

## Remembering Independence, Desiring Enemies: Reflections on Nationhood in Contemporary Lithuania

Ignas Kalpokas\*

### Abstract

The paper addresses the remembrance of events surrounding the restoration of Lithuanian independence, as well as their repercussions on the present, concentrating on the younger generation that does not have first-hand experience of the period and, therefore, has to rely on other people's accounts, textbooks, and other sources.

If one considers the state and, especially, its social (or communal) dimension as impossible totalities, memory and history acquire significant importance as they both provide 'a magma of significations', out of which particular signifying structures are instituted in order to anchor meaning and exhort a unifying claim through dominant narratives that tend to subjugate the otherwise inevitable variety of discourses. The discourse of the Lithuanian history textbooks is analysed by outlining its emphasis on unity and self-sacrifice in 1988-1991, and by portraying the Lithuanian history as an unending struggle against enemies and their malevolent plots. Also, considering the accounts of young people, two tendencies are visible: first, a bias towards images of unity and self-sacrifice depicting the period concerned, second, the predilection to employ the categories of 'aliens' and 'enemies' is evident, significantly affecting perceptions of the present with widespread images of disintegration and decay in the absence of the Other.

**Keywords:** