</sup> Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1984), 47.

the publication of her *The Gods and Goddesses*, which so obviously addressed many radical feminist concerns?

In an interview with her assistant Joan Marler, when asked about her connection with feminism, Gimbutas answered:

- The only thing for me was to find the truth. I did not do this work because women were supporting me. Not at all ... It's too bad that now readers are connecting me with the women's movement or with some ideology.
- *How would you rather be considered?*
- As a scientist. As an archaeologist. Of course, I need the support of women. Their response was a revelation to me. A big surprise. Because to the last moment I was so involved in my work that I didn't realize how strong the feminist movement is. Or receptive. Or how intelligent women are. I actually didn't think much about the reaction. I did my work.<sup>609</sup>

As seen in the quote above, Gimbutas stressed her dedication to science and archaeology, and her purity from ideological thinking or speculation, arguing that her theory of Old Europe was born out of her dedication to her work and the search for scientific "truth". However, Gimbutas did not distance herself completely from feminism, but emphasized how pleased and surprised she was by her positive reception among the women's (spirituality) movement. Still, in the quote above and in other instances,<sup>610</sup> Gimbutas established that it was rather feminism was influenced by her thought, than that she was influenced by feminism.

It is difficult to precisely evaluate how much Gimbutas was familiar with feminist works in disciplines other than archaeology. Gimbutas' student and close colleague Ernestine Elster argued that Gimbutas was "a product of her generation and experiences; to expect her to adjust to a change

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<sup>609</sup> Joan Marler, "The Circle Is Unbroken: A Brief Biography," in *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas* (Manchester: Knowledge, Ideas and Trends, 1997), 20.

<sup>610</sup> Gimbutas made a similar statement in an interview with the Lithuanian writer Kazys Saja in 1992. There she denied being a feminist, but also expressed her satisfaction with inspiring the women's movement. See Saja, "Geresnio gyvenimo ilgesys. M. Gimbutienė. [Longing for better life. Marija Gimbutas]."

in social thought that took decades to be adopted and understood (...) is absurd".<sup>611</sup> Elster argued that the new social movements of the U.S. academic environment that started roughly around the time when Gimbutas moved to Los Angeles, had little effect on Gimbutas' thinking, because she belonged to an earlier generation of female scholars, and that therefore Gimbutas never claimed to be a feminist.<sup>612</sup> This statement is somewhat supported by Gimbutas' personal library, currently held by the Pacifica Graduate Institute, which contains only a small collection of feminist books, mainly written from the perspective of the women's spirituality movement and published after *The Gods and Goddesses*.<sup>613</sup> It is also known that Gimbutas had no or little contact with the Women's Studies program at the UCLA,<sup>614</sup> because, as she explained, of their divergent interests: feminist scholars at the UCLA were only interested in contemporary politics, and paid no attention to prehistory or the Goddess.<sup>615</sup> Despite her familiarity with the women's spirituality movement and the proximity of her ideas with certain academic feminist debates, as I have shown in previous sections, Gimbutas hardly quoted any feminists in her work (she also quoted very few women in

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<sup>611</sup> Elster, "Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda," 106.

<sup>612</sup> While the generational factor indeed has affected the way Gimbutas positioned herself in relation to feminism, it certainly does not provide a sufficient explanation, because other women of the same generation as Gimbutas, even with rather similar life trajectories, like, for example, Gerda Lerner (1920-2013), did not distance themselves from the label of feminism, but embraced it.

<sup>613</sup> One of the exceptions to this rule is a copy of Simone de Beauvoir's seminal philosophical treatise *The Second Sex*, originally published in France in 1949, and highly influential among the feminist circles in the United States starting with the 1960s. Gimbutas' personal library includes the English reprint of *The Second Sex* from 1974, exactly the same year in which Gimbutas published her *The Gods and Goddesses*, and includes comments penciled in the margins, especially in the "Part II. History", which was clearly the most relevant to her own work. Gimbutas had underlined passages in the chapter "Early Tillers of the Soil" and written "wrong" in the margins, expressing her disagreement with Beauvoir's views. Namely, Gimbutas disagreed with Beauvoir's evaluation of the matrilineal societies as being more "primitive", in comparison to the successive patriarchal civilizations, and the interpretation of the prehistoric Goddess religion as expressing the voluntary self-enslavement of the Man. Beauvoir proposed in *The Second Sex* that any religion in the history of humanity was always the creation of men, even if it was centered around a female goddess, as men have always been superior: "woman's place in society is always that which men assign to her; at no time has she ever imposed her own law" (Beauvoir 1974, 109). Gimbutas' work, obviously, countered such proposition.

<sup>614</sup> Women's studies were first granted formal status as an academic program at the UCLA in 1975, growing into a degree program in 1987. In Elizabeth Marchant, "Message from the Chair," UCLA Gender Studies, 2019, accessed June 9, 2019, <http://www.genderstudies.ucla.edu/message-from-the-chair>.

<sup>615</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 67.

her work, a rare exception being Riane Eisler and Heide Göttner-Abendroth, who both kept in correspondence with Gimbutas in the later 1980s and the early 1990s) and was more prone to quoting such male scholars as Erich Neumann, Carl Gustav Jung, J.J. Bachofen, and others. Despite the fact that she was making political claims inspiring for the women's spirituality movement and ecofeminism, in her books and interviews Gimbutas did not align herself with feminism, but rather with the male intellectuals of her generation and older, such as the Romanian religious scholar Mircea Eliade, the Lithuanian semiotician Algirdas Julius Greimas and the American mythologist Joseph Campbell.<sup>616</sup> Some of these male scholars, Campbell in particular, strongly endorsed Gimbutas' work.<sup>617</sup>

Even if Gimbutas was little affected by feminist developments in academia, by the late 1980s she was surely conscious of the label of feminism that was often attached to her, with related accusation of the political/ideological motivation for her research on Old Europe.<sup>618</sup> Being aware of the criticism that her work is ideological and therefore lacks scientific rigor, Gimbutas distanced herself from any political influences, feminism especially, and claimed only a disinterested scholarly motivation for her work. In the interviews given at the time of the publication of her last two books, Gimbutas promoted an image of herself as a scholar, who approached the study of the pre-Indo-European Europe without any preconceived theory, model or formula; motivated only by pure curiosity and spontaneous inspiration.<sup>619</sup> Her "scientific persona",<sup>620</sup> however, can be seen as at least double sided. On the one hand, Gimbutas presented her work as an intellectual activity

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<sup>616</sup> Marler, "Introduction," 18.

<sup>617</sup> Algirdas Julius Greimas, "Europa be indoeuropiečių [Europe without Indoeuropeans]," in *Laimos palytėta*, 183–87; Campbell, "Foreword."

<sup>618</sup> Hayden, "Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?"; Leslie, "The Goddess Theory."

<sup>619</sup> Marler and Gimbutas, "Gimbutas Biography Transcriptions by Joan Marler," 68.

<sup>620</sup> Bosch, "Persona and the Performance of Identity."

requiring enormous patience, perseverance and a disinterested perspective, creating a scientific persona following the framework of a “modest witness”.<sup>621</sup> As Haraway has argued, this specifically modern European masculine imagination of science assumes that the scholar can allow the facts to speak for themselves, as if the subjectivity and embodiment were not involved in the process of doing science.<sup>622</sup> On the other hand, Gimbutas also supplemented her image with the imaginary of *ragana* (Lithuanian for witch), claiming for herself supernatural wisdom beyond pure science. In doing this she followed some of the Romantic notions of science, as a work of natural genius, or a divine inspiration, a revelation of almost religious significance.<sup>623</sup>

### 3.3.1 Gimbutas as a scientist

Working in a discipline notorious for its susceptibility to misinterpretation and ideologization<sup>624</sup>, Gimbutas often emphasized the constraints of the material evidence on her interpretation. While in the 1980s the awareness of the influence of subjective factors on archaeological interpretation has deepened, still the field largely retained trust in the ability of the material evidence to provide constraints on interpretation.<sup>625</sup> Espousing her trust in the “truth” of the material evidence, Gimbutas argued that the very archaeological artifacts, unearthed during her excavations in South East Europe in the 1960s and the 1970s led her, after years of careful analysis and interpretation, towards more female-centered interpretation.<sup>626</sup> As the Los Angeles Times Magazine journalist Jacques Leslie wrote in an article about Gimbutas, published in 1989, “the sheer tonnage of arms found at the Indo-European sites sickened her [Gimbutas- R.N.]”, making Gimbutas inquire into

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<sup>621</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, “Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium,” in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 223–50.

<sup>622</sup> Haraway.

<sup>623</sup> Wesseling, “Judith Rich Harris.”

<sup>624</sup> Arnold, “The Past as Propaganda”; Trigger, “Alternative Archaeologies.”

<sup>625</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 381.

<sup>626</sup> Marler, “The Circle Is Unbroken: A Brief Biography,” 16–21.

the earlier, apparently more peaceful period.<sup>627</sup> And indeed, instead of the weapons prevalent in the Bronze Age graves and the proof of social inequality and warfare in Kurgan societies, the earlier Neolithic Old European settlements were rich with hundreds of female shaped figurines and other sophisticated artifacts, decorated with what Gimbutas would later decipher as Goddess symbols.<sup>628</sup> As she wrote in *The Language of the Goddess*:

Archaeological materials are not mute. They speak their own language. And they need to be used for the great source they are to unravel the spirituality of those of our ancestors who predate the Indo-Europeans by many thousands of years.<sup>629</sup>

The archaeological materials, Gimbutas argued, were speaking for themselves, and her work was only to use the information that these materials provided. Gimbutas often emphasized the tedious work with the figurines and other artifacts, lasting at least ten years, that led her to developing the very idea of the Old European civilization, as fleshed out in *The Gods and Goddesses*. Gimbutas emphasized on numerous occasions that the very archaeological evidence, the female shaped figurines, made it natural to place the female Goddess at the center of the analysis of European prehistory – she was only deciphering, translating what the materials were communicating to her.

The translation however, was more complicated than translation of one language to another – it was a translation between two worldviews. Gimbutas in her interpretation of Old Europe had to reverse the taken for granted associations with femininity and masculinity, and insist on the feminine imaginary being positive, powerful and creative, despite the denigration of the “feminine” in the contemporary patriarchal context. Encouraging the self-fashioning of Gimbutas as a translator between the two worlds, the mythologist Joseph Campbell in his foreword to *The*

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<sup>627</sup> Leslie, “The Goddess Theory,” 11.

<sup>628</sup> Leslie, “The Goddess Theory.”

<sup>629</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, xix.

*Language* compared Gimbutas' reconstruction of the Old European symbolism with the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone by Jean-Francois Champollion.<sup>630</sup> In this way Gimbutas was also portrayed as a “discoverer”, the only scholar in the twentieth century, as Kavolis remarked, to be able to find the whole new civilization, unearth a new layer of history.<sup>631</sup>

### 3.3.2 Gimbutas as “ragana”

Despite her self-fashioning as primarily a scientist, Gimbutas also criticized the limitations of positivism and the strict reliance on scientific method of the so called New Archaeology (or processual archaeology), which dominated the archaeological thinking in the United States roughly between the 1950s and the 1980s (Marler 1997b, 18). By way of emphasizing her freedom from the limitations of the scientific method Gimbutas would sometimes invoke the imaginary of a “witch”, or, in Lithuanian folklore – *ragana*. For example, in an interview, published in the diaspora newspaper *Akiračiai* in 1976, Gimbutas expressed her regret about the limits of processual archaeology:

The road of qualitative method is going to an absolute extreme. (...) Arts and religion are described by some scientists merely as “psychic needs”. Maybe this is the reason I am moving towards the analysis of prehistoric religion: in order to get away from the sterilizing cultural phenomena. (...) Yes, the archaeology of today is far from poetry. But there is some taste of wild strawberries in every branch of science. It can be found when a scientist is also a poet (or a *ragius* – “the one who sees”).<sup>632</sup>

In the above quote, Gimbutas criticized the narrow positivist understanding of the scientist, promoted, as she thought, by the dominant processual approach in archaeology. Instead, Gimbutas starting with the 1970s already, aimed to reclaim the word and the figure of *ragana* or *ragius*,

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<sup>630</sup> Campbell, “Foreword.”

<sup>631</sup> Kavolis, “Civilizacijos atradėja, darbo ir džiaugsmo žmogus [The Discoverer of the New Civilization, The Person of Work and Joy].”

<sup>632</sup> Marija Gimbutas, “Apie žemuogių skonį archaeologijoje (1976) [About the Taste of Wild Strawberries in Archaeology],” in *Laimos palytėta*, ed. Austėja Ikamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002), 93.

therefore implying herself to be a sort of a female prophet with an exceptional ability to see beyond material artifacts and dry facts.

By referring to herself as *ragana* Gimbutas established an affinity with the heritage of the mythological supernatural female power, which has been, she thought in line with many feminist thinkers,<sup>633</sup> feared and despised by modern masculine science as well as Christianity. In a Lithuanian language response to a criticism by Jonas Balys, a well-known Lithuanian folklorist, Gimbutas similarly implied to be gifted with poetic and visionary powers of *ragana*.<sup>634</sup> Defending herself from criticism that she allegedly misreads the archaeological artifacts, Gimbutas responded by claiming to have a vision, available only to the selected few, and therefore not accessible to the majority of scholars. Gimbutas explained also in her English language writings that in her native Lithuanian language the word *ragana/ragius* is etymologically connected with the word “to foresee” (Lit. “regėti”),<sup>635</sup> in this way claiming this mythological character to have some prophetic qualities. In harmony with some other Lithuanian scholars,<sup>636</sup> she thought *ragana* to be a Lithuanian pagan goddess of death and regeneration, demonized in the process of the Christianization of the country.<sup>637</sup> This powerful Goddess, Gimbutas wrote in the *Civilization of the Goddess*, was “demonized and degraded into the familiar and highly publicized image of the witch”.<sup>638</sup> Gimbutas, who aimed to reverse the modern norms, which were applied to the understanding of prehistoric mythology, personally empathized with the degraded images of

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<sup>633</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*; Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

<sup>634</sup> Marija Gimbutienė, “Apie lietuvių mitologijos populiarizacijos reikalą bei šaltinius Baltų mitologijai atkurti. Atsakymas Jonui Baliui [About the Popularizing of Lithuanian Mythology and the Source for the Reconstruction of Baltic Mythology. An answer to Jonas Balys],” in *Laimos palytėta*, ed. Austėja Ikamaitė (Vilnius: Scena, 2002), 187–90.

<sup>635</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 210.

<sup>636</sup> Vytautas Kavolis, *Moterys Ir Vyrai Lietuvių Kultūroje / Women and Men in Lithuanian Culture* (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros institutas, 1992).

<sup>637</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 185.

<sup>638</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 244.



Goddess, and in a way aimed to “channel” the values of the Goddess-centered Old Europe in her own scholarly work.

The image of the scientist both as a disinterested truth-seeker or a genius with a “divine spark” has been criticized by the feminist science studies in the 1980s, with feminists emphasizing the biased and partial perspective of any academic work.<sup>639</sup> In fact, it was probably one of the biggest achievements of the feminist science studies – to demonstrate the profoundly social nature of science, which became, to some extent, a common sense assumption in academia by the 1990. While feminism was (and is today) sometime accused of “biased”, “ideological” or “political” research, the feminist science studies have shown convincingly, how the very notion of objective science has been constructed to serve the interests of a very specific scholarly subject – white, male and European. Gimbutas, who was criticized, similarly to other proponents of women-centered research, for being biased and political, chose a radically different strategy for retaining (unsuccessfully) her academic authority. Instead of arguing, as academic feminists largely did, starting with the 1980s, that science was a profoundly political matter, she appealed to the classic modern as well as Romantic notions of science: as disinterested truth seeking and as a divine inspiration. However, the “divine” inspiration that Gimbutas referred to challenged the androcentric norms of scientific imaginary, as it was the subversive and magical women’s power, rooted in her native Lithuanian culture – the power of witches – that she chose to embrace as a part of the scientific persona. As I show in what follows, Gimbutas scientific persona was received in conflicting ways in academia and outside of it, illustrating the very process of boundary drawing in what counts as (feminist) science.

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<sup>639</sup> Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*; Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

### 3.4 Providing scientific evidence for the Goddess movement

The multilayered “scientific persona” of Gimbutas, as described above, was very appealing to the feminist spirituality movement. This movement, which “flourished” in the United States, California in particular, in the 1980s and the 1990s, was derived from radical feminism and neopaganism, and had a strong focus on female Goddess worship.<sup>640</sup> The uses of Gimbutas’ work in the feminist spirituality movement and the involvement of this movement in the construction of Gimbutas’ public image, is the main topic of Chapter 4. Here I only discuss the importance of Gimbutas’ scientific persona for her reception within the feminist spirituality movement. On the one hand, Gimbutas’ work provided the much needed academic authority to the theory of prehistoric “matriarchy”, the foundational myth of the contemporary Goddess movement.<sup>641</sup> From Gimbutas’ works the feminist spirituality movement learned that the worship of Goddesses was the basis of the prehistoric human spiritual organization, leading to a harmonious social structure.<sup>642</sup> On the other hand, Gimbutas was also critical of the shortcomings of positivist science, and constructed an image of herself as *ragana* with supernatural wisdom, which appealed to the images of feminine power advocated by the movement.<sup>643</sup>

Gimbutas’ authority made her work on Old Europe a very much valued contribution for the feminist spirituality movement, which was constantly negotiating its status within the broader feminist movement and society at large. As the religious studies scholar Cynthia Eller argued:

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<sup>640</sup> Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>641</sup> Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*.

<sup>642</sup> Christ and Goldenberg, “The Legacy of the Goddess: The Work of Marija Gimbutas”; Starhawk, “Marija Gimbutas’ Work and the Question of the Sacred,” in *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas*, ed. Joan Marler (Manchester: Knowledge, Ideas and Trends, 1997), 519–23.

<sup>643</sup> Carol P. Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” *Heresies* 5, no. The Great Goddess (1978): 8–13; Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance. A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

Gimbutas loaned her impressive archaeological credentials to the myth [of prehistoric matriarchy – R.N.] at a time when other academic archaeologists were steadfastly unwilling to do so. Though there are many intelligent and well-read partisans of the myth, Gimbutas is the only one who is an archaeologist. Her very existence – to say nothing of her work – has done much to enhance the credibility of feminist matriarchal myth in the eyes of the more mainstream audiences.<sup>644</sup>

In her book Eller argued that the feminist spirituality movement was seen as an esoteric endeavor and was ridiculed by the social mainstream as well as more “mainstream” feminism.<sup>645</sup> Therefore, the fact that Gimbutas held a high academic position and derived her ideas about the prehistoric Goddess cult from scientific research, contributed a lot to the importance she was attributed by the feminist spirituality movement. Coming from academia, Gimbutas provided a narrative of prehistory that was based primarily on material “evidence” and not derived purely from political ideas or artistic imagination.<sup>646</sup> The feminist spirituality movement therefore invested a lot of energy in defending Gimbutas’ academic authority from critics.<sup>647</sup>

The eco-feminist Charlene Spretnak became probably the most prominent advocate of Gimbutas, publishing, in 1996 and 2011, two articles dismantling the critiques of the hypothesis of Old Europe and accusing Gimbutas’ opponents of a highly orchestrated misogynist conspiracy.<sup>648</sup> Spretnak was also the first to employ Gimbutas’ work for the sake of protecting the authority of the feminist spirituality movement in the introduction to the collection of essays *The Politics of*

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<sup>644</sup> Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, 38–39.

<sup>645</sup> Feminist spirituality movement is sometimes likened to “New Age” (see Meskell, “Goddesses, Gimbutas, and ‘New Age’ Archaeology”; Karlyn Crowley, *Feminism’s New Age: Gender, Appropriation, and the Afterlife of Essentialism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011). This is most often done in an attempt to dismiss feminist spirituality for being esoteric and/or naïve, but Cynthia Eller, who is in fact a critic of the feminist spirituality movement, has argued against equating the two phenomenon. While there is some overlap between the contemporary Goddess worship and New Age practices, the feminist spirituality movement has roots in feminist activism and remains a separate and internally complex phenomenon. See Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*..

<sup>646</sup> Christ, “A Different World,” 60–61.

<sup>647</sup> Carol P. Christ, “Introduction: The Legacy of Marija Gimbutas,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12, no. 2 (1996): 31–35; Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*.

<sup>648</sup> Spretnak, “Beyond the Backlash”; Spretnak, “Anatomy of a Backlash.”

*Feminist Spirituality* <sup>649</sup>. In a lengthy footnote explaining the possible reasons of the prehistorical patriarchal revolution Spretnak mentioned Gimbutas' work twice, and noticed with regret how "the archaeological and anthropological evidence"<sup>650</sup> supplied by Gimbutas has been ignored by both mainstream and feminist scholars.<sup>651</sup> Spretnak, characteristically to the feminist spirituality movement in general, presented the existence of the prehistoric women-oriented societies as a scientific fact, proven by the unquestionable evidence collected by Gimbutas.<sup>652</sup> With a similar lack of skepticism Spretnak approached also the findings of the neuropsychological research, which argued for the existence of inherent biological differences between the sexes. In the introduction to *The Politics of Feminist Spirituality* Spretnak used these scientific "facts" to claim women's inherent superiority to men, due to their "connectedness", "life-affirming" and holistic approach to the world.<sup>653</sup> Despite the contempt for the male-dominated science and its contribution to the modern alienation between humans and Nature, the feminist spirituality movement expressed unwavering belief in the ability of a better, women-oriented science to provide the knowledge and tools for the improvement of the society. Gimbutas' works for them was an example of such women-oriented, feminist science, that had to be taken at face value.

The emphasis on the "scientific" character of the Old European hypothesis seemed to rather irritate than convince the critics of the feminist spirituality movement. The religious studies scholar Cynthia Eller, for example, who had written quite sympathetically about the Goddess spirituality

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<sup>649</sup> Spretnak, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*.

<sup>650</sup> Charlene Spretnak, "Introduction," in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (New York: Doubleday, 1982), xi–xxx, xxv.

<sup>651</sup> Gimbutas' article "Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe" Marija Gimbutas, "Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 63–71. was included in this collected, in the section entitled "Discovering a History of Power".

<sup>652</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>653</sup> Spretnak, "Introduction, xiii"

movement and its quest for spiritual empowerment in her 1995 book *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*,<sup>654</sup> already five years later found the idea of prehistoric matriarchies, and the persistence with which these feminists hold on to this idea, worth ridicule.<sup>655</sup> Hence she treated the issue of prehistoric women-centered societies as purely a myth that was invented by the movement for its ideological needs, abusing archaeological and historical materials. In *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, at the center of Eller's criticism was Marija Gimbutas, who provided the scientific credibility to the unscientific myth of "feminist matriarchalists", as Eller calls them. She aimed to prove that Gimbutas' scientific credentials simply hid the fact that her hypothesis is a naïve and politically problematic myth, a "house of cards", built on nothing more than emotions and unjustified beliefs.<sup>656</sup> The book presented a lengthy critique of the various aspects of what is essentially Gimbutas' hypothesis of Old Europe, juxtaposing it with other, more reliable, in Eller's opinion, scientific theories and interpretations of archaeological evidence. By criticizing Gimbutas as an archaeologist, Eller aimed to prove that the idea of prehistoric "matriarchy" was unscientific.

Another important point for Eller was to show that the theory of prehistoric matriarchy was problematic from a feminist point of view, because it reinforced the essentializing and traditionalist understandings of femininity and masculinity.<sup>657</sup> The critique of the women's spirituality movement was extended also to "difference feminism". Eller criticized the emphasis put by the feminist spirituality movement on the female physiology, especially the symbolic importance attributed to pregnancy, menstruation, lactation and other female bodily functions, as well as the attachment of moral superiority to women's traditional social tasks such as child rearing. She

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<sup>654</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*.

<sup>655</sup> Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*.

<sup>656</sup> Eller, 181.

<sup>657</sup> Eller, 67.

noticed the similarity of such rhetoric to traditional conservative discourse of eternal femininity, which placed the woman closer to nature, and the man – closer to civilization.<sup>658</sup> Eller, on the other hand, in the tradition of “equality feminism” aimed to show that women and men are not that different biologically and thus socially and psychologically. Following the poststructuralist developments in feminism, she also argued that there is no access to biological sex which would not be mediated by culturally constructed gender and thus any appeals to “true femininity” are ideological and problematic, even if they come from the women’s movement.<sup>659</sup>

The fact that the feminist spirituality movement embraced Gimbutas and her work, and used her scholarly authority to build their own credibility worried also some of Gimbutas’ colleagues and the advocates of her work within archaeology. Gimbutas’ student, archaeologist Ernestine Elster for example suggested to distinguish between Gimbutas’ controversial work on the prehistoric Goddess spirituality, embraced by the women’s movement, and the very concept of Old Europe, which should be “independently evaluated” as an important scientific contribution.<sup>660</sup> Moreover, she saw Gimbutas’ affinity with the women’s spirituality movement as a certain weakness, which was a result of her being left “vulnerable” by the harsh criticism of her Old Europe by other archaeologists. Due to this supposed vulnerability, towards the end of her life Gimbutas found it difficult to “refuse the outpouring of enthusiasm and support, and indeed adoration, from the ‘goddess’ groups”.<sup>661</sup> The sympathetic Lithuanian academic reception of Gimbutas also tended to minimize the “matristic” side of her theories and represented her affiliation with the women’s

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<sup>658</sup> Eller, 64–65.

<sup>659</sup> Eller, 73.

<sup>660</sup> Elster, “Marija Gimbutas: Setting the Agenda,” 102.

<sup>661</sup> Elster, 106.

spirituality movement as rather trivial.<sup>662</sup> One of the most prominent Lithuanian archaeologists of the Soviet period, Rimutė Jablonskytė-Rimantienė, a childhood friend of Gimbutas, argued, for example, that her theories were “appropriated by feminists and the new pagans”, who allegedly took her ideas and twisted them to suit their own approaches.<sup>663</sup> Gimbutas in these accounts appeared as if cleaned from those aspects of her work that had been criticized as unscientific.

Gimbutas herself, obviously, did not see her work on Goddess as a result of “weakness”. Quite on the contrary, as I have shown above, she thought her work on deciphering the Goddess symbolism and the spiritual beliefs of Old Europe to be the highest achievement of her life work. She also did not see her work as unscientific, but rather as questioning the narrow limits of what constitutes science, which, in her opinion, deprived scholars of the possibility to make any meaningful statements, or have a “vision”. She also, although never calling herself a feminist, did not dismiss the women’s spirituality movement, but instead, embraced their political goals and supported, with her work, the criticism of modernity, characteristic to this movement, as I discuss later in this dissertation. Gimbutas’ decision not to distance unambiguously from the women’s spirituality movement, and her continuous and even increasing criticism of androcentric archaeology contributed to the popular perception of her as ideologically connected to this particular strand of feminism, despite the fact that she herself refused the label of “feminism”.

### **3.5 Mainstream archaeological reception**

The 1980ies and 1990ies marked the period of increasing awareness about the socio-political constraints on the production of archaeological knowledge. Authors such as the archaeologist Bruce

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<sup>662</sup> Adomas Butrimas, “Priešistorinių deivių mitai” [The myths of prehistoric goddesses], *Mokslas ir gyvenimas*, 1990; Milisauskas, “Marija Gimbutas.”

<sup>663</sup> Jablonskytė-Rimantienė, “Pasaulis jos neužmiršta ir dabar” [The world does not forget her], 223.

Trigger demonstrated convincingly how the development of archaeological ideas was always influenced by the prevalent ideologies – nationalist, imperialist, colonialist, etc.<sup>664</sup> In the 1990s the field of archaeology was strongly criticized for the failure to produce a sufficient reflection on its “service” for the questionable political goals, such as National Socialism in Germany.<sup>665</sup> Others noted how the Nazi abuse of archaeology in fact was fundamentally similar to the way the Western colonial powers have employed archaeological artifacts to promote the perception of the racial superiority of white colonialists.<sup>666</sup> These developments echoed similar criticisms formulated in the field of science and technology studies and feminist science studies, leading to the perception of the inherently subjective and situated, even political nature of science.<sup>667</sup>

The increased reflexivity within the academic community created a worry among some archaeologists that after accepting the “hyperrelativity” of scientific knowledge it would not be possible anymore to distinguish between a sound account of prehistory and a complete fantasy or an intentional ideology. Moreover, some archaeologists worried that the idea that *any* interpretation of the prehistoric materials is biased might hinder the authoritative critique of those archaeological explanations, which were more obviously derived from political agendas. Increased awareness of the inevitable subjective factors shaping the archaeological interpretation urged archaeologists to look for ways to distinguish between biased and objective research, and cast those theories that are “clearly” ideological outside of the boundaries of proper science. The late 1980s and especially the 1990s became also the decades of the most intense debates about

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<sup>664</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*; Trigger, “Alternative Archaeologies.”

<sup>665</sup> Arnold, “The Past as Propaganda.”

<sup>666</sup> Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 164.

<sup>667</sup> Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1979); Haraway, “Situated Knowledges.”



Gimbutas' academic authority, with some scholars accusing her of biased and ideological research, while others defending her work.

The publication and republication of *The Gods and Goddesses* in the 1970s was first met with a relative silence from the archaeological community. Scholarly reviews praised the author for the materials she gathered, but criticized the interpretation of symbolism as too subjective and therefore unverifiable.<sup>668</sup> There was however no deeper engagement with her ideas within archaeology. The first thorough criticism Gimbutas' work on Old Europe was articulated by the archaeologist Brian Hayden only in the 1986, in his article *Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?*<sup>669</sup> In this text Hayden criticized Gimbutas for reviving the old-fashioned notion of the prehistoric matriarchy<sup>670</sup> and argued instead for a view of prehistoric culture as dominated by the symbolism of "basic sexual duality" and most likely ruled by men.<sup>671</sup> While Hayden attacked Gimbutas for a lack of methodology and rigor in her analysis, his critique was not substantiated by competing evidence or a more rigorous methodology than employed by Gimbutas. Being, like Gimbutas, an expert in folklore materials, Hayden aimed to contradict various female-centered interpretations of archaeological artifacts that Gimbutas provided in *The Gods and Goddesses*. However, he did not always make it clear why his interpretations should be seen as more reliable than Gimbutas. Hayden argued, for example, that

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<sup>668</sup> See, for example, J. D. Muhly, "Review: The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images by Marija Gimbutas," *The American Historical Review* 80, no. 3 (1975): 616–17.

<sup>669</sup> Hayden, "Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?"

<sup>670</sup> Gimbutas insisted on not using the word "matriarchy", insisting that the Old Europe was not a "mirror reflection" of patriarchy and instead used words like gynocentric, gylanic, matristic and matrilineal, women-centered, etc., stressing the equality of sexes that was characteristic to these societies. It was characteristic of her critics, however, to use the shorthand "matriarchy" in referring to her ideas. See Gimbutienė "The Speech at Vytautas Magnus University."

<sup>671</sup> Hayden, "Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?," 25–27.

The pillar is yet another symbol that Gimbutas interprets as representing the Great Goddess, whereas all common sense and psychiatric wisdom would associate it instead with the phallus or masculine forces.<sup>672</sup>

As exemplified by the quote above, Hayden referred to “common sense” as well as a pseudo-psychoanalytic explanations in his article, instead of providing a comprehensive alternative methodology for the interpretation of the figurines. In a number of instances throughout the article, Hayden argued that Gimbutas’ interpretations can be replaced by what he considered more “logical”<sup>673</sup> interpretations, without explanation of the principles of reasoning that brought him to this conclusion. Instead of providing a sound critique, Hayden therefore can be said to have substituted Gimbutas’ matrilineal theory of Old Europe with his own theory of sexual “complementarity”, as the title of his article also indicates. While Hayden saw his own interpretation as simply “logical”, Gimbutas’ work was presented as serving the ideological needs of the feminist movement.

Hayden’s article exemplified the conceptual paradox, intrinsic in any effort at refuting Gimbutas’ hypothesis about the matrilineal, Goddess-centered Old Europe. Namely, his article exposed that the “common-sense” interpretation of prehistoric materials often relies on the unacknowledged androcentric prejudices, that qualify male-centered analysis as allegedly more “logical”, while female-centered – as biased. The difficulty to argue against Gimbutas’ gendered interpretations without revealing the authors own gendered biases regarding prehistory might have been one of the reasons, why critics of Gimbutas often supplemented their critique of the theory of Old Europe with the dismantling of Gimbutas’ “scientific persona”. The accusation of Gimbutas’ affinity to feminism became one of the most popular tactics to demonstrate that Gimbutas’ ideas were tainted

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<sup>672</sup> Hayden, 20.

<sup>673</sup> Hayden, 19, 21, 23.

by politics and ideology<sup>674</sup>. However, it is worth noticing that most of Gimbutas' academic critics in the 1990s did not represent themselves as anti-feminist. Quite on the contrary, most of them declared support to the development of gender approaches in archaeology. In fact, most of Gimbutas' critics argued, in one way or another, that it was their support for sophisticated gender archaeology that motivated them to expose Gimbutas' "sexist agenda".<sup>675</sup> The critics argued that Gimbutas propagated women's superiority, instead of a complex view of gender relations in prehistory. These articles, discussed further below, not only argued that Gimbutas' work was motivated by feminism, but also stressed that it was a wrong kind of – spiritual, or Goddess feminism – which motivated an essentialist view on gender in Gimbutas' work and therefore made it unscientific.

The most representative examples of such "debunking" of Gimbutas' work are articles by archaeologists Lynn Meskell<sup>676</sup> and John Chapman<sup>677</sup>. Meskell's article "Goddesses, Gimbutas and New Age Archaeology" (1995) criticized the utopian vision of the prehistoric Mother Goddess and argued against Gimbutas' selective treatment of figurines, her methodology, interpretative jumps and overtly authoritative voice in *The Language of the Goddess* and earlier works.<sup>678</sup> A large part of Meskell's text was dedicated however, not to a theoretical debate over the interpretation of the figurines, but a narrative which was intended to demonstrate that Gimbutas' work was allegedly motivated by a two-fold political agenda. On the one hand, Gimbutas' approach was tainted by "pseudo feminism" as embodied by the Goddess movement,<sup>679</sup> while on the other hand

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<sup>674</sup> Hayden, "Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?"; Fagan, "A Sexist View of Prehistory"; Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archaeology."

<sup>675</sup> Fagan, "A Sexist View of Prehistory."

<sup>676</sup> Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archaeology."

<sup>677</sup> Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations."

<sup>678</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

<sup>679</sup> Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archaeology," 83.

she was motivated by “modern nationalist concerns”<sup>680</sup> of the Baltic countries, occupied by Soviet Union. Meskell argued that Gimbutas’ work provided an inspirational origin myth for the women’s movement and saw it as detrimental to feminist goals in academia. Gimbutas’ work, she thought, might associate bad scholarship, based on “emotional narratives” and “pure fantasy”,<sup>681</sup> with the gender perspective in archaeology. Instead of promoting “reverse sexism”<sup>682</sup>, and a “gynocentric agenda”<sup>683</sup>, feminist archaeologists should work on providing a balanced gendered vision of prehistory, taking both sexes into account.

Furthermore, Meskell implied that Gimbutas was not only motivated by feminist political goals, but also by her nationalist sentiments. She argued that Gimbutas’ life experiences, especially the experience of Nazi and Soviet occupations which forced her to escape into exile, shaped Gimbutas’ view on Old Europe:

There is a striking congruence between Gimbutas’ own life and her perception of Old Europe. Born in Lithuania, she witnessed two foreign occupations by ‘barbarian’ invaders: however, those from the East stayed. This prompted her immigration to the United States, during which time the Soviet occupation continued almost up until her death in 1994.<sup>684</sup>

In the quote above Meskell argued that Gimbutas projected her personal trauma and her nationalist sentiment onto her scholarly work. Meskell in this way used some of the facts of Gimbutas’ biography, namely those that made her life different from the normative life-narrative of a Western scholar, as the “truth” behind her work. Although claiming a feminist motivation of her criticism, in fact Meskell here debunked Gimbutas’ work by using probably the oldest strategy in dismissing the public achievements of prominent female scholars – she reduced Gimbutas public achievement

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<sup>680</sup> Meskell, 78.

<sup>681</sup> Meskell, 83.

<sup>682</sup> Meskell, 83.

<sup>683</sup> Meskell, 76.

<sup>684</sup> Meskell, 78–79.

to her personal life experiences and her psychology.<sup>685</sup> Hence the rhetorical framework of “modest witness”, to which Gimbutas appealed in the construction of her scientific persona, as I have shown above, was easily dismantled. Gimbutas failed to fit into the masculine and Western-centric normativity of the scientific “transparency”<sup>686</sup> and therefore couldn’t easily claim a disinterested scholarly view.

The idea that Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe is a mirror reflection of her life trajectory, mentioned by Meskell in passing, was taken up and fleshed out by the archaeologist John Chapman in a biographical essay on Gimbutas, published in the edited volume *Excavating Women: A History of Women in European Archaeology*.<sup>687</sup> In this chapter Chapman speculated that when an archaeologist experiences migration or displacement during their lifetime, this experience might form a psychic “undercurrent”, which, without archaeologist’s conscious intention, might affect how she interprets prehistory.<sup>688</sup> In the case of Gimbutas (which was the only “case study” analyzed in Chapman’s text), her experience of displacement during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania was directly translated to her theory of Old Europe and Kurgan invasions. Chapman illustrated his argument with a schematic representation of Gimbutas’ biography, juxtaposed with Gimbutas’ proposed chronology of pre-historic Europe. The “stages” of her life supposedly represented, in Chapman’s interpretation, the “stages” of prehistory as they were theorized by Gimbutas:

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<sup>685</sup> Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>686</sup> Haraway, “Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium,” 233.

<sup>687</sup> Díaz-Andreu and Sorensen, *Excavating Women*.

<sup>688</sup> Chapman, “The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations.” The text by Chapman is sloppy as a biographical essay, for it contains many factual mistakes, such as claiming, for example, that Gimbutas’ husband was German (he was Lithuanian) or that it was “the Free University of Lithuania” that granted the honorary doctorate on Gimbutas (there is no such “Free University of Lithuania”, and it was Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas that granted this title to Gimbutas). Despite numerous problems in this text, it was still published in a volume that was intended to shed a light on women’s contributions to archaeology.

Table 14.2 States in Marija Gimbutas' life and their transformation in her writings

<i>State 1</i>	<i>Transformation</i>	<i>State 2</i>
Birth, childhood and adolescence in Vilnius	German and Russian invasions of Vilnius	Emigration and exile in Germany and USA
OLD EUROPE	KURGAN INVASIONS AND MIGRATIONS	KURGANIZATION OF BRONZE AGE EUROPE

Chapman argued that the memory of the “idyllic childhood” in Lithuania was unconsciously translated by Gimbutas into an utopian vision of Old Europe, while the violent experiences of war, occupation and exile informed her Kurgan hypothesis.<sup>689</sup> Chapman, like Meskell, explained Gimbutas' work in pseudo-psychoanalytic terms, using her personal experiences as a proof of her unconscious bias. However, Chapman also added another explanatory variable – her gender – implying that being a woman made Gimbutas' more susceptible to biased interpretation.

While the usage of the neutral language of ‘gender’ in Chapman’s article might create an impression that his analysis is equally applicable to both male and female scientists, in fact he made an assumption that in the field of archaeology it is only women, who have “gender”, which can affect their work. This is made clear, when Chapman argues, for example, that “gender makes a critical difference in the life and oeuvre of female archaeologists”.<sup>690</sup> In this article Chapman suggested that women, more than men, are inclined to include their subjective emotional experiences into their academic work, even when the “masculine frame of rhetoric” would limit it.<sup>691</sup> Following this line of argumentation, Chapman sketched out Gimbutas' biography,

<sup>689</sup> Chapman, 290.

<sup>690</sup> Chapman, 288.

<sup>691</sup> Chapman, 289.

emphasizing what he considers to be the “feminine” aspects of her experience. For example, he speculated that Gimbutas’ menopause might have prompted her interest in the issues of fertility:

The second point is one perhaps not easily discussed by a male prehistorian. It concerns the personal fertility of Gimbutas and its loss at the time of menopause; this latter can be dated to some time in the 1960s. It may be no more than coincidence that a woman with strong professional interests in the Mother Goddess, regeneration and fertility begins to write most vividly about fertility symbols at a time when her own personal fertility is disappearing and her own children leave home. Yet this is a factor which I would be loathe to omit from my account.<sup>692</sup>

The biological essentialism implicit in Chapman’s “critical biography” of Gimbutas is strikingly contradictory, because Chapman otherwise expressed an agreement with the criticism of “essentialism” in Gimbutas’ work. While Chapman used the term “gender”, a term that was carved by feminists to denote the sexual construction of femininity and masculinity and resist biological determinism,<sup>693</sup> he employed it merely as a synonym for biological sex throughout his article. Following Chapman, the reader would have to believe that Gimbutas “femaleness”—her biological sex – made her especially susceptible to bringing her personal experiences into her scholarly work.<sup>694</sup> For Chapman “it is hard to believe that a male scholar would have made such a link, let alone constructed such an edifice on top of this image”, as Gimbutas did with the image of the prehistoric Mother Goddess.<sup>695</sup> Chapman, to put it in other words, used the “gender” of the female scholar, namely Gimbutas, in order to debunk her allegedly “gender essentialist” work.

The pervasiveness of the tendency to see female scientists as more prone to be biased, while normative masculinity is still perceived as a “disinterested”<sup>696</sup> position, made Gimbutas into a

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<sup>692</sup> Chapman, 300.

<sup>693</sup> Joan Scott, “The Uses and Abuses of Gender,” *Tijdschrift Voor Genderstudies* 16, no. 1 (2013): 71.

<sup>694</sup> Chapman, “The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations,” 288.

<sup>695</sup> Chapman, 296.

<sup>696</sup> Haraway, “Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium,” 232.

perfect object of demarcating the space between the subjective and objective, political and scientific. The texts by Meskell and Chapman were inspired by the increasing self-reflexivity of the field of archaeology in the 1980s and the 1990s. However, instead of acknowledging the subjective biases and political ideologies shaping any and all archaeological explanations, they focused on creating a paradigmatic case of “biased science”, as embodied by Gimbutas. In this way critics were also reproducing the idea that archaeology can be non-ideological, if it is done in a “proper” way. As I have demonstrated, both Chapman and Meskell appealed to Gimbutas’ gender, nationality, and her traumatic experiences in criticizing her work, thus reducing her scholarship to her personality and/or her biography. Appealing to those aspects of Gimbutas’ experience, that make her different from the – male, Western – norm of scientific objectivity, they argued her to be allegedly more susceptible to subjectivity and bias.

Moreover, these *ad hominem* attacks on Gimbutas functioned also as a sort of a warning sign for gender and feminist archaeologists in general. Meskell, speaking from the position of a “feminist and archaeologist”, was concerned with the popularity of Gimbutas, because of her alleged “disservice” to the potentially fruitful field of gender archaeology.<sup>697</sup> Meskell suggested that “sound feminist scholarship needs to be divorced from methodological shortcomings, reverse sexism, conflated data and pure fantasy, since it will only impede the feminist cause and draw attention away from the positive contribution offered by gender and feminist archaeologies”.<sup>698</sup> Similarly, referring to Gimbutas’ work, the archaeologist and popular writer Brian Fagan, warned readers that the credibility of the archaeology of gender “depends on fine-grained scientific research, not on subjective impressions, however brilliant”.<sup>699</sup> These authors stressed the necessity

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<sup>697</sup> Meskell, “Goddesses, Gimbutas, and ‘New Age’ Archaeology,” 82.

<sup>698</sup> Meskell, 83.

<sup>699</sup> Fagan, in James B. Harrod and Brian Fagan, “Great Goddess Flap,” *Archaeology* 45, no. 4 (1992): 11.



for the gender archaeology to dissociate from Gimbutas if they wish to be taken seriously in the field. This implied that gender approaches in archaeology, as well as female scholars, were perceived as somehow more easily susceptible to the “weaknesses” such as emotionality, subjectivity and lack of scientific rigor. Therefore, scholars, aiming to employ a feminist approach in archaeology, were implicitly warned to be proactive in proving their “scientific” character and avoiding any association with such complicated and unorthodox scholars as Gimbutas.

### **3.6 Reception in gender archaeology**

In the North American academia, the critical gender approach in archaeology was developed much later than in anthropology or history.<sup>700</sup> One of the first articles arguing against the pervasive lack of conceptualization of gender in prehistory was Margaret W. Conkey and Janet D. Spector’s “Archaeology and Study of Gender”, published in 1984.<sup>701</sup> The authors showed how androcentric presumptions informed the construction of allegedly objective knowledge of prehistoric societies (such as the Man-the-Hunter model of human evolution) and advocated moving towards a more sophisticated theory of human social life, including its gendered aspects. Perceiving a lack of progress and aiming to encourage gender sensitive research in archaeology, Conkey and Joan M. Gero organized a conference in 1988, which then resulted in a volume *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*.<sup>702</sup> Since then, the engendering of the field has been explosive, suggests Conkey, resulting in a diversity of approaches: from gender archaeology as interested in women and gender relations, to feminist archaeology as critically engaging with feminist literature on

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<sup>700</sup> Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero, “Tensions, Pluralities, and Engendering Archaeology: An Introduction to Women and Prehistory,” in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 3–30; Wylie, “The Engendering of Archaeology Refiguring Feminist Science Studies.”

<sup>701</sup> Conkey and Spector, “Archaeology and the Study of Gender.”

<sup>702</sup> Gero and Conkey, *Engendering Archaeology*.

gender and applying it to archaeological research.<sup>703</sup> As I show in this section, Gimbutas' contribution to gender archaeology, as challenging the implicit androcentric biases and providing a women-centered perspective, was gradually erased from the genealogy of feminist archaeology. Following Hemmings' insights on the role of narratives in feminist historiography<sup>704</sup> I argue that the active dissociation from Gimbutas was a part of the rhetorical strategy on part of some feminist archaeologists to establish the scientific credibility of gender archaeology and strengthen their belonging to the field.

The authors, represented in the early publication *Engendering Archaeology*, reflected on the reasons which delayed the establishment of gender approaches in archaeology. Among them was the very nature of prehistoric archaeology as a science which deals almost exclusively with the material (rather than textual) remains of the past culture, therefore creating the problem of gender attribution.<sup>705</sup> In other words, there is no self-evident link between prehistoric artifacts and individuals of one or another gender. According to the philosopher of science Alison Wylie, another reason of this belated arrival was the positivist profile of American archaeology since the 1960s, embodied by *New Archaeology*, which privileged the large scale system-level explanations, leaving ethnographic material aside, as not objective enough.<sup>706</sup> All of this contributed to the state of affairs where the "common sense" Western understanding of gender relations was simply projected onto the past, assuming that gender is natural and fixed and, as a side product, essentializing the current gender order. In this context, the contributors to the volume *Engendering Archaeology* presented their insights as pioneering the gender approach in the field

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<sup>703</sup> Conkey, "Has Feminism Changed Archaeology?," 870.

<sup>704</sup> Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*.

<sup>705</sup> Conkey and Gero, "Tensions, Pluralities, and Engendering Archaeology," 11.

<sup>706</sup> Wylie, "The Engendering of Archaeology," 36–37.

and working without any preexisting “recipe”<sup>707</sup> to rely on, inventing an innovative feminist voice in archaeology.<sup>708</sup>

Perceiving themselves to be the pioneers in feminist archaeology, Conkey and Gero turned therefore to the conceptualization of gender as it was developed in other disciplines, in particular anthropology, history and critical theory. This meant that the scholar of *Engendering Archaeology* worked under a strong influence of poststructuralist understanding of gender as historical, contextual, fluid and relational, which by that time became dominant in these fields. Drawing on the work of feminist historian Joan W. Scott, anthropologist Gayle Rubin, theorist Jane Flax, and others, the editors of *Engendering Archaeology* proposed a theoretical framework for gender archaeology, which would rely on “rejection of the biological determinism that is implicit in many models of sex role differentiation”.<sup>709</sup> The introduction of this sophisticated understanding of gender was hopefully to shake the very foundations of positivist archaeology, by focusing on the micro-scale production of social categories rather than solely on the systemic macro-scale changes, and keeping in-check the socio-political factors that influence the production of scientific knowledge.<sup>710</sup> For such an endeavor, heavily influenced by poststructuralist approaches, Marija Gimbutas, with her rather static understanding of gender as a binary category marking diametrically opposed femininity and masculinity, was not a suitable intellectual “foremother” to rely upon. The first feminist archaeologists in the context of the North American academia, as I

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<sup>707</sup> Tringham, “Households with Faces,” 103.

<sup>708</sup> Conkey and Gero, “Tensions, Pluralities, and Engendering Archaeology,” 8.

<sup>709</sup> Conkey and Gero, 8.

<sup>710</sup> Alison Wylie, “Gender Theory and the Archaeological Record: Why Is There No Archaeology of Gender?,” in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 31–54.

will show next, aimed to establish a clear differentiation between their work and the legacy of Gimbutas.

Published in 1991, the contribution to *Engendering Archaeology* by Ruth E. Tringham included Gimbutas' work into the genealogy of gendered archaeology as a "remedial feminist study".<sup>711</sup> However, Tringham, the only author in the volume to mention Gimbutas at all,<sup>712</sup> also explicitly distanced her approach from that formulated in Gimbutas' works on Old Europe.<sup>713</sup> Tringham criticized Gimbutas' approach for failing to question the very epistemological and theoretical assumptions of Establishment archaeology, failing to meet the standards of scientific method, and, most importantly, for her overtly broad generalizations about the gendered shifts in prehistory.<sup>714</sup> Tringham compared Gimbutas' work with Marxist archaeology, and explained both as ideological, as constructing an utopian vision of the past, and therefore problematic from the scientific point of view. Tringham furthermore argued that since the question of gender in prehistory has been connect with these "ideological" research frameworks, this has caused the lack of serious consideration of gender issues from the archaeological "Establishment" of New Archaeology in the West.<sup>715</sup> This argumentation, firstly, put the blame of the belated interest in gender issues in archaeology on the "ideologization" of this question by supposed outsiders to the Western academic establishment: Marxist scholars and Gimbutas. Secondly, it implied that the U.S.-born New Archaeology was not ideological, differently from the Soviet archaeology for example.<sup>716</sup> Tringham, as a result, created a clear distinction between ideological and non-ideological science,

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<sup>711</sup> Tringham, "Households with Faces."

<sup>712</sup> Probably mainly because they work on a similar prehistoric period.

<sup>713</sup> Tringham, "Households with Faces."

<sup>714</sup> Tringham, 115–16.

<sup>715</sup> Tringham, 97.

<sup>716</sup> For a different interpretation, see Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*.

positioning the others – Soviet archaeologists and Gimbutas – as outside the boundaries of objective science.

If in 1991 Gimbutas was still seen by some as a part of the genealogy of feminist approaches in archaeology, only a few years later Gimbutas was already unequivocally casted outside the emerging feminist cannon in archaeology. Two articles written by archaeologists Tringham and Conkey in 1995 and 1998<sup>717</sup>, interpreted Gimbutas' work as the opposite of what feminist archaeology is supposed to look like. In the 1995 article "Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology"<sup>718</sup>, Conkey and Tringham argued that Gimbutas' approach was antithetical to the critical gender approach that feminist archaeologists should follow. They took Gimbutas' approach to be representative of the Goddess movement, which they called "a seemingly feminist social movement"<sup>719</sup> and the phenomenon of "popular culture".<sup>720</sup> According to Conkey and Tringham, the homogenizing story of prehistory, told in Gimbutas' works on Old Europe is emblematic of what happens when the phenomenon of popular culture, such as the Goddess movement, meddles with the matters of scientific knowledge production. The most fundamental criticism that they had for Gimbutas' work was the way she interpreted archaeological artifacts in a way that rested on gender essentialism. In contrast to Gimbutas' "essentialist" approach, Conkey and Tringham elaborated an approach based on "the recognition and acceptance of ambiguity, which admits the role of constructedness and the possibilities for reconfiguring and renegotiating meanings, including what constitutes evidence".<sup>721</sup> They introduced therefore a

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<sup>717</sup> "Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology"; "Rethinking Figurines. A Critical View from Archaeology of Gimbutas, the 'Goddess' and Popular Culture."

<sup>718</sup> "Archaeology and the Goddess."

<sup>719</sup> Conkey and Tringham, 205.

<sup>720</sup> Conkey and Tringham, 199.

<sup>721</sup> Conkey and Tringham, 231.

radically different approach to gender in feminist archaeology (not as fixed sexual difference, but as a fluid system of meanings) claiming it also to be more in line with rigorous academic scholarship.

In the second article published in 1998, Conkey and Tringham<sup>722</sup> elaborated one more argument, which justified the exclusion of Gimbutas from the cannon of gender archaeology. Gimbutas' work not only serves the needs of popular culture, they argued, but also “presents a markedly authoritative voice that is in line with the prevalent mode of discourse among both traditional and New (processualist) Archaeologists”.<sup>723</sup> Gimbutas' exclusion from the progressive gender archaeology was therefore made double – as too popular, serving the interest of laymen, and as too authoritative, following the lines of discourse of the “Establishment”. Her work on Old Europe was presented not only as problematic, but also as threatening for the progressive gender research, as it “forecloses the goals of feminist – and even traditional – archaeology: to probe and understand how and why humans use material culture and to probe the various symbolic and social complexities of past human lives”.<sup>724</sup> Similarly to Conkey and Tringham, the archaeologist Lauren Talalay also argued that Gimbutas' work was “antagonistic both to the future of women's movements and to the development of new perspectives on Mediterranean prehistory”.<sup>725</sup> Given such characterization, the 2003 overview article by Conkey “Has Feminism Changed

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<sup>722</sup> Conkey and Tringham also gave a course at Berkley, entitled “Archaeology and the Goddess”, which involved debates about Gimbutas' narrative as potentially “a feminist narrative of resistance”. See Tringham and W. Conkey, “Rethinking Figurines”, 44. While students in this course seem to have had a disagreement on the issue, Tringham and Conkey's answer to the feminist potential of Gimbutas' work was negative in this article.

<sup>723</sup> Tringham and Conkey, “Rethinking Figurines. A Critical View from Archaeology of Gimbutas, the ‘Goddess’ and Popular Culture,” 23.

<sup>724</sup> Tringham and Conkey, 44.

<sup>725</sup> Lauren Talalay, “A Feminist Boomerang: The Great Goddess of Greek Pre-History,” *Gender and History* 6, no. 2 (1994): 172.

Archaeology” published almost a decade later, did not mention Gimbutas’ work at all, casting her outside of the framework of the historiography of gender and/or feminist archaeology.<sup>726</sup>

Writing in the 1990s, feminist archaeologists had to balance between the criticism of the androcentrism of their discipline, fundamental questioning of the taken for granted norms of what constitutes objective science, and, at the same time, the necessity to work within the scholarly requirements and hierarchies of this same discipline. According to Wylie, feminist archaeologists chose not to subscribe to the “hyperrelativism” of postmodern critique, while at the same time they criticized the alleged neutrality and objectivity of processualism.<sup>727</sup> As I have shown above, feminist archaeologists were eager to show that engendering archaeology did not mean that “anything goes” in archaeology, but on the contrary, that the consideration of gender will strengthen the reliability of its findings and increase the explanatory potential of the discipline. Ascribing the label of gender essentialism exclusively to Gimbutas, Conkey and Tringham represented their own approach as non-essentialist, thus less ideological, and not presuming anything about the prehistoric gender order in advance. The dissociation from Gimbutas’ “ideological” work proved an efficient rhetorical tool to demonstrate the scientific and rigorous character of engendered archaeology. Actively casting Gimbutas “outside” the canon of engendered archaeology demonstrated the loyalty of feminist archaeologists to the scientific method within the discipline, while at the same time it helped to promote the poststructuralist approach to gender as a legitimate part of the disciplinary toolbox.

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<sup>726</sup> Conkey, “Has Feminism Changed Archaeology?”

<sup>727</sup> Wylie, “The Engendering of Archaeology,” 85.

### **3.7 Concluding remarks: Old Europe as “Pre-her-story”**

This chapter aimed to provide a picture of Gimbutas as a scholar, starting with a closer look at the development of a gender perspective in her work, continuing with an investigation of the construction (and “deconstruction”) of Gimbutas’ scientific persona, and finally, delving into the controversial reception of Gimbutas’ ideas within archaeology. I proposed that gender has played an important part in Gimbutas’ work already starting with her first English language monographs and that in the mid-1970s Gimbutas developed a full-fledged women-centered archaeological approach. Her theory of Old Europe, first proposed in *The Gods and Goddesses* in 1974 and later on fleshed out in the *Language of the Goddess* (1989) and the *Civilization of the Goddess* (1991), proposed a challenge to the androcentric narratives of prehistory and the habitual masculine-centric interpretations of archaeological materials. Gimbutas’ work, although it preceded the development of feminist approaches in North American archaeology by at least a decade, mirrored similar developments in other scholarly disciplines in the 1970s and, in general, the ideas popularized by the feminism movement around the same time.

However, when feminism in academia moved, largely, from the women-centered analysis to the post-structuralist inspired deconstruction of gender in the 1980s and the 1990s, Gimbutas’ work on Old Europe appeared to be rather old fashioned and problematic. Even more anachronistic appeared her scholarly persona, based, on the one hand, on the modern ideals of impersonal, objective science, and, on the other hand, a rather esoteric notion of divine, witch-like inspiration and special insight. Such image of Gimbutas, as well as her research on Old Europe appealed, starting with the 1980s, mainly to the feminist spirituality movement, itself a marginalized part of the women’s movement. The feminist spirituality movement, which aimed to use Gimbutas’ scientific authority in order to enhance the appeal of the contemporary Goddess worship by



showing its apparent basis in the humanities ancient past. However, the effect of this was mainly that the association with the marginalized Goddess movement did a lot to harm Gimbutas' authority as a reliable scholar. While Gimbutas herself never embraced the label of feminism, her critics often pointed out her alleged political/ideological interests in promoting a feminist "gynocentric agenda" via her theory of Old Europe. The critique of Gimbutas' work often took shapes of misogynistic attacks on her personality, and making her into a sort of symbolic warning sign for those wishing to implement feminist approaches in archaeology.

In this chapter I also suggested to historicize the reception of Gimbutas' work (and its eventual dismissal) within the circles of feminist archaeology in the 1990s as a part of the broader context of the popularization of post-structuralist approaches within academia and the resulting debates over "essentialism" in feminism. The first self-defined feminist archaeologists, like Conkey and Tringham, were largely formed by a poststructuralist school, which avoids presuming any fixed meaning of gender, and they positioned themselves in contrast to the radical feminist tradition of the 'Second Wave', exemplified by Mary Daly and the proponents of women's spirituality.<sup>728</sup> For them, the critique of gender essentialism in Gimbutas' work was also a critique of the essentialism characteristic to the 'Second Wave' that poststructuralism has allegedly overcome.<sup>729</sup> To follow the argument developed by Hemmings about the construction of feminist political narratives, the feminist archaeologists in the 1990s were eager to propose a progress narrative, which positioned them at the forefront of the progressive developments in their discipline and presented the past, embodied by Gimbutas, as problematic and old-fashioned.

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<sup>728</sup> Conkey and Tringham, "Archaeology and the Goddess," 209.

<sup>729</sup> Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

Gimbutas' critics noticed the obvious fact that she did not follow, nor did the women's spirituality movement, the poststructuralist approach to gender as socially constructed. Instead, she took sexual difference as a given, even as a metaphysical reality. It is not surprising therefore, that Gimbutas' Old Europe was made, by post-structuralist feminists, into a symbol of the problems of the Second Wave radical feminism, from which a poststructuralist feminist approach (in archaeology) had to dissociate itself. Gimbutas' thinking represented the simplistic dualistic and essentialist thinking that academic feminists had supposedly overcome by thinking in terms of 'gender', and not in terms of 'women'. What is problematic, however, is that the result of this theoretical disagreement was the purification of the historiography of feminist and gender archaeology from such "complicated" cases as that of Gimbutas. The contribution of Gimbutas' work in questioning, ahead of her times, the androcentrism of archaeology, was almost completely erased from the history of feminist interventions in archaeology. Countering this erasure I suggest, following the early article by Tringham, to see Gimbutas' work as a "remedial feminist study",<sup>730</sup> which indeed countered the androcentrism of mainstream archaeology by focusing on women, even if she later failed to adapt to the changing gender approaches in academia.

Drawing a parallel with the development of feminist approaches in the field of history, one might consider Gimbutas to be an archaeological equivalent of "her-story" in feminist historical research. Indeed, it seems not an exaggeration to say that while the field of archaeology was dominated by androcentric narratives,<sup>731</sup> Gimbutas became a pioneer in making "women a focus of inquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative".<sup>732</sup> The insistence on uncovering women's participation and agency in historical processes, was, as the historian Joan W. Scott suggests, the

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<sup>730</sup> Tringham, "Households with Faces," 115.

<sup>731</sup> Conkey and Tringham, "Archaeology and the Goddess," 201.

<sup>732</sup> Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 17.

main feature of women's history since the advent of the Second Wave feminism, unifying the field despite the diversity in its approaches and methods. Gimbutas' works on Old Europe embrace all aspects of "her-story": focusing on women's experience as different from men's; adding women as a new subject of analysis; using evidence on women's agency in order to challenge progress narratives; suggesting a new periodization and historical narratives.<sup>733</sup> However, assuming, that femininity and masculinity are diametrically opposed categories, straightforwardly represented by different physiology, and associating the positive characteristics with femininity for the sake of reversal of the androcentric point of view, Gimbutas made herself vulnerable to poststructuralist-inspired critiques. Nevertheless, I argue that Gimbutas' "pre-her-story" provided a radical antidote to the androcentrism of archaeology which then served as a springboard for a more nuanced engendered archaeology, and therefore deserves a place in the genealogy of feminist archaeology and academic feminism in general. Treating Gimbutas' work as a part of the narrative of the development of feminist approaches in academia allows to see the relationship between the women's movement and modern science as fundamentally ambiguous, caught between the desire for objective knowledge and lingering gendered hierarchies and imaginations.

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<sup>733</sup> Scott, 18–20.

## Chapter 4. Searching for Old Europe: Marija Gimbutas and the Problem of Cultural Appropriation in Feminist Spirituality

Gimbutas' vision of the matristic Old Europe fits rather neatly within the context of the 1970s American feminist discourses, particularly the strand of the feminist movement that has since been dubbed "cultural feminism".<sup>734</sup> Deriving their ideas from radical feminism, authors such as Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly aimed at reversing the traditional patriarchal understandings of masculinity and femininity, and rethinking "feminine essence" as a source of women's empowerment and social change.<sup>735</sup> The victory against patriarchy for them was achieved not by the eradication of the sex-class system, but in revaluing the traits associated with females.<sup>736</sup> In an effort to rethink what it means to be a woman, feminists in this tradition looked back to the prehistory of human civilization, looking both for the explanation of the development of patriarchy and for the proof of the existence of alternative social and ideological structures, where females were connected with power, strength, and creativity. Gimbutas' *The Gods and Goddesses* (1974), which described the Great Goddess worship in Neolithic and Chalcolithic Europe, provided a scientific ground for the feminists aiming to deconstruct the claims of the historical universality of patriarchy. Her hypothesis of a harmonious, peaceful and egalitarian prehistoric women-centered society of *Old Europe* was particularly important for the American feminist spirituality movement, which flourished in the 1980s and the 1990s.<sup>737</sup> This movement, also called the Goddess movement, looked into the prehistoric Goddess worship in search of its own roots.

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<sup>734</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*; Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36.

<sup>735</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*; Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York ; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976).

<sup>736</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 6.

<sup>737</sup> Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*.

Although the correspondence between Gimbutas' work and certain feminist discourses of the same period is obvious, her influence to cultural/radical feminism is not always acknowledged. One of the possible reasons for this is Gimbutas' hesitance to explicitly call herself a feminist and her wish to be seen primarily as a scientist.<sup>738</sup> The debates over attributing the label of feminism to Gimbutas so far have told more about the politics and positioning of the people doing the naming, rather than providing a deeper understanding of Gimbutas' work, as I have argued in the previous chapter. Drawing on some of the insights developed in feminist new biography studies,<sup>739</sup> in this chapter I do not wish to put on Gimbutas the label of "feminism", that she has herself refused during her lifetime. Instead, my aim is to contextualize her intellectual and life trajectory within the framework of the history of American women's liberation movement from the 1970s to the 1990s and show the mutual influences between feminist thinking and Gimbutas' work. I propose, that despite Gimbutas not calling herself a feminist, the context of feminist activism and theorizing has constituted one of the most important backgrounds both for her thinking and the reception of her ideas.

Moreover, employing the insights from postcolonial studies and critical postsocialist studies, I bring to the forefront the importance that Gimbutas' Eastern European background and the Cold War context had to both her work and its reception within the American feminist spirituality movement. This movement has been criticized by feminists from other political strands for, among other things, its whiteness, Eurocentrism and appropriation of other culture. In this chapter I argue that the construction of Gimbutas as a heir to the authentic pre-Soviet Eastern European cultural tradition had a significant effect on the popularity of her work and persona among the feminist

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<sup>738</sup> Saja, "Geresnio gyvenimo ilgesys. M. Gimbutienė. [Longing for better life. Marija Gimbutas]"; Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*.

<sup>739</sup> Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*; Caine, *Biography and History*.

spirituality movement. In her work, Gimbutas brought the margins of Europe to the center of the narrative of the development of the patriarchal Western civilization – showing how, for example, the Lithuanian goddess-witch *Ragana* can reveal more about the roots of the European culture than the currently globally dominant Anglo-Saxon cultural images. Subsequently, the Orientalized images of pre-modern Eastern Europe were employed by the feminist spirituality movement in the U.S., in an effort to counter the accusations of cultural appropriation of non-Western cultures. As I argue in this chapter, Gimbutas' work on Old Europe should be interpreted as a negotiation of the complicated question of the European belonging of marginalized Eastern European nations, therefore complicating the debate about cultural appropriation.

#### **4.1 Feminists re-discovering the Goddess**

The 1970s – the decade of a general flourishing of feminist activism and theorizing in the United States – was also an important period for the feminist reconsideration of religion and spirituality.<sup>740</sup> Published in 1973, Mary Daly's seminal book *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* argued for the necessity for the women's movement to deal with the exclusively male imaginary of God in the Christian faith. While the majority of Second Wave feminists were secular or atheist, owing to their embedment in the existentialist and Marxist philosophical traditions,<sup>741</sup> the radical feminist philosopher and theologian Daly argued that the women's movement could not go around the apparently universal human desire for spiritual fulfillment. For Daly, the transformation sought by feminists could not stop at what she saw as the

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<sup>740</sup> The history of Western feminism's involvement with religion however goes back at least to the late XIX century, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton initiated the writing of "The Woman's Bible", which challenged the misogyny of Christian religious orthodoxy. At the time her book was repudiated by other suffragists as detrimental to the women's cause and rediscovered only with the Second Wave feminism due to its characteristic interest in broader cultural politics. See Christ and Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising*, 19.

<sup>741</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times. The Postsecular Turn in Feminism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 6 (2008): 3.

formal changes within the male-dominated political and spiritual system, such as voting rights or ordination of women. The goal was to leave behind the ontological framework derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition and imagine the ultimate transcendence, or God, from the female point of view. In her call for feminism to be “not only many-faceted but cosmic and ultimately religious in its vision,” Daly famously re-envisioned feminist revolution as a change in consciousness and not primarily a fight for an institutional change.<sup>742</sup>

A similar line of thought was continued by other feminists, such as most prominently Adrienne Rich (1976)<sup>743</sup>, Susan Griffin (1978)<sup>744</sup>, and others. What characterized these works, later put under the umbrella term of “cultural feminism”, was their commitment to the women-centered approach, the connection of feminism with the environmental politics, skepticism towards technological progress, and the importance assigned to psychological and spiritual change.<sup>745</sup> Reacting to the earlier tendency in radical feminism to transcend the “biology” of gender altogether and strive towards androgyny, cultural feminists wanted instead to reclaim femininity, reverse the predominant negative associations with womanhood and female power, and create a culture based on ‘female values’ (presumed to be superior than ‘male values’) of nonviolence and non-possession.<sup>746</sup> The appearance of women’s or feminist spirituality movement was a part of this “cultural” tendency in feminism. As feminist historians notice, starting with the late 1970s feminist spirituality was a flourishing field of theorizing and activism, especially on the West Coast in the United States, with a set of its accompanying institutions, such as magazines, book shops,

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<sup>742</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 29.

<sup>743</sup> Rich, *Of Woman Born*.

<sup>744</sup> Griffin, *Woman and Nature*.

<sup>745</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*.

<sup>746</sup> Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 72.

publishing houses, as well as health centers.<sup>747</sup> Feminists even had their own educational institutions – like the Woman’s Building in Los Angeles dedicated to feminist art education.<sup>748</sup> At its point of flourishing the movement was rather diverse: for some women feminist spirituality was primarily a catalyst of political and artistic activism and writing, for others it became a countercultural religious community.

One of the landmark texts in presenting the theoretical background for the feminist spirituality was the collected volume *Womanspirit Rising. A Feminist Reader in Religion*.<sup>749</sup> Authors in this collection, mainly theologians, but also activists and spiritual leaders, were united in their radical feminist desire to create a “post-patriarchal religious future”.<sup>750</sup> While theoretical background and approaches to this issue were different, the volume notably included mainly feminists of a white European background, with criticisms directed to Christianity and Judaism.<sup>751</sup> In the introduction to *Womanspirit Rising*, Christ and Plaskow distinguished between the two strands of the women’s critical engagement with religion, as they developed in the 1970s: one ‘reformist’, aiming at the transformation of traditional religions, while the other one more ‘radical’ in its breaking with the tradition. The proponents of the latter strand, according to Christ and Plaskow, aimed to establish a new “revolutionary” belief system, referred to by a variety of names: witchcraft, neopaganism, womanspirit, or Goddess movement. Within this ‘radical’ strand were authors such as Carol P. Christ, Naomi R. Goldenberg, Zsuzsanna E. Budapest, Starhawk, Merlin Stone, and others.

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<sup>747</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*.

<sup>748</sup> Klein, “Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s.”

<sup>749</sup> Christ and Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising*.

<sup>750</sup> Christ and Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising*, 8-13.

<sup>751</sup> In the preface to the 1992 edition of the book, editors have noted with regret the lack of diversity in the first collection, which according to them was mainly determined by the lack of works on the issues of spirituality by the women of color (or lesbians, or people from other than middle class position) available in 1979.



The breaking with Judeo-Christian tradition, implied in the creation of the Goddess movement, meant the need to look for alternative “tradition” – a history and mythology which would ground the new spirituality in a different cosmology. Therefore feminists in this new religious formation turned to “the prebiblical past in constructing new feminist spiritual visions”.<sup>752</sup> The widely quoted article by Christ “Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections”,<sup>753</sup> first published in the special issue “The Great Goddess” of a feminist journal *Heresies* and republished in the *Womanspirit Rising*, encouraged a quest for new spiritual origins. Following Daly, in this text Christ argued that participating in religious rituals that are centered around the symbolism of the male God, women are alienated from their bodies and from their identity as women. The symbolism of the female Goddess facilitated, Christ believed, regaining the sense of strength inherent in women’s bodies, and a belief in their own willpower. Therefore, recovering the knowledge available about the ancient Goddess-worship traditions was important, she argued, in the creation of this feminist women’s spirituality.

The interest in the prehistoric Goddess worship meant that the feminist spirituality movement revised anew the XIX century idea of prehistoric matriarchy, found in the writings of J.J. Bachofen, Friedrich Engels and others, and gave this idea a feminist twist. The sculptor and art historian Merlin Stone argued that “far from the generally accepted idea that the Judeo-Christian religions rescued women from supposedly more barbarian and anti-women societies, women have actually lost a great deal of status and physical and material autonomy since the inception of these and other male-worshipping religions”.<sup>754</sup> According to Stone, the knowledge about the existence of the prehistoric Goddesses-worshipping and women-centered societies can help feminists both to

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<sup>752</sup> Christ and Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising*, 11.

<sup>753</sup> Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” 1978.

<sup>754</sup> Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, 2.

understand the roots of today's patriarchal structures and provide an utopian future vision. As the argument went, if patriarchy was only a historical phenomenon of roughly the past 5000 years, then the claims of contemporary feminists for a radical cultural change had much better historical grounding. It was the “herstory” of the matriarchal prehistory, argued the political scientist Sheila Collins, that could inspire feminists to fight the anti-women attitudes of the contemporary Western world, defined by Judeo-Christian values.<sup>755</sup> While the contemporary mainstream culture was not rich with positive representations of female power, on the contrary, the ancient, prehistoric, prebiblical societies, shrouded in mystery due to the lack of available information, could provide an imaginary landscape for an utopian image of a society characterized by Goddess worship and female ascendency.

#### 4.1.1 Past as a metaphor

As the editors of the *Womanspirit Rising* volume noted, the relationship that the contemporary feminists had to the ancient Goddess worship was rather paradoxical: although they were trying to break with patriarchal tradition and mythology of origins, they were also risking to establish a new romanticized and possibly distorted picture of the past.<sup>756</sup> The relationship to the prehistoric past was therefore a debated topic within the Goddess movement, ranging from metaphorical to more literal interpretations among participants. On the more metaphorical side of the spectrum was, for example, the radical lesbian feminist and power Adrienne Rich, who argued that the historical reality of Goddess worship and the existence of “matriarchal” societies is less important than the psychological aspect of the idea – the concept of beneficent female power.<sup>757</sup> According to Rich,

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<sup>755</sup> Sheila Collins, “Reflections on the Meaning of Herstory,” in *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 71.

<sup>756</sup> Christ and Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising*, 11.

<sup>757</sup> Rich, *Of Woman Born*.

even if the “Golden Age” of Goddess worship did not exist, the individual experience that every human being had in their infancy – that of a bodily and psychological dependency on their mothers – was already a strong enough reason for the existence of a universal archetype of woman’s power and rule.<sup>758</sup>

Still, Rich argued, like many feminists in the 1970s and the 1980s, for the need to reconnect and understand the prehistoric period, when women were venerated. This was necessary in order to change the contemporary negative associations with the female embodiment and overcome stereotypes about femininity:

My own negative associations with male derivations from female anatomy were so strong that for a long time I felt distaste, or profound ambivalence, when I looked at some of the early Mother Goddess figures emphasizing breasts and belly. It took me a long time to get beyond patriarchally acquired responses and to connect with the power and integrity, the absolute nonfemininity (sic), of posture and expression in those images. Bearing in mind, then, that we are talking not about “inner space” as some determinant of woman’s proper social function, but about *primordial clusters of association*, we can see the extension of the woman/vessel association. (It must be also borne in mind that in primordial terms the vessel is anything but a “passive” receptacle: It is transformative – active, powerful.)<sup>759</sup>

Rich here argues that in order to adequately understand what these particular feminine images meant in the prehistoric times, people have to unlearn the patriarchal frameworks of interpretation, which would immediately assume the connotations with womanhood as a passive container, an empty vessel, e.g. nothing but a womb bearing man’s children and thus lesser than man. Only the access to “primordial clusters of association” can help to reevaluate the ancient female symbolism in a positive light and use prehistory as a source of empowerment. Only a deep knowledge of the

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<sup>758</sup> Rich, 73.

<sup>759</sup> Adrienne Rich, “Prepatriarchal Female / Goddess Images,” in *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 37. The piece was reprinted in Spretnak’s collection from Rich’s “Of Woman Born” (1976).

ancient spirituality would allow the reimagining of the vessel-womb-woman symbolism not as “passive”, but as transformative, both life enabling and death containing.

For thinkers like Rich or Carol P. Christ,<sup>760</sup> the actual historical “reality” of the prehistoric past was not as important as the certain feminist attitude and feeling that women had to acquire in approaching their individual and collective female past and feminine nature. Although cultural feminists were critical of Carl Jung’s work on “anima”, his notion of archetype was a strong influence in thinking about the relationship with the ancient Goddess worship.<sup>761</sup> To put it in a nutshell, Jungian approach argued that the images derived from the ancient Goddess worship were alive in contemporary people minds as archetypes (unchanging basic forms of perception) and needed only a trigger in order to inspire “remembering” the times before patriarchy and, in this way, psychological empowerment in the present.

While the women’s spirituality movement was dominated by people of white European descent, the issue of the spiritual empowerment of women via the images of the ancient past was also a reoccurring theme in the work of the Black radical feminist poet Audre Lorde, for example. In the famous essay „The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power“, read first as a paper in 1978, Lorde wrote about the erotic power of women, which, according to her, was to be found in a “deeply female and spiritual plane”.<sup>762</sup> The erotic for Lorde was different from sexuality – it was „an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our

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<sup>760</sup> Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” 1978.

<sup>761</sup> Naomi R. Goldenberg, “Dreams and Fantasies as Sources of Revelation: Feminist Appropriation of Jung,” in *Womanspirit Rising. A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 219–27.

<sup>762</sup> Audre Lorde, “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 87.

lives”.<sup>763</sup> Lorde argued against the separation of the political and spiritual planes and argued that the “erotic” – the capacity to take satisfaction from work and political activism – was something that connected the two. While in this essay Lorde did not explicitly connect women’s empowerment with the ancient spiritual images, she did so in the famous letter written to Mary Daly in 1979.<sup>764</sup> This open letter, published in the important collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*,<sup>765</sup> addressed the Euro-centrism of the feminist spirituality movement in relation to its treatment of the prehistoric past. More precisely, Lorde pointed out how Mary Daly in her book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*<sup>766</sup> did not include any examples of Black heritage among the numerous examples of the ancient Goddess worship. Lorde criticized Daly for taking interest only in the prehistory of the Judeo-Christian white cultures, and ignoring the images of the Goddess from the African context.<sup>767</sup> For Lorde, it was important that the African ancient tradition of female ascendancy and Goddess worship would become a part of the “reservoirs of our ancient power” for contemporary feminists.<sup>768</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Past as historical truth

On the other side of the spectrum between metaphorical and literal uses of the prehistoric past were the neopagan priestesses Starhawk and Zsuzsanna Budapest, who envisioned the connection between the new Goddess worship and the ancient Goddess tradition in terms of continuity and legacy, rather than merely an archetype. Starhawk argued, for example, that the modern feminist witchcraft *inherited* the tradition of the oldest world religion of Goddess worship. She encouraged

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<sup>763</sup> Lorde, 89.

<sup>764</sup> Audre Lorde, “An Open Letter to Mary Daly,” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 94–97.

<sup>765</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983).

<sup>766</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

<sup>767</sup> Lorde, “An Open Letter to Mary Daly,” 94.

<sup>768</sup> Lorde, 96.

women to re-discover witchcraft in its pre-Christian guise, as an “earth centered, nature-oriented worship that venerated the Goddess, the source of life”.<sup>769</sup> This tradition, according to her, started in Paleolithic and continued to be practiced even after the rise of the patriarchal monotheistic religions. Following the understanding of witchcraft as it was popularized by the British Egyptologist Margaret Murray,<sup>770</sup> Starhawk argued that the witch-hunts in the Early Modern period in Europe was a fight of Christian churches against the remnants of the ancient Goddess religion.<sup>771</sup> The persecution of witches, according to this popular narrative, forced the Goddess religion to go completely underground, until it was revived again in the mid-XX century by neopagans and taken over by feminists.<sup>772</sup> Another important figure in creating the modern Goddess spirituality, its separatist Dianic strand, Zsuzsanna Budapest, also claimed to be following an ancient tradition of witchcraft as it was secretly practiced in her motherland Hungary, and which allegedly had roots in the prehistoric tradition of the Great Goddess worship.<sup>773</sup> In the neopagan feminist circles thus, the historicity of Goddess worship was perceived as factual, and served as an important background out of which the new spiritual tradition could be rebuilt.

#### **4.2 Sources of pre-her-story**

Despite the differences in understanding the relationship between contemporary feminist spirituality and the ancient Goddess worship, all these approaches still required an image of the past in order to construct a feminist utopian future. This naturally facilitated the increasing interest

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<sup>769</sup> Starhawk, “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture,” in *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 259–68.

<sup>770</sup> Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*.

<sup>771</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance. A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, 7.

<sup>772</sup> Historical research in the 1980s and 1990s disproved this narrative, but it continued to be popular among radical feminist and the Goddess religion in particular. See Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996)..

<sup>773</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 56.

in the examination of the ancient past from a feminist point of view. The first author, since the start of Second Wave feminism, to delve into this history was the librarian Elizabeth Gould Davis, with her book *The First Sex*.<sup>774</sup> The book was read by such popular feminists as Robin Morgan, and inspired one of the earliest “cultural feminist” texts “Mother Right. A New Feminist Theory”, by the former leftist radical Jane Alpert.<sup>775</sup> Gould Davis’ book was however later criticized for its lack of scientific rigor and largely dismissed – her work for example never made it into the anthologies of feminist spirituality.

Merlin Stone’s book *When God Was A Woman*<sup>776</sup> was received with much more appreciation than Gould Davis’ work. The sculptor and art historian Stone, an active participant in the feminist spirituality movement, described the ancient Goddess worship and the violent rise of the patriarchal religious and political establishment, focusing on the Near and Middle East sources. Although Stone based her book on careful research, she was, like Gould Davis, an amateur prehistorian – not trained as a historian or an archaeologist, which meant that she had to rely in her research almost exclusively on secondary sources. Moreover, Stone supported her arguments with references to the works of some of the nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars,<sup>777</sup> who had rather conservative ideas on femininity and masculinity.<sup>778</sup> Adrienne Rich noticed for example, that Bachofen, who influenced both Davis’ and Stone’s writings on matriarchy, held a rather sentimental and traditionalist understanding of the “feminine principle”, and also saw matriarchy

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<sup>774</sup> Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1971).

<sup>775</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 252–53.

<sup>776</sup> Stone, *When God Was a Woman*.

<sup>777</sup> The British archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes, the British historian of religions E.O. James, the English poet and classicist Robert Graves, the Scottish social anthropologist Sir. James Frazer, the British archaeologists James Mellaart and Sir. Arthur Evans, the French social anthropologist Robert Briffault, and others.

<sup>778</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, for example, the pioneering woman to study archaeology and also an important influence to these writers, held conservative views on gender roles and saw women as the force of resistance against social change. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 358. (Hutton 2001, 358).

as inferior to the later patriarchal stage.<sup>779</sup> This, of course, contradicted the ideological goals of Second Wave feminists. For these reasons Stone's work also did not leave a more significant mark in the feminist understanding of prehistory.

The timing of Gimbutas' *Gods and Goddess* could have not been more perfect – published in 1974, it landed in the fertile soil of the growing feminist spirituality movement and filled in the perceived lack of scholarly information about the prehistoric Goddess-worshipping. The place was also perfect – Gimbutas lived and worked in Los Angeles, the city that arguably was the biggest hub of the Goddess movement.<sup>780</sup> The narrative of the rise and fall of the women-centered and Goddess worshipping societies of the Neolithic Old Europe was based on primary sources and scholarly classification, analysis, and interpretation. Gimbutas herself had directed the excavations that produced many of the artifacts described in the book. The scientific authority that Gimbutas brought to the debate was therefore incomparable to Stone, Gould Davis and others. Moreover, Gimbutas, unlike earlier scientists – predecessors of the idea of “matriarchy” – did not see the pre-patriarchal stage as more primitive than what followed afterward. Quite on the contrary, the whole book, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 3, was intended to show the cultural superiority of the matrilineal Goddesses-worshipping society in contrast to the later androcentric Indo-European civilization, and to depict and interpret its spiritual and artistic achievements.

Gimbutas' work on Old Europe was first of all taken up by the emerging feminist art movement. As the art historian Jennie Klein argues, Goddess spirituality became “the single most important idea to inform the radical politics of a number of artists working in the 1970s” (Klein 2009, 598). In 1978, the feminist journal *Heresies* dedicated the whole issue to the topic of the Great Goddess,

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<sup>779</sup> Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 87.

<sup>780</sup> Klein, “Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s.”



including artistic, philosophical and historical exploration of the subject. One of the editors of the issue, the pioneer of the feminist art movement, Mary Beth Edelson, published an article, describing, how reading Gimbutas' *The Gods and Goddesses* inspired her to go on a Goddess pilgrimage.<sup>781</sup> In 1977, after studying the maps provided by Gimbutas, she undertook a self-financed trip to Hvar island, then a part of Yugoslavia, looking for traces of the prehistoric spirituality of Old Europe. In this island Edelson managed to locate a cave called Grapceva, which supposedly served as a place for Goddess rituals in the Neolithic period. In this cave she then performed rituals, which allowed her to spiritually reconnect to the ancient past, and recorded them with photo camera.<sup>782</sup> Edelson explained in her article the desire for going to a site of the prehistoric Goddess worship as a wish to physically experience the presence of the past, as it was somehow preserved in the materiality of a Neolithic site.<sup>783</sup> Besides from this performance, another article on the prehistoric sites of Goddess worship, published in this issues of *Heresies*, also mentioned Gimbutas' work.<sup>784</sup> These were the first signs of the feminist interest in Gimbutas' work, which provided visual and material substance to the feminist wish to revive Goddess spirituality.

While Gimbutas did not belong to any feminist spirituality groups and denied any relationship with feminism, her works were openly promoting a message similar to that of the Goddess movement – that a society guided by 'feminine values' was a happier and more advanced society than patriarchy. While some prominent voices in the feminist spirituality movement were careful in arguing for or against the actual existence of prehistoric "matriarchies", and saw this idea mostly

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<sup>781</sup> Mary Beth Edelson, "Pilgrimage/See for Yourself: A Journey to a Neolithic Goddess Cave, 1977, Grapceva, Hvar Island, Yugoslavia," *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 5 (1978): 96–99.

<sup>782</sup> Edelson, 96–99.

<sup>783</sup> Edelson, 96.

<sup>784</sup> Mimi Lobell, "Temples of the Great Goddess," *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 5, no. The Great Goddess (1978): 32–39.

as a metaphor for female empowerment, the work of Gimbutas advocated the actual facticity of the prehistoric Goddess worship and female social leadership. *The Gods and Goddesses* also provided an enormous number of visual materials to inspire women-centered artistic imaginary. Finally, Gimbutas herself was an exemplary woman scholar, as if embodying the values of feminine leadership and wisdom that the feminist spirituality movement praised. According to Christ, Gimbutas' work was "radical and implicitly feminist"<sup>785</sup> and provided a "scientific", factual discursive background for the discursive construction of the feminist idea of the prehistoric matrilineal society and the millennia-long worship of Goddesses. Gimbutas' findings and her scientific authority therefore gave a boost to the "literal" side of the debate over the prehistoric Goddess worship and women's power.

#### 4.2.1 Gimbutas' role for the Goddess Movement

When in 1982 Gimbutas' book was republished with the originally intended title, as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images*,<sup>786</sup> her popularity among the feminist spirituality movement started growing rapidly. The same year the eco-feminist Charlene Spretnak included Gimbutas' article "Women and Culture in Goddess-oriented Old Europe" in the edited volume *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement*.<sup>787</sup> A few years later the edited volume *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*<sup>788</sup> was published, featuring the same article by Gimbutas. In this volume, Gimbutas' text about the Goddess-oriented Old Europe was put next to the texts by some well-

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<sup>785</sup> Carol P. Christ, "'A Different World': The Challenge of the Work of Marija Gimbutas to the Dominant Worldview of Western Cultures," in *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas*, ed. Joan Marler (Manchester: Knowledge, Ideas and Trends, 1997), 55.

<sup>786</sup> Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.*

<sup>787</sup> Charlene Spretnak, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays by Founding Mothers of the Movement* (New York: Doubleday, 1982).

<sup>788</sup> Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, eds., *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989).

known feminist thinkers, critics of patriarchal social and religious structures, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Alice Walker, Susan Griffin, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Daly, Audre Lorde and others. Placed in the section “Our Heritage is Our Power”, Gimbutas’ text answered the need, as editors explained, for “a positive past with which feminists can identify, the search for new ways to imagine and speak about the sacred, the effort to redefine the self and transform a patriarchal world”.<sup>789</sup> Gimbutas’ narrative of Old Europe indeed provided such a “positive past”, an image of the egalitarian prehistoric society, where women could make choices about their social and sexual life and obtain positions of the highest social and political authority.<sup>790</sup> Uncovering the positive female symbolism as encoded in the many manifestations of the prehistoric Goddess, Gimbutas participated, as Christ put it, in affirming the history of female power.<sup>791</sup> As the neopagan priestess and writer Starhawk explained in retrospect, Gimbutas’ work supported the feminist project of reclaiming the importance of female, body, and nature, and argued that patriarchy, war, and violence were not necessarily a part of human nature, but rather an unfortunate historical development.<sup>792</sup>

If in *The Gods and Goddesses* Gimbutas only hinted at the potential psychological and political effects of her work on Old Europe, her last two books *The Language of the Goddess* (1989)<sup>793</sup> and *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991)<sup>794</sup> were written already in full belief that the recovery of the prehistoric Goddess religion could contribute to positive changes in the contemporary

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<sup>789</sup> Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, “Introduction,” in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 9.

<sup>790</sup> Gimbutas, “Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe,” 64.

<sup>791</sup> Carol P. Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” in *Womanspirit Rising. A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 277.

<sup>792</sup> Starhawk, “Marija Gimbutas’ Work and the Question of the Sacred,” 522.

<sup>793</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989.

<sup>794</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*.

consciousness. Although both books followed the scientific requirements of the discipline of archaeology, they were written for a broader than specialist audience, discussing the spiritual and political implications of reimagining the prehistory of Western civilization. The interpretation of archaeological materials provided in these books would have been quite counterintuitive for a reader unfamiliar with Gimbutas' previous works or with the feminist spirituality movement, as the books took for granted the existence of a *gylanic* social structure in the Neolithic and Paleolithic times.

Gimbutas borrowed the word “gylanic” (meaning that the society was presided by a queen-priestess, and worshiped a female Goddess)<sup>795</sup> from the author Riane Eisler.<sup>796</sup> Eisler's popular *The Chalice and the Blade* (1988) book was in turn heavily influenced by Gimbutas' work.<sup>797</sup> *The Chalice and the Blade* revised the history of civilization from the perspective of two competing systems – that of domination, characterized by “masculine” values of hierarchy, power and domination, and that of partnership, characterized by “feminine” values of care, equality, creativity. Eisler argued, that neither communism nor capitalism can provide a solution to the contemporary social, economic and environmental dilemmas, and that the path forward lies in the revival of gylany, or society, based on partnership between the sexes.<sup>798</sup> Both Eisler and Gimbutas preferred the word “gylany” over “matriarchy” to talk about a social system that is not a patriarchy and is egalitarian in terms of gender.<sup>799</sup> “Matriarchy”, they argued, could be misunderstood as a reversal of patriarchy, which it was not, because in Old Europe, as theorized by Gimbutas, “men

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<sup>795</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, xix.

<sup>796</sup> Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*.

<sup>797</sup> Riane Eisler, “Rediscovering Our Past, Reclaiming Our Future: Toward a New Paradigm for History,” in *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas*, ed. Joan Marler (Manchester: Knowledge, Ideas and Trends, 1997), 335–49.

<sup>798</sup> Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*.

<sup>799</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 324.

were not oppressed by women”.<sup>800</sup> The change in Gimbutas’ vocabulary from the previously used “women-centered”, “matristic”, “matristic and matrilineal”, to the term “gylanic” in her last books, indicates her ongoing exchange with other women in the circles of the feminist spirituality movement, Eisler in particular.<sup>801</sup>

In the late 1980ies and early 1990ies Gimbutas established a close relationship with many people active in the feminist spirituality movement: ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak, writer and psychotherapist Patricia Reis, Buddhist teacher Joan Iten Sutherland (editor of Gimbutas *The Language of the Goddess*),<sup>802</sup> Joan Marler (editor of *The Civilization of the Goddess*,<sup>803</sup> Gimbutas personal assistant and biographer), mythologist Miriam Robbins Dexter (editor of the posthumously published *The Living Goddess*)<sup>804</sup> and others. Spretnak described the relationship between the feminist spirituality movement and Gimbutas in the following way: “we visited her, held gatherings to wish her well, expressed our gratitude, and offered other acts of friendship”, making it clear that Gimbutas was not a member of any of the Goddess worshipers groups, but rather an honorable guest.<sup>805</sup> Gimbutas was invited to give talks at the Goddess worshippers meetings, appeared on radio and TV shows,<sup>806</sup> in articles of the counter-cultural publications,<sup>807</sup> and more mainstream newspapers.<sup>808</sup> The presentation of her *Civilization of the Goddess* drew a

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<sup>800</sup> Gimbutas, 324.

<sup>801</sup> Eisler later became a professor at the California Institute for Integral Studies – currently a major academic hub for people in the Goddess movement, such as Starhawk, Carol P. Christ, Mara Lynn Keller, and other. The religious studies scholar Cynthia Eller indicates Eisler as one of the “moderate” proponents of the narrative of prehistoric women-centered civilization, as *The Chalice and the Blade* aimed to present a less clearly “gendered” understanding of different social structures, and talk more about dominator vs partnership model, which could possibly be separated from masculinity and femininity. Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 156.

<sup>802</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989.

<sup>803</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*.

<sup>804</sup> Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*.

<sup>805</sup> Spretnak, “Anatomy of a Backlash,” 35.

<sup>806</sup> Goode, *The Goddess in Art: An Interview with Marija Gimbutas*.

<sup>807</sup> More precisely such publications as *ReVision*, *East-West*, *Snake Power*, feminist magazine *Ms*.

<sup>808</sup> Leslie, “The Goddess Theory”; Lefkowitz, “The Twilight of the Goddess.”

crowd of people to a church in Santa Monica in 1991, and Gimbutas received standing ovations after a ceremony reminding more of a religious ceremony than of a usual presentation of an academic book.<sup>809</sup> Gimbutas kept personal friendships with the members of the movement, which grew into a support network during the last decade of her life.

To understand the character of veneration that Gimbutas received from the women participating in the Goddess movement it is revealing to analyze in more detail the interaction between Gimbutas and her fans at the “Goddess Weekend” event, which took place in Sudbury, Massachusetts in 1992.<sup>810</sup> As in other similar events of the feminist spirituality movement’s circles, Gimbutas there gave a lecture about the matristic civilization of Old Europe and received questions from the audience. This was followed by a consciousness-raising circle, in which participants shared the stories of revelation, experienced due to the encounter with Gimbutas’ work. At least two of the participants emphasized coming from the Irish Catholic background, and stressed that Gimbutas’ work revealed for them the possibility to reconnect with their European roots. Because of Gimbutas’ work they realized that behind the oppressive patriarchal Christian religion, there was another, more ancient level of the European spiritual heritage, which was, in fact, empowering for women. To put it in the words of one participant, Gimbutas’ work was truly inspirational for her in finding the sacredness and beauty of women and femininity. “I found my roots, I found my home, I can do my work, I am not alone”, she shared emotionally.<sup>811</sup> Yet another participant – a second generation Lithuanian – claimed to have found in Gimbutas’ work her lost motherland.

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<sup>809</sup> Ragana, *Voice of the Goddess: Marija Gimbutas*.

<sup>810</sup> The event was recorded by Joan Marler in three audio cassettes, which are currently held at the Marija Gimbutas Collection at the Opus Archives and Research Center. The summary here is my own. See Marler, *Marija Gimbutas. Women and the Goddess Weekend*.

<sup>811</sup> Marler.

Being feminists of a white European background, these women were grateful to Gimbutas for the possibility to realize that not everything connected with the Western civilization and whiteness was oppressive and patriarchal. Their contributions to the consciousness rising circle revealed an emotional relationship with Gimbutas' work, as a source of spiritual empowerment. To summarize it, Gimbutas' work, starting with *The Gods and Goddesses*, and increasingly throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, was embraced by the feminist spirituality movement. For the movement comprised mainly of women of white European background, Gimbutas' work provided a rewriting of the history of the Western civilization. She argue that at the roots of the European culture lied a layer of matristic, Goddess-centered civilization, the values of which could provide a way out of the troubles of modern societies.

#### **4.3 Historiography of feminist spirituality: critical and revisionist approaches**

The Goddess movement has been seen, mainly from Marxist and post-structuralist perspectives, as essentialist and apolitical. In what follows I trace these criticisms as well as some more recent attempts at a revisionist approach to feminist spirituality, concluding that the most persistent critiques of this movement are those of Eurocentrism and cultural appropriation. This outline will provide a theoretical and historiographic background for my further investigation of the issue of the reception and appropriation of Gimbutas' work in the feminist spirituality movement.

##### **4.3.1 Marxist and post-structuralist criticism**

Originally the strongest critique to the rise of the feminist spirituality movement came from a Marxist perspective. The feminist historian Alice Echols criticized "cultural feminism" as she named it, for its abandonment of the political struggle and the Left and the turn to separatism and

“mysticism”.<sup>812</sup> Instead of seeing female biology as a source of social oppression, cultural feminists argued that woman’s body can be taken as a resource for the empowerment of women,<sup>813</sup> and promoted the “reclamation and establishment of a so-called female principle”.<sup>814</sup> This, according to Echols, was essentially a conservative and reactionary idea, which revived the old notions of women’s alleged proclivity to relationality, sensitivity and higher moral standing. Moreover, cultural feminist took the slogan “personal is political” from the earlier women’s liberation movement, and altered its meaning, argues Echols, by encouraging an overt preoccupation with lifestyle and self-transformation.<sup>815</sup> Cultural feminist ideology and politics, Echols claimed, was elitist and ignored the differences among women based on racial and class oppressions.

While Echols stressed the stark divide between the earlier radical and later cultural feminism, the gender sociologist Hester Eisenstein argued for seeing more continuity between the two. According to Eisenstein, both radical feminism of the 1960s and cultural feminism of the 1970s included a theoretical separation from Marxism, prioritizing psychological approach over class analysis, and promoted false universalism of the global ‘sisterhood’.<sup>816</sup> However, Eisenstein also argued that these problems became exaggerated in “metaphysical feminism” of Daly, Rich, Robin Morgan and others, as these thinkers idealized women’s essential superiority derived from their body, female bonding and women’s culture.<sup>817</sup> They made feminist struggle, argued leftist critics, into an inner spiritual journey.

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<sup>812</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 285.

<sup>813</sup> Alice Echols, “The New Feminism of Yin and Yang,” in *Powers of Desire. The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 442.

<sup>814</sup> Echols, “The New Feminism of Yin and Yang.”

<sup>815</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 17.

<sup>816</sup> Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*.

<sup>817</sup> Eisenstein, 135.



While in the 1980s cultural feminism received mainly socialist feminist critiques, the 1990s saw a new wave of criticism, this time articulated from a poststructuralist point of view. If leftist critics were mainly concerned with what they saw as cultural feminist tendency to counter-cultural separatism and the lack of political engagement, the critiques from the post-structuralist camp were mostly preoccupied with the problem of essentialism. Judith Butler's famous work *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) that became a landmark of post-structuralist gender analysis, was highly critical about the recourse to "genuine femininity" and the imaginary "before" patriarchy.<sup>818</sup> Butler summarized the theoretical and political problems that poststructuralist feminists have with utopian visions of prehistoric women's rule:

The postulation of the "before" within feminist theory becomes politically problematic when it constrains the future to materialize an idealized notion of the past or when it supports, even inadvertently, the reification of a precultural sphere of the authentic feminine. This recourse to an original or genuine femininity is a nostalgic and parochial ideal that refuses the contemporary demand to formulate an account of gender as a complex cultural construction. This ideal tends not only to serve culturally conservative aims, but to constitute an exclusionary practice within feminism, precipitating precisely the kind of fragmentation that the ideal purports to overcome.<sup>819</sup>

Written in the late 1980s, Butler's text most likely referred to the feminist spirituality movement and its fascination with the narrative of the prehistoric Goddess worship and the return to the "feminine". By using value laden terms, such as "nostalgic and parochial", Butler in this excerpt characterized the feminist spirituality interest in the re-discovery of the pre-patriarchal women's culture as politically problematic: conservative, old fashioned, and not responding to the "contemporary demands". Prioritizing social constructionist approach to gender, Butler saw the cultural feminist approach to femininity as essentialist, and not compatible with the newly dominant constructionist approaches. Moreover, the feminine ideal that the cultural feminists were

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<sup>818</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 47–49.

<sup>819</sup> Butler, 49.

proposing was also, according to Butler, exclusionary and divisive, due to its tendency towards obscuring cultural and ethnic differences. The kind of feminism that Butler criticized was faulty of subsuming all diverse oppressions under the homogenizing term of “patriarchy”.

Another landmark text published around the same period, Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*<sup>820</sup>, also referred to the Goddess movement in a negative way. As the theologian Zandra Wagoner noted, Haraway used the figure of the goddess as a way to implicitly criticize cultural feminists for their tendency to “idealize nature, associate women with the innocence of the garden, search for common pasts in female societies, or desire essential unities among women”.<sup>821</sup> Haraway proposed a new figure for feminism to strive for, instead of the problematic Goddess – a cyborg, which for her symbolized the fragmentary and temporary alliance building that should characterize a new type of non-essentialist feminism. Given that such prominent authorities in feminist thought like Butler and Haraway both implied criticism to the Goddess movement in their respective ground-breaking works, it is no surprise that by the beginning of the 1990s it became conventional to render feminist spirituality as being “outside the bounds of acceptable feminism”.<sup>822</sup> The key figures in poststructuralist academic feminism criticized the women’s spirituality movement for its essentialism and false universalism, in this way constructing the movement as Western-centric, problematically exclusionary and simply *passé*.

The disagreement between the post-structuralist gender studies scholars and the Goddess movement meant that besides from being often referenced in an exclusively negative way, the

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<sup>820</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” In . New York: Routledge, 1991, Pp.149-181.,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>821</sup> Zandra Wagoner, “Kinship Figures, Polluted Legacies, and Recycling: Pragmatic Considerations for FeministGod-Talk,” *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (2007): 257.

<sup>822</sup> Wagoner, 253.

movement to this day has been rather understudied.<sup>823</sup> The religious studies scholar Cynthia Eller is one of the rare researchers from outside of the movement to have extensively written about Goddess spirituality, yet her approach over time changed from a rather sympathetic ethnographic description in *Living in the Lap of Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (1995)<sup>824</sup> towards a highly critical theoretical debate in *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (2000).<sup>825</sup> Eller's books serve as a good example of a predominant secular academic feminist view on the feminist spirituality movement.

In the first book Eller pointed out that the Goddess spirituality movement has been characterized by eclecticism, meaning that their spirituality, rituals and traditions were created by borrowing from all available cultures and intellectual traditions: from Buddhism, to Native American spirituality to Jungian psychology. According to Eller, this borrowing was a practice that troubled the women of the movement, who were mostly of the white-European, middle-class background, and did not want to be accused of cultural appropriation.<sup>826</sup> According to Eller, one of the strategies of dealing with the problem of cultural appropriation for Goddess movement was to turn to “their own” heritage, meaning the European tradition of witchcraft. Zsuzsanna Budapest, one of the founders of the neopagan feminist spirituality movement, was among those advocated a turn to the European tradition witchcraft, namely, as it was allegedly preserved in her own native Hungarian culture. According to Eller, this strategy was meant to elevate the “white liberal guilt” that was tormenting the majority of white middle-class women of the movement.<sup>827</sup>

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<sup>823</sup> Crowley, *Feminism's New Age*.

<sup>824</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*.

<sup>825</sup> Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*.

<sup>826</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 75.

<sup>827</sup> Eller, 79.

### 4.3.2 Feminist spirituality revisited

While a skeptical attitude towards the Goddess movement was predominant among post-structuralist and Marxist feminist scholars, in the late 1990s and 2000s the role of spirituality in feminism started being reconsidered by a few scholars, notably the anthropologist Kathryn Rountree and the art historian Jennie Klein. Rountree in particular focused on the accusation of essentialism that has been directed towards Goddess feminists. She came to the conclusion that similarly to the tradition of sexual difference feminism, the women's spirituality movement aims to overcome the binary thinking inherent in the structure of gender, rather than reclaim the conservative notion of femininity.<sup>828</sup> Rountree also argued, building on the findings of her ethnographic research in New Zealand, that:

Despite the stigma attached to spirituality, it seems to me that the women I have come to know within the movement have the same political goals as other feminists, working in their personal and professional lives for the transformation of gender relations and all relations of unequal power. [] These women's spirituality seems to underpin rather than undermine their feminist activity. The charge that „embracing spirituality is an apolitical copout“ seems unfair, based more on a Marxism-derived theory about the relationship between politics and spirituality than on an observation of real failures of Goddess feminists.<sup>829</sup>

In this quote Rountree responded to the accusations towards Goddess spirituality of being apolitical, coming mainly from Marxist feminists, as I have shown above. According to Rountree, the feminist spirituality movement was political from its very inception in the 1970s in the U.S., and continued to have a political profile throughout 1980s and 1990s.

Similarly to Rountree, the art historian Jennie Klein also aimed to revise the history of the feminist spirituality movement and reconsider the usual charges that had been directed at this movement:

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<sup>828</sup> Kathryn Rountree, "The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 43, no. 2 (1999): 153–55.

<sup>829</sup> Rountree, 140.

that of its lack of political awareness/significance and that of an essentialist view on gender. For that reason Klein identified examples of radical feminist activism, inspired by the idea of Goddess spirituality: Mary Beth Edelson and the feminist art movement in the 1970s; the establishment and activities of the Woman's Building (1973-1991), a feminist art education institution in Los Angeles; and the publication of *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women's Culture* (1977-1980). The appeal of Goddess spirituality to feminist artists, Klein argued, lay in its potential to inspire non-patriarchal imagery of women's body, to challenge the mind-body dualism and question the elitist world of avant-garde art.<sup>830</sup>

Klein also discussed the problem of essentialist approach to gender in feminist spirituality and argues that their "gender essentialism" was only strategic and not based on actual belief in either essential femininity or matriarchal origins. However, Klein argued, in the 1980s and the 1990s, when feminism became gradually institutionalized in academia, feminist scholars started prioritizing poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and other theoretical approaches in thinking about gender.<sup>831</sup> This led the majority of feminists, Klein argued, to see the art and activism inspired by Goddess spirituality as "an unsophisticated and naïve attempt to undo patriarchal assumptions by simply reversing the terms by which men were associated with culture and the mind and women with the body and nature".<sup>832</sup> Klein argues that such an accusation was unjust and possibly a result of the wish on behalf of academic feminists to distance from the controversial beliefs and practices of the Goddess movement, which could threaten their own precarious status within academia.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>830</sup> Klein, "Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s," 581.

<sup>831</sup> Klein, 596–97.

<sup>832</sup> Klein, 577.

<sup>833</sup> Klein's argument about feminist art resembles my own conclusions with regard to feminist archaeologists, who similarly wished to distance from the Goddess movement. See Chapter 3.

While both Rountree and Klein wished to defend the Goddess movement from criticism over gender essentialism and apolitical character, they both also criticized some aspects of this movement, namely, the exclusion of women of color from the movement, and the belief in the facticity of the prehistoric matriarchy. The later criticism clearly points out both the importance that Gimbutas' work had for the women's spirituality movement, and the theoretical problems that contemporary theorists faced in evaluating this influence. Klein in particular stressed the role that the fascination with Gimbutas' persona and her ideas played in the Californian Goddess movement. She strongly criticized Gimbutas' work for being "myth-inflicted" and "based on visual rather than historical evidence".<sup>834</sup> Similar skepticism was expressed also Rountree. Writing about New Zealand, where Gimbutas' influence was less direct, Rountree noted a tendency among the Goddess worshippers to refer to the "existence of a period of matriarchy prior to the arrival in southern Europe of waves of Indo-European invaders bringing their patriarchal religions and societies".<sup>835</sup> The mentioning of the "Indo-European invaders" leaves no doubt that this is an echo of Gimbutas' theory of Old Europe. While distancing herself from the „utopian“ image of matriarchy that some feminists „clung to“, Rountree pointed out that the „psychological value of imagining or inventing a past where women were more powerful“ had more importance for the feminist spirituality than the historical truth of matriarchies.<sup>836</sup>

Both Rountree and Klein accepted the fascination with the topic of prehistory in Goddess movement as long as it remained on a metaphorical level, and as long as the Goddess remained a symbol of women's power, without pretense to be accepted as a historical truth. Arguing that the gender essentialism was "fabricated", "invented" and "progressively deployed" within the feminist

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<sup>834</sup> Klein, "Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s," 586.

<sup>835</sup> Rountree, "The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate," 149.

<sup>836</sup> Rountree, 150.

spirituality movement,<sup>837</sup> Klein obscured the level to which some parts of the Goddess movement sincerely embraced both the existence of prehistoric matriarchy as well as contemporary Goddess worship. Implicit in Klein's article is a belief, that the feminist spirituality movement and its fascination with the Goddess could be justified in the eyes of contemporary academic audience only by showing that artists in 1970s did not actually believe in prehistoric matriarchy, but used it only as a discursive device to fight patriarchy. This rewrites feminist spirituality in poststructuralist language, but it does not do justice to the complexity of its actual ideology, as I have outlined it above. Klein ridiculed Gimbutas' scientific authority and especially her idea of the Goddess-worshipping Old Europe,<sup>838</sup> creating a distinction between the part of the women's spirituality movement worth reconsidering, and the "essentialist" part which could and should be dismissed as problematic and *passé*.

Another problem that both Rountree and Klein saw in the Goddess movement was the predominance of white women of European background and the exclusion of women of color. They, however, interpreted this problem in rather contradictory ways: while Klein focused on the charges of Eurocentrism and the *lack* of engagement with other cultures, Rountree pointed out the cultural appropriation of world cultures, characteristic to the movement. Engaging with the earliest manifestations of the Goddess movement, starting with the 1970s, Klein argued that the lack of women of color in the feminist spirituality movement was a result of the "initial, and unacknowledged, ethnocentricity of 1970s Goddess feminism, which did not question the (false) premise that culture—and religion—originated in European countries".<sup>839</sup> Klein attributed the blame for the Eurocentrism of the feminist spirituality movement to Gimbutas' theory of Old

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<sup>837</sup> Klein, "Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s," 592.

<sup>838</sup> Klein, 584.

<sup>839</sup> Klein, 596.

Europe, which was “imbued with a Eurocentric point of view”.<sup>840</sup> The centering of European culture via the story of the prehistoric matriarchal civilization of Old Europe allegedly made the Goddess movement politically unattractive to women of color. Quite on the contrary to Klein, Rountree pointed out the eclectic postmodern character of the ideology of feminist spirituality and the predominance of cultural borrowing of spiritual practices. She found the appropriation of the elements of Native beliefs by white women of Western backgrounds especially politically problematic, as it was tainted by „a strong mixture of romantic nostalgia for the „primitive” or exotic with cultural ignorance“. <sup>841</sup> It was rather this cultural appropriation, Rountree proposed, that made women of color distance themselves from the Goddess movement. <sup>842</sup>

Feminist spirituality movement, as represented by the authors describe above, seems to be caught in a double bind of being simultaneously appropriating “other” women’s cultures for spiritual empowerment *and* looking for spiritual roots only in its European heritage. These issues can be seen however as two sides of the same coin, namely, like Eller (1995) argues and I will explore in what comes next, that the accusations of cultural appropriation have led the feminist spirituality movement to turn to its European roots. Being wary of borrowing from the cultural traditions that were not “theirs”, white feminists in the American Goddess movement turned to Gimbutas’ research on Old Europe, hoping in this way to find empowerment in “their own” heritage. Concluding this chapter I will argue however, that analyzing the case of Gimbutas demonstrates

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<sup>840</sup> Klein, 586.

<sup>841</sup> Rountree, “The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate,” 145.

<sup>842</sup> This reading of the feminist spirituality movement rests on a problematic narrowing down of this movement only to white women. Interest in Goddess worship and feminist or women-centered spirituality has been of interest and significance in numerous indigenous, women of color and other non-Western, non-white women’s movements. See for example, Gloria Anzaldúa, “O.K. Momma, Who The Hell Am I? An Interview with Luisah Teish,” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 221–31; Paula Gunn Allen, “Grandmother of the Sun: The Power of Woman in Native America,” in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality.*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 22–28.



very clearly the constructed character of any (feminist and non-feminist alike) heritage. As I show, Gimbutas' picture of the authentic European matrilineal prehistory relied on the creation of an Orientalized picture of Eastern Europe, in particular on the idealization of her homeland Lithuania as an authentic "premodern" land.

#### **4.4 The language and civilization of the Goddess**

In her last two books, *The Language of the Goddess* and *The Civilization of the Goddess*, Gimbutas elaborated the literally black-and-white distinction between the Old European and Indo-European civilizations, as represented in their "diametrically opposed" symbolism, religion and social system.<sup>843</sup> If in the chthonic Old European symbolism the color black was the color of life, Earth, and the fertility of moist soil, then in the sky-oriented Indo-European mythology black became the color of death.<sup>844</sup> Similarly, if in the Old European cosmology snake was the symbol of vitality, life energy, and regeneration, while in the Indo-European symbolism the snake became the symbol of evil, which was then carried into the Christian Paradise myth. This radical change in religious symbolism – from the one venerating goddess, femininity, nature, and earth, to the one venerating the male warrior sky god – reflected also the change in social structure which happened with the expansion of Indo-Europeans. The change, as Gimbutas argues, was violent and radical, and it was reflected in the foundational myths of Indo-European civilizations. Vedic, Nordic and Babylonian myths, among others, tell the allegory of the male god of sky and thunder, who kills the evil serpent and thus starts the new epoch.<sup>845</sup> Feminists in the 1970s and the 1980s had interpreted this myth as

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<sup>843</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 396.

<sup>844</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 121.

<sup>845</sup> Gimbutas, 121.

an allegory of the literal overthrow of the previous gylanic social structure by patriarchy.<sup>846</sup> Gimbutas largely embraced this interpretation and supported it with archaeological evidence.

The goal of Gimbutas in *The Language* and *The Civilization* was however, not to analyze the violent rise of patriarchy, but to reconstruct the symbolism, worldview and the social system of the pre-patriarchal, gylanic civilization of Old Europe. This task, in Gimbutas' view, had not only a scholarly importance, but also, and primarily, a spiritual and therefore political contemporary importance. A deep reflection on the pre-patriarchal Old European heritage, she wrote,

may affect our vision of that past as well as our sense of potential for the present and future. The necessity for this has never been greater as we discover that the path of "progress" is extinguishing the very conditions for life on earth.<sup>847</sup>

In line with feminist, environmentalist and pacifist ideas, Gimbutas saw modernity, both in its Western capitalist and Soviet guises, as leading humanity to self-destruction and the destruction of environment.<sup>848</sup> She criticized the notions of *civilization* and *progress*, which took for granted the androcratic model of social organization, characterized by "hierarchical political and religious organization, warfare, a class stratification, and a complex division of labor".<sup>849</sup> None of this was intrinsic to human nature, she thought, and did not represent a higher stage of development of the human society – it was rather a mistake that has been continuous for 5000 years, due to the many forms of patriarchal rule.

The original human spirituality was woman- and Goddess- oriented, argued Gimbutas.

According to myriad images that have survived from the great span of human prehistory on the Eurasian continents, it was the sovereign mystery and creative power of the female

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<sup>846</sup> Stone, *When God Was a Woman*; Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*.

<sup>847</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, vii.

<sup>848</sup> Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, 196.

<sup>849</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, viii.

as the source of life that developed into the earliest religious experiences. The Great Mother Goddess who gives birth to all creation out of the holy darkness of her womb became a metaphor for Nature herself, the cosmic giver and taker of life, ever able to renew Herself within the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth.<sup>850</sup>

This Goddess-centered spirituality resulted also in a social system, which was beneficial for the flourishing of human creativity, and which did not involve any violence or oppression, based on either sex or class. The Old European society, which believed in the Goddess as the nature itself, lived in a harmonious relationship to nature, and embraced the immanence of life.<sup>851</sup> The overthrow of this civilization by the Indo-European invasion in Gimbutas' eyes was comparable to the violent conquest of Americas by European colonizers.<sup>852</sup>

Gimbutas proposed in her latest works and speeches that a completely different world was possible if a change of consciousness would take place, that is, if contemporary society would get rid of the "prejudice against this worldliness" and would stop prioritizing the "philosophical rejection of this world".<sup>853</sup> That is, similarly to other authors in feminist spirituality movement and ecofeminism,<sup>854</sup> Gimbutas suggested that the salvation from the apocalyptic scenario lied in a fundamental, religious transformation. What humanity needed was a shift from the transcendental religions, starting with the Indo-European sky gods and continuing with Judaism and Christianity, towards the religions of immanence, such as the religion of the Great Goddess in prehistoric Europe. Gimbutas argued that the gynarchy of Old Europe, which centered the "feminine principle" in social and spiritual life, was an alternative to the androcratic Western civilization.<sup>855</sup> A reflection and

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<sup>850</sup> Gimbutas, 222.

<sup>851</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 316.

<sup>852</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 352.

<sup>853</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 321.

<sup>854</sup> Spretnak, "Introduction"; Starhawk, "Marija Gimbutas' Work and the Question of the Sacred."

<sup>855</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 320; Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 324.

affirmation of the matristic heritage was, in Gimbutas' words, the answer to the pervasiveness of the patriarchal culture:

We are still living under the sway of that aggressive male invasion and only beginning to discover our long alienation from our authentic European Heritage – gylanic, nonviolent, earth-centered culture. This book presents for the first time the concrete evidence of this long-standing culture and its symbolic language, whose vestiges remain enmeshed in our own system of symbols.<sup>856</sup>

The passage illuminates Gimbutas' theory that the remnants of the Old European culture were still *alive* at some level in modern societies. Gimbutas presented, for example, a cross-cultural comparison of female deities (Lithuanian and Latvia Laima, Irish and Scottish Brigit, Greek Artemis, etc.) and rituals devoted to them, arguing that these goddesses have roots in the Old European symbolism and “have nothing to do with the Indo-European pantheon of Gods”.<sup>857</sup> While Gimbutas argued for the persistence of Old European Goddess symbolism in folklore and myths, she also emphasized that this culture could be found also alive in “the subconscious dream and fantasy world”.<sup>858</sup> With reference to Jungian psycho-analytic theory, Gimbutas argued for the persistence of Goddess archetypes and “the feminine principle” as a part of the collective human unconscious.<sup>859</sup> The persistence of Goddess symbolism on the unconscious level meant that the contemporary people were still able to decipher, understand, and revive the spirituality of Old Europe, despite it being so radically opposite from contemporary worldview.

#### **4.4.1 From witch-hunts to Stalinism**

Gimbutas' narrative of Old Europe was meant to address the foundations of the Western civilization and its universally problematic patriarchal aspects, but she also managed to put a

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<sup>856</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, xxi.

<sup>857</sup> Gimbutas, 111.

<sup>858</sup> Gimbutas, 320.

<sup>859</sup> Gimbutas, 320.

certain Eastern European (Lithuanian) perspective at the very core of her narrative. In Gimbutas work, one of the most impressive example of the oppressed European gylanic heritage was the figure of the witch. The witch for Gimbutas served as an illustration of how the positive female symbolism of the Old European spirituality was denigrated and reversed in the patriarchal Christian worldview and came to stand for the evil forces. Gimbutas argued that the earlier meaning of witch, as a powerful pagan Goddess of death and regeneration, “Killer-Regeneratrix”,<sup>860</sup> persisted in the oppressed women’s culture, in the unconscious realm and the folklore images. The most authentic images of the witch, according to Gimbutas, could be found in European folklore, as for example Basque *Mari*, Irish *Morrígan*, Russian *Baba Yaga*, Polish *Jędzia*, and Lithuanian and Latvian *Ragana*. Lithuanian folklore had an especially important role in Gimbutas’ interpretation. She explained that the word *ragana* in Lithuanian was etymologically connected with the word “regėti” (to see, to foresee) and “ragas” (a horn) – which revealed her prophetic powers and her connection with the symbolism of the Goddess of regeneration.<sup>861</sup> Gimbutas, who did not hesitate to call herself *ragana*, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, suggested that despite the negative connotations attached to the figure of witch in modern times, it can continue to empower women.

Gimbutas’ preoccupation with the figure of the witch discursively connects Gimbutas with radical feminist narratives about the empowerment of women, and the past as a repository of female strength. As Eller notices in her ethnographic research on the feminist spirituality movement, the symbolism of the witch was widely employed by feminists, starting already with the 1970s.<sup>862</sup> Probably the first time the word “witch” entered the Second Wave feminist vocabulary in an

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<sup>860</sup> Gimbutas, 210.

<sup>861</sup> Gimbutas, 209–10.

<sup>862</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*.

empowering way was as a name of the New York Radical Women (NYRW) action group. This anti-capitalist feminist direct action group called themselves W.I.T.C.H., meaning (although it is debated) “Women’s International Conspiracy from Hell”. Their public interventions played with the popular misogynic imaginary of witches.<sup>863</sup> While in this case the name was not employed in any spiritual sense, it was later taken up by the rising feminist spirituality groups, which took seriously the connection between witchcraft, magic and paganism.<sup>864</sup> The history of witchcraft also caught the attention of such radical feminists as Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin.<sup>865</sup> Daly used “witch” both as a powerful metaphor of reclaiming women’s power, as well as a reference to the historical reality of women’s oppression and the genealogy of women’s resistance to patriarchy.<sup>866</sup>

Echoing many similar narratives popular among modern Goddess worshipers,<sup>867</sup> Gimbutas argued that the Medieval witch-hunts were motivated by the desire of the Christian Church to eradicate the last traces of the prehistoric religion of the Goddess and limit women’s social power.<sup>868</sup> Gimbutas even dedicated a passage to describe the early modern witch-hunts, and in this way uncharacteristically moved away from prehistory into the historical times. In the passage quoted below, Gimbutas depicted the witch-hunts as a continuation of the conflict between the values of

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<sup>863</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 76.

<sup>864</sup> Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows*, 1976; Starhawk, “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture.”

<sup>865</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 55. The interest in the history of witchcraft, and especially the history of the persecution of witches by the Inquisition never really disappeared in feminism. For a Marxist feminist analysis see for example Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*. Nowadays one can see also a rising pop culture interest in witches and witchcraft, as for example in the work of the feminist rap singer Princess Nokia.

<sup>866</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 63.

<sup>867</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*.

<sup>868</sup> As the religious scholars writes, the feminist spirituality movement believed that the prehistoric Goddess worship persisted into the patriarchal times as an underground pagan movement. The history of the witch burnings for them was a history of the fight of the patriarchal system against the women’s power, manifested in various activities of healing and magic, uniformly called witchcraft. See Cynthia Eller, “Relativizing the Patriarchy: The Sacred History of the Feminist Spirituality Movement,” *History of Religions* 30, no. 3 (1991): 286. Also see Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*.

the matristic Old European civilization and the Indo-European patriarchal culture. Furthermore, she then connected the early modern witch-hunts with the atrocities of the wars and genocides of the twentieth century:

The Killer-Regeneratrix, the overseer of cyclic life energy, the personification of winter, and Mother of the Dead, was turned into a witch of night and magic. In the period of the Great Inquisition, she was considered to be the disciple of Satan. The dethronement of this truly formidable goddess whose legacy was carried on by wise women, prophetesses, and healers who were the best and bravest minds of the time, is marked by blood and is the greatest shame of the Christian Church. The witch hunt of the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries is a most satanic event in European history in the name of Christ. The murder of women accused as witches escalated to more than eight million. The burned or hanged victims were mostly simple country women who learned the lore and the secrets of the Goddess from their mothers or grandmothers. In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII in a Papal Bull denounced witchcraft as an organized conspiracy of the Devil's army against the Holy Christian Empire. In 1486, a handbook of the witch hunters, called *Malleus Maleficarum*, "Hammer of Witches," appeared and became an indispensable authority for terror and murder. The use of any means of physical and psychological torture to force confessions out of the accused was allowed. The period can boast of greatest creativity in the discovery of tools and methods of torture. This was the beginning of the dangerous convulsions of androcratic rule which 460 years later reached the peak in Stalin's East Europe with the torture and murder of fifty million women, children, and men.<sup>869</sup> (Gimbutas 1989, 319)

From the point of view of Gimbutas, who was used to writing about the developments that lasted for thousands of years, the time distance of 460 years between the publication of *Malleus Maleficarum* and the violent Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe was rather insignificant, and represented the unraveling of one and the same phenomenon – the perverse patriarchal rule. In reiterating this narrative, Gimbutas invoked the discourse characteristic of radical feminism, which positioned the oppression of women at the core of all hierarchical and abusive relationships, both historically and cross-culturally. At the center of this drama of human history were women, "the best and bravest minds of the time", who fell victim to the violent march of patriarchal "progress".

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<sup>869</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 319.

The historical period of modernity for Gimbutas was the period of “the dangerous convulsions of androcratic rule”, resulting in the twentieth century atrocities.

The passage illustrates, how Gimbutas saw the Soviet Union as a part of the self-destructive development of Western civilization and the project of modernity. In fact, Gimbutas represented the Stalinist crimes in Eastern Europe as the “peak” of the androcratic rule, which had been developing since its inception in prehistoric Europe, with the overthrow of the peaceful and egalitarian, matristic Old Europe. What was quite unusual for the radical feminist discourse as it was reiterated by Gimbutas, is that she ascribed the culmination of the patriarchal “convulsions”, meaning, in her language, the peak of the “progress” of the Western civilization, to the atrocities of the Stalinist regime in Eastern Europe. This stood in contrast to the usual Western feminist discourses, which normally employ the Nazi regime as an example of embodiment of the ultimate evil.<sup>870</sup> Mary Daly, for contrast, in her controversial work *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) compared the systematic violence against women in the U.S. health system with the tortures practiced in Nazi death camps, in order to emphasize its cruelty.<sup>871</sup> By choosing Stalinism to stand for the *ultimate* wrongdoing of patriarchy in her text, Gimbutas retained difference from the American feminist spirituality movement and emphasized her Eastern European background.<sup>872</sup> Although in the predominant Western discourses the Nazi crimes are

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<sup>870</sup> Diane Purkiss notes that in feminist discourse witch-hunts are often compared to the Holocaust. While noting that indeed Holocaust has become the paradigmatic narrative of evil in the late twentieth century (in the “Western World”, I would add), she also criticized the radical feminist usage of this comparison. According to Purkiss, radical feminists often claim that the number of the victims of the witch-hunts are approximately nine million, which goes above the approximate number of the victims of the Holocaust. This not only contradicts historical facts, but also encourages a sort of competition of victimization, as if feminist wished to argue that “women” have historically suffered more than anyone else. See Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations*, 17.

<sup>871</sup> Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*.

<sup>872</sup> The so called memory wars between the Eastern and Western European interpretations of XX century history, which nowadays take place at the level of the European Union policy making are well depicted in the work of the Estonian international relations scholar Maria Malksoo, see for example Maria Malksöö, “Nesting Orientalisms at



normally employed as an example of evil, Gimbutas proposed Stalinism as the example of the ultimately evil regime, thus implicitly portraying the oppression of her homeland Lithuania as an example of ultimate victimhood.

Gimbutas' *Language of the Goddess* and *Civilization of the Goddess* (1989 and 1991 respectively) were written at the time of the major political turmoil in Eastern Europe, including Lithuania. The 1989 saw the fall of the "Iron Curtain", and 1990 was the year of the declaration of the national independence of Lithuania. These events, as I will discuss more broadly in Chapter 5, encouraged a radical rejection of the Communist system in Eastern Europe, and an uncritical embrace of the Western capitalist system. Differently from the majority of intellectuals and politicians with an Eastern European background, Gimbutas however did not demonstrate in her works and speeches of that period a strong preference for the Western system, in comparison to the Soviet Union.<sup>873</sup> She wrote about the Stalinist regime as a part of the same phenomenon – the Western modernity – which, in its own turn, was just the manifestation of the 5000-year long androcratic rule, which started with the overthrow of the matrilineal Old Europe and continued with the persecution of witches. In this approach, Gimbutas was similar to, for example, Riane Eisler, who wrote in *The Chalice and the Blade* (1988), that "neither capitalism nor communism offers a way out of our growing economic and political dilemmas".<sup>874</sup> Writing in the 1980s and the 1990s, in the context of the so called "postsocialist condition",<sup>875</sup> characterized with the disappointment, among the

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War," in *Orientalism and War*, ed. Tarak Barkawi and Ketih Stanski (Oxford University Press, 2013), 176–95. See also the work of the historian Timothy Snyder, who aims to reframe the Western historical imaginary of the Second World War atrocities, by treating the crimes committed by the Soviet Union at the same level of importance as the those committed by the National Socialist in Germany in his historical work, see *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*.

<sup>873</sup> Gimbutienė, "The Speech at Vytautas Magnus University," 15.

<sup>874</sup> Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, 158.

<sup>875</sup> Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*.

progressive social movements with both the Western and the Communist systems, Gimbutas proposed that the only solution to the problems of modernity was in the revival of the lost women's culture and the "feminine values".<sup>876</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Gylany - bringing margin to the center

In *The Language and the Civilization* Gimbutas employed the methodology which she called archaeomythology, essentially meaning the use of the study of myth and folklore in the interpretation of prehistoric materials. Archaeomythology was Gimbutas' main tool in recovering the forgotten Goddess religion, as it was, according to her, preserved in the folklore and traditions of various European nations up until the twentieth century, and, in the unconscious realm, up until today.<sup>877</sup> The most important sources for the recovery of the ancient Goddess tradition were located, Gimbutas argued, on the cultural margins of Europe. According to her, the remnants of the Old European beliefs persisted mostly in the folklore of the peripheral European areas: "Basque, Breton, Welsh, Irish, Scottish, and Scandinavian countries or where Christianity was introduced very late, as in Lithuania."<sup>878</sup> She even argued that the small Basque ethnic group living mainly in the North of contemporary Spain, should be considered as the last "living Old European" culture.<sup>879</sup> The folklore of the peoples that were historically marginalized in the course of the development of Western modernity for Gimbutas provided the main key for understanding the gylanic past and the remnants of Goddess religion.

Although Gimbutas argued for the remnants of the Old European spirituality to be alive across Europe, in folklore, myth and symbol, her native Lithuania provided her with the richest resource

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<sup>876</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989; Gimbutienè, *Senoji Europa* [The Old Europe].

<sup>877</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 320.

<sup>878</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989.

<sup>879</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 348.

for the reconstruction of the gynocentric European past. She explained, for example, the snake worship, that was a part of the traditional village culture in Lithuania up until the twentieth century, as a remnant of the Old European symbolism.<sup>880</sup> While the Indo-European mythology (and connected Christian mythology) made serpent into the symbol of evil, in Old European mythology it was a benevolent creature, a symbol of vitality and regeneration.<sup>881</sup> Lithuanian folklore also served her as an example of the persistence of the worship of Mother Earth in Europe up until the contemporary times.<sup>882</sup> In the *Language of the Goddess* Gimbutas wrote,

In some nooks of Europe, as in my own motherland, Lithuania, there still flow sacred and miraculous rivers and springs, there flourish holy forests and groves, reservoirs of blossoming life, there grow gnarled trees brimming with vitality and holding the power to heal; along waters there still stand menhirs, called „Goddesses“, full of mysterious power.<sup>883</sup>

In the excerpt above, Gimbutas claimed her own “motherland” Lithuania to be an especially rich depository of the values of Old Europe, in fact, a living example of the Goddess- and women-oriented spirituality. In this way she also positioned herself as a part of the gylanic tradition of Old Europe, which has been handed from one generation of women to the next one throughout the centuries, reaching the contemporary times.<sup>884</sup>

Gimbutas was not alone in her turn to the marginalized folk traditions in search for the women-centered prehistory. This context in which she was writing is especially clear in the aforementioned anthology *Weaving the Visions*,<sup>885</sup> which contained texts from authors representing a variety of

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<sup>880</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 135.

<sup>881</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 121.

<sup>882</sup> Gimbutas, 159.

<sup>883</sup> Gimbutas, 320.

<sup>884</sup> Gimbutas, 111.

<sup>885</sup> Plaskow and Christ, *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*.

religious and ethnic contexts.<sup>886</sup> The narrative of the suppression of the original matrifocal, Goddess-centered religion and culture in Old Europe, suggested by Gimbutas,<sup>887</sup> bore many similarities to the one presented in the work of the Chicana lesbian poet and writer Gloria Anzaldúa, published in the same volume.<sup>888</sup> Anzaldúa's work on the Mexican folk religiosity, and the history of spiritual colonization in Central America echoed the work of Gimbutas in its tracing back the prehistoric women-centered culture.

Anzaldúa argued that the powerful Goddesses Creatrices of Mesoamerican cultures were demonized and appropriated first by the Azteca-Mexica culture and then even more diminished by Christianity, which reduced the all-encompassing nature of Indian Goddesses to the image of the *Virgin of Guadalupe*. Even in this reductive portrayal, *Guadalupe* was still a potent symbol in Chicana imagination, according to Anzaldúa, connecting indigenous people to their ancient roots in the pre-patriarchal, prehistorical civilization.<sup>889</sup> This narrative echoed that of Gimbutas', who claimed already in *The Gods and Goddesses* that the Old European spiritual heritage manifests to some extent in the importance attributed to the cult of Virgin Mary in Catholic European countries.<sup>890</sup> For Gimbutas this signified that even after the Christianization of the country, European people found ways to continue cultivating the old beliefs, adapting them to the symbols and rituals provided by Catholicism. Similarly to Anzaldúa in the Mesoamerican context, Gimbutas claimed that although the Old European Goddesses were appropriated and reduced first

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<sup>886</sup> The first anthology *Womanspirit Rising* was focused almost exclusively on the Judeo-Christian contexts and issues. The second volume very consciously aimed to fix this blind spot and editors managed to cover some of the diversity of ethnic, racial and obviously religious backgrounds of American feminists.

<sup>887</sup> Gimbutas, "Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe."

<sup>888</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, "Entering into the Serpent," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality.*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 77–86. Anzaldúa's piece "Entering into the Serpent" was reprinted from her autobiographical book *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

<sup>889</sup> Anzaldúa, "Entering into the Serpent," 77–79.

<sup>890</sup> Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses*, 200.

by the Indo-European and then by Christian religion, they still survived to some extent in the folk traditions of the marginalized European people and thus could serve as a tool for empowerment.<sup>891</sup>

Both Anzaldúa and Gimbutas argued against the popular understanding of ancient spirituality as “primitive” and inferior to the contemporary rational-scientific worldview. On the contrary, the ancient Goddess-centered spirituality for both authors was a source of resistance against the patriarchal notion of progress, and the imperialism related with it. However, while for Anzaldúa, it was the Western modernization that was the final step in suppressing the authentic spirituality of her people, for Gimbutas it was the Soviet modernity that eradicated the leftovers of the traditional lifestyle and worldview in Lithuania and Europe in general. While Anzaldúa talked about the prehistoric religions of the people colonized by the European powers, for Gimbutas, the roots of the Goddess worship were in Europe itself and were still detectible in its most marginalized corners. If Anzaldúa saw Europe and the Western civilization as the cause for the eradication of the indigenous women- and Goddess- centered civilization and spirituality, for Gimbutas, the history of Europe itself represented a story of the tragic eradication of gylanic heritage in the name of the patriarchal progress.

#### ***4.5 The uses and abuses of Eastern European heritage***

In *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* (1995) Cynthia Eller showed, among other things, how the predominantly white participants of the feminist spirituality movement in the U.S. were concerned about cultural borrowing inherent in their religious practices.<sup>892</sup> On the one hand, white women,

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<sup>891</sup> Gimbutas claimed already in 1974 that the Old European spiritual heritage manifests to some extent in the importance attributed to the cult of Virgin Mary in Catholic European countries (see Gimbutas, *Gods and Goddesses*, 200), similarly like it does in the cult of Guadalupe in Central America. This for Gimbutas signified that even after Christianization of the country, people found ways to continue cultivating the old beliefs, by adapting the symbols and rituals provided by Catholicism.

<sup>892</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*.

who made up the disproportionate majority in the feminist spirituality movement, wanted to avoid Eurocentrism in their beliefs, and therefore took African, Asian, or Native American traditions to be as much their heritage as the European ones.<sup>893</sup> Moreover, the desire for inclusion of the diversity of cultural traditions in the modern Goddess worship was dictated by the wish to stress the universal oppression of women, and the allegedly universal pre-patriarchal tradition of Goddess worship.<sup>894</sup> On the other hand, borrowing from traditions of the people who have been colonized and oppressed by the European powers caused debate inside the movement about the ethics of cultural appropriation. Can white women of European descent pick and choose from the leftovers of the spiritual traditions that have been largely eradicated by European colonialism and suffered as a consequence of Western “progress”? Being aware of this problem, and facing criticism inside and outside the movement, some spiritual feminists decided to turn to the tradition that was assumed to be mostly “theirs” – the pre-patriarchal European tradition of Goddess worship.<sup>895</sup>

This position was in particular advocated by the high priestess of Dianic Wicca<sup>896</sup>, Zsuzsanna Z. Budapest, whom Eller identifies as “the closest thing feminist spirituality has to a founder”.<sup>897</sup> Born Zsuzsanna Emese Mokcsay in 1940, Z. Budapest took her pseudonym from the name of her hometown – Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Being of an Eastern European origin, Budapest had

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<sup>893</sup> The awareness of Euro-centrism within the mostly white feminist spirituality movement was most likely a result of the poignant critique expressed by Black feminists. One of the best known examples of such critique is the open letter to Mary Daly written by the Black lesbian radical feminist Audre Lorde, where she criticized Daly for employing only “white, western-european, judeo-christian” images of the goddess for the goal of feminist empowerment, and not acknowledging the value of African spiritual heritage, see Lorde, “An Open Letter to Mary Daly.”

<sup>894</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 18.

<sup>895</sup> Eller, 77.

<sup>896</sup> Dianic refers to the separatist strand of contemporary witchcraft which is practiced by women and worships female goddesses.

<sup>897</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 55.

a life trajectory that echoed that of Marija Gimbutas. Similarly to Gimbutas, she was forced to flee from the Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe, except not during the Second World War as Gimbutas, but during the Hungarian Uprising of the 1956. Budapest eventually ended up in the United States, and after splitting up with her husband entered the feminist activist scene in Los Angeles in 1970.<sup>898</sup> Being passionate about neopaganism, in 1971 she founded the first feminist witches coven, called the Susan B. Anthony Coven No.1<sup>899</sup> and in this way essentially put the movement of the Goddess worship in motion. Budapest, in her self-styling as the founder and high priestess of feminist witchcraft, relied extensively on her Eastern European roots. Budapest claimed that she inherited the tradition of witchcraft from her mother Masika Szilagyi, who was allegedly a heir of the centuries old tradition of Hungarian witchcraft. Budapest also referred to Hungarian folklore in her books, such as *The Feminist book of Lights and Shadows* (1975) and *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (1989), which helped to establish the rituals of Dianic Wicca.<sup>900</sup> Reliance mainly on her Eastern European roots helped Budapest to avoid the blame of cultural appropriation, that otherwise was troubling the white women within the feminist spirituality movement. She insisted on turning back to “our own heritage”, meaning the folklore of the European people.<sup>901</sup>

Although Gimbutas was far from a founder or a priestess of the new feminist neopagan tradition, her popularity within the Goddess movement also relied to some extent on her Eastern European roots and the construction of a romantic image of Lithuania as a land with a particularly authentic connection with the Old European gylanic heritage. As I have shown above, Gimbutas did not only

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<sup>898</sup> Eller, 55.

<sup>899</sup> Susan B Anthony was an important social reformer, anti-slavery activist and feminist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. Naming the coven after her indicated the feminist character of Budapest' neopaganism.

<sup>900</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 55–56.

<sup>901</sup> Eller, 79.

used Lithuanian folklore in order to interpret the archaeological materials from the European Neolithic. She also presented a rather orientalized<sup>902</sup> image of Lithuania. as a country, which managed to preserve not only premodern, but even prehistoric heritage, embodied in the strong and authentic bond with the worship of the Goddesses and the exceptional respect for nature.<sup>903</sup> By relying on such a picture of her “motherland”, Gimbutas presented herself not only as a disinterested scientist/objective researcher, but as a heir of the tradition of her own people which she was restoring to life. For the feminist spirituality movement therefore, Gimbutas was definitely not only a knowledgeable and impartial scientist to whom Goddess worshipers turned for the evidence of the prehistoric matristic civilization. By virtue of being Lithuanian, Gimbutas also had a personal connection to the gylanic European heritage, she could be see an a “crone”<sup>904</sup>, who embodied wisdom and feminine power and sent a healing message about the past and the future.

Gimbutas, as I have shown above, presented a narrative of the prehistory of the Western civilization in which the authentic indigenous European culture was matristic, egalitarian, peaceful and Goddess-worshipping, oppressed by the patriarchal invaders from the East. This narrative allowed the predominantly white feminist spirituality movement to reconnect with its European heritage in a new way, without the “white liberal guilt”<sup>905</sup> about the atrocities caused by the Western colonialism and modernization. Gimbutas constructed Lithuania (similarly to Hungary in the case of Z Budapest) as a marginalized and oppressed country, as a European periphery that both has preserved the most authentic connection to the gylany, and suffered under the most

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<sup>902</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>903</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 320.

<sup>904</sup> In the feminist spirituality movement , crone is one out of three aspects of the Goddess and an aspect of women’s life which represents wisdom and maturity. This image of crone is intended to contradict the negative images of old women in popular culture and thus empower women to age with pride. See for example Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” 1978.

<sup>905</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 79.



extreme “convulsions of androcratic rule”.<sup>906</sup> The “Europeanness”, represented by Gimbutas in the eyes of the feminist spirituality movement was not dominant or oppressive, but subordinate and marginalized. This made it much more relatable for the women in the feminist spirituality movement, who tended to empathize with the underdog, with the oppressed, rather than the oppressor.<sup>907</sup> However, even while being colonized, countries like Lithuania or Hungary retained the cultural status associated with the Western and European allegiance, since in the case of Soviet modern imperialism, contrary to the history of Western colonialism, it was the communist occupants who were considered “barbaric” and “inferior” among the East Central European intelligentsia.<sup>908</sup> Gimbutas, descending from Lithuanian national intelligentsia therefore embodied the sort of European heritage with which the women in the feminist spirituality movement could identify due to perceived cultural similarity, but without guilt. This resulted in maintaining and exaggerating the image of Lithuania as the idealized premodern European homeland.

#### **4.5.1 Lithuania “out of time”**

The feminist spirituality movement took up Gimbutas’ narrative of Old Europe as representing the authentic story of European heritage. However, I argue the connection with this heritage was dependent on an Orientalized picture of Lithuania as a depository of the gylanic values of Old Europe. The documentary *Signs out of Time*<sup>909</sup> by the neo-pagan priestess Starhawk and the Canadian film maker Donna Read is a great example of how the romantic image of Lithuania was taken by the feminist spirituality movement at a face value and reiterated to the extent where it became a figment of orientalist imagination. The voice-over of the documentary described

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<sup>906</sup> Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989, 319.

<sup>907</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 73.

<sup>908</sup> Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?,” 121.

<sup>909</sup> Read and Starhawk, *Signs Out of Time*.

Lithuania as „a land tucked away in north-east Europe, where remnants of an ancient world still linger, passed down through families”.<sup>910</sup> The filming crew of the documentary visited Lithuania in 1999,<sup>911</sup> but the video materials that were selected for the final version could have as well represented Lithuania in the nineteenth century, before modernization. The documentary started with video coverage showing a group of people celebrating summer solstice, wearing a stylized version of traditional Lithuanian peasant attire. Other video fragments from Lithuania showed the following imagery: a man and a woman plowing soil with a horse-drawn plow; an old woman cutting grass with a hand-held sickle; village women signing folk songs; elderly ladies selling vegetables at a market. While the voice-over mentioned how the „common people of Lithuania“ were an inspiration for Gimbutas‘ work, the video showed the Skansen-style Dzūkijos folklore museum<sup>912</sup> and the traditional household items displayed in a wooden peasants house. Documentary did not feature any Soviet or post-Soviet architecture, no modern city life, no modern technology whatsoever. The unrealistically “ancient” imagery presented in the documentary, confirmed the image of Lithuania promoted by Gimbutas – as a premodern land, where the spiritual connection with Old Europe still lingers. The documentary by Starhawk and Read reproduced therefore the images typical of Western orientalism towards Eastern Europe, as lagging behind the West in terms of modernization.<sup>913</sup>

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<sup>910</sup> Read and Starhawk.

<sup>911</sup> Information about the documentary was taken from the official web page of the filmmakers. See Belili productions, *About Signs Out of Time*, accessed 29 August 2019, <https://www.belili.org/marija/aboutSIGNS.html>.

<sup>912</sup> Skansen was the first open air folklore museum established in Sweden at the end of the XIX century as a part of the Romantic project to preserve the folklore tradition quickly vanishing with the advancement of modernization. There have been many museums of this kind established, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe. Read more in Hans Ruin, “A Home to Die in: Hazelius, Skansen and the Aesthetics of Historical Disappearance,” in *History Unfolds: Samtidskonst Möter Historia : Contemporary Art Meets History*, ed. Helene Larsson (Stockholm: Pousette: Art and Theory Publishing, 2017), 136–47.

<sup>913</sup> On the notion of Eastern European lagging behind and the orientalization of Eastern Europe in Western discourses, see Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*; Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

An important role in promoting this Orientalized image of Lithuania was played also by Joan Marler, a participant in the feminist spirituality movement, Gimbutas' editor and assistant (1987-1994).<sup>914</sup> In her hagiographic biographical sketches Marler depicted Gimbutas as being imbued with nearly magical characteristics, which were supposedly a part of her Lithuanian heritage. Marler wrote, for example:

When Gimbutas was a child her mother gave her this prophesy: "You will give something very important to the world which will keep people from becoming ill." Toward the end of her life she contemplated how her work had still fulfilled her mother's prophesy. (...) I am convinced that by remaining true to the culture that had nourished her, she embodied an essence of the Lithuanian soul. She transmitted a vision of cultural potential for Lithuania within a pan-European context that is profoundly meaningful at this time of great transition.<sup>915</sup>

As exemplified above, in Marler's biographical writing Gimbutas appeared to be the heir of healing powers, transmitted through her mother, similarly to autobiographical narrative promoted by Z Budapest. Gimbutas, according to Marler, was not simply representing Lithuanian culture – she *embodied* the "Lithuanian soul" – meaning that Gimbutas inherited the values of the gylanic Old Europe culture. Marler's biographical sketches on Gimbutas echoed closely the theories of Joseph Campbell about the universal mythic structure of "heroes journey".<sup>916</sup> Her writing presented Gimbutas as a struggling heroine, who persisted in her endeavors, fighting against all odds and evil forces. Gimbutas, in Marler's narrative, came out of her allegorical scientific journey

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<sup>914</sup> Marler wrote a number of biographical sketches about Gimbutas, see Marler, "The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas"; Marler, "The Circle Is Unbroken: A Brief Biography"; Marler, "Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend"; Marler, "Gimbutas, Marija Birutė Alseikaitė." She also initiated the publication of one of the biggest books of tributes to Gimbutas, collecting articles from various disciplines as well as different countries, see Marler, *From the Realm of the Ancestors*. Marler also advised the makers of the documentary *Signs Out of Time*.

<sup>915</sup> Marler, "Introduction."

<sup>916</sup> The schema of the mythic narrative was summarized by Campbell in the following way: „a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man". In Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2008), 23.

triumphant, with an important message that she had deciphered from the prehistoric materials – the message that had the power to “heal” the contemporary society, to save humanity.<sup>917</sup>

Another interesting similarity between the (auto)biographical narratives of Z Budapest and Gimbutas was that the pagan spirituality was represented not necessarily as practiced in their families, but as transmitted via the servants of the household. Servants, who would come from peasantry, were the actual believers in Fates, as in the case of Gimbutas, or the carriers of the knowledge of witchcraft, as in the case of Budapest. As Marler narrated it, Gimbutas was first touched by the symbolism of Lithuanian folklore due to her encounter with the working Lithuanian peasant women, who were singing “authentic, very ancient” songs. Her knowledge of the pagan folk beliefs was also derived from the peasant household servants.<sup>918</sup> Similarly, in the autobiographical narrative of Z Budapest, she claimed to have inherited the Eastern European folk wisdom from her mother, who, in turn, got initiated into the ancient Hungarian witchcraft tradition by a peasant household servant.<sup>919</sup> The tendency in both Gimbutas’ and Z Budapest’ (auto)biographical narratives to attribute the continuity of the matristic (Old European) culture to peasants probably reflects the fascination that Eastern European interwar nationalist intellectuals had with the „authentic“ peasant culture.<sup>920</sup> To summarize, the Old European heritage that was represented by Marija Gimbutas, described in her works, and eagerly appropriated by the feminist spirituality movement as its “sacred history”,<sup>921</sup> relied on an Orientalized image of Lithuania,

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<sup>917</sup> Gimbutas and Campbell held correspondence and admired each other’s work. Currently Marija Gimbutas’ Collection at the OPUS Archives is held together with the private collection of Campbell. The busts of Gimbutas and Campbell decorate the entrance to the archive, representing, in the words of the librarian, the feminine and masculine elements. Joseph Campbell and Marija Gimbutas Libraries, OPUS Archives and Research Center, Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara.

<sup>918</sup> Marler, “The Circle Is Unbroken: A Brief Biography,” 9.

<sup>919</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 55–56.

<sup>920</sup> See Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*. I also elaborate on it in Chapter 2.

<sup>921</sup> Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 151.

which in turn was partly derived from the Eastern European nationalist idealization of the peasant culture, characteristic to the interwar period.

#### ***4.6 Concluding remarks: the construction of the Old European heritage***

In this chapter I have read Gimbutas in the context of the Second Wave feminism, and in particular in the context of the American feminist spirituality movement from the 1970s until the 1990s. In her works Gimbutas, as I have shown, developed a distinct political vision, which was women-centered, environmentalist and pacifist. While she always resisted the label of feminism, Gimbutas in her works argued for no less than what Mary Daly suggested to be the ultimate goal of the radical feminist revolution – the overcoming of the imaginary of the single male God and a transformation consciousness. The efforts of the so called “cultural feminists” to reimagine the world, retell the history of humanity and undo the deeply seated patriarchal structures inside their own thinking, cannot be easily dismissed, because they still inform contemporary feminism. Gimbutas’ works are a part of this heritage and should be critically reread with an eye for the possibilities for a new feminist interpretation. I have summarized here the attention that Gimbutas paid to marginalized cultures in her work, her resistance to patriarchal narratives, especially the critique of the narrative of progress and civilization, and obviously, her criticism of the male-centered view of the prehistory of “the Western civilization”.

Bringing Gimbutas to the center of feminist historiography in this chapter I have emphasized the ambiguous relationship that the feminist spirituality movement had with “their” white European cultural background. In particular I aimed to shed light on the imaginary relationship with the (former) state-socialist Europe within the discourses and politics of this feminist strand. Gimbutas, as I have shown, was particularly attractive figure for the feminist spirituality movement, since she

provided an emphatically feminist narrative about the matristic European past, thus reversing the usual patriarchal story of the development of the “Western civilization”. Her theory of Old Europe provided a number of symbolically and spiritually important materials, including visual ones, for the feminists of white European descent within the feminist spirituality movement. Due to Gimbutas’ work, these feminists felt that they could find elements of empowering gylanic past in “their” cultural heritage and thus avoid charges of cultural appropriation.

However, as I have argued here, the picture of Old Europe has been constructed by Gimbutas from a particular (Lithuanian) location of the geographical, historical, and economic European margins – the so called post-socialist “New Europe”. Her theory of matristic past and, in particular, her hypothesis about the continuity of archetypal and folklore images of women’s strength in the twentieth century Lithuanian culture, must be read as a part of an ongoing negotiation of European belonging among the marginalized (post-)socialist Eastern European nations. In her latest books, written around the fall of the “Iron Curtain”, when the Eastern European nations regained national independence, she aimed, among other things, to rewrite the mainstream Western (pre)historical narrative, as to make space for the history of post-socialist Europe and emphasize the fundamental Europeanness of Lithuanian culture, among other marginalized peoples.

Gimbutas’ idealized picture of Lithuania as a particularly authentic resource of the reconstruction of the matristic Old European symbolism was taken up by the feminist spirituality movement in an Orientalizing way, perpetuating stereotypes about Eastern Europe as lagging behind on the road of modernity. Following this observation I do not argue however, that the Old European heritage, as described by Gimbutas, does not “belong” to the American feminist spirituality movement and therefore was “appropriated”. Instead I propose that any heritage, feminist or non-feminist, is always to some extent constructed from a contemporary perspective. The “Europe” in Gimbutas

Old Europe has therefore to be denaturalized with attention to Eastern European political sensitivities in the context of the end of the Cold War and the fall of the “Iron Curtain.

## Chapter 5. The Archaeologist of Nation and Gender: Gimbutas and Post-Socialist Lithuanian Feminism

One of the very few books on Lithuanian women in post-socialism, the edited collection *Women in Transition. Voices from Lithuania* starts with three “interesting facts”, that everyone interested in Lithuanian women should learn about.<sup>922</sup> One of these facts is that

The most revered Lithuanian woman is the internationally famous archaeologist, the late Marija Gimbutas, whose research suggests that much of paleolithic Europe, including Lithuania, was populated by a nonpatriarchal, matristic culture. She is a national icon, and her theories are enthusiastically embraced by women scholars.<sup>923</sup>

Written by the American cultural anthropologist Suzanne LaFont,<sup>924</sup> the introduction to this volume proclaimed Gimbutas to be a national icon and a feminist role-model in Lithuania. The book also contained a biographical sketch on Gimbutas, entitled “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend”<sup>925</sup> and a number of references to Gimbutas in several other chapters. *Women in Transition* is not exceptional in its treatment of Gimbutas as “iconic” and “legendary” figure. During my research on Lithuanian post-socialist women’s movement I came across numerous mentions of Marija Gimbutas, with virtually every feminist text published in the 1990s referencing her academic achievements and, especially, her theory of the matristic Old Europe.<sup>926</sup> As Viktorija Daujotytė, the Lithuanian literature professor at Vilnius University told me in an interview, “we

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<sup>922</sup> Suzanne LaFont, *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

<sup>923</sup> Suzanne LaFont, “Introduction,” in *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania*, by Suzanne LaFont (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>924</sup><sup>924</sup> LaFont taught at the Women’s Studies Center, Kaunas University of Technology, in Lithuania, between 1994 and 1995. LaFont, “Introduction.”

<sup>925</sup> Marler, “Marija Gimbutas: Tribute to a Lithuanian Legend.”

<sup>926</sup> As I explain in detail in earlier chapters, Gimbutas proposed a distinction between the Indo-European and a more archaic, Old European layers of the European civilization. She strongly contrasted the two layers – the Old European representing a female-centered, Goddess-worshiping, peaceful, harmonious society, while the Indo-European civilization was brought to Europe by aggressive and male conquerors, who worshiped male gods. Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*; Gimbutas, “The Collision of Two Ideologies.”



mentioned her everywhere, where we could, and probably also where we should not have mentioned her”.<sup>927</sup> Similar sentiments were repeated also by other prominent Lithuanian feminists, active in women’s activism in the 1990s. This chapter demonstrates how and why Marija Gimbutas’s ideas about the prehistoric matristic culture and Goddess worship became such an important point of reference for the post-socialist women’s movement in Lithuania.

The history of feminism in many post-socialist countries, especially such historically marginalized countries like Lithuania is poorly documented and little theorized. The forms that women’s activism took in Lithuania in the 1990s is largely unknown to those who did not directly participate in this organizing. My wish to fill this gap in feminist historical scholarship had been initially the main motivation for this dissertation and it is precisely in doing archival research about feminist organizing in Lithuania in early post-socialism that I came across the name of Gimbutas, who seemed to be an ubiquitous point of reference for women’s activism of all kinds. On the one hand, therefore, this chapter is my attempt to outline the creation of the image of “Marija Gimbutas” in Lithuania, to understand the reception and appropriation of her ideas and her public persona in post-socialist feminism. On the other hand, by using the figure of Marija Gimbutas as an entrance point, I outline also the main characteristics of post-socialist Lithuanian women’s movement, in particular focusing on its ideological contradictions.

I investigate how Gimbutas became the heroine for the emerging post-socialist feminism in the 1990s Lithuania, and how her ideas and persona were taken up by feminists in the construction of a range of feminist strategies and discourses. Namely, I show how by using Gimbutas Lithuanian feminists managed to combine their emancipatory goals with the two most pervasive yet seemingly

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<sup>927</sup> Viktorija Daujotytė, interview with the author, Vilnius, April 7, 2016.

contradictory discourses of post-socialism: the narrative of Western-oriented modernization, which I will refer to as the *narrative of transition*; and the narrative of nationalist re-traditionalization, or the *narrative of return*. In this chapter I argue that it was the *ambivalence*<sup>928</sup> of Gimbutas' persona and her ideas about women's role in society, femininity and masculinity, about the origins of the nation and European belonging, among other things, that made her theory of Old Europe so easily moldable for a variety of ideological purposes, adding gender elements into both the *narrative of return* and the *narrative of transition*.

### **5.1 Between “transition” and “return”: discourses of post-socialism**

The post-socialist transformation<sup>929</sup> in Eastern Europe was a period after the collapse of state socialism, characterized by massive structural changes in economic, political and social spheres.<sup>930</sup>

In 1990, even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia went through the peaceful change of authority and declared their independence from the Soviet Union.<sup>931</sup> The complex transformation of Eastern Europe in the 1990s has been predominantly understood (both by people who directly participated in the events, as well as by theorists) with the help of two narratives: the *narrative of return* and the *narrative of transition*.

The first *narrative of return* pictured the post-socialist transformations as a revival of something

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<sup>928</sup> Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman*.

<sup>929</sup> One of the main reason of this massive and rapid change was the implementation of the policies of *perestroika* (Rus. reform) and *glasnost* (Rus. transparency) by Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. See Senn, *Lithuania Awakening*; Alfred Erich Senn, *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania*, 1st ed (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). His policies in turn were a response to the economic and political stagnation of the Soviet Union, as some have argued, see T. Iván Berend, *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>930</sup> The fall of socialism in East Central European countries, such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria happened rather peacefully in 1989, with the leading Communist parties losing elections for their political opposition (with the exception of Romania).

<sup>931</sup> Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and the Path to Independence*, 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

that has existed before (ethnic-national traditions, Catholic morality, etc.). The second *narrative of transition* represented the post-socialist transformation as a teleological development of Eastern European societies and economies towards something they were lacking – the Western standard of capitalism and democracy. These two narratives shaped and explained the events of the 1990s and, as I will show in what follows, impacted the gendered imaginaries, norms and ideals in Eastern European societies. Although seemingly contradictory, the *narratives of return* and *transition* were not incompatible, as in fact worked in tandem in forming both the material and ideological conditions of the possible for the women’s movement of this period.

The narrative of return, can be understood in at least two guises: as nationalist and as European-oriented. The nationalist, traditionalist return narrative has been analyzed as a predominant feature of the Eastern European post-socialist transformation across the region, and also as phenomenon, which posed a threat to the development of a democratic and liberal society.<sup>932</sup> As Davoliūtė argued, the return narrative in post-socialism accentuated conservative cultural values and expressed nostalgia towards the archaic village life, the idealized Golden age of the nation, combined with the fear of modernity and the destruction of nature and national culture.<sup>933</sup> The return narrative was, however, not limited to purely ethno-centric imagination, but included also the idea of the “return to Europe”, which posited Eastern European countries as a part of the European/Western civilization, and inherently deserving to “return” to it. This facet of the return narrative was also criticized on the basis that the “Europe” to which the Eastern European

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<sup>932</sup> Jan Jozef Lipski, “Two Fatherlands, Two Patriotisms,” in *Between East and West : Writings from Kultura.*, ed. Robert Kostrzewa (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); Adam Michnik, “Three Kinds of Fundamentalism,” in *Letters from Freedom : Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives*, ed. Irena Grudzińska-Gross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Tomas Venclova, *Forms of Hope : Essays*. (Riverdale-On-Hudson, N.Y.: Sheep Meadow Press, 1999).

<sup>933</sup> Violeta Davoliūtė, “The Sovietization of Lithuania after WWII: Modernization, Transculturation, and the Lettered City,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016): 49–63; Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*.

intellectuals and politicians wanted to “return”, was the Europe before socialism, the Europe “of the 1920s and 1930s”.<sup>934</sup> The post-socialist “return to Europe” narrative was permeated by the nostalgia for the interwar Europe, where the interests of the ethnically defined nation were of the primary political importance and human rights were yet to be invented.<sup>935</sup> Both the nationalist and the European-oriented guises of the return narrative were permeated with the nostalgia for the past, strongly anti-Communist and inherently conservative. The narrative of return helped to interpret the radical changes of post-socialism as if they were merely a rebuilding of pre-socialist institutions and traditions, the return to the allegedly “natural” human and social condition.

The narrative of the “return” implied also the return to the “traditional” gender roles, which didn’t leave any space for imagining women’s emancipation. As the Lithuanian gender studies scholar Alina Žvinklienė has argued, “in the political rhetoric of the 1990s, the rebirth of the nation was perceived within the rebirth of the traditional family, i.e., the traditional gender contract”.<sup>936</sup> This allegedly “traditional” gender contract implied that women’s main task is motherhood, the task they have supposedly forgotten because of the Communist propaganda;<sup>937</sup> and that women’s and LGBT rights were incompatible with authentic national values.<sup>938</sup> The American anthropologist Katherine Verdery demonstrated how the post-socialist abortion debates, for example, were largely embedded in the narrative of return.<sup>939</sup> Nationalist traditionalist discourse claimed that the

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<sup>934</sup> Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, 374.

<sup>935</sup> Tomas Venclova, “A Fifth Year of Independence: Lithuania, 1922 and 1994.,” *East European Politics & Societies* 9, no. 2 (March 1995): 344–67.

<sup>936</sup> Alina Žvinklienė, “Gender Equality in the Baltic States: Democratization of Patriarchy,” in *Gender Matters in the Baltics*, ed. Irina Novikova (Riga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2008), 81.

<sup>937</sup> Irina Novikova, “History, National Belongings and Women’s Movements in the Baltic Countries,” in *Women’s Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Edith Saurer, Margareth Lanzinger, and Elisabeth Frysak (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), 149.

<sup>938</sup> Igor’ Semenovich Kon, “Sexual Culture and Politics in Contemporary Russia,” in *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. Aleksandar Štulhofer and Theo Sandfort (New York: Haworth Press, 2005), 111–24.

<sup>939</sup> Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Communist regime was “unnatural”, that it was contrary to the gendered “nature” of people, and that in post-socialism women had to be reeducated to be the proper mothers and wives for the sake of the Nation.<sup>940</sup> As many theorists have pointed out, this discourse was especially handy in the neo-liberal economic conditions and at the time of the collapse of the social security system.<sup>941</sup> Entrenching women as the primary caretakers for the family and the household made them economically vulnerable and dependent on men in the circumstances of economic and social change.

If the narrative of return was more of a local notion, the narrative of transition was seen as a more “scientific” way to think about transition, coming from the English-speaking international context.<sup>942</sup> The narrative of transition worked as an ideological blueprint for political and economic decisions, and represented the post-socialist transformation as a one-way road: from the socialist economic system of central planning towards the capitalist system of free market, and from the Communist Party dictatorship towards liberal democracy.<sup>943</sup> The narrative of transition also had an implication of “success” – that is the presumed and idealized Western standard of prosperity and freedom that had to be achieved with capitalism and democracy. This narrative implied the transformation of the socialist society and the individual into a new type of “western” modern individual, able to function and flourish in the new circumstances.<sup>944</sup> The euro-centrism of this

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<sup>940</sup> Mirjana Ule and Tanja Renner, “Nationalism and Gender in Postsocialist Societies,” in *Ana’s Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe*, ed. Tanya Renne (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1997), 220–33; Daina Stukuls, “Body of the Nation: Mothering, Prostitution, and Women’s Place in Postcommunist Latvia,” *Slavic Review* 58, no. 3 (October 1, 1999): 537–58.

<sup>941</sup> Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?*; Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women’s Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993).

<sup>942</sup> Gal and Kligman, “After Socialism,” 10.

<sup>943</sup> Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, *Capitalist Diversity on Europe’s Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>944</sup> See, for example, the work of the prominent Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka, who argued that Eastern Europeans needed to undo their “homo sovieticus” mentality in order to be able to embrace the lost European values and re-enter the “European home” (Sztompka 1993, 86). For a postcolonial critique of such narrative see

narrative in political and popular discourses was criticized from the post-colonial feminist perspective<sup>945</sup> and, more recently, from the perspective of sexuality studies.<sup>946</sup> Given the lack of success in the project of minimizing the economic disparity between the Eastern and Western Europe,<sup>947</sup> the narrative of transition can be seen as just another variety of the narratives of “backwardness” and “catching up” that have characterized the economic and political thinking about Eastern Europe since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>948</sup>

The anthropologist Neringa Klumbytė has shown how the thinking in terms of transition towards “European standards” has affected people’s everyday understandings and imaginations in post-socialist societies. According to her, “Europe” has become a symbol of superiority and a value laden category, basically the synonym of “the good”, while Eastern Europe was seen as lagging behind the West.<sup>949</sup> Some scholars have pointed out how the narrative of transition has affected women’s activism and the establishment of gender studies in post-socialist Europe. The historian Susan Zimmerman argued, for example, that the commitment to the values of gender equality in post-socialism usually went hand in hand with the often uncritical commitment to “Western values”, as well as the embrace of the Western social and economic system. Gender issues in post-socialism became a sort of “symbolic marker”,<sup>950</sup> of the level of Westernization and progress.

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Michal Buchowski, “The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, no. 3 (2006): 463. For anthropological research into the effects of transition on an individual gendered level, see Elizabeth C. Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of the Polish Working Class*, Culture and Society after Socialism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>945</sup> Joanna Regulska, “The New ‘Other’ European Woman,” in *Shifting Bonds, Shifting Bounds: Women, Mobility and Citizenship in Europe*, ed. V Ferreira, S Portugal, and T Tavares (Celta Editora, 1997), 41–58.

<sup>946</sup> Anikó Imre, “Lesbian Nationalism,” *Signs* 33, no. 2 (2008): 255–82; Kulpa and Mizielinska, *De-Centring Western Sexualities*; Navickaitė, “Under the Western Gaze: Sexuality and Postsocialist ‘Transition’ in East Europe.”

