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Sudarytojas VYTIS ČIUBRINSKAS

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# Post-Socialist Sensations: Nostalgia, the Self, and Alterity in Lithuania

*Neringa Klumbytė*

This article explores nostalgia for socialism among some rural and urban communities in Lithuania. It focuses on the sensations, such as people's experiences of hunger or cold, that give rise to nostalgia and are reinterpreted through it. In this article I argue that nostalgia is a restorative discourse, through which an individual reclaims one's own dignity and respect by transposing himself or herself onto an idealized chronotope of the Soviet past. Nostalgia is also a way to claim recognition and inclusion in a post-Soviet mainstream society, which very often denies equal citizenship to those who long for Soviet times.

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## Introduction[1]

It's 1984. I and some other people dressed in threadbare coats descend into a bunker. Down there, the colonel makes us run through the dark corridors until we start losing our breath. Then we march in a dark room, chanting one-two-three, for 15 or 20 minutes. And work in the dark moving metal scrap from one cement platform to another. And then from that platform back to the first one. I have to put on a gas mask and learn how to save myself from nuclear attack by wrapping myself into a white blanket. And then the doctor's cabinet with an old and scary gynecological table and a dental chair. I am ordered to sit in the dental chair. The doctor "finds some problems" that she intends to fix. But the bell rings and saves me. In another room, a KGB interrogator smokes a cigar and starts questioning us on a variety of issues. He supposedly finds drugs in the pocket of a foreign reporter. The reporter doesn't speak Russian or Lithuanian. The KGB interrogator screams at him,

[1] This article is a revised version of my chapter: Klumbytė Neringa. 2008. The Post-Soviet Publics and Nostalgia for Soviet Times, Schröder I. and Vonderau A. (eds.). *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe.* Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia: 27–45. Halle: LIT Verlag.

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and then tells him that he will get a heavy sentence and be deported to Siberia. The reporter is forced to confess that he had committed a crime against the Soviet state, and is beaten with a leather belt.

Next, I am taken to the shop where I and others can get a bar of authentic Soviet soap, a can of coffee, a cigarette, toilet paper, a jar of peas, and few other things. All of these items are luxuries, scarce commodities. The colonel is nicer now, and shows us Soviet style women's underwear, which arouses laughter. One woman puts it on her pants and turns around as if she were in a fashion show. The next trip is to a shop for foreigners. We can gaze through the window: a sewing machine, a bottle of cognac "Beliy aist," a pair of jeans, some other clothing and luxury commodities… We are allowed to choose a bottle of cognac, which we all share during the "Soviet dinner." I refuse a drink and tell the colonel that I am driving. The colonel tells me to read the poster on the wall: "The Party is our driver!" and orders me to drink. I pretend I do. The dinner includes a warmed-up can of beef and barley, some cookies and chocolate, some jam, a package of tea, and coffee.

This bunker serves as a major performance ground for 1984 in the Bunker (Back to the USSR) where participants play the role of Soviet citizens. The bunker was originally built in 1980 as a backup TV station in case of a nuclear war with the United States. It is not far away from the capital of Vilnius, in the woods, in a former secret two-level underground maze spread over 3,000 square meters (32,291 square feet) in a two-hectare closed territory. At present, this amusement park recirculates the official history of Soviet times through the performance of the abuse, injustice, fear, uncertainty, and absurdity that Soviet citizens are supposed to have experienced in Soviet times. The name of the performance, 1984 in the Bunker, is a reference to George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (Orwell 1949), a dystopian satire of totalitarian regimes. The colonel, the KGB agent, and the other actors, dressed in Soviet militia uniforms and speaking Russian, are reminders of the police state that intruded into people's lives and made them suffer.

In addition to being the museum of an animated history of 1984, this park is also a laboratory of memory. Its goal is to produce a "correct" memory of those times for the younger generation, as well as to correct nostalgic memories of Soviet times. This physical manifestation of memory assists in evoking "how it was." And since "There are still many people in Lithuania who are ill with Soviet nostalgia," the producers "began this show to help them recover (Rūta Vanagaitė)."[2] The discordance between the generated "Soviet" life presented

[2] See Reuters coverage at <http://www.reuters.com/news/video?videoId=74839&videoChannel=2> [accessed on 03 20 2008].

in this production and contemporary post-Soviet life is designed to illustrate "how much Lithuania and its people have achieved in the seventeen years of independence [since 1990]."[3]

This park is an intense communicative site embedded with nostalgic and other voices. It is an example of Bakhtinian dialogism – multiple voices (nostalgic and not) are not self-enclosed, but rather hear each other constantly, reflect in one another, and call back and forth to each other (Bakhtin 1984: 75). The park primarily addresses the post-Soviet public, a kind of social totality that, according to Michael Warner (Warner 2002), exists by virtue of being addressed, and which is as much notional and text-based as empirical.[4] Warner (Warner 2002: 88) claims that dominant publics take their discourse pragmatics and their lifeworlds for granted, as is certainly the case in the *1984 in the Bunker* project, which mistakes the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy. This post-Soviet public is also European, since the park is part of the European program *Vilnius – European Capital of Culture* 2009, which aims to create a new European cultural experience.[5]

Nostalgia-focused debates like those in the *1984 in the Bunker* project exemplify the normalization of a post-Soviet nation as a future-looking Western and European community.[6] This normalization rests on objectification of the nostalgic as the other, which is inside and, at the same time, outside the post-Soviet publics. This other is outside culture, tradition, authenticity, nation, consumer society, and post-Soviet modernity. It is an anomalous and polluting part of the social and political body.

This article attends to the circulation of nostalgia discourse in three rural communities and in some urban spaces of the city of Kaunas. Although nostalgia is widespread and exists in multiple forms and at various registers, I focus on the sensations that give rise to nostalgia and are reinterpreted through it. I will look at various materialities, such as food, clothing, heat, light, and others, to illustrate how material and sensory are intertwined in nostalgia discourse or nostalgic experience. Through these various materialities people experience post-Soviet alterity, which shapes nostalgia and is expressed in nostalgia for socialism.

[3] See the introduction to 1984 in the Bunker on the official website of Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009, <http://www.culturelive.lt/en/events2009/events2009-live/2009live-museums-2/> [accessed on 04 01 2008].

[4] This post-Soviet public includes many former dissidents and political prisoners, many intellectuals and the younger generation, as well as the new elites, among many others.

[5] See the official website of Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009, <http://www.culturelive.lt/en/events2009/events2009-live/2009live-museums-2/> [accessed on 04 01 2008].

[6] For normalization of West and West/Europe bound identities in Lithuania see Vonderau 2007; Vonderau 2008; Lankauskas 2002; on Europe as a new colonial other in the Baltics see Kelertas 2006; on the geopolitics of European difference in Europe see Klumbytė (forthcoming).

In this article I argue that nostalgia is a restorative discourse, through which an individual reclaims one's own dignity and respect by transposing himself or herself onto an idealized chronotope of the Soviet past. Nostalgia is also a way to claim recognition and inclusion in a post-Soviet public. By portraying nostalgia as a disease, intellectuals undermine the claims of inequality, injustice, and experiences of alterity embedded in nostalgia discourse. By creating discourses and images of the nostalgic others, they reproduce the alterity that they aim to eliminate by curing the nostalgic, as in *1984 in the Bunker*.

## Methods and data

This article is based on my research in Vilnius and Kaunas, as well as three villages in central and eastern Lithuania in the early and mid-2000s, and follow-up research in the summers of 2007 and 2008.[7] Many of the interviewees cited in this article lived in villages. All three villages are relatively small, with 29, 115, and 705 inhabitants. The largest village is the only one with several small industries and large farms. Most people in these three villages subsist on small plots of a few hectares, and usually do not consider themselves "farmers" (see also Mincyte 2006). Among those interviewed in the villages, there were twice as many women as men, and four times as many unemployed or retired as employed. Although Kaunas residents had various opinions about Soviet times, in this article I include the voices of those who were nostalgic for Soviet times; this way I illustrate a broader – rural and urban – geography of nostalgia. The research relies on about a hundred unstructured interviews, several life histories, participant observation in villages and cities, and media and archive analysis.

I conducted multi-sited research, traveling to the villages and cities and staying there for short periods of time. My research methods included unstructured, person-centered, open-ended interviews, which are suited for exploring subjectivity and understanding social change, as well as people's responses to social and political developments (Bernard 2000; cf. Weller 2000). I purposefully selected people who were in their mid-thirties and older, thus, those who came of age in Soviet Lithuania. My selection was based on the observation that younger people related to social and political history differently.

My research was designed to explore political history and subjectivity in post-Soviet Lithuania. The major interview questions included inquires about village history (in villages), about the liberation movement period, and the experience of the Soviet and post-Soviet period. I also asked questions about the

[7] Following the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics, the names of interviewees have been changed and village names are not revealed.

European Union, elections, and voting. Soviet times became the unintentional reference point in most of the interviews. In the beginning of my research in the villages, the villagers themselves were comparing present social history to what was "then," "in Soviet times," "under the Russians." Later in my research, when asked to make my questions more concrete, in some cases I pointed to Soviet times myself, asking an interviewee about his or her life in Soviet times and at present.

Informants expressed nostalgia in the discourse of "better times." They claimed that life was superior in various ways during Soviet times, while the present was narrated in the terms of decline, chaos, destruction, and dissolution. I call the memory of "better [Soviet] times" nostalgia, since it involves longing for a place and time that no longer exist, encapsulates feelings of romance, loss, irreversibility, displacement, and, in some cases, includes grief and stasis (cf. Berdahl 1999; Boyer 2006; Boym 2001; Davis 1979; Herzfeld 1997; Rosaldo 1989). I approach nostalgia as a social practice and a cultural artifact.[8] The discourse of good Soviet times was a narrative way to express experience as well as to experience the everyday.[9] The questions I raise in this article about social and political history and nostalgia are essentially about the present. By focusing on the present, the argument that nostalgia displays the past fictitiously, selectively, and partially, as it does, loses its relevance; nostalgia is an essential constitutive part of the individual's *present* self and his or her *present* projections of social history. Rather than judging nostalgia against its accuracy and truth value, I show that certain pasts are granted authenticity and become integral to articulation of post-Soviet publics and citizenship, while others are marginalized and negated.

Nostalgia emerged in narratives about "better [Soviet] times." In this article "Soviet times" mark a real and symbolic time and space invoked in interviewees' stories about their lives "under the Russians," "in Soviet times," "then," and "under the other government" (*prie anos valdžios*). People usually

[8] On memory as a social practice and a cultural artifact see Abercrombie 1998; Bourdieu 1994; Connerton 1989; Järvinen 2000; Lambek 1996.

[9] Not all invocations of the Soviet past are nostalgic. Some of my other informants invoked positive aspects in Soviet times, but did not express feelings of loss, displacement, or romance. They were also critical about other aspects of the Soviet period. Among most of my informants, nostalgia for "better Soviet times" was very widespread and largely uniform. Most people shared the discourse of "better Soviet times" and the current decline, which structured their understanding of their selves and social history. This largely was due to their similar experiences in Soviet times and, as I claim in this article, their post-Soviet marginalization. Similar experiences of decline and longing for the idealized better times are reported in many other places within and outside the post-Soviet region (see Ferguson 1999; Knudsen 2006; Lankauskas 2006; Özyürek 2006; Paxson 2005; Pelkmans 2006; Petrović 2006; Sliavaite 2005; Velikonja 2008).

recollected late socialism. "Post-Soviet times" refers to, in informants' words, the "present," the time "under Lithuania," or "under this government" (*prie šitos valdžios*), that is, the years of the 1990s and 2000s. Interviewees understood this division as fundamental and as built upon opposed features (see also Davidson 2007).

This article focuses on identification and subjectivity, rather than the economic and political developments that shape rural and urban nostalgic communities. In other words, it asks how people relate to and make sense of their social position and everyday life in a changed social, political, and economic context.[10] It builds on the works by David Kideckel (Kideckel 2008), Margaret Paxson (Paxson 2005), Frances Pine (Pine 2002), Nancy Ries (Ries 1997), and Kristina Sliavaite (Sliavaite 2005), which variously explore experiences of decline, but, with the exception of Kideckel, pay little attention to the interconnection of memory, nostalgia, and post-Socialist alterity regimes.

## Post-Soviet Alterity

Post-Soviet alterity is an economic, political, and social process. Because of post-industrial developments, low budgetary investments into regions outside major cities, as well as continuing support of large-holding farmers and large businesses, many rural residents often feel disadvantaged. As Diana Mincyte (Mincyte 2006) noted, the EU is steering its agricultural production, consumption, and distribution systems into a post-productivist mode. This mode can be broadly characterized by a movement away from a production-centered towards a consumption-centered countryside (cf. Ilbery and Bowler 1998; Schwartz 2006; Wilson and Rigg 2003). Villagers thus experience not only the loss of their role as agricultural producers, but also of their role as consumers because of their limited income. As in Soviet times, their small subsistence plots provide a shield from economic hardships.

In many cases, the old age of urban and rural residents also contributes to experience of marginalization. Small social security benefits, high medical bills, high utility bills, small pensions, and employer preference for young people differentially target the elderly. Pensioners claim that the state is waiting for them to die. Such experiences evoke feelings of injustice and negative sensibilities towards the government and post-Soviet history.

Shortages of money also variously produce senses of marginality. In the post-Soviet period, money has become a new token of prestige, intrinsic to the formation of inequalities, social boundaries, and distinctions (cf. Berdahl 1999).

[10] On economic and political developments in Eastern Europe see Berdahl et al. 2000; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Hann 2002; Kideckel 2008; Pine and Bridger 1998; and Verdery 2003.

Various new consumer goods, such as digital cameras, plasma televisions, and computers, the insignia of post-Soviet prosperity, are often beyond villagers' and some urban residents' means. Soviet televisions and cars, the insignia of Soviet prosperity and modernity, are not only devalued, but also re-signified as backward. Similarly unreachable is the experience of the good life populating advertisements, such as vacations abroad, new houses and luxury furniture, amusement parks, and meals at restaurants.

Nostalgia for Soviet times is related to anti-democractic, pro-communist, and populist sentiments.[11] As elsewhere in Eastern Europe and Russia, nostalgics are thought to long for a strong leader, as well as to oppose neoliberal reforms and Europeanization. In 2003, a poster erected in the center of Vilnius stated "We are for Europe! The turnips (*runkeliai*) are not going to stop us!" Labeling rural inhabitants "turnips" was an act of negative classification, of marginalization as well as an act that defined and re-enforced social boundaries. Such labeling not only marks difference, but also rationalizes the hierarchies of power, knowledge, and privilege. At present, to label someone a "turnip" is to place an individual outside democratic politics, the formal economy, the official history, the law, and morality, and to associate him or her with backwardness, stasis, rigidity, impotence, poverty, old age, and despair.[12]

Marginalization is also a discursive process. On a Lithuanian National Television and Radio program, Vytautas Landsbergis, a member of the European Union Parliament and a leader of the national movement of Lithuania in the late 1980s and early 1990s, argued that the nostalgic long for oppression. "They do not understand or remember that they were not free. <…> that their lives were limited, controlled, and threatened."[13] Landsbergis maintained that nostalgic thoughts are infantile. The comments by Panevėžys mayor Vitas Matuzas nicely catches various elements of the public opinion about nostalgia for Soviet times:

> I remember very well long lines in Soviet times, and the angry, elbowing people in line for "wet" Soviet sausage. We used to joke that the major ingredient [of sausage] is toilet paper <…> I associate "Soviet" with cold, animosity,

[11] See Jonušys, Laimantas, "Longing for a Soviet Sausage" ("Sovietinės dešrelės ilgesys"). Lithuanian writers' weekly Literatūra ir menas. 12 10 2004, no. 3027. See <http://www.culture.lt/lmenas/?leid_id=3027&kas=straipsnis&st_id=5860> [accessed on 05 12 2006].

[12] The name "turnips" emerged after the 2000 protests of sugar beet growers in Suvalkija, which culminated in a blockade of Lithuania's major highways in the southern region of Lithuania. The label "turnips" soon extended to include many of the resentful, the poor, the rural, and the other others.

[13] Lithuanian National Television and Radio. G. Aleknonis's radio broadcast "On the Scales." Edition on post-Soviet nostalgia. Vilnius. 07 31 2007.

> darkness, hungry people, and oppression. I suggest everyone avoid "Soviet" products. I hope the producers will realize that not everyone is sick with the Soviet nostalgia virus.[14]

Negative labeling of nostalgic people circulates in stories about village and small-town residents drowning in alcoholism, women giving birth to children solely in order to get government benefits, and people either avoiding work or relying on a questionable work ethic and dishonesty. Juska et al. (Juska et al. 2005: 14) claim that "the rural population was increasingly being characterized as drunken, lazy, conservative, unwilling to change, and capable only of lobbying for more welfare and subsidies." Similarly, in the media, the poor and deprived are called ignorant, backward, and politically illiterate (Balockaite 2009). In some discursive spaces, such as Lithuanian fiction, villagers even appear as demonic when hatred and despair, isolation and impotence are invoked to characterize them.[15]

These stories of othering are not restricted to urban spaces and intellectual discourse. They circulate in rural communities as well as among marginalized urban residents. Even those who like to have a drink in a village bar tend to acknowledge that villages are "drowning in alcoholism," unlike in Soviet times. By engaging in self-marginalization, some acknowledge their low social status in a post-Socialist society and normalize the social difference circulating in public spaces.[16]

## Nostalgia and Biography

In post-Soviet Lithuania, nostalgia for good socialist times is most visible among the currently marginalized, including the unemployed or underemployed, the poor, the elderly, living on small retirement benefits, and disadvantaged families with many children. However, nostalgia is not simply the possession of the dispossessed (Humphrey 2002). During my research I met intellectuals, Soviet-era professionals, and former Communist Party members who were successful at present, but nostalgic for Soviet times. Their nostalgia indexed

[14] See Vitas Matuzas "Kulinarinė nostalgija?" ("Gastronomic nostalgia?"), the personal Internet blog of the mayor of Panevėžys, <http://www.matuzas.lt/?naujiena;aid.451> [accessed on 12 30 2007]. On marketing and consumption of "Soviet" sausages see Klumbytė 2010a.

[15] See Vida Kasparavičienė's analysis of Lithuanian fiction (Kasparavičienė 2004: 22–33).

[16] Nostalgia was very prevalent in 2003 and 2004. During my consequent visits in the summers of 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, I noticed that although people have not changed their opinions about the past and the present, nostalgia had lost its intensity. It is possible that the nostalgia discourse was intensified by Rolandas Paksas presidential campaign of 2002, which appealed to many villagers' and urban residents' sentiments about social history and everyday life.

*different* post-Soviet experiences and social positions, and voiced different discontents than the marginalized rural and urban residents. Significantly, since nostalgia "always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties, even though they may not be in the forefront of awareness" (Davis 1979: 34), those who have relatively little to fear or be discontented about, are not nostalgic for the Soviet past. Furthermore, nostalgia for good Soviet times is not common among those who were stigmatized during the socialist period, including many political dissidents and the faithful, even if they are poor and disadvantaged. If nostalgia is a yearning for continuity of a self (Davis 1979), it is indeed this continuity that some try to escape.

Because nostalgia is very common among marginalized rural and urban residents, it is possible to relate it to class identity and claim that nostalgia expresses emerging class differences (see Balockaite 2009; Kideckel 2008; Schröder and Vonderau 2008). However, I would argue that nostalgia is a biographical phenomenon. It is primarily experienced by those who are subjected to post-Soviet alterity, like many rural and former industrial town residents throughout Eastern Europe (see Ashwin 1999; Buchowski 2003; Emigh and Szelényi 2001; Hann 2002; Juska and Pozzuto 2004; Kideckel 2002; McIntyre 1992; Rausing 2004). In most cases, people who did not experience alterity in Soviet times and became marginalized in the post-Soviet period are the ones who feel nostalgia for socialism.

In Soviet times alterity was shaped by terror, discipline, and control. The open terror was definitive of the Stalinist period and subsided after Khrushchev's accession to power. Albertas from Kaunas, an active Catholic in his early 70s, remembered that in Soviet times he was invited to join the Communist Party several times. One time he agreed but, after discussing it with his family, he changed his mind. He reasoned that if he joined the Party, then he could not even be buried by a priest. His director was angry. The director told Albertas that if he survived the pressure at work, then he could stay in his job. That year, Albertas got 21 warnings: "They threatened to fire me. If there was any problem, I was always to blame. They did not fire me because I was a good specialist." In his attempt to secure part of his biography – the possibility of being buried by a priest – Albertas made himself a subject of vindictive disciplining, and lived under pressure, fear, and a rigid insistence on conformity. Albertas was subjected to pressure at work because of the difference he himself acknowledged by deciding in favor of a future Catholic burial instead of membership in the Party. However, Albertas' biography was not always consistent. He recollected that while he was in the Soviet army, he voluntarily joined the Komsomol because he could not stand the denigrating experience of difference:

"I was out of patience – everyone went to meetings; I had to go sweep the street. When I came back [from the army], I destroyed the membership card." Discarding his Komsomol card was a symbolic act reaffirming Albertas' loyalty to non-Komsomol traditions, the reclaiming of a different biography and one's authorship over it. However, joining the Komsomol was a resistant compromise, a desire to be among the respected, or, at least, invisible, rather than among the *others* with a broom in one's hand. Sweeping the street and discipline and punishments at work were the techniques of marginalization that fashioned Albertas into the Soviet "other."

Experiences of alterity in Soviet times, as exemplified in Albertas's case, are bound to displacement, estrangement, exclusion, and intolerance. They are signs of embodied humiliation, threat, conformity, closure, discontent, uncertainty, and insecurity. Such experiences generate negative emotional relations to social history, community, state, and even self. This is reflected in the discourses of opposition toward the Soviet era. Articulating opposition in Soviet times, "biographic others" resisted their marginalization, negotiated and negated their social biography of alterity, and produced themselves as moral and respectful subjects.

Soviet-era alterity and experiences of difference are important in understanding nostalgia for socialism. In post-Soviet times Elena, a villager in her seventies, experienced various hardships and often shared them with her neighbors. Although many of her neighbors experienced similar hardships and were nostalgic for Soviet times, Elena's relation to the Soviet past was different. She was tortured in a Soviet prison for her collaboration with the Lithuanian partisans after World War II, and was later deported to Siberian camps where she spent 10 years. She was not *nostalgic,* even if she *remembered* some positive aspects of her life in the Soviet period. For Elena, post-Soviet era official discourses about Soviet oppression provide a narrative of continuity with a self that was to be eliminated in a Soviet prison and deportation camps. Elena feels that independence restored justice. Like Albertas, she does identify with the post-Soviet public as articulated in official spaces through discourse and policy, or through performances like *1984 in the Bunker*. In Lithuania, nostalgia thus is not simply a response to economic deprivation and differences of status, it is a response to neoliberal modernity and post-Soviet regimes of citizenship, as well as the disempowerment and difference that they entail (see also Klumbytė 2010b). It will be experienced by those, like Elena's neighbors, who are not only disadvantaged economically, but also marginalized socially and politically.

## Embodied Difference and the Materiality of Nostalgia

During my research in villages and Kaunas, nostalgia emerged in informants' conversations about social and economic displacement, isolation, relative hunger, poverty, contracting social and personal space, and insecurity. Themes that dominated narrations of a self and social history were structured in terms of good Soviet times and decline, chaos, and regression at present. Many informants discussed Soviet-era cheap housing, free education and medical care, accumulation of savings, low crime rates, mobility and travel throughout the Soviet Union, cheap vacations in summer resorts, lively and noisy times, and general peace and order in society. The post-Soviet life was characterized by an inability to keep houses and pay bills, hardships in getting an education, the high prices of medicine and degraded health care, flourishing alcoholism, loss of savings and money shortages, increased criminality and the absence of justice and order, dissolution of industries and agriculture, the inability to go on vacation, and the loss of any belief in the future.

Among the various topics that populated people's conversations, stories about cold invoked deprivation and discontent and triggered nostalgic reminiscences of better Soviet times. In Soviet times prices for utilities were low. Some pensioners in villages claimed that in the Soviet period they would even have been provided with firewood for heating. A former teacher in her seventies remembered: "In Russian times, there was a law that if a teacher living in a village retired, compensation for electricity and heating had to be guaranteed to that teacher. Firewood had to be delivered until the end of the teacher's life." Her words were a reflection on her exclusion from a post-Soviet collective and a negative commentary on post-Soviet citizenship regimes.