<sup>947</sup> Bohle and Greskovits, *Capitalist Diversity on Europe’s Periphery*.

<sup>948</sup> Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*; Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness”.

<sup>949</sup> Neringa Klumbytė, “Europe and Its Fragments: Europeanization, Nationalism, and the Geopolitics of Provinciality in Lithuania,” *Slavic Review* 70, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 844–72.

<sup>950</sup> Zimmermann, “The Institutionalization of Women’s and Gender Studies,” 140.

Other scholars have criticized the usage of the symbolic power of “Europe” and “the West” in feminist and sexual activism, arguing that such discourse reproduced problematic notions of backwardness.<sup>951</sup> The narrative of transition made westernization and “the West” into an almost universally accepted value in itself.

The sociologist Daina Stukuls Eglitis has noted that both narratives of return and transition can be seen as two facets of the same permeating post-socialist desire to restore “normality”, to return to the “natural state of things”, understood in opposition to the Soviet period, which was constructed as “a fundamental deviation from what was perceived to be the normal course of national, state, social and economic development”.<sup>952</sup> Both these narratives,<sup>953</sup> she argued, contained also a discourse about the “natural” and “normal” gender roles, understood in contrast to the “abnormal” gender regime of the Soviet period. While the Soviet system allegedly imposed the “artificial” uniformity of gender roles, and “overemancipated” women, the post-Soviet order was supposed to reconstruct the “natural” differences between sexes.<sup>954</sup> Eglitis pointed out how, in the context of post-socialist Latvia, the discourse of “normal” gender order was embedded in both the return and transition narratives: the examples of ideal gender roles and relations were to be found both in the national tradition (which had to be recovered) and in the Western societies (which had to be aspired to).<sup>955</sup> She also showed how women’s rights activism in Latvia did not only resist these gender

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<sup>951</sup> Shannon Woodcock, “A Short History of the Queer Time of ‘Post-Socialist’ Romania, or Are We There Yet? Let’s Ask Madonna!,” in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, ed. Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielinska (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 63–83; Jelisaveta Blagojevic and Jovana Timotijevic, “‘Failing the Metronome’. Queer Reading of the Postsocialist Transition,” in *The Future of (Post)Socialism: Eastern European Perspectives*, ed. John Frederick Bailyn, Diana Jelaca, and Danijela Lugaric (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 71–.

<sup>952</sup> Daina Stukuls Eglitis, *Imagining the Nation: History, Modernity, and Revolution in Latvia* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>953</sup> Stukuls differentiates between the spatial and temporal narratives of normality, which roughly correspond with what I call, respectively, the transition and return narratives.

<sup>954</sup> Eglitis, *Imagining the Nation*, 224.

<sup>955</sup> Eglitis, 240.

normalization discourses in their different guises, but also participated in reiterating these problematic notions about the gendered “nature” of women and men.<sup>956</sup> The Latvian women’s activists, Eglitis argued, in fact also bought into the belief about the “natural gender” and often reinforced the stereotypical imaginations about femininity and masculinity.

In what follows I outline the landscape of post-socialist Lithuanian feminism in the 1990s, reconstructed on the basis of an extensive archival and field research. Building on the arguments developed by other authors,<sup>957</sup> I show, how the emerging Lithuanian women’s activism neither submitted to the discourses of the “normalization” of the gender order, nor only resisted the *narratives of return* and *transition*. Instead, following the work of Francesca Stella on the creation of lesbian spaces in post-socialist Russia I use the notion of *carving space*<sup>958</sup> to refer to actions and discourses that both accommodate and resist the post-socialist ideological environment. While Stella’s argument more literally refers to urban spaces, I understand “carving space” both literally and metaphorically, as a construction of material and ideological enclaves for women’s activism and feminist discourses in post-socialism. The post-socialist Lithuanian context was largely defined, as I have shown, by the rejection of the Soviet period and the Soviet gender equality as unnatural, and the competing desires to restore gendered “normality” by *return* to national roots, or a successful *transition* towards Western norms. In this context, the developing Lithuanian women’s movement, had to adapt feminist discourse and action to the dominant narratives. At the same time, feminists also wished to contest the problematic gendered assumptions implicit in the *return* and *transition* narratives of the post-socialist state building project. This tension can explain,

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<sup>956</sup> Eglitis, 203.

<sup>957</sup> Eglitis, *Imagining the Nation*; Zimmermann, “The Institutionalization of Women’s and Gender Studies.”

<sup>958</sup> Francesca Stella, *Lesbian Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia: Post/Socialism and Gendered Sexualities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 131.



as I demonstrate in what comes afterwards, the multilayered appeal that Gimbutas' theory of the matristic Old Europe had for the emerging Lithuanian post-socialist feminism.

## **5.2 Lithuanian feminists negotiating dominant discourses**

The development of feminism in Lithuania since 1990 has not yet received a systematic scholarly treatment – there is only a handful of essays on this topic in cultural magazines and scholarly journals, and only in the recent years feminists started reflecting on this process during public debates.<sup>959</sup> The existing reflexive essays, written by people more or less directly involved with the development of women's activism, give an impression of feminism having had limited influence in post-socialist Lithuanian society, restricted mainly to the educated city women.<sup>960</sup> The academia, according to some, was the field where feminism was taken up fastest and with biggest success: feminist theory was employed as a tool of analysis, and women's studies were institutionalized at universities starting with the Women's Studies Center at Vilnius University, already in 1992.<sup>961</sup> One of the first women's organization to be (re-)created in post-socialism was LUMA – the Lithuanian University Women's Association, in 1991.<sup>962</sup> Although often overlooked, the sphere of party politics was also a space where feminist ideas found fertile soil. The 1990s saw the creation of women's groups affiliated with the mayor political parties: Homeland Union – the Conservative Party, Social Democratic Party, Christian Democratic Party;<sup>963</sup> as well as the multi-

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<sup>959</sup> For example, during the "National Emancipation Day". This annual event was first organized in 2017, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February, in this way marking the anniversary of a massive women's protest against the exclusion of women from the signing of the Lithuanian Independence Act in 1918.

<sup>960</sup> Solveiga Daugirdaitė, "Ko moteris nori? Spėlionės po dvidešimties metų" [What Does A Woman Want? Speculations after Twenty Years.] *Colloquia* 25 (2010): 17–28.

<sup>961</sup> Karla Gruodis, "Studying Lithuanian Women," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 3/4 (1993): 172–83; Daugirdaitė, "Ko moteris nori?" [What does a woman want?].

<sup>962</sup> Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė, "Būtinybė išlikti" [The necessity to survive] (1994), in *Viltys ir nusivylimai* [Hopes and Disappointments] (Petro ofsetas, 2011).

<sup>963</sup> Zita Čepaitė, Dalia Gudavičiūtė, and Solveiga Daugirdaitė, eds., *Moterys kintančioje visuomenėje: Lietuvos nevyriausybinų moterų organizacijų ataskaita Jungtinių Tautų organizacijos IV Pasaulinei moterų konferencijai*

party women's parliamentary group.<sup>964</sup> Most significantly, in 1995 also a separate Lithuanian Women's Party (LMP) was created, aiming to counter the continuous underrepresentation of women in the electoral lists and the Parliament.<sup>965</sup> Besides from academia and politics, women's activism became also an important part of the growing non-governmental sector. By 1995, Lithuania had already 30 organizations, that shared as one of their primary aims the "promotion of women's rights and the advancement of women".<sup>966</sup> Women's organizations formed around shared ethnicity, religion, occupation or social issues, rather than only gender issues: from the Mothers of the Soldiers Union to the Business Women's Association, to the Jewish Women's organization. Some organizations, however, also explicitly defined themselves as feminist, such as the consciousness-raising group *Klėtis*.<sup>967</sup>

According to Giedrė Purvaneckienė, who was one of the main women's organizers in the 1990s and later a progressive politician for the Social Democratic party,<sup>968</sup> the Lithuanian feminist scene was surprisingly united in the early 1990s.<sup>969</sup> Activists initially shared a similar ideology – the vaguely defined goal of advancing women's rights – and did not have substantial disagreements. This allowed for regular "round-table" meetings in Vilnius among different women's organizations and orchestrated effort in the preparation for the 1995 Beijing Conference on

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*Pekine 1995 rugsėjo 4-15 d.* [Women in changing world: the report by the Lithuanian women's NGOs for the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995 September 4-15]. Vilnius: Pradai, 1995.

<sup>964</sup> Moterų informacijos centras, *Moterys ir rinkimai* [Women and elections] (Vilnius: Petro ofsetas, 1998), 15.

<sup>965</sup> Prunskienė, "Lietuvos Moterų Partijos programa" [The program of the Lithuanian Women's Party]."

<sup>966</sup> Nijole White, "Women in Changing Societies: Latvia and Lithuania," in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 210.

<sup>967</sup> Čepaitė, Gudavičiūtė, and Daugirdaitė, *Moterys Kintančioje Visuomenėje* [Women in Changing World], 1995 September 4-15.

<sup>968</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, "Biografija" [Biography], purvaneckiene.lt, 2019, accessed March 23, 2019. <http://purvaneckiene.lt/biografija/>.

<sup>969</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, interview with the author, Vilnius, June 1, 2016.

Women.<sup>970</sup> Women's activists from across the political and ideological spectrum engaged in common initiative to promote the Law for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted in 1998.<sup>971</sup> The rather harmonious cohabitation of women's organizations and individual activists of different ideological inclinations is noticeable also in the pages of the publication *Moters pasaulis* (Women's World).<sup>972</sup> Between 1994 and 2000, the publication informed about the developments in the broadly defined area of women's issues (violence against women, women in leadership positions, feminization of poverty, prostitution, the history of women's activism, etc.), congratulated women for reaching high positions in politics or business, advocated for more women in the parliament, informed about the activities of all the women's organizations and the newest sociological research on women's situation in Lithuania. The women often referenced each other and supported others' activities in the pages of *Moters pasaulis*, without prominent signs of ideological conflict. According to Purvaneckienė, only a decade later women's organizations started being differentiated in their progressive or conservative leaning, with some turning "pro-life" or "pro-family".<sup>973</sup>

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<sup>970</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, interview with the author. The only area of disagreement, which was abortion rights, was intentionally left undiscussed, according to Purvaneckienė. However, since the Lithuanian parliament did not take action to reverse the legislation of the Soviet period, the women's movements had no necessity to publicize the issue in the 1990s, unlike in the neighboring Poland.

<sup>971</sup> Irena Litvinaitė, "1998 metų gruodžio 1 dieną Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas priėmė Lietuvos moterų ir vyrų lygių galimybių įstatymą" [The 1st of December, 1998, Lithuanian parliament adopted the law for the equal rights between men and women]. *Moters Pasaulis*, December 1998.

<sup>972</sup> *Moters pasaulis* was a publication that started as a newsletter in the preparation for the Beijing conference, in 1994. It was published in English as well as *Women's World*. After the conference it continued being published until 2000 with the financial support of UNDP.

<sup>973</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, interview with the author. The reasons behind the relative "harmony" among women's organizations in the early 1990s and the later ideological differentiation are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but definitely deserves further research.

### 5.2.1 Rejecting the Soviet legacy

If the women's movement in Lithuania in the 1990s did not show, or was oblivious to its internal ideological disagreements, what was it united around? One of the predominant uniting features of the post-socialist women's activism in Lithuania was that it was constructed by its participants as something new, a phenomenon quite different from the Soviet-style gender equality policies. The new non-governmental women's organizations was supposed to focus on *women's* problems, find new activities that would facilitate women's empowerment, and not simply repeat the pattern of social, educational and care work, carried out by the Soviet-style women's organizations. Why was the Soviet style women's activism not acceptable for the post-socialist women? Lithuanian feminists (at least those coming from academia) tended to perceive the Soviet ideology of gender equality as "artificial", "perverted" and "dangerous".<sup>974</sup> The Soviet gender equality did not pay attention, they argued, to the feminine essence, to differences between the sexes – it enforced a uniformity of sexes, rather than equality.

Reflecting these attitudes, the introduction to the edited volume *Feminizmo ekskursai: moters samprata nuo antikos iki postmodernizmo* (The currents of feminism: the concept of woman from Antiquity to postmodernity),<sup>975</sup> the first collection of Western feminist texts translated to Lithuanian, argued that

The pseudo-equality enforced by the Soviet system, which artificially erased the differences between the sexes, was very harmful for the relationships between women and men, as well as for the women's position in Lithuania.<sup>976</sup>

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<sup>974</sup> For examples of this discourse, see Violeta Kelertienė, "Prakalbinti tylinčias kultūros prasmes" [To voice the silent meanings of culture], *Metai* 5 (1992): 74–78.

<sup>975</sup> Gruodis, *Feminizmo ekskursai* [The currents of feminism].

<sup>976</sup> Karla Gruodis, ed., "[vadas]" [Introduction], in *Feminizmo ekskursai* [The currents of feminism], (Vilnius: Pradai, 1995), 40.

The editor of this collection, a Lithuanian-Canadian feminist Gruodis, implied that feminism propagated by women in post-socialism was to be different from the “pseudo-equality” of the Soviet period, and, in fact, was also a necessary step towards becoming a truly democratic and “civilized” (commas in original – R.N.) country. With this statement, Gruodis explicitly responded to the popular conservative argument against feminism, which attributed the idea of gender equality exclusively to the Communist ideology. The response to the conservative pressure of the post-socialist Lithuanian cultural environment was to dissociate from Communism, by conceptualizing the gender equality ideology of the Soviet period as only the source of *problems* faced by post-socialist women but not as a positive legacy. The main difference between the Communist and post-socialist women’s movement was the approach to “differences between sexes” – while socialism has allegedly “eradicated” them, the feminism in independent Lithuania thought about itself as attentive to the supposedly “natural” differences between men and women.

There were voices among Lithuanian women, however, that argued against the dismissal of the Soviet gender equality policy and the socialist women’s activism. For example, Nijolė Steponkutė, the leader of the Lithuanian Women’s Society, an organization that took over the structure of the Women’s Soviets of the Lithuanian SSR, wrote an article for *Moters pasaulis*, aimed at revising the historical erasure of women’s activism during the Soviet period. She argued that the history of Women’s Soviets, the idealism and hard work of women active in this structure should serve as a background for the post-socialist women’s movement, instead of being ridiculed.<sup>977</sup> While Steponkutės views were reactive to the opinion of the majority, other prominent women’s activists also occasionally expressed a sense of loss about the period of socialism, which provided economic

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<sup>977</sup> Nijolė Steponkutė, “Kas gera prisiminkime, kas bloga - lai išblės” [Let’s remember what was good and let the bad things fade away]. *Moters Pasaulis*, November 1996.

and social security for women.<sup>978</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of the post-socialist Lithuanian feminists in a majority of cases constructed the Soviet period as mainly detrimental to gender equality and the position of women.<sup>979</sup> The hegemony of the anti-Soviet ideology was entrenched by such symbolic acts as the removal of the March 8<sup>th</sup>, the International Day of Women's Solidarity,<sup>980</sup> from state holidays – a decision supported by female politicians.<sup>981</sup> The political environment of early post-socialism dictated distancing from the Soviet gender equality policy and socialist rhetoric as a strategy for the women's movement aspiring to become mainstream. This meant also, that women's activists had to largely reinvent the ideological background for their fight for women's rights and find a new way to relate to gender equality issues. This led to the adoption of a diversity of strategies, which, as I show in what follows, can be roughly systematized with reference to the narratives of “transition” and “return”.

### 5.2.2 Transition to the “West”

In an overview essay on Lithuanian and Latvian feminism in the 1990s, Nijole White notes that the post-socialist women's movement across the region shared “the Soviet experience which they are trying to leave behind, and the Western models of feminism which they strive to emulate to a

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<sup>978</sup> Irena Litvinaitė, “‘Man patinka būti laisvai ir kūrybingai’. Interviu su Dalia Teišerskyte” [‘I love being free and creative’. An interview with Dalia Teišerskytė]. *Moters Pasaulis*, December 1994; Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė, “Feminizmas Lietuvoje: istorija ir dabartis” [Feminism in Lithuania: history and now], *Moters Pasaulis*, February 1997.

<sup>979</sup> Daujotytė, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman's share and destiny]; Pavilionienė, *Lyčių drama* [Gender drama]; Solveiga Daugirdaitė, *Rūpesčių moterys, moterų rūpesčiai* [The Women of Worry, the Worries of Women] (Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2000); Dalia Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970* (Amsterdam ; New York : Rodopi, 2010); Laima Kreivyte, “Moterys ir vyrai Lietuvos kultūroje po 20 metų” [Women and men in Lithuanian culture after 20 years], *Literatūra ir menas*, January 8, 2016.

<sup>980</sup> While the history of the International Women's Day has its origins in the socialist women's movement, in the Soviet Union the celebration of this day became largely detached from its radical roots and was mainly marked by men individually congratulating their wives and colleagues with flower bouquets, further entrenching gender stereotypes.

<sup>981</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, interview with the author, Vilnius, June 1, 2016.

greater or lesser extent.”<sup>982</sup> She noted that the establishment of women’s studies in Lithuania and Latvia had a clearly pro-Western orientation, learning from the experience mainly of Nordic, Western European and Northern American countries, “due to their desire to re-join Western culture”.<sup>983</sup> Indeed the aspiration towards “Western models” of feminism characterized the women’s movement as a whole, not only in academia, and had both ideological and materials elements. Ideologically, it allowed women’s activists to claim to participate in the Lithuanian “transition” to the West, which served as one of the major state-building narratives in post-socialism, as I have argued above. This argument became especially strong with the Lithuanian decision to apply for the European Union membership in 1995.<sup>984</sup> In a characteristic line of argumentation, Pavilionienė, the head of the Women’s Studies Center in Vilnius, wrote, criticizing the lack of progress in the field of women’s rights in Lithuania, that “Lithuania is marching to the European Union, while Lithuanian women are still standing at the doorstep of public life”.<sup>985</sup> Reflecting a broader tendency, Pavilionienė relied on such statements to advocate for the necessity to implement progressive gender equality policies as a way of achieving integration in Western political structures.

Lithuanian women’s activists were aware of the symbolic power that “the West” held and employed it not only arguing for a political or legal change, but also advocating for the introduction

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<sup>982</sup> White, “Women in Changing Societies: Latvia and Lithuania,” 215.

<sup>983</sup> White, 212.

<sup>984</sup> For example, see Pavilionienė, “Feminizmas Lietuvoje: istorija ir dabartis” [Feminism in Lithuania: history and now], 4.

<sup>985</sup> Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė, “Moters teisės - žmogaus teisės” [Women’s rights - human rights]. In *Moterys kintančioje visuomenėje: Lietuvos nevyriausybinų moterų organizacijų ataskaita Jungtinių Tautų organizacijos IV Pasaulinei moterų konferencijai Pekine 1995 rugsėjo 4-15 d.* [Women in changing world: the report by the Lithuanian women’s NGOs for the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995 September 4-15], edited by Zita Čepaitė, Dalia Gudavičiūtė, and Solveiga Daugirdaitė (Vilnius: Pradai, 1995), 6.

of women's studies in universities. In a reflexive essay from 1993, Gruodis, who gave the first ever women's studies course at Vilnius University, wrote that

in a society that simultaneously held to conservative patriarchal values and Soviet cultural cynically proclaimed pseudo-equality (both of which considered Western feminism to be one of the most extreme perversions), academic science, and the notion of Western science and learning, provided women's studies with a thin veil of respectability during its earliest stage.<sup>986</sup>

According to Gruodis, the patriarchal and Soviet ideologies both formed a negative attitude towards feminism in society at large, however, the respectability accorded to *Western* science and knowledge allowed for a relative social tolerance towards gender equality debates. To build on an argument by Zimmermann, this way of argumentation constructed feminism as representing “Western values”, and women's studies, as a sort of litmus test for the level of westernization.<sup>987</sup>

It has to be noted that the persona of Gruodis herself – a Lithuanian-Canadian scholar, educated in the West and closely related to the OSF,<sup>988</sup> also added the so needed “respectability” to women's studies. It is not a coincidence that the very first courses in women's studies in Lithuanian post-socialist context were given by émigré scholars: Gruodis, in 1991,<sup>989</sup> and the prominent culture historian Vytautas Kavolis in 1992. The lectures of the latter were also published as “*Moterys ir vyrai Lietuvos kultūroje*” (Women and Men in Lithuanian Culture).<sup>990</sup> Besides Lithuanian diaspora

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<sup>986</sup> Gruodis, “Studying Lithuanian Women,” 174.

<sup>987</sup> Zimmermann, “The Institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies,” 141.

<sup>988</sup> The father of Karla Gruodis, Vytautas E. Gruodis was the head of the OSF at the time. Her husband Darius Čiplinskas was responsible for the publishing program at the OSF. According to Solveiga Daugirdaitė, the personal connections of Gruodis helped to find the funding for the publishing of feminist literature. Solveiga Daugirdaitė, interview with the author, Vilnius, November 5, 2015.

<sup>989</sup> Gruodis, “Studying Lithuanian Women.”

<sup>990</sup> Kavolis, *Moterys ir vyrai lietuvių kultūroje* [Women and men in Lithuanian culture]; Solveiga Daugirdaitė, “Vytautas Kavolis ir feminizmas” [Vytautas Kavolis and feminism], in *Vytautas Kavolis: Humanistica vs. Liberalia*, ed. Ramutis Karmalavičius (Vilnius: LLTI, 2005), 111–24.



feminists, such as aforementioned Gruodis and Kavolis, as well as Violeta Kelertas;<sup>991</sup> Lithuanian post-socialist women activists were also exposed to Western feminists, coming to post-socialist region for volunteer work (for example, the British feminists Anne Nelligan and Car Williams, who started self-defense training)<sup>992</sup> or research/teaching work (e.g. the aforementioned Suzanne LeFont). They also established contacts with Western feminists by participating in workshops for post-socialist women, taking place in Western Europe.<sup>993</sup> Some of these interactions led to an idealized image of “Western feminism” and Western societies in general, as obvious from articles such as one entitled “Danish Women on their Way to Paradise” (“Danijos moterys pakeliui į rojų”), which with approval portrayed Danish feminists as “feminine” and beyond “aggressive feminism”.<sup>994</sup> Although *Women’s World* republished an article by Slavena Drakulič, a Croatian writer, who ironically reflected on the mismatch between Western feminism and the realities of post-socialist post-Yugoslav women,<sup>995</sup> there was basically no equivalent critique produced by Lithuanian feminists of this often hierarchical relationship in the 1990s.

The material aspects of pro-Western orientation also should not be underestimated. Lithuanian women’s activists in most NGOs as well as academia relied for financial support on Western donors. During early post-socialism, Lithuania saw an influx of Western donor money for a variety of projects, from the establishment of the Crisis center for women suffering from domestic abuse,

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<sup>991</sup> Violeta Kelertas, “Kokio feminizmo Lietuvai reikėtų?” [What kind of feminism Lithuania needs?], *Literatūra ir menas*, January 25, 1992.

<sup>992</sup> Aušra Vyšniauskienė, “Moterų savigyna - kas tai?” [What is women’s self-defense], *Moters Pasaulis*, December 1998.

<sup>993</sup> Virginija Apanavičienė, “Forumo dienos ir menų naktys” [The days of the forum and the nights of art], *Moters Pasaulis*, September 1994; Leonarda Jekentaitė, “Danijos moterys pakeliui į rojų” [Danish women on their way to paradise], *Moters Pasaulis*, July 1997.

<sup>994</sup> Jekentaitė, “Danijos moterys pakeliui į rojų” [Danish women on their way to paradise].

<sup>995</sup> Slavenka Drakulič, “Ko mes išmokome iš Vakarų feminisčių” [What we learned from Western feminists], *Moters Pasaulis*, March 1998.

financed by the Norwegian Foreign Affairs Ministry and women's organizations,<sup>996</sup> to the publication of the translation of Simone de Beauvoir's "Second Sex", financed by the Open Society Foundation.<sup>997</sup> The publication of *Women's World* was financed by the UNDP, just like other publications relating to information about 'women's issues, both in the preparation for the Beijing conference and as a follow up.<sup>998</sup> Some of the activities of the conservative Women's League, for example, were financed by Oxfam<sup>999</sup> and the Nordic Information Center<sup>1000</sup>, while the social programs of the Lithuanian Women's Society – by the German Heinrich Böll Foundation and other foreign funds, just to give a few examples.<sup>1001</sup>

The relationship of financial dependency and ideological orientations towards the West limited the possibilities for critical approach towards Western forms of feminism, reflecting the pattern of hierarchical relationship, noted and criticized by scholars, informed by postcolonial approaches.<sup>1002</sup> In the context of anti-Communism, "the West", also referred to as "the free world" or "the civilized countries" was constructed as radically different from the Soviet reality, a source of a new ideological background for the growing post-socialist women's movement.<sup>1003</sup> Moreover, the integration to the European political structures and the close collaboration with the Western

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<sup>996</sup> Lilija Vasiliauskienė, "Norvegės padeda skriaudžiamoms lietuvioms" [Norwegian women are helping the abused Lithuanian women], *Moters Pasaulis*, August 1996.

<sup>997</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Antroji lytis* [The Second Sex], trans. Violeta Tauragnienė and Diana Bučiūtė (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 1996).

<sup>998</sup> Moterų informacijos centras, *Moterys ir rinkimai* [Women and Elections]; Moterų informacijos centras. *Lietuvos Respublikos moterų ir vyrų lygių galimybių įstatymas* [The Lithuanian Republic law of the equal opportunities for men and women] (Vilnius: Via Recta, 1999).

<sup>999</sup> Ona Voverienė, ed., *Lietuvaitė. Lietuvos moterų judėjimai nuo seniausių laikų iki šiol* [Women's movements in Lithuania from the oldest times until now] (Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, 1995).

<sup>1000</sup> Ona Voverienė, ed., *Lietuvaitė. Moters vieta ir vaidmuo visuomenėje* [Woman's place and role in society] (Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, 1997).

<sup>1001</sup> Nijolė Steponkutė, *Kaip mes mokėmės išgyventi* [How we learned how to survive] (Vilnius: Spauda, 2001).

<sup>1002</sup> Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness"; Kulpa and Mizielinska, *De-Centring Western Sexualities*.

<sup>1003</sup> See for example Jurga lavanauskaitė, in Kelertienė, "Prakalbinti tylinčias kultūros prasmes" [To voice the silent meanings of culture], 80.

women's organizations and financial donors provided tangible opportunities for activities in the non-governmental and academic spheres, creating a group of "professional" feminists, who took up women's activism as their main activity and a source of income. It is not surprising therefore that in the late 1990, as Purvaneckienė noted, with the decreased influx of foreign funding, women's activism experienced a sharp decline and increasing competition over scarce resources.<sup>1004</sup>

### 5.2.3 Return to the past

The wish to construct women's activism in post-socialism as fundamentally different from the socialist women's activism required, as already noted, for the feminists to turn to "the West", understood as the opposite of the Soviet reality. However, in the environment of post-socialist nationalism, feminists did also aim to find the local "Lithuanian" history of feminism, to show that women's activism was not simply an imported ideology, but something intrinsically Lithuanian. A part of this was the tendency to "recreate" women's organizations in post-socialism, and stress the roots that they had with the interwar period of an independent Lithuanian Republic. LUMA emphasized the continuity it presented with the interwar organization of Lithuanian University Graduated Women's Association (*Lietuvos baigusiu aukštąjį mokslą moterų sąjunga* (BAMMS))<sup>1005</sup>; The Union for the Military Officers Wives (*Lietuvos didžiosios kunigaikštienės Birutės karininkų šeimų moterų sąjunga*) was continuing the activities of the organization with the same name established in 1925.<sup>1006</sup> Even the Lithuanian Women's Party (LMP), arguably a very typical post-socialist phenomenon, as I will show later, suggested it was continuing the tradition

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<sup>1004</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, interview with the author.

<sup>1005</sup> LUMA, "Istorija," Lietuvos Universitetų Moterų Asociacija, accessed February 9, 2019, <https://www.luma.lt/2018/03/19/dalia-marija-brazauskiene/>.

<sup>1006</sup> Elena Adomavičienė, "Lietuviškų tradicijų puoselėtojos" [The ones fostering Lithuanian traditions]. *Moters Pasaulis*. August 1996.

of The Lithuanian' Women's Association established in 1922.<sup>1007</sup> The interwar period attracted the attention of women's historians, and was presented as the period of economic and cultural flourishing and intensive women's (especially Catholic women's) activism. The idealized accounts of the interwar period contained little or no critical reflection on the effects that the autocratic political rule of Antanas Smetona had on the construction of a conservative gender regime and the persecution of leftist political activists.<sup>1008</sup>

In academic texts, the Lithuanian roots of feminist criticism were shown by turning back to the early twentieth century, uncovering the early Lithuanian women's activism in political and cultural fields.<sup>1009</sup> The literary scholar Viktorija Daujotytė (-Pakerienė) did especially important work in theorizing the work of Lithuanian women's writers of the twentieth century from a gendered perspective.<sup>1010</sup> In search for the signs of women's emancipation, post-socialist feminists turned also to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), where in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the first legal code of Lithuania granted certain property and inheritance rights to women. This regulation was

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<sup>1007</sup> White, "Women in Changing Societies: Latvia and Lithuania."

<sup>1008</sup> Danutė Valionytė, "Baltiškojo moteriškumo stiprybė" [The strength of Baltic femininity], *Moters Pasaulis*, September 1994; Nijolė Blaževičiūtė, "Moterys Lietuvos Respublikoje 1918-1940 m." [Women in the Lithuanian Republic 1918-1940], in *Moterys Kintančioje Visuomenėje* [Women in Changing World]. Compare with recent research by Ugnė Marija Andrijauskaitė on the leftist women's activism during the interwar period and the political repressions. See Ugnė Marija Andrijauskaitė, "Emancipacija per revoliuciją: radikalčiai kitokios Lietuvos moterų istorijos [Emancipation through revolution: radically different stories of Lithuanian women], *Mano Teisės*, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/emancipacija-per-revoliucija-radikalčiai-kitokios-lietuvos-moteru-istorijos/>.

<sup>1009</sup> Daujotytė, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman's share and destiny]; Gruodis, "Įvadas" [Introduction]; Pavilionienė, "Feminizmas Lietuvoje: istorija ir dabartis" [Feminism in Lithuania: history and now].

<sup>1010</sup> Daujotytė, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman's share and destiny]; Viktorija Daujotytė-Pakerienė, *Viktorija Daujotytė. Klausimai ; Janina Degutyte. Atsakymai*. [Viktorija Daujotytė. Questions. Janina Degutyte. Answers] (Vilnius: REGNUM fondas, 1996); Viktorija Daujotytė-Pakerienė, *Šatrijos Raganos pasaulyje: gyvenimo ir kūrybos skaitymai* [In the world of Šatrijos Ragana: reading life and works] (Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 1997); Viktorija Daujotytė-Pakerienė, *Salomėja Nėris: gyvenimo ir kūrybos skaitymai* [Salomėja Nėris: reading life and works] (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1999); Viktorija Daujotytė-Pakerienė, *Parašyta moterų* [Written by women] (Vilnius: Alma littera, 2001).

“phenomenal”<sup>1011</sup> and “unique to “civilized” Europe”,<sup>1012</sup> stressed feminists, aiming to demonstrate the allegedly exceptional Lithuanian tradition of women’s equality. Professional historians, however, had a much more modest evaluation of the historical status of Lithuanian women, claiming that the legal regulation was at best ambivalent in the GDL, with some legislation “compensating” for otherwise inferior status that women held.<sup>1013</sup> Still, the general tendency was of the idealization of the women’s role in Lithuanian history. The prehistoric roots of the tradition of supposed Lithuanian (or Baltic) gender equality was often demonstrated with reference to Marija Gimbutas’ work,<sup>1014</sup> something I will elaborate on later in this chapter.

While the wish to find the “local” roots of the women’s movement was not always inherently problematic, it was easily susceptible to nationalism and conservatism. Wishing to emphasize the national “Lithuanian” character of their work, some authors writing about women rights and women’s activism in Lithuanian history established a new concept of *feminologija*.<sup>1015</sup> The history of the Lithuanian women’s movement, written from the perspective of *feminologija*, emphasized the long tradition of women’s high standing and respectability in Lithuanian society, especially by contrasting it with the allegedly much worse patriarchal oppression that women allegedly experienced in Russia. In this, the Lithuanian *feminologija* echoed a similar discourse in post-socialist Ukraine, where, as Tatiana Zhurzhenko has pointed out, the nationalist narrative included a popular image of “strong” Ukrainian women (embodied in the image of the goddess-protectress

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<sup>1011</sup> Dajotyte, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman’s share and destiny], 20.

<sup>1012</sup> LaFont, “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>1013</sup> Irena Valikonytė, “Moters statusas Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės visuomenėje XVI a.” [The Status of woman in the society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, XVI c.]. In *Moterys kintančioje visuomenėje* [Women in Changing World], 8–9.

<sup>1014</sup> Dajotyte, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman’s share and destiny]; Giedrė Purvaneckienė, “Women in the Domestic Domain,” in *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania*, ed. Suzanne LaFont (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 48–59.

<sup>1015</sup> Valionytė, “Baltiškojo moteriškumo stiprybė” [The strength of Baltic femininity]; Irena Leliūgienė, “Humanitarinės studijos moterims ” [Humanities for women], *Moters Pasaulis*, June 1995.

Berehinia) and the myth of the allegedly matriarchal character of the peasant Ukrainian society.<sup>1016</sup> Zhurzhenko interpreted this narrative as a part of the formation of the national identity in post-Soviet Ukraine, created through distancing from Russia as a supposedly more patriarchal civilization.

Similarly to the case of Ukraine, also the Lithuanian discourse of *feminologija* aimed to show Lithuania as inherently “better” for women than its aggressive and oppressive neighbors. This narrative also allowed for the dismissal of the Soviet socialist gender equality doctrine as detrimental to women:

Equalizing the rights of women and men in a primitive manner, the Soviet system took the Lithuanian woman off the pedestal of the birth-giver to the world, Madonna, creatrix, which was given to her by the Lithuanian national tradition; limited her personal freedom and burdened her with responsibility.<sup>1017</sup>

The discourse of *feminologija*, as quoted above, implied that the inspiration for the post-socialist feminist activism had to be drawn from the Lithuanian national tradition of women’s elevation. This meant also that the authentic Lithuanian feminism was not supposed to seek gender equality, but instead, for the special treatment of women, in relation to their perceived “natural” differences from men.

The women involved in the construction of the discourse of *feminologija* initially claimed the word “feminism”,<sup>1018</sup> but with time established a critical relationship towards it, and, assuming feminism to be a Western phenomenon, turned from the criticism of the Soviet period and its gender equality,

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<sup>1016</sup> Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “Strong Women, Weak State: Family Politics and Nation Building in Post-Soviet Ukraine,” in *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, ed. Kathleen R. Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), 30.

<sup>1017</sup> Valionytė, “Baltiškojo moteriškumo stiprybė 2” [The strength of Baltic femininity 2], 10.

<sup>1018</sup> Ona Voverienė, “Moterų judėjimai šių dienų Lietuvoje (1989-1995)” [Women’s movements in contemporary Lithuania (1989-1995)]. In *Lietuvaitė. Lietuvos moterų judėjimai nuo seniausių laikų iki šiol* [Women’s movements in Lithuania from the oldest times until now], edited by Ona Voverienė (Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, 1995). 31–35.

towards the criticism of “the West” and its “gender ideology”.<sup>1019</sup> The women writing in the tradition of *feminologija* wished to reconstruct the women’s role in the national narrative, to show the great deeds and selfless sacrifices that the women did for the sake of the nation and the survival of Lithuanian culture.<sup>1020</sup> Probably the biggest project of the conservative and nationalist excavation of the Lithuanian women’s history was taken up by the Lithuanian Women’s League in the conferences organized between 1995 and 1998. The published materials<sup>1021</sup> from these conferences (which were attended by prominent conservative politicians, such as Vytautas Landsbergis) presented the history of Lithuanian women’s resistance to the Soviet occupation and presented women as either victims or heroines, always working in the service of the nation.<sup>1022</sup> The “western style” feminism was presented in these texts as not suitable for Lithuanian women, since it was about “various freedoms, sexual freedom and other incomprehensible, abstract freedoms”.<sup>1023</sup> The discourse propagated in *Lietuvaitė* and by other writers in the tradition of *feminologija*, made the women’s movement legitimate only in the service for the survival of the nation, and propagated the image of Lithuanian women as not suitable for “revolutionary feminism”.<sup>1024</sup> This discourse was strongly connected with the conservative post-socialist “return

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<sup>1019</sup> While it was not explicit initially, in a more recent article Ona Voverienė contrasted *feminologija* with gender studies, which she referred to as an ideology, propagated by European Union and detrimental to the Nation and the State. See Ona Voverienė, “Sugrįžimas iš Užmaršties...” [Return from the Past...], *alkas.lt*, accessed July 6, 2016, <http://alkas.lt/2015/07/26/o-voveriene-sugrizimas-is-uzmarsties/>.

<sup>1020</sup> Voverienė, *Lietuvaitė. Lietuvos moterų judėjimai nuo seniausių laikų iki šiol* [Women’s movements in Lithuania from the oldest times until now], 6.

<sup>1021</sup> The series were published under the name *Lietuvaitė*, roughly meaning “Lithuanian girl” and implying a certain “folk” imagery of a female virgin.

<sup>1022</sup> Ona Voverienė, ed., *Lietuvaitė. Moterys ir rezistencija Lietuvoje* [Women and resistance in Lithuania] (Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, 1998); Ona Voverienė, ed., *Lietuvaitė. Žymiosios XX a. Lietuvos moterys* [Famous Lithuanian women of the XX century] (Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, 1998).

<sup>1023</sup> Vilija Aleknaitė-Abramkienė, “Žvilgsnis į dabartį” [A glance at the present], in *Lietuvaitė. Moterys ir rezistencija in Lithuania* [Women and resistance in Lithuania], ed. Ona Voverienė (Vilnius: Mokslo aidai, 1998), 20.

<sup>1024</sup> Valionytė, “Baltiškojo moteriškumo stiprybė” [The strength of Baltic femininity], 8.

narrative”, including (and especially emphasizing) the perceived necessity for the Lithuanian society to return to “natural” gender roles for the sake of the Nation.

It is often emphasized how the combination of nationalist re-traditionalization and neoliberal economic forces almost obliterated the possibility for women’s organizing and feminist discourses in post-socialist Baltic societies.<sup>1025</sup> On the contrary to this argument, in this section I have outlined how the Lithuanian women’s activism in fact managed to craft some space for action *within* the hostile post-socialist ideological terrain by partially adapting to the predominant ideological views of society. Women’s activists, as I have shown, conformed to the strong anti-Soviet sentiments in society and presented post-socialist feminism as fundamentally different from the Communist gender equality policy. In search for the new feminist ideological background, they adopted, to some extent, both the narrative of *transition* and the narrative of *return* in framing their actions and discourses as either progressive and Western-oriented, or conservative and “Lithuanian”. While the tension between these two contradictory narratives have in the long run defined the divisions and contradictions of the Lithuanian women’s movement, in early post-socialism the two narratives were initially often intermingled, allowing for the comparatively harmonious collaboration between ideologically different women’s groups.

In what follows I outline how Marija Gimbutas works published in Lithuania, starting with late socialism and focusing in particular on early post-socialism. I also focus on her self-presentation in popular media throughout this period. In particular I analyze how Gimbutas became a suitable heroine for a broad range of feminist goals in the post-1990 period: from the academic environment

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<sup>1025</sup> Daugirdaitė, “Vytautas Kavolis ir feminizmas”; Irina Novikova, “Post-Socialist Politics of Memory and Women’s Narratives of Their Past: Baltic Contexts,” in *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective. Women Narrating Their Lives and Actions* (Centre for Women’s Studies, Zagreb, 2013).



of the Lithuanian women's studies, to the realm of party politics. I argue that the ambiguity of Gimbutas' theories and the multilayered character of her public persona made her moldable to suit the purposes of both *return* and *transition* narratives as they were employed by feminists.

### **5.3 Gimbutas in (post-)Soviet Lithuania**

As a prehistorian and archaeologist, Gimbutas was known in Lithuania mainly for the narrative that she proposed about the origins and history of Lithuanian ancestors, the Balts.<sup>1026</sup> Her interpretation of this nationalist (pre)historic narrative, as I argue here, united elements of both *return* and *transition* narratives, positioning Lithuania as both an integral part of Europe, and by criticizing Western modernity from a perspective of the historically marginalized European peripheries. This made her into a very attractive thinker for the post-socialist Lithuanian nationalist audiences. Moreover, Gimbutas' persona also united the elements of both the charm of the interwar Lithuanian intelligentsia, and the appeal of "Western lifestyle", allowing her not only to theorize but also to embody a certain nationalist narrative. She suggested to reconceptualize the Lithuanian nationalist narrative in a way which, as I show, on the one hand, framed the Soviet experience as inauthentic, not corresponding to the true "Lithuanian spirit" while on the other hand also answered to the new fears and insecurities of the period of the social and economic transformation, and the perceived "lagging behind" the West. Gimbutas theory of Old Europe proposed a critique of modernity, which was equally critical of both the capitalist and the state-socialist forms of modernity and proposed an antimodernist feminist spiritual vision for Lithuania.

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<sup>1026</sup> In this section I only analyze books, articles and speeches written or given by Gimbutas in Lithuanian language and for the audience living in Soviet or post-Soviet Lithuania. The translations to English here are all mine.

### 5.3.1 “Lithuanian spirit”

At the core of Gimbutas’ reconceptualization of the Lithuanian national narrative was her emphasis on paganism as the only authentic expression of the “Lithuanian spirit” and the only source of true national pride in the contemporary times. The history of the Christianization of Lithuania and other Baltic lands (current Latvia, Lithuania, and former Prussia) for her was a part of the history of oppression – an internal European colonization. In the book *Baltai priešistoriniais laikais: etnogenezė, materialinė kultūra ir mitologija* (The Balts in Prehistoric Times: Ethnogenesis, Material Culture and Mythology),<sup>1027</sup> published in Soviet Lithuania,<sup>1028</sup> Gimbutas presented Christianity as the ideology of the conquerors, enforced by sword starting with the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1029</sup> (Gimbutienė 1985, 149).<sup>1030</sup> Lithuanians, similarly to other Baltic peoples, resisted the imposition of the culture and religion foreign to them, and continued practicing their pagan beliefs until just a few centuries ago, with some remnants of the old beliefs remaining alive up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she argued.

In an article from 1988, published in a Lithuanian-American monthly *Akiračiai*<sup>1031</sup> Gimbutas wrote that “to understand the concept of the transcendental God was probably the most difficult thing for our ancestors, who breath in sync with the rhythm of Nature, who were inseparably connected with

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<sup>1027</sup> Gimbutienė, *Baltai priešistoriniais laikais*.

<sup>1028</sup> In this Chapter I only use Lithuanian language texts by Gimbutas, written for the Lithuanian audience both in Soviet and post-Soviet times. Translations to English are all mine.

<sup>1029</sup> Gimbutienė, *Baltai priešistoriniais laikais*, 149.

<sup>1030</sup> Gimbutas wrote: “The Teutonic Order brought Christianity to the Baltic lands on the tip of a sword. The order killed people, but could not eradicate the old religion until the XVII century, until the Prussians completely disappeared (were assimilated by Germans). Latvian peasants retained their marvelous mythological songs and old traditions almost until the twentieth century, even though they were officially Christianized at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century... Until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup>-beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lithuania did not get completely Christianized.” In Gimbutienė, 149.

<sup>1031</sup> The diaspora magazine *Akiračiai* organized a questionnaire on the occasion of the 600 years anniversary of the Christianization of Lithuania. In the essay answering to the questionnaire, Gimbutas argued that Christianity, at least initially, went against the natural inclination of the Lithuanian spirit.

the soil, the trees, with sacred sources and waters”.<sup>1032</sup> Coming from a holistic worldview, Gimbutas argued, Lithuanians found it difficult to accept the androcratic Christian organization, its androcentric spirit and the exaltation of suffering. Up until modern times Lithuanians, Gimbutas wrote, believed in the life energy, impersonal spirit, reincarnation – they created a hybrid religion with elements of both Christianity and paganism.<sup>1033</sup> For Gimbutas, the cult of Virgin Mary was an example of such hybridization - one of the proofs of this survival of the “Lithuanian spirit” through the centuries of Christianization.<sup>1034</sup> Gimbutas argued that Christianity was a relatively recent cultural layer, and that therefore it was still possible to decipher the archaic Old European mythological layer through the study of Baltic folklore. Through this narrative Gimbutas propagated a primordialist nationalist account of the origin of Baltic nations and portrayed Lithuanians as victims of centuries long military and spiritual oppression by foreign powers from East and West, starting with Christianity and finishing with modern occupations.<sup>1035</sup>

However, by stressing the resistance to Christianization, Gimbutas did not aim to portray Lithuanians and other Balts as antithetical to the European civilization. On the contrary, Gimbutas stressed the inherently “European” character of Lithuania and Latvia, and the special connection that the Baltic culture had with the most archaic European cultural layer – the layer of Old Europe, more *profoundly* European than Christianity. Gimbutas here followed to a large extent the ideas of Jonas Basanavičius – a central figure of the early twentieth century Lithuanian nationalism, and Gimbutas’ “adopted grandfather” something I discuss more at length in Chapter 2. As Putnaitė

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<sup>1032</sup> Akiračiai, “Krikščionybė Lietuvoje - 600. Į Akiračių anketos klausimus atsako Marija Gimbutienė’ [600 years of Christianity in Lithuania. Marija Gimbutas answers to Akiračiai questionnaire]. *Akiračiai*, 1988, 108.

<sup>1033</sup> Akiračiai, 109.

<sup>1034</sup> Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*; Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 1989.

<sup>1035</sup> Such a primordialist understanding of nationhood and nationalism is contradictory to the approach embraced by many contemporary historians, who see the Eastern European nations largely as a creation of the nationalist movement of the XIX century. See for example Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*.

argues, Basanavičius proposed a vision of Lithuanian history, in which Christianity was at the root of the civilizational downfall of Lithuanian culture, while paganism represented a higher culture – the Golden Age of Lithuania. This narrative placed the Baltic culture at the root of the European civilization, paradoxically, argues Putnaitė, presenting Christianity as only a barbarian rendition of the former superior old pagan beliefs.<sup>1036</sup> One can notice almost identical logic in Gimbutas’ work, where she argued that due to the preservation of pagan beliefs, Lithuania can be seen as a descendant of the most authentic and archaic European civilizational layers, as a culture which preserved the remains of the civilizational background of the European culture. Such understanding, propagated both by Basanavičius and Gimbutas, reversed the usual power dynamic between the center and periphery of Europe, inherent in the “transition” narrative, which portrays the marginal Baltic nations as “trapped in backwardness”.<sup>1037</sup> Lithuania, they argued, is not behind the European civilizational development, it is “preserving” the true treasures of the past, from which the center, or “the West”, has drifted away to its own misfortune.

### 5.3.2 Critique of modernity

It would be tempting, as Putnaitė does with Basanavičius, to see Gimbutas as merely a critic of “the West” and Europe, due to the way she negatively interpreted the imposition of Christianity in the Baltics. However, for Gimbutas, the criticism of Christianity is just a prelude for the criticism of the direction of progress of patriarchal civilization in general. Gimbutas presented a strong critique of modernity, or as she called it “the last 300 years” of social and economic development in the Western world, broadly understood, and directed her criticism equally towards both capitalist and Communist forms of modernity.<sup>1038</sup> One of the best illustrations of Gimbutas’

<sup>1036</sup> Putnaitė, *Šiaurės Atėnų tremtiniai* [The deportees of Northern Athens], 23–27.

<sup>1037</sup> Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness.”

<sup>1038</sup> Gimbutienė, “The speech at Vytautas Magnus University,” 14.

antimodern critique can be found in the speech that she delivered during the ceremony for her Honorary Doctorate at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, her Alma Mater, in 1993. It is arguably the most recorded speech given by Gimbutas in post-socialist Lithuania and also her last one.<sup>1039</sup> In her speech, an excerpt of which is quoted at the beginning of this dissertation, Gimbutas criticized modernity for creating a “mechanical world”, by which she meant that the human approach to nature has changed from mystical and spiritual towards rationalist and utilitarian.<sup>1040</sup> The modern society has left no space for spirituality in human life, she claimed, and this led to the unprecedented period of wars and destruction in the twentieth century.<sup>1041</sup> Talking in a country that has just recently liberated from the Soviet Union, Gimbutas talked about “standing today at the closing doors of the passing era” and the need for a change in consciousness.<sup>1042</sup>

In the early post-socialism Gimbutas’ talking about “the end of an era” could have not been read differently than in the light of hegemonic anti-Communism – contributing to the already pervasive understanding of the Soviet period as “unnatural” and “artificial”. Gimbutas, however, framed the Lithuanian trauma of the Soviet occupation within the broader historical narrative of the downfall of the Western civilization – which started with the imposition of patriarchy 5000 years ago and reached its peak with modernity of the last 300 years – instead of seeing it as an exceptional event. Hence also the Lithuanian resistance during “the last 50 years of Soviet terror”,<sup>1043</sup> as she called it, for Gimbutas was just another manifestation of resistance to imposed ideologies, all foreign to the authentic Lithuanian – and Old European - soul. Gimbutas saw both Soviet and Western

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<sup>1039</sup> The speech was first printed in the cultural magazine *Literatūra ir menas* about a month after it was given and then reprinted in *Laimos palytėta* (2002). Fragments of this speech were also included in the short documentary film about Gimbutas, by Algirdas Tarvydas, “Marija Alseikaitė - Gimbutienė. Lietuvos Ironika”.

<sup>1040</sup> Gimbutienė, “The speech at Vytautas Magnus University,” 15.

<sup>1041</sup> Gimbutienė, 14–15.

<sup>1042</sup> Gimbutienė, 14.

<sup>1043</sup> Gimbutienė, “The speech at Vytautas Magnus University.”

modernity as problematic, as the two sides of the coin of the patriarchal modernization, the androcratic model of progress and civilization. In an interview for the Lithuanian national television (LRT) with Kazys Saja, recorded in 1992, Gimbutas described the twentieth century as the peak of the negative consequences of the development of humanity, which resulted in “the most terrible dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, biggest lies and injustices”.<sup>1044</sup> Talking in the context of the recent Lithuanian independence from the Soviet Union, Gimbutas emphasized that the current times might be the times of the change in consciousness, turning away from the militaristic, destructive understanding of progress, back towards more Earth-bound spirituality and feminine values. This imbued the Lithuanian emancipation from the Soviet Union with an additional layer of meaning, portraying it not only as a nationalist or political achievement, but also as a “spiritual” liberation.

What was typical for Gimbutas’ ideas, as she promoted them in post-socialism, is that she rhetorically connected the Lithuanian post-socialist transformation with an antimodernist global vision of change. By reversing the normally positive understanding of progress and civilization she also challenged the idea, implicit in the *transition* narrative, that the Western modernity is the logical end-point of the post-socialist transformation.<sup>1045</sup> The Lithuanian “backwardness” in industrial and economic terms became an advantage in Gimbutas’ vision: the relatively late Christianization and, later on, “belated” modernization and industrialization, allowed Lithuania to preserve the values and traditions of the “old world”. Lithuanians were closer to nature, to Earth, thus morally superior than the representatives of the urban and industrial cultures. Gimbutas’ antimodernist narrative allowed to tackle the tacit fears about the massive economic, social and

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<sup>1044</sup> Saja, “Geresnio gyvenimo ilgesys. M. Gimbutienė. [Longing for better life. Marija Gimbutas].”

<sup>1045</sup> Gimbutienė, *Senoji Europa* [The Old Europe], 10.

cultural transformation. However, while adding a strong feminist elements into the nationalist trope of the return to the Golden Age of the nation, she also challenged the *return* narrative. For Gimbutas, the return to Lithuanian national origins was, as I show next, a return to the values of pagan Old Europe, where the “traditional” gender contract was reversed, with women taking the leadership positions and the “feminine principle” being the guiding spiritual principle.

### 5.3.3 “Feminine principle”

The antimodernist narrative that Gimbutas proposed had a strong gender element in it, adding the “women’s question” to the nationalist post-socialist narratives of *transition* and *return*. Gimbutas believed that the social issues caused by modernity can be healed by turning to the gynocentric spiritual origins of the European culture, returning to “feminine values”.<sup>1046</sup> In what follows I argue that Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe, as she promoted it in post-socialist Lithuania, challenged but also responded to the desire for gendered “normality”, implicated to some extent in both return and transition narratives. By putting *femininity* at the center of the nationalist Golden Age picture, Gimbutas also left the content of it rather empty, thus creating space for feminist reimaginings of the nationalist discourse.

In her speech in Kaunas Gimbutas quoted Thomas Berry, an eco-spiritualist thinker,<sup>1047</sup> saying that “we need to revise history and bring back to life the forgotten vital elements: Earth, body (health), femininity and unconscious”.<sup>1048</sup> While Gimbutas did not explicitly refer to any movement or theory, her references and the use of the expressions such as “new world” and “the

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<sup>1046</sup> Gimbutienė, *Senoji Europa* [The Old Europe]; Gimbutienė, “The speech at Vytautas Magnus University.”

<sup>1047</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988). The printed version of her speech in Lithuanian (in Ikamaitė 2002) contains a mistake – it quotes Tim M. Berry, the evolutionary scientist and biologist. My reason to believe that Gimbutas quoted Thomas Berry in her 1993 speech is that she has made the same reference in an analogous speech during the presentation of her book “The Civilization of the Goddess” in Santa Monica. See Ragana, *Voice of the Goddess: Marija Gimbutas*.

<sup>1048</sup> Gimbutienė, “The speech at Vytautas Magnus University,” 15.

end of an era”, intellectually connected her to eco-spiritualism and eco-feminism, growing to popularity in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, but also rooted in earlier countercultural movements, including radical feminism, of the 1960s. These movements tended to see the end of the twentieth century as the turning point in the history of humanity, the start of the new era, which would be more spiritual and “feminine”.<sup>1049</sup> Similarly, Gimbutas argued, the answer to the tragedy of the twentieth centuries’ disasters was to be found in the humanity’s ability to turn away from the anthropocentric, patriarchal, “mechanistic”, militaristic worldview and find an alternative way of living, drawing an inspiration from the prehistoric, goddess worshipping civilization and its “feminine” culture.

Gimbutas argued that women-oriented spirituality, the “feminine principle” was a part of the Baltic culture, directly inherited from the Old Europe. Already in *The Balts* Gimbutas outlined the main elements of Lithuanian pagan spirituality, distinguishing between the Indo-European and Old European layers. The Old Europe layer was represented in Lithuanian culture, in her opinion, by the powerful Lithuanian female goddesses: *Laima*, *Ragana*, *Žemyna*, *Austėja*, etc. These Goddesses, she wrote, were not the wives of Gods, but independent powers, with an established hierarchy among themselves – thus, she theorized, they proved the existence of a matrilineal order

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<sup>1049</sup> See Chapter 4 for a broader discussion of the connection between Gimbutas’ ideas and the ecofeminist and eco-spirituality thinking, popular in the early 1990s. See, for example, Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, “Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health,” *Society and Nature* 2 (1993): 1–35; Gore, *Earth in the Balance. Forging a New Common Purpose*. Still, it should be noted here, that it would be a mistake to understand Gimbutas as being influenced by these “Western” cultural trends. Instead, Gimbutas should be understood as a part of the development of “ecofeminism/ eco-spiritualism”, and in fact, a reference point for others, providing the archaeological background. Two influential ecofeminist thinkers, Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, for example, referenced Gimbutas’ work on Old Europe in their article “Ecofeminism: Toward global justice and planetary health” (1993), published in the same year as Gimbutas gave this speech. Her ideas had influence outside feminism by that time as well. Already in 1992, the American politician and environmentalist Al Gore, in his book *Earth in Balance. Ecology and Human Spirit* (1992) drew on the work of Gimbutas to argue that the prehistoric Europe was characterized by the worship of Earth Goddess and the harmonious cohabitation with nature.



in the pagan period, at least in the spiritual sphere.<sup>1050</sup> Gimbutas stressed the “beauty” and the persistence of the pagan beliefs: the ancient Balts lived in the world imbued with spirituality and meaning (*sudievintame pasaulyje*) and they did not easily surrender to the androcentric Christian beliefs, imposed from the outside. The female goddesses, argued Gimbutas, “became so deeply rooted in the Baltic psyche, that neither Indo-European, nor Christian religion could uproot them”.<sup>1051</sup> Gimbutas believed that the Old European gynocentric culture has not disappeared altogether but was preserved as “the feminine principle” to some extent in individual psyche as an unconscious archetype. It was especially deeply rooted in the Baltic psyche, argued Gimbutas, making Lithuanian and Latvians some of the most authentic heirs of Old Europe.

Gimbutas placed the “feminine”, the “women’s culture” at the center of the national historical narrative – she argued that the “balance of sexes” and the centrality of femininity was intrinsic to the authentic Lithuanian national culture. Gimbutas presented a narrative of Lithuanian history, which positioned it in a “unique” position within the European history: while it was indeed the part of the Western civilization, it also had the peculiarity, the “national treasure” (to quote her article from 1949), that is the cultural heritage from the pre-Christian, Goddess-centered time, that allegedly had survived in the psyche of contemporary Lithuanians up until today:

If we would look on the surface only, it would seem that we [Lithuanians – RN] are very big admirers of knights, dukes and heroes, riding horses and concurring the world... But our fundament is the woman’s culture that, in fact, preserved our culture to this day. Our songs (*dainos*) are from Old Europe, most of them. The love for nature, the feeling of life energy in a leaf, a tree, a bird, a stone – all of this is from the Old Europe.<sup>1052</sup>

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<sup>1050</sup> Gimbutienė, *Baltai priešistoriniai laikais*, 161.

<sup>1051</sup> Gimbutienė, 150.

<sup>1052</sup> Gimbutas, quoted in Tarvydas, “Marija Alseikaitė - Gimbutienė. Lietuvos kronika.”

As seen in the excerpt from the documentary video in 1993, Gimbutas presented the connection to the Old European culture as a key to the national survival - it was the women's culture, or the women-centered culture, that preserved the national identity of Lithuanians.

Gimbutas formulated a similar message in the introduction to the book *Senoji Europa* (The Old Europe) available in virtually every library in Lithuania.<sup>1053</sup> In the introduction written for the Lithuanian edition Gimbutas expressed a critical attitude towards the direction of the Western progress, which “annihilates the conditions for life on Earth”<sup>1054</sup> and argued for the necessity to return to the values of the past:

We can say that the influence of the ancient cultures has not disappeared. It has survived up until our times as a background of Western civilization. The *feminine principle* cannot be destroyed because it is natural. Let us hope that the ability of our ancestors to include the *feminine principle* into their everyday spiritual life will help us to regain the balance and heal the restless contemporary world.<sup>1055</sup>

Gimbutas argued that the past societies had a more authentic, more natural connection to the environment and a more balanced, harmonious way of live, defined by their connection to what she called the “feminine principle” (*moteriškasis pradai*). Goddess-centered religion was the reason for the peacefulness, egalitarian character and their harmonious relationship with Nature of the archaic Baltic (European) civilization. What was essential, according to Gimbutas, was to reconnect to this feminine principle, which was an intrinsic aspect of the archaic way of life, to reintroduce the *feminine* in to the contemporary reality, in this way making it more balanced and harmonious.

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<sup>1053</sup> *Senoji Europa* is an (abridged) Lithuanian language version of the *Civilization of the Goddess*.

<sup>1054</sup> Gimbutienė, *Senoji Europa* [The Old Europe], 10; emphasis mine.

<sup>1055</sup> Gimbutienė, 11.

Gimbutas criticized the Western project of modernity, as well as the moral deficiencies of the big Western nations, at the same time as she presented the Soviet modernity as artificially imposed on the Baltic nations. The road for Lithuania to return to the family of European nations, to the Western civilization, Gimbutas argued, was not in “catching up” with the West, but in regaining the pride in its national heritage, its national uniqueness, in fact, a sort of moral superiority, which was also gendered – feminine. Gimbutas theory of Old Europe certainly made the questions of gender equality and women’s role central to the Lithuanian historical narrative and to its post-socialist state building project. However, as it is clear from the analysis presented above, Gimbutas gave little content to the concept of “feminine principle”, as well as little explanation of in what particular ways the heritage of Old Europe could be employed in the post-socialist context. In what follows I argue how precisely this ambiguity allowed Gimbutas’ ideas to be used by post-socialist Lithuanian feminists in a variety of ways, both as a tool of criticism of both the Soviet legacy and its detrimental effects, and as a discursive apparatus to channel for the insecurity created by the post-socialist transformation.

#### ***5.4 Gimbutas and post-socialist Lithuanian feminism***

As I have shown above, in the Lithuanian speaking environment Gimbutas was known mainly for her ideas about the origins and (pre-)historic development of the Balts, the ancestors of Lithuanians and Latvians. She provided a nationalist narrative that argued for the centrality of the “pagan”, Old European values in Lithuanian culture, among those values being spirituality (as opposed to rationality), closeness to Nature (as opposed to environmentally destructive progress), peacefulness (as opposed to war and conflict), and femininity (as opposed to masculinity). While she saw the Western civilization, and various forms of modernity (capitalist and state-socialist) as drifting away from these core values, she thought them to be fundamental, and constructed

Lithuanian culture as the most authentic resource and heir of the Old European heritage. In this section I show, in what ways Gimbutas ideas on gender, nation and modernity were taken up by the post-socialist women's movement. In particular I analyze two significant areas of the appropriation of Gimbutas' work and persona in Lithuania: the developing academic field of women's studies and the creation of the Women's party in the context of the party politics. Through the examples presented here I argue that the appeal of Gimbutas' ideas about femininity, nationhood, and modernity in its state-socialist and capitalist guises, demonstrate the complex and sometimes ambivalent relationship of the growing women's movement with the questions of Western-oriented economic and social reform, Soviet legacy and the nationalist re-traditionalization.

#### **5.4.1 Gimbutas in academia: from women's past to women's voice**

Given Gimbutas' authority as an archaeologist and prehistorian, it is not surprising, that in the majority of cases she was taken up by post-socialist feminists as an unquestionable authority in understanding the history of women's role in society. Gimbutas was particularly useful for providing a positive picture of Lithuanian, as well as of European prehistory, where women once allegedly occupied the position of power. The majority of Lithuanian feminist texts in the 1990s referred to Gimbutas as a source of authority without questioning her ideas about gender and women's place in prehistory. The introduction to *Feminizmo ekskursai* by Karla Gruodis, for example, referred to Gimbutas' work on Old Europe to argue that the question of sexual difference is as old as humanity – already the ancient religions and mythologies were structured with a help of gender binary. Following Gimbutas' claims, Gruodis stated that the ancient, prehistoric societies of Europe were matristic, structured by the religion of the Mother Goddess, while the later, Indo-European civilization replaced the female-centered symbolism with male gods and inaugurated the

ideology of war and aggression, characteristic to the Western civilization.<sup>1056</sup> In the aforementioned edited volume *Women in Transition*<sup>1057</sup> the sociologist Giedrė Purvaneckienė also turned to Gimbutas to talk about the gender roles in prehistory, narrowing down from the scale of Western civilization to the history of Lithuania. Talking about the prehistoric Baltic tribes, Purvaneckienė claimed, relying on Gimbutas' work, that the ancestors of Lithuanians were “basically egalitarian...the region was matrilinear in the prehistoric era”.<sup>1058</sup> It can be said that Gimbutas' ideas were used by these Lithuanian post-socialist feminists in a similar way as they were employed by the Goddess spirituality movement in the U.S.. As I have analyzed in Chapter 4, Gimbutas' work on Old Europe providing a positive image of prehistory to serve as a background for women's activism and feminist political reimagining in the present.

The appeal of Gimbutas' vision of women's past as a background for contemporary feminist thinking can be seen most clearly in the work of Viktorija Daujotytė-Pakerienė, a Lithuanian literary critic and philologist. In her book *Moters dalis ir dalia. Moteriškoji literatūros epistema* (Woman's Share and Destiny: The Feminine Episteme in Literature) Daujotytė presented probably the first feminist analysis of Lithuanian literary works by female (and some male) authors, while using Gimbutas' work as her theoretical background.<sup>1059</sup> Daujotytė reflected in her book on the epistemological break, a “new paradigm” that her work was inaugurating – while in the Soviet period, she argued, any analysis of literature had to apply the class perspective, at the expense of other approaches, her work was the first in Lithuania to give primacy to the question of gender.<sup>1060</sup> This perspective was necessary, she argued, to understand the flourishing of women's literature in

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<sup>1056</sup> Gruodis, “[vadas] [Introduction], 11.

<sup>1057</sup> LaFont, *Women in Transition*.

<sup>1058</sup> Purvaneckienė, “Women in the Domestic Domain,” 48.

<sup>1059</sup> Daujotytė, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman's share and destiny].

<sup>1060</sup> Daujotytė, 101.

Lithuania since the beginning of the 1980s, and to understand the development of a specific “women’s voice” in literature.<sup>1061</sup> Daujotyte did not rely in her work on any western feminists explicitly, besides a passing comment on the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Wolff.<sup>1062</sup> In an interview with me Daujotyte however retrospectively acknowledged being familiar with Julia Kristeva’s work and the possible influence of the *écriture feminine* (women’s writing) literary theory to her thinking. She however preferred to consider her ideas as developing independently and “parallel” to similar ideas abroad.<sup>1063</sup> In *Moters dalis ir dalia* Daujotyte developed what could be called a Lithuanian variant of “women’s writing” approach, without relying explicitly on any Western feminist theoretical works, and with reference only to the work of Marija Gimbutas.

Daujotyte analyzed in her book, among other things, the criticism towards the Soviet modernity, as it was formulated in the works of Lithuanian women writers (especially Vanda Juknaitė) of the late socialist period.<sup>1064</sup> The Soviet modernity, as it was portrayed in the writings of these authors, broke the human connection with Nature, the environment, as well as the authentic Lithuanian culture.<sup>1065</sup> Moreover, the Soviet period disrupted the gendered nature of individuals, which resulted in the loss of “natural” gendered instincts, the loss of “normal” manifestations of femininity and masculinity.<sup>1066</sup> Analyzing these literary criticisms of Soviet modernity and its effects, Daujotyte embraced Gimbutas’ work, in order to conceptualize the masculine and feminine “elements” as essential and unchanging.<sup>1067</sup> The “women’s writing” approach, as formulated by Daujotyte, aimed at unearthing the archaic pagan cultural layer, which held the possibility to

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<sup>1061</sup> Daujotyte, 190.