Present decline reached into the minute details of everyday life, such as the heat at home and the warmth of the body. In Soviet times many apartments were part of a centralized heating system with heat distributed equally, although actual apartment temperature depended on pipes, floor levels, and building deterioration, among other things. Under post-Socialism, state decentralization included the decentralization of the heat supply. Many residents had to install their own furnace or build fireplaces, since the price for central heating increased tremendously. In the largest village where I conducted my research, in a two-story apartment building, where many former factory workers lived, several families built fireplaces with chimneys projecting through windows and started using coal or firewood for heating. The former modern Soviet building became a postmodern and post-Soviet architectural collage. Although an outsider could interpret the privatization of heat as a step toward the new post-Soviet modernity, for many people it was another sign of post-Soviet backwardness,

a return to the pre-Soviet condition, when heating with firewood and coal was common in rural areas. In this village, as elsewhere in Lithuania or other post-Soviet spaces, housing became intrinsic in the reproduction of social hierarchies, with some being able to afford warmth, and others not.

Many of those interviewed strategized to feel warmer and to minimize bills during the long cold period, which lasts about seven months. In Kaunas, some of the interviewees sold larger apartments and bought smaller ones in order to be able to pay heating bills. Some others, struggled with keeping their houses, and managed to keep up with the bills by living in cold conditions, walking around in their coats at home, or heating only one room with the electric stove. They spoke regretfully of the possibility of selling their houses, most of which were built in Soviet times with their own hands. The story of Kazys illustrates how sensations of cold and nostalgia become intertwined in everyday experiences.

> Kazys from a suburb of the city of Kaunas, lived in his house for forty years. He came to this place as a young man and worked in the construction brigade. Soon he got a plot of land where he built a house with the help of some relatives and friends. Kazys made good money. He was a major provider of income for his family. Post-Soviet changes reached their family in the same house. Since the central heating was dismantled, Kazys had to purchase an expensive gas furnace. Nevertheless, monthly bills consumed much of Kazys's meager pension and became a real challenge. Like many others, Kazys's family strategized to feel warmer and to minimize bills during the long cold period. Kazys's family used mainly one room which they heated with the electric stove. They pleasantly remembered Soviet times and spoke regretfully of the possibility of selling their house, which was so much intertwined with their children, work, and hopes over forty years (fieldnotes, 2004).

For some, not only warmth, but also water and light became a luxury. In Kaunas, some pensioners saved water by minimizing dish washing and bath taking as well as collecting rain water, if possible. Some collected drops of water from dripping taps. The meter did not record any changes if there was only a trickle of water. Among the most poignant strategies that I encountered was not flushing the toilet regularly, or flushing it with water used for washing dishes or clothes. In these cases, post-Socialist poverty acquired a specific smell.

Light was another matter that sparkled nostalgia. Although many urban residents had unpaid bills and debts, which they managed to pay little by little and get by, in some cases, electricity was disconnected. The story of Marija shows how sensations of darkness sparkle nostalgia for socialism and political sentiments.

> Marija, before moving to the village, lived with her two small children and a husband in a town. She worked at a factory until the early 1990s, when traveling to the workplace became too expensive as the factory terminated subsidies for commuting. Her husband lost his job due to staff reductions. Marija remembered how it got harder and harder to pay their bills and to survive on the temporary jobs her husband took. The electricity was turned off. They began using candles that Marija's stepfather, a sexton, made for them from used Church candles.[17] Marija remembered: "The ceiling was black. […] The curtains were smoked up. In the summer – dawn breaks early, the sun sets late. Not bad. But in winter you have to live with those candles. How can you be happy with this free Lithuania, my dear? In the dark. No TV." Marija was happy that her family decided to come to live with her mother and her stepfather. Now she lives with five other people in a small two-room house in the village. "The children get milk and eggs," said Marija. As a testimony to her words, a chicken peeked into the house and ran away. It is easier for her family. "But in comparison to those times [Soviet times], there's no thing to say," sighed Marija (fieldnotes, 2004).

Practically any commodity or experience could spark nostalgia. Clothing, like many other things, was often wrapped in nostalgic reminiscences. Many villagers bought their clothing at a so-called *skudurynai* (second-hand stores, the Lithuanian word *skudurynai* literally means a "place for rags"). Many agreed that "it is good that these second hand stores exist;" "if you couldn't buy there, you would have to wander around naked <…> what would you wear?" (Vitkus family, in their late sixties). However, clothing bought at second hand stores stinks, "but you cannot buy at a store – it's so expensive" (Renata in her early forties). According to a librarian in her fifties, "earlier it was shortages, *blatas*, but people did not make the rounds of those second-hand stores. Even the poorest did not buy there. And now intellectuals wear used underwear [laughs]. Look… really, all those rags…" For Marija, cited above, like many others, her experience of post-Soviet history as recalled through her different consumption practices is about personal decline:

> I made good money [in Soviet times]. There were no second hand stores, well, there were these consignment stores [*komisai*]. But you didn't even look in that direction. And now? Now it's finished. Now you cannot buy a new item at a shop. […] Usually those second hand stores save us. Otherwise you would have nothing. And in earlier times, when you went to a store, from every salary you purchased things for yourself, for your children, and… and anything else.

[17] In a Catholic church, a sexton guards the church edifice and its treasures, and as an inferior minister attends to burials, religious festivals, bell-ringings, and similar offices about a church. He is charged with the maintenance of church buildings and surroundings, including a graveyard, and thus has access to used candles.

For Marija and others, Soviet consumption practices index their respectable personhood, while shopping in second-hand stores, in the present, reminds them of their degraded social status. Sensing the used dress or a suit on their bodies, people think about the inequality and social difference that defines their post-Soviet lives.

Food consumption is another everyday encounter through which people experience post-Soviet decline and their changing social position and status. Some feel that "in the other times" they were fuller, because they had things to put on the table at parties, which are seldom given today. People were also able to get their beloved hunter sausages (*medžiotojų dešrelės*) "from under the counter" (*iš po stalo*). It was the time, informants reiterate, when "food was cheap and we had money," while at present "there are goods, but there is no money."

Some villagers and urban residents feel that "in the other times" they had more to eat. Villagers can rarely buy bananas or oranges, which only rarely appeared in stores in Soviet times. One Homeland Union (Tėvynės Sajungos) ideologue, a state council member and a member of the Homeland Union, claimed during our interview that now people can buy "occasionally," whereas earlier "they could not buy at all." However, even if people do not experience physical hunger, even if they can occasionally buy bananas, subjectively they feel more "hungry" at present.[18] The hunger they experience is socially constructed; people think not only of what they actually consume, but also of what they could consume in a changing society with multiple venues and options.

For villagers, their experiences of contracting social space were everyday reminders of changing social position and place in family, community, and society. They recalled Soviet times as full of happiness, togetherness, and social harmony. Conversely, emptiness, quiescence, and sadness defined the social space of the present. Interviewees claimed that now people are less cheerful, more disappointed and angry, living in stress, and depressed. They recalled gathering for potato harvest seasons in Soviet times. According to Kazys, a city resident and a pensioner in his early sixties who was born in a village, in Soviet times children and grandchildren from the cities used to come, "the time was much more alive." Kazimiera, an eighty-year-old woman from Panevėžiukas, claimed that "it is sad in the village." She pointed out that there are no concerts, cinema, or dances, as there were earlier. Kazimiera recalled that in Soviet times a movie was shown every week. In the past, according to the villagers, they went to the opera and ballet in the capital city Vilnius, as well as on tourist trips outside the country to the Caucasus or Crimea. Now, in the words of Jadvyga N., a woman who was responsible for cultural programs in the late 1980s, "No one organizes such things. Even if someone did, a ticket to an opera… or somewhere else costs a lot. Nobody takes people anywhere anymore."

[18] On subjective hunger see Caldwell 2004.

Drinking is another physical experience that prompts nostalgia and concerns about the self and community. Villagers and some city residents referred to villages in general as "drowning in alcoholism." According to many villagers, "maybe earlier they didn't drink any less. But they had jobs. Maybe they drank on Fridays. And now – every day…" Similarly to other men, Povilas, in his fifties, known not to refuse a drink, reflected that

> earlier there was no time to drink. You had to work. How will you drive a tractor drunk? How will you work? Maybe sometimes on Fridays or when we got paid. We used to meet and celebrate [*aplaistyti*]. […] There was discipline, and the trade union watched. They came; if they found you drunk, you lost half of your pay. That's how it was.

Povilas's wife, who, like Povilas, was unemployed after the dissolution of the kolkhoz, complained about him drinking too much; she also agreed that earlier Povilas drank less. Like everyone in the kolkhoz, according to her, he "had to work, and care for cattle at home." Three years after I first met Povilas in 2004, Povilas could not be found in his "spot," his wife's term for the bar where he attended his post-Soviet celebrations. Villagers said alcohol was among the most important reasons for his untimely death.

Insecurity is another experience that reminds people of good Soviet times. People remember that they lived without locks on their doors, were not afraid of burglars, did not think or hear about murders. Many traveled or went out at night if they needed to. Marija claimed that now

> people get killed. Earlier, in Russian times, I don't know, but maybe the laws were different. And now it is no big deal to kill someone. If you steal a chicken, you may spend more years in prison than for a case of murder. I don't know…

Conversely, the past was presented as a time of order and justice. As Vitkienė, a woman in her sixties observed, "Earlier there was order. I don't know… it was stricter. You were punished for everything. And now nothing…"

The discourse on the current sense of insecurity and crime is influenced by the media, which people pay attention to, as they themselves acknowledge. However, these are also narratives of experience. The Vitkus family reported that their cow was taken from right behind the house and butchered in the field. One older man from another village was locked outside his apartment until the burglars took what they wanted. Bronė, from a third village, was once approached by the two young men and asked to give money, which she did not have and could not give away. Milk cans, chicken, anything valued cannot be left outside at night; Bronė concluded that "if you leave them outside – they are not yours anymore." She also said she went to sleep with one thought: "My God, I hope no one comes and tortures me while I'm asleep [smiles]."

Informants remembered the Soviet era as a time of habitual practices, behavior, values, and feelings; as harmonious, prosperous, and orderly; and as a morally superior universe. Post-Soviet moral degradation is ubiquitous. It may be noticed in a variety of social phenomena, such as alcoholism, selfishness, crime, and in different social relations, such as interactions at work or among community members. Elvyra, a Kaunas doctor in her early sixties, remembered:

> The earlier generation came from the countryside. It was a healthy peasant generation… it was a healthy country then. Without alcoholism [or] degradation… These people, even Sniečkus [the long-term leader of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania]… they weren't as selfish, I think, as people are now… They're so self-serving. I remember when I was little we used to say "my word of honor." That meant everything, everyone had to trust you. And now… Does anyone remember what they promise?.. What I don't like is this invasion of American culture. Everyone goes for it. What's going on in Russia [Russia is also affected by American culture]. Such debauchery… Lithuanians were modest.

In all of these cases nostalgia depends upon abstraction, selectivity, and forgetfulness. It imparts charm and goodness to what at the time may have been experienced as ordinary and uneventful (Davis 1979: 38), or even threatening and unpleasant. Nostalgia romanticizes and glorifies the past, and dramatizes the past for the present. Nevertheless, it is an important historical and political commentary on post-Soviet alterity and the neoliberal regimes of difference. Peoples' narratives merge sensations of materialities, such as cold and insecurity, with their expectations and desires of well-being and respectful citizenship.[19] Nostalgia emerges in the space of incommensurability between the experiential and the expected. Although in nostalgic commentaries, informants objectify their social difference, nostalgia is also a way to reclaim the ideal and moral self, as well as one's status and dignity. Positive memories of Soviet times not only reintegrate the Soviet tradition into the present and provide continuity for identity; they reinvoke the whole semiotic space in which an individual is an honorable person and where his or her life has significance (cf. Ferguson 1999).

## Conclusion

Nostalgia for Soviet times is at odds with much of the scholarship on socialism that defines the Soviet or socialist regimes as "totalitarian," "immoral," "imposed," and "oppressive."[20] Furthermore, it stands in sharp contrast

[19] In addition to materialities discussed in this article, the two other very important social markers of difference were work and money. I discuss them in detail in Klumbytė 2010b.