<sup>1062</sup> Daujotyte, 15.

<sup>1063</sup> Viktorija Daujotyte, interview with the author, Vilnius, April 7, 2016.

<sup>1064</sup> Daujotyte, *Moters dalis ir dalia* [Woman’s share and destiny], 275.

<sup>1065</sup> Daujotyte, 281.

<sup>1066</sup> Daujotyte, 280.

<sup>1067</sup> Daujotyte, 13.

reconnect with the authentic femininity, allegedly oppressed under socialism. Trying to find the authentic “feminine voice” in literature Daujotyte embraced Gimbutas’ view that the traditional Lithuanian pagan religion (due to the elements preserved from the Old European culture) was beneficial for women and for the flourishing of the “feminine element”.<sup>1068</sup> Daujotyte, it can be said, to some extent embraced the dominant *return* narrative of post-socialism, which portrayed the Soviet period as distorting the “natural” gender roles, and perpetuated the alleged need for reconnecting with the “normal” femininity and masculinity. However, using Gimbutas’ work allowed Daujotyte to embrace this narrative without succumbing to the pervasive conservative Catholic definitions of gender roles,<sup>1069</sup> and instead proposing a perspective of women’s empowerment, based on the utopian pagan matrilineal imaginary.

Gimbutas’ work allowed Daujotyte to criticize both the “artificial” Soviet gender equality and the gendered re-traditionalization, characteristic to the post-socialist period. Moreover, embracing the vision of “feminine element” as formulated in Gimbutas work, enabled Daujotyte to also formulate anxieties around the new forms of gendered expression, arising, as she presented them, in the context of Westernization. Characteristic to Daujotyte’s work was a strict distinction between the masculine and feminine “elements” (masculinity being associated with aggression, confrontation, goal-oriented activity, and culture; while femininity - with empathy, feelings, introspection and nature) and the claim that due to the overarching dominance of the masculine perspective in all fields of life, the authentic feminine perspective had no possibility to be developed in the creative terrain.<sup>1070</sup> This led her to distinguish between “authentic” and “inauthentic” women’s writing, criticizing some prominent contemporary female writers (like Jurga Ivanauskaitė) for writing in

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<sup>1068</sup> Daujotyte, 17–19.

<sup>1069</sup> Daujotyte, 17.

<sup>1070</sup> Daujotyte, 12.

what she considered *masculine* style, propagating an “artificial emancipation”.<sup>1071</sup> It can be said therefore that in *Moters dalis ir dalia* Daujotytė provided a pioneering analysis of women’s writing, while at the same time often employing the stereotypical representations of “femininity”. Daujotyte established a Lithuanian “women’s writing” approach, referring to the work of Gimbutas, which both enabled a formulation of the specific contribution of “women’s voice” in the field of literature, but also demarcated the boundaries of the possible “authentic” expression of female writers.

The appeal of Gimbutas’ ideas about the Old European matristic society was not universal in the field of the developing Lithuanian women’s studies. Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė,<sup>1072</sup> differently from the majority of Lithuanian feminists writing in the 1990s, did not find Gimbutas’ theories appealing or trustworthy. In her 1998 book *Lyčių drama* (Gender drama), Pavilionienė analyzed selected works of Western literature from the feminist perspective. In the introduction she provided an overview both of the historical development of women’s oppression and feminist consciousness, as well as the theoretical development of feminist thinking in the West. *Lyčių drama* was one of the first works in the Lithuanian academic sphere to introduce a social constructivist approach to gender, and to criticize strongly the biologist background for gender stereotypes, demystifying homosexuality and transsexuality, and arguing for androgyny as a solution from limiting gender roles.<sup>1073</sup>

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<sup>1071</sup> Daujotytė, 14.

<sup>1072</sup> Aušrinė Marija Pavilionienė was of the initiators of the revival of LUMA (Lithuanian University Women’s Organization) and the head of LSC (Women’s Studies’ Center since 1992, later -Gender Studies Center at Vilnius University). Later she became a parliamentarian from the Lithuanian Social Democrat Party, promotor of progressive policies.

<sup>1073</sup> Pavilionienė, *Lyčių drama* [Gender drama], 11–24.



Pavilionienė ventured into an overview of the historical development of patriarchy, in order to support her claim that gender inequality is based not on different biology of women and men, but on historical processes and social environments. However, following Simone de Beauvoir, she held that women had always been subordinated by men, that there was never a society where women truly held the position of power analogous to that of men in patriarchy. The “myths and legends about the Amazons and the era of matriarchy”, Pavilionienė argued, had been created as a psychological “compensation for the subordinated female sex”.<sup>1074</sup> She employed the work of the historian Gerda Lerner,<sup>1075</sup> to argue against the existence of prehistoric matriarchy, which was propagated by, as Pavilionienė put it, “our compatriot Marija Gimbutienė”.<sup>1076</sup> Similarly to Lerner, Pavilionienė was more interested in following and explaining the creation of the contemporary women’s subordination, rather than seeking sources of empowerment in the ancient past.

Despite the prominent position that Pavilionienė had in the Lithuanian academic feminist sphere in the 1990s, being the head of the Center for Women’s Studies at Vilnius University, her opinion regarding Gimbutas’ ideas was marginal in the overall post-socialist feminist context. Gimbutas’ ideas about the matristic Old European past and the Lithuanian national tradition of women’s power have been mainly embraced by women academics in the newly developing women’s studies field. First, it was used in constructing the national narrative of women’s power, and secondly, it was used, by Daujotyte, in formulating a Lithuanian version of the “women’s writing” approach in literary criticism. As I have shown here, one of the appeals of Gimbutas’ work was that it fit to

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<sup>1074</sup> Pavilionienė, 24.

<sup>1075</sup> Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*. In *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1987) Lerner, in fact, takes for granted many of the archaeological findings by Gimbutas, and comes to similar conclusions about the overthrow of a more matristic society by the patriarchal, hierarchical ancient states; while at the same time criticizing the utopian feminist image of prehistoric “matriarchy”.

<sup>1076</sup> Pavilionienė, *Lyčių drama* [Gender drama], 24.

some extent within the framework of the narrative of *return* to “normal gender order”. Employing Gimbutas’ theories allowed conceptualizing a feminist theory based on strong sexual difference – emphasizing difference between femininity and masculinity, as innate human characteristics. However, given the vagueness of Gimbutas definition of “feminine element”, and also her otherwise strong criticisms towards both Western and Soviet forms of modernity, it allowed feminists to reimagine the “normal” gender order outside the limiting framework of conservative nationalist post-socialist context of gendered re-traditionalization.

#### **5.4.2 Gimbutas in politics: the Lithuanian Women’s Party**

One of the best illustration of Gimbutas’ wide popularity among Lithuanian feminists in the 1990s is the inclusion of her ideas on the matristic Old Europe in the political program of the Lithuanian Women’s Party (*Lietuvos moterų partija*, LMP). As I have shown in this chapter, in the majority of cases in post-socialist Lithuania, the need for women’s involvement in politics and progressive legislation of gender equality was justified by feminists as the part of the Westernization and the integration to the European political and economic structures.<sup>1077</sup> Contrary to this tendency, LMP chose to argue, with the help of Gimbutas, for the intrinsic Lithuanian character of women’s participation in the decision making process and social justice. The uses of Gimbutas’ work and her persona in the LMP program and other discourses of the party show, how the theory of Old Europe bended the usual center-periphery power dynamics of the narrative of *transition*, portraying Lithuanian national culture as an exemplary case of women’s power, rather than lagging behind “the West”. Most importantly, I argue, the reliance on Gimbutas’ work distanced LMP’s

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<sup>1077</sup> Pavilionienė, “Feminizmas Lietuvoje: istorija ir dabartis” [Feminism in Lithuania: history and now].

feminism from the Soviet doctrine of gender equality, while at the same time making it appear as intrinsically “Lithuanian”.

LMP was created in 1995 as a response to the relative exclusion of women from party politics. Women’s participation in *Sajūdis*<sup>1078</sup> central organization and national politics was marginal, and later women were underrepresented in the first democratically elected *Seimas*<sup>1079</sup> of independent Lithuania – they made up only 10% of the deputies.<sup>1080</sup> An exceptional personality in this context of the general exclusion of women from politics was Kazimira Prunskienė, the first Prime Minister of post-Soviet Lithuania, who led an all-male cabinet during the first year of countries independence (1990-1991). Prunskienė, an economist and university professor, a former Communist Party member, was one of the initiators of *Sajūdis*. Her popularity and professional abilities led her to the top of the new political elite, but the political and economic turbulence of the period – high inflation rates, the economic blockade by Russia, etc. – resulted in the fall of the cabinet after a year. After her “expulsion” from politics, as she described it in her memoirs (she saw the fall of her cabinet as a result of political machinations), Prunskienė became more aware of women’s discrimination in politics and got involved with women’s activism.<sup>1081</sup> She created the Lithuanian Women’s Association in 1992 and was an active participant in the non-governmental sphere of women’s activism in Vilnius.<sup>1082</sup> This led her to eventually participate in the creation of LMP, which won her a seat in the Parliament in the 1996 elections.

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<sup>1078</sup> *Sajūdis* (Lietuvos persitvarkymo sąjūdis), or the Organization for the Transformation of Lithuania, was the key organization in the transitional period during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of an independent country.

<sup>1079</sup> *Seimas* is the name of the Lithuanian parliament.

<sup>1080</sup> White, “Women in Changing Societies: Latvia and Lithuania,” 208.

<sup>1081</sup> Kazimiera Prunskienė, *Laisvėjimo ir permainų metai* [The years of liberation and change] (Vilnius: Viltis, 1995).

<sup>1082</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, interview with the author,

The appearance of a women's party was not unique to Lithuania in the post-socialist context. The political scientist John Ishiyama has shown that between 1993 and 1998, political parties (or other political organizations eligible to participate in elections) run by women were created in a number of former republics of the Soviet Union: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania. *The Women of Russia* movement, the Armenian *Shamiram* Women's Party and the Democratic Women's Party of Kyrgyzstan, as well as LMP in Lithuania managed to win seats in their respective national parliaments.<sup>1083</sup> *The Women of Russia* demonstrated the potential appeal of such parties already in 1993, when it won 8,03% of the vote in the parliamentary election,<sup>1084</sup> thus it could have served as an example for Prunskienė. Ishiyama noticed that post-Soviet women's parties ideologically preoccupied themselves mainly with "women's concerns", such as family policy and child welfare and held a center political position. As described by one of the leaders of *The Women of Russia*: "we are not with the right and not with the left . . . we are by ourselves!"<sup>1085</sup> The Lithuanian Women's Party espoused a similar ideology of "no ideology". One of the leaders of the party, Dalia Teišerskytė, poet and entrepreneur<sup>1086</sup> wrote, echoing her Russian counterpart, that the political orientation of LMP is "neither right or left, but straight forward".<sup>1087</sup> The party, according to her, was created to solve the problems affecting Lithuanian families and children, and tackle the rising poverty. The program of LMP stated a wish to avoid antagonism of different political powers, and seek the

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<sup>1083</sup> John T. Ishiyama, "Women's Parties in Post-Communist Politics," *East European Politics & Societies* 17, no. 2 (2003): 279–82.

<sup>1084</sup> Ishiyama, 287.

<sup>1085</sup> Ishiyama, 288.

<sup>1086</sup> White, "Women in Changing Societies: Latvia and Lithuania."

<sup>1087</sup> Dalia Teišerskytė, "Why and How the Party of Women Was Formed in Lithuania," in *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania*, ed. Suzanne LaFont (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 98.

middle ground, a “rational and human” compromise between free-market economy and social security, national values and the openness to the world.<sup>1088</sup>

The party program of LMP invoked Gimbutas’ work from the very first page, outlining the general ideals of the party:

Globally acknowledged Lithuanian scientist Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė has revealed in her works the layer of the old matristic culture of Lithuania and Europe, which was suppressed by the patriarchal layer of the last few millennia. She has proven how important it is for this culture to return to our life, so that the humanity would finally stop fighting and destroying, so that after reaching the harmony in the relationship between women and men, the equality of the expression of both genders, it could develop and progress freely. Lithuanian women’s party is based on matristic culture.<sup>1089</sup>

The program stressed the scientific authority of Gimbutas, as well as the scholarly character of her hypothesis of the matristic Old Europe. Employing Gimbutas’ work, LMP proposed a political vision, where the “return” of matristic culture would facilitate the restoration of social harmony, establish a balance of sexes. Claiming that “matristic culture” is at the basis of both Lithuanian and European culture, it implied that the change towards more “harmonious” gender order was to be achieved without struggle and conflict, but organically, by retrieving the forgotten, but intrinsic Lithuanian cultural elements. The program implied also, similarly as in Gimbutas’ work, that the key to avoiding ideological conflicts was to be found in women’s nature – the party was not a vehicle for the individual political and career ambitions, but a way for women, as a group, to

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<sup>1088</sup> Prunskienė, “Lietuvos Moterų Partijos programa” [The program of the Lithuanian Women’s Party], 5. The desire of the LMP to seek the middle ground, to stay beyond competing ideologies is visible in many of its stances. For example, while in principle the party was against the death penalty (“as it is against the Christian and humanist morality”), it did not wish to abolish the penalty immediately (“due to the aggression of the criminal world and the insecurity of people”).

<sup>1089</sup> Prunskienė, 4–5.

become more involved in national politics, in order to facilitate the state affairs “with wisdom and care”,<sup>1090</sup> just like in the imagined utopian matristic past.

LMP did not call itself “feminist” and received mixed responses from Lithuanian feminists. On the one hand, the program of LMP proposed a conservative definition of womanhood, arguing that, for example, “healthy children is the biggest joy of every normal woman” and invoking Catholic morality as the basis for national culture and education.<sup>1091</sup> Some prominent feminist voices in Lithuania criticized LMP, and especially its leader Kazimira Prunskienė, for avoiding the association with feminism, the most prominent critic being the aforementioned Pavilionienė.<sup>1092</sup> On the other hand, while LMP’s leader Prunskienė would often start her arguments with the phrase “I am not a feminist, but...”, the content of her talks was relatively progressive for the particular historical moment.<sup>1093</sup> Not surprisingly thus, Prunskienė (and LMP) was seen positively by many prominent Lithuanian women.<sup>1094</sup> However, after the not very successful election of 1996, when only the party leader Prunckienė was elected to *Seimas*, the party eventually changed its name (becoming *The New Democracy – Women’s Party* in 1998, then simply *New Democracy* in 2001) and character, becoming more inclusive and populist, eventually rejecting its background as a party of women. At the particular moment between 1995 and 1998,

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<sup>1090</sup> Prunskienė, 5.

<sup>1091</sup> Prunskienė, 7. The contradiction of relying both on Gimbutas’ hypothesis of Old Europe, with its privileging of Old Lithuanian pagan religion, and on Catholic morality at the same time, is another manifestation of the amorphous “middle-way” ideological character of LMP.

<sup>1092</sup> Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė, *Viltys ir nusivylimai* [Hopes and Ddisappointments] (Vilnius: Petro ofsetas, 2011).

<sup>1093</sup> Giedrė Purvaneckienė, interview with the author,

<sup>1094</sup> Viktorija Daujotytė, interview with the author, Vilnius, April 7, 2016; Jurga Ivanauskaitė, “Moters individualizmas Lietuvoje” [Woman’s individualism in Lithuania], *Metmenys* 58 (1990): 166–73; Kelertas, “Kokio feminizmo Lietuvai reikėtų?” [What kind of feminism Lithuania needs?]. The positive attitude towards Prunskienė was later compromised by the later rumors of her alleged collaboration with KGB. Violeta Kelertienė, interview with the author, Vilnius, September 10, 2015.

however, LMP managed to revive the question of gender in the sphere of party politics dominated by men, even if it was not claiming the name of feminism.

Using Gimbutas name and her work in the party program did a multilayered ideological work for LMP. Just like in many other spheres of women's activism in immediate post-socialism, LMP was concerned with establishing itself as ideologically different from the Communist gender equality institutions. Especially it was important for Prunskienė, who was accused of pro-Russian attitudes and even collaboration with the KGB.<sup>1095</sup> While LMP was a part of a broader trend of the appearance of women's parties in the post-Soviet sphere (a phenomenon that has not been sufficiently analyzed or explained to this day), it wished to dissociate itself from the post-socialist region and instead align with the "European" tendencies. Thus LMP program stated that the concept of women's parties has been especially characteristic to Scandinavian countries,<sup>1096</sup> but did not mention the development of women's political movements in Russia or other post-Soviet countries. As Gimbutas' theory claimed about the existence of the prehistoric matrilineal layer in the culture of "Lithuania and Europe", it showed the fundamental connection between Lithuania and Europe, indeed demonstrated that Lithuania was an intrinsic part of the European culture historically, thus twisting the usual transition narrative. Furthermore, while Gimbutas clearly stressed the importance of "the balance of sexes" in society, and criticized the existing social order, she did not claim the label of feminism and thus was less threatening than an explicitly "feminist" theorist. All in all, evoking Gimbutas allowed the party to embrace the European/Western horizons

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<sup>1095</sup> Prunskienė, *Laisvėjimo ir permainų metai* [The years of liberation and change].

<sup>1096</sup> Prunskienė, "Lietuvos Moterų Partijos programa 1996 m. Seimo rinkimams" [The program of the Lithuanian Women's Party for the 1996 elections], 5.

of culture and science, and at the same time, to claim the inherent “Lithuanianness” of its intentions to “restore” the harmony between men and women.

### **5.5 Concluding remarks: archaeology of women and nation in post-socialism**

This chapter shows how in the post-1990 period Lithuanian women activists, politicians and academic managed to carve a space for feminist discourses and actions with the post-socialist environment, dominated by the narratives of *return* and *transition*. In the period of post-socialism, the Eastern European feminists, quite similarly to their Western counterparts within what Nancy Fraser has described as “the post-socialist condition”<sup>1097</sup>, could not rely on socialist argument for gender equality. Even more so, due to the pervasive negative association of women emancipation with the Soviet legacy, Lithuanian feminists, just like in other Eastern European countries, had to avoid any discursive connection with left-wing ideas<sup>1098</sup>. In search for a new paradigm on which to build their claim for equality, Lithuanian feminists found Marija Gimbutas’ antimodernist vision of Old Europe. Gimbutas provided an ideological background that was critical of both Soviet and Western modernity, that embraced the nationalist ideals and also positioned women as the center point for the spiritual and moral renewal of society. Gimbutas theory of the matristic Old Europe as a part of the national Lithuanian heritage created a discursive space for the women’s participation in, and critique of the state-rebuilding in post-socialism from a feminist perspective. Gimbutas’ gendered nationalist vision made her into a perfect icon for the post-socialist women’s movement, which aimed to carve a space for itself within the nationalist, pro-Western and anti-Communist ideological environment.

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<sup>1097</sup> Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*.

<sup>1098</sup> Gal and Kligman, “After Socialism.”



## Conclusion

Marija Gimbutas has been rhetorically placed both inside and outside of feminism, made into a “heroine” and an inspirational model, or into a straw-man of “gender essentialism”, sometimes included and sometimes excluded from feminist historiographies. This dissertation has traced this discursive making and unmaking of “Marija Gimbutas” in feminist circles in a variety of different contexts, and analyzed for what political, ideological or strategic goals and purposes Gimbutas has been claimed or rejected by feminists. It historicized and contextualized this process, considering the effects of the Cold War environment and the fall of the Soviet Union on the discourses of certain strands of feminism on the both sides and across the (former) “Iron Curtain”. This dissertation did not aim to create a new narrative about Gimbutas, which would erase the tensions and contradictions in her works, her public persona, or her multilayered reception, construction and appropriation. Instead, I took the analysis of the ambivalence and “controversy” of Gimbutas as a nodal point, which sheds light on the internal complexity of feminism, and the ongoing process of defining what feminism is and what exactly belongs or does not belong within feminism. From a historically informed transnational and postcolonial/postsocialist perspective I proposed to consider Gimbutas as an important point of reference for the ongoing project of feminist self-definition.

As Clare Hemmings has argued in her recent work on Emma Goldman, the contemporary feminism is characterized by the alleged consensus on certain political issues, something that often obscures the fact that the women’s movement both in the past and the present has been driven by divergent and sometimes incompatible ideas and goals.<sup>1099</sup> A contextualized and historicized look

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<sup>1099</sup> Hemmings, *Considering Emma Goldman*.

at the rise and fall of contested feminist figures such as Gimbutas, I proposed, following Hemmings, can reveal some of the ongoing theoretical and political disagreements in feminism, contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive feminist historiography. Taking Gimbutas as a “contingent narrative”<sup>1100</sup> of gendered historical processes, and positioning it at the center of this analysis was useful in particular for a closer examination of the situation of feminism in the (post) Cold War era, and for creating a more inclusive, transnational historiography of feminism, taking into account the often excluded (post-)socialist Europe.

In my analysis I combined the insights from the feminist engagement with the notion of “scientific persona”,<sup>1101</sup> in analyzing the construction of Gimbutas’ public representation by herself and others, with a strong emphasis on the historical contextualization of the places and time periods, that Gimbutas’ experienced throughout her life, and where her ideas were put to a certain use. This mixed methodology proved helpful in acknowledging the agency of many actors, and the importance of a wide range of political, ideological, geographical, economic, religious and other factors in determining women’s and gender politics. It allowed me to demonstrate how the phenomenon of Gimbutas is not a product of one particular context, either, for instance, Eastern European nationalism or the women’s liberation movement in the United States; but a combination of these and other historical circumstances and factors. This dissertation paid attention to both individual agency of Gimbutas, the collective politics and discourses of many feminist groups, from Lithuania to the U.S., and wider cultural, political and ideological contexts. In this way it challenges the one-sided narrative of Western feminism as “the norm”, and Eastern Europe as only a recipient of feminist ideas and politics, and instead proposes an alternative picture, where

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<sup>1100</sup> Caine, *Biography and History*, 124.

<sup>1101</sup> Bosch, “Persona and the Performance of Identity. Parallel Developments in the Biographical Historiography of Science and Gender, and the Related Uses of Self Narrative.”

women's politics both in "the East" and "the West" are dependent on the (in some senses ongoing) Cold War division of the world, and other transnational hierarchies, divisions and encounters.

In this dissertation I particularly focused on the 1980s and the 1990s, the decades characterized by "the postsocialist condition", as Fraser has called it, namely, by the disillusionment with the traditional political ideologies on the one hand, and hopes for the possibility of a global political change on the other hand. I investigated how the utopian feminist vision of the prehistoric matrilineal civilization of Old Europe, proposed by Gimbutas, was received in this context of the perceived crumbling of the ideological background for the women's movement, both, as I argue, in the West and in the post-socialist Eastern Europe. Gimbutas proposed a globalist antimodernist vision, urging the humanity to return to pre-modern values, embedded within a prehistoric spiritual system focused on the worship of the Goddess Creatrix, the Nature itself. Gimbutas was critical of both Western capitalism and the Soviet system, seeing them as only two faces of the patriarchal modernity, and proposed that the social, environmental and moral issues of the contemporary times can be solved only by the radical overthrow of this androcentric, militaristic and self-destructive system, not by its further development or "progress". Gimbutas' vision was appealing to some and radically opposed by others within the women's movement, reflecting the tensions and contrasts characteristic of the era. Moreover, the conflicting responses to Gimbutas' vision revealed, I have argued in this dissertation, some of the fundamental contradictions of modern feminism in general, such as the question of objectivity in science, the connection with female identity, and the conflicting relationship with the hegemony of "the West".

As I have shown in this dissertation, Gimbutas constructed a strong identity of herself as a Lithuanian, and promoted Lithuanian ethnic culture as supposedly providing a resource for the reconstruction of the matrilineal Old European beliefs and worldview. The women-centered

nationalism of Gimbutas was at times romanticized and sometimes demonized by feminists in the West, in both cases often perpetuating Orientalizing imaginaries of Eastern Europe as in many ways backward place. At the same time, for the Lithuanian women's movement, Gimbutas' vision of Old Europe provided new discursive opportunities for emancipatory gender politics in the period of "transition" to "the West". This dissertation interrogated Gimbutas' Lithuanian nationalism without assuming it to be automatically incompatible with her "feminism", or with her utopian global matristic vision. Keeping these allegedly contradictory aspects of Gimbutas thought and her reception in mind allowed me to demonstrate in this dissertation, how the women's movements, regardless their geopolitical location or ideological affiliation, in many ways remain entangled within the particular political and discursive conditions, provided by their respective national and transnational locations. At the same time, feminism both "East" and "West" stays enmeshed, albeit in multiple contradictory ways, with the ideals and goals of modernity, and the desire to be a part of a "universal" feminist struggle, which very often remains tainted by Eurocentrist imaginaries. Gimbutas' struggle to reconcile the particular interests, related to her national context, and her global vision of emancipation, is a perfect example of such uneasy relationship between the universal and particular interests, characteristic, I argue, of any feminism.

In the analysis of Gimbutas persona in her work, and the reception, construction and appropriation of her theory of Old Europe, this dissertation focused mainly on the politics of gender, and zoomed in on a variety of feminist contexts. There are, of course, many ways to read Gimbutas, by focusing for example, on her exaltation of pagan spirituality and the complex relationship with Christianity; by analyzing the genealogy of her thought within the Lithuanian and Eastern European intellectual environment, or by emphasizing the role of environmentalist concerns in the formation and reception of her ideas. These aspects of Gimbutas' thought and her construction and reception in

academia and in activist circles have been touched upon in this dissertation, but they still require further historical and anthropological research. This dissertation however, mostly dealt with the “question of feminism” regarding Gimbutas, and the way gender played out in both Gimbutas’ archaeological thought and her life, and the way she was understood or misunderstood, accepted or rejected in terms of her work and her self-presentation. I chose to focus on gender and feminism, partly, because these questions have been probably the most “controversial” in forming Gimbutas’ public image, and discussed too often in black-and-white terms. Because of the related controversies, I found the question of Gimbutas’ “feminism” and her gender politics so illuminating in terms of one of the most heated issues in contemporary feminism both in “the East” and in “the West”, namely, the question of gender essentialism. As my dissertation shows, the relationship of the women’s movement with the female identity and embodiment remains nothing but unresolved, used most often as a rhetorical weapon, a means of exclusion or inclusion in feminism. Gimbutas, however, I argued, cannot be easily placed in either “essentially” or “non-essentialist” camp, not only because the two camps metaphor is fundamentally reductive, but also because her theory of Old Europe provided a way to reimagine femininity and womanhood in a variety of different feminist contexts, ranging from very traditionalist and conservative, to very radical and thought provoking.

The Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides the first comprehensive transnational account on Gimbutas’ life, relating her experiences to a diverse range of historical and geo-political circumstances, which can be considered key to her intellectual and political formation. Without constructing a singular explanatory narrative, I proposed to see a few contexts as the most crucial for Gimbutas’ formation and her later reception and perception. I focused on the Lithuanian cultural nationalism in the interwar environment, the Second World War and the Soviet and Nazi

occupations, and their lasting impact on Eastern Europe, the ideological and religious politics of Lithuanian diaspora, the environment of the post-war anti-Communism in the United States, the changing gender politics within the American academia, the disciplinary context of archaeology, as well as the popularity of neopaganism and alternative spiritualities in the Soviet Union and the United States. I, however, proposed not to treat Gimbutas' personal life as a "reason" or "explanation" for her matristic hypothesis of Old Europe, but rather to see her life and ideas as arising at the complex interaction between the historical/political context and individual agency.

In Chapter 3 I presented Gimbutas as a scholar and an academic, narrating the intellectual trajectory that led her to give more and more emphasis to gender and to finally develop the women-centered perspective in her archaeological works on Old Europe, starting with the mid-1970s. In this chapter I analyzed the reception of Gimbutas' most "controversial" ideas within academia, showing the double marginalization she eventually faced. While initially it was the mainstream archaeology, that criticized Gimbutas for her allegedly biased and "unscientific" interpretation, later it was precisely the growing feminist archaeology that questioned the scientific validity of Gimbutas' approach and findings, and criticized her alleged "gender essentialism". In this chapter I paid attention to Gimbutas' scientific persona as arising at the intersection of academia as a social institution, and the particularity of Gimbutas' person, her ideological and scholarly beliefs.<sup>1102</sup> In this chapter I aimed to reveal, how the feminist project of challenging gender bias in science has to first of all counter the overwhelming androcentrism of some of the most fundamental common-sense assumptions in science, in this way inevitably appearing, in the eyes of the male-dominated establishment, as biased and ideological. One of the main challenges for feminism within academia therefore lies, as Gimbutas' controversy reveals so brilliantly, in the balancing act between the

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<sup>1102</sup> Bosch.

critique of androcentrism and the attempt to avoid the label of “radicalism”. Focusing on Gimbutas’ academic reception, I proposed a historicized look at the moment of the rise of post-structuralist approaches within academic feminism, and the new hegemony of thinking about gender that it established, showing how it largely delegitimized the earlier attempts at challenging the scientific androcentrism. While dismissing Gimbutas’ approach as essentialist and therefore problematic, the new feminist archaeology proposed their work as more scientific and less ideological, therefore more acceptable, in this way “smuggling” gender approaches to academia.

In Chapter 4, I placed Gimbutas and her Old Europe within the context of the Second Wave feminism, positioning her ideas as corresponding with and answering to the main concerns of the so-called “cultural” or “radical” feminism in the United States. While Gimbutas never took on the label of feminism, her ideas as well as their reception, I proposed, cannot be seen outside of this broader historical, political and philosophical context. Gimbutas’ vision of matrilineal Old Europe provided a scientific background for the utopian imagination of a women-centered, peaceful, egalitarian and environmentally harmonious future for feminists, starting with the 1970s. In this chapter I traced the genealogy both of the feminist spirituality movement, and of the variety of feminist criticisms of the Goddess worship and its (problematic) effects on women’s politics, including the criticisms of Gimbutas’ role in this movement. I focused in particular on how Gimbutas constructed Lithuanian, Eastern European ethnic culture as a resource for the reconstruction of the women-centered prehistoric world view, and its potential implication for feminist politics at the end of the Cold War. I showed how the feminist spirituality movement, dominated by women of white European background, turned to prehistoric (Eastern-) European cultural and spiritual traditions as supposedly more authentically “theirs”, in response to the accusations of cultural appropriation. In this process, however, the women’s spirituality movement

established a new Orientalized “other”, that is, the image of post-socialist Eastern Europe as stuck in premodern times, with an ongoing bond to the matristic Old European prehistory. Through my analysis of Gimbutas’ case I provided a new look at the notion of “cultural appropriation” from the perspective of (post)socialist Eastern Europe, and proposed to rethink the way “authenticity” is structured around racial and ethnic/national lines. This allowed me to denaturalize the notion of “Europe” in Gimbutas’ theory of Old Europe and propose to see it as a political construct created from the perspective of the European margins, which are trapped in the ongoing rhetorical and historiographic negotiations of their belonging to “the West”.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I explored the reception, construction and appropriation of Gimbutas and her work in the women’s movement in Lithuania in the 1990s. For this chapter I developed an original genealogy of the formation of feminism in Lithuania post-1990, and discussed its main ideological and political struggles in the light of broader feminist debates. The appeal of Gimbutas for many post-socialist Lithuanian feminists lied primarily, I argue, in her critique of modernity in both its Western and Communist guises. Gimbutas’ utopia of Old Europe rejected the narrative of “transition” to Western modernity as the only possible choice for Lithuanian society post-1990. Instead, she proposed a return to the matristic values of the ancient pagan past and the revival of the true, women-centered “Lithuanian spirit”. Due to an emphasis on the centrality of women and femininity, but also ambiguity in terms of what kind of gender politics such a vision implies, Gimbutas allowed Lithuanian feminists to challenge the re-traditionalization implicit in the “return” narrative of post-socialism, and resist the discursive framing of women in social roles of only mothers and housewives. Gimbutas argued for the importance of women’s leadership and creativity, and the broadness of her utopian vision appealed to many post-socialist Lithuanian feminists, as they were navigating between the competing anti-Communist, pro-Western and



nationalist narratives, which all relegated women to a secondary status. Due to its ambivalence, however, the vision of Old Europe appealed as well to the advocates of conservative gender policies and discourses, making Gimbutas' legacy for Lithuanian feminism rather contradictory.

Gimbutas envisioned, in line with the feminist spirituality movement, an antimodernist solution to the problems of humanity, and found support from some of those who perceived the contradictions of modernity, both in its Western and Soviet guises, increasingly vexing. Her vision resonated in particular within the general atmosphere of the end of the Cold War, when a new, more just and prosperous world seemed within a hands reach, when people were “longing for a better life”<sup>1103</sup> both in “the East” and in “the West”, beyond the political agendas of the traditional Left or Right, which then seemed disappointing and uninspiring. This dissertation does not propose to revive or embrace Gimbutas' utopian vision, but rather historicizes it within a particular period in feminism and the global political and ideological environment. The unconventional ideas of Gimbutas made her into a nodal point for some sections of the women's movement in the 1980s and the 1990s, in vastly different yet interrelated contexts, revealing, through the diversity of the engagements with her thought, some elements of the political ambivalence of contemporary feminism. This dissertation suggested one possible story about Gimbutas' rise and fall within the women's movement and outside of it, with the hope of broadening the interpretative possibilities for rereading feminist pasts and reimagining its futures.

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<sup>1103</sup> Saja, “Geresnio Gyvenimo Ilgesys. M. Gimbutienė. [Longing for a Better Life. Marija Gimbutas].”

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