[20] See, for example, the works on totalitarianism by Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Hannah Arendt, Richard Pipes, Merle Fainsod, and Robert Conquest. For a discussion of Sovie-

to national and international assessments of the Soviet Union as responsible for enormous human suffering comparable to that inflicted by Nazi Germany (see Todorova 2006).[21] Maria Todorova concludes that in such circumstances, nostalgia can be subsumed under the Marxist notion of false consciousness (Todorova 2006). Furthermore, this false consciousness is linked to false morality. As Deanna Davidson notes in the case of Germany, the Western economic victory over socialism is capitalist democracy's moral victory. The ''here and now'' of national politics, official histories, and mainstream news is a time of wealth and freedoms, a point of progress beyond fascism and dictatorship (Davidson 2007: 215) or beyond totalitarianism and economic stagnation in the former Soviet states. The moral ranking of states, in which West is superior to East, is a fundamental cultural knowledge that underlies mainstream discursive norms (Davidson 2007: 215). The West's superiority over the East and, in case of post-Soviet states, the "Soviet," is also a fundamental legitimacy narrative of post-Socialist and post-Soviet regimes. Therefore, struggles against nostalgia are intrinsic to the Eastern European normalization of post-Socialist statehood and citizenship.

However, artists, journalists, and politicians who contribute to such normalization often dismiss nostalgia as a modern process concurrent with post-Soviet modernization, and embedded in global processes of neoliberal transformation. By associating nostalgia with backwardness, stagnation, and the past, they gloss over the fact that nostalgia is immanent to post-Soviet modernity, as well as to post-Soviet citizenship regimes. Furthermore, because of various national and transnational circulations, nostalgia is inflated, since the oppositions in which differences between higher-order collectives, like the geopolitical and moral orders of East and West, are laid onto lower-order discords, like local disagreements about the meaning and value of the past; this adds the force and meaning of the greater antipathy to ongoing local differences (see Sahlins 2005 on symbolic amplification). The antagonisms of the Cold War and post-Cold War eras are added to arguments between individuals, in this way inflating nostalgia disputes out of all proportion to the original reasons of those who long for Soviet times. During such nostalgia inflation, the arguments about the past are often displaced – for example, villagers and urban residents whom I interviewed did not deny the atrocities of Soviet times. They did not long for

tology and revisionism see Fitzpatrick 2008. For a recent critique of the scholarship on socialism that reinforces the Cold War binaries see Yurchak 2006.

[21] For example, Roger Cohen regrets that "years of debate have not resolved how the terrible twins of the 20th century, communism and fascism, should be viewed on a scale of evil" (cited in Todorova 2006). See Cohen 2005: 2.

oppression, or make arguments about the Soviet Union Communist Party and the Soviet regime. Moreover, if asked directly, they usually claimed that they wouldn't like the USSR to return. In their nostalgia discourse they speak of different issues intrinsic to the arguments about *their post-Soviet* suffering and which are actually commentaries on *post-Soviet* society and the state.

This article explores how post-Soviet marginalization is experienced through sensations which instigate nostalgia discourse. People look back to Soviet times with nostalgia when they feel cold and are afraid of burglars, when they live in darkness, suppress desires for necessities or specialties, and dress up in second-hand clothing. Through these sensations nostalgia becomes an embodied experience. Its physicality is important for an understanding of self, society, and social history. The producers of *1984 in the Bunker* try to reeducate people by making socialism a similar sensory experience, the experience of abuse, fear, and uncertainty. However, as this article shows, it is *the present,* not the past, that has to be the major plot for a post-socialist drama meaningful to those who long for Soviet times.

In this article I argue that in nostalgic reminiscences of Soviet times villagers and marginalized urban residents reclaim visibility, voice their concerns, and appeal for respect, recognition, and inclusive citizenship. By accusing the nostalgics of having a false consciousness and remaking them into social others, the mainstream public like the producers of *1984 in the Bunker,* repeatedly deny their right for a respectful citizenship and exclude them from the post-Soviet modernity project.

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## Posovietinės jausenos: nostalgija, savastis ir marginalizacija Lietuvoje

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### *Santrauka*

Tiek Lietuvoje, tiek kitose Europos šalyse nostalgija viešojoje erdvėje dažnai vertinama kaip neigiamas reiškinys. Maria Todorova (Todorova 2006) teigia, kad nostalgija kvestionuoja valstybinius ir tarptautinius sovietų režimo, kurio nusikaltimai prilygsta nacistinės Vokietijos nusikaltimams, vertinimus. Nostalgija taip pat meta iššūkį dominuojančiam moraliniam ir ideologiniam diskursui, kad Vakarai yra pranašesni už sovietinius Rytus, demokratija – už totalitarizmą ar autoritarizmą, rinkos ekonomika – už socialistinę planinę ekonomiką. Todėl tie, kurie ilgisi sovietmečio, dažnai suprantami kaip „kiti" ar „kitokie"; jie tarsi esą infantilūs, nesuprantą istorijos ar sergą Stokholmo sindromu; jie gali būti siejami su prokomunistine orientacija, priešiškumu Europos Sąjungai ir vakarietiškai modernizacijai bei protesto balsavimu. Šie „kiti" yra už kultūros, tradicijų ir demokratinės visuomenės ribų. Tai anomali visuomenės socialinio ir politinio kūno dalis.

Ar iš tiesų tie, kurie ilgisi sovietmečio, yra priešiški dabartinei santvarkai ir ilgisi sovietų valdžios? Šiame straipsnyje, remdamasi etnografiniais tyrimais, atliktais keliuose Lietuvos kaimuose ir Kaune, analizuoju nostalgiją sovietmečiui. Nostalgija tiek Lietuvoje, tiek kitose Rytų Europos šalyse daugiausia paplitusi kaimuose, mažuose miesteliuose ir buvusiuose industriniuose centruose. Tačiau ji nėra tik „nusigyvenusiųjų" būsena. Sovietinių laikų ilgisi ir dalis buvusio komunistinio elito, kai kurie intelektualai ir politikai, tačiau jų nostalgija nesutampa su paprastų kaimo ir Kauno gyventojų nostalgija. Nostalgija yra biografinis reiškinys: sovietinio ir posovietinio laikotarpio patirtys nulemia nostalgijos turinį. Žmonės, kurie patyrė Sibiro kančias ir marginalizaciją sovietiniu laikotarpiu, nesiilgi sovietmečio, nors ir patiria įvairių ekonominių sunkumų. Šie žmonės paprastai identifikuojasi su viešojoje erdvėje cirkuliuojančiu pilietiškumo ir tautiškumo diskursu bei posovietiniais istoriniais naratyvais. O dauguma apklaustųjų, kurie išgyveno sovietmetį be ypatingų netekčių ir sukrėtimų, prisimena jį kaip geresnį laiką. Labai svarbus yra ir šių žmonių kaip „kitokių" įvaizdis, kuriamas viešojoje erdvėje. Apklaustųjų atveju biografinė patirtis ir posovietinė ekonominė bei socialinė marginalizacija paaiškina, kodėl žmonės ilgisi sovietinių laikų. Nostalgija šiuo atveju iš tiesų mažai ką pasako apie praeitį, kuri atsimenama fragmentiškai ir selektyviai, ji yra komentaras apie dabartinį žmonių gyvenimą ir jų norą būti modernios vakarietiškos visuomenės dalimi.

Kaimo ir miesto gyventojai ilgisi socialinės ir ekonominės gerovės, o ne sovietinės politinės santvarkos. Jie neneigia sovietinio režimo nusikaltimų ir žmonių kančių „anais laikais." Tačiau savo nostalgiškais prisiminimais jie pabrėžia savo kentėjimą posovietiniu laikotarpiu, kuris išreiškia jų socialinę, ekonominę ir politinę atskirtį. Ši atskirtis patiriama įvairiai: Europos Sąjungos parama pirmiausia pasiekia pagrindinius miestus ir stambius ūkininkus, ne mažažemius kaimo ir miestelių gyventojus. ES rinką apibūdina postproduktyvistinis modelis, pagal kurį siekiama kurti ne gaminantį, bet vartojantį kaimą. Šiame kontekste kaimo gyventojai ne tik praranda savo kaip gamintojų statusą, dėl mažų pajamų jie netampa ir ES rinkos visaverčiais vartotojais. Mažos pajamos yra kitas atskirties mechanizmas: didelės išlaidos vaistams, dideli mokesčiai, mažos pensijos formuoja vyresnių žmonių patirtis. Atskirtis yra ir viešo, ir privataus diskurso dalis. Šis diskursas sutinkamas ne tik žiniasklaidoje, politikų ar intelektualų pasisakymuose ir moksliniuose straipsniuose, bet ir kaimo ar miesto bendruomenėse.

Nostalgija atsiskleidžia įvairiose kasdienėse situacijose. Žmonės kalba, kad „anksčiau buvo geriau" ar geriau buvo „prie anos valdžios"; jiems sovietmetis yra pranašesnis už dabartinį posovietinį laikotarpį. Posovietinis laikotarpis siejamas su chaosu, ekonominiu ir socialiniu nuosmukiu ir netvarka. Nostalgija

geresniems sovietiniams laikams išreiškia nesugrąžinamo laiko ilgesį, taip pat praradimo, negrįžtamumo, skausmo, sąstingio ir romantiško ilgesio emocijas. Nostalgija yra būdas išreikšti patirtį, taip pat ir struktūrinti patyrimus.

Šiame straipsnyje teigiu, kad nostalgija yra diskursas (kartu ir veiksmas), kuriuo individas siekia atkurti savo orumą posovietinės istorijos kontekste. Prisimindamas „gerus tarybinius laikus“, žmogus sukuria idealią erdvę, kurioje jis gerbiamas ir svarbus. Nostalgija išreiškia atstumtojo savivoką, kartu ir norą būti pripažintam. Žurnalistai, intelektualai ir politikai, vadindami besiilginčius sovietmečio „runkeliais“ ar kitokiais „kitais“, didina atskirtį ir paneigia žmonių nuomones apie posovietinę nelygybę, socialinį neteisingumą ir atstumtųjų patirtis.

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamos įvairios jutiminės patirtys, kurios prikelia nostalgiškus prisiminimus ir kritinį diskursą dabarties atžvilgiu. Patirdami šaltį savo namuose, kadangi šildymas brangiai kainuoja, sąlygišką alkį, kadangi nusipirkti tai, ko norisi, dažnai neleidžia šeimos biudžetas ar maža pensija, rengdamiesi rūbais iš dėvėtų drabužių parduotuvių, žmonės patiria posovietinį nuosmukį, kuris kartu tampa fizine ir kūniška patirtimi. Šiluma, šviesa, (šiltas) vanduo, skanus maistas, socialinė erdvė, kupina laimės, harmonijos ir buvimo kartu, saugumas ir ramybė bei kitos kasdienės jutiminės patirtys veikia socialinės istorijos ir žmonių vietos joje suvokimą. Šios patirtys formuoja patiriančiuosius kaip atstumtųjų klasę, kartu pažadina nostalgiją, kuri kuria teigiamą jų įvaizdį alternatyvioje įsivaizduojamoje sovietinėje aplinkoje. Ši įkūnyta nostalgija duoda svarbių įžvalgų apie posovietinius socialinius skirtumus ir marginalizaciją.

Straipsnis pagrįstas kokybiniais nestruktūruotais interviu, gyvenimo istorijomis, dalyvaujančiu stebėjimu, žiniasklaidos analize ir archyvų duomenimis. Dauguma apklaustųjų buvo vyresni nei trisdešimt penkerių metų, vadinasi, užaugę ir subrendę sovietiniais laikais. Tarp apklaustųjų buvo dvigubai daugiau moterų nei vyrų ir keturis kartus daugiau nedirbančiųjų arba pensinio amžiaus žmonių nei dirbančiųjų. Kaimuose nuomonės apie sovietinius laikus buvo labai panašios, tačiau Kauno gyventojų prisiminimai buvo įvairūs. Kadangi šio straipsnio tikslas buvo atskleisti nostalgiją per jutimines patirtis, o ne pateikti prisiminimų įvairovę, aš pateikiu prisiminimus tų miesto gyventojų, kurių nuomonės buvo panašios į kaimo gyventojų, tokiu būdu siekiu atskleisti platesnę – kaimo ir miesto – nostalgijos geografiją. Straipsnyje analizuojamos žmonių subjektyvios patirtys, ne ekonominiai ir politiniai procesai, kurie formuoja nostalgiją. Jis prisideda prie kitų posovietinių visuomenių studijų (Kideckel 2008; Paxson 2005; Pine 2002; Ries 1997; Sliavaite 2005), kuriose tiriamas posovietinio laikotarpio socialinės, ekonominės bei politinės kaitos ir atminties santykis.

*Gauta 2009 m. birželio mėn.*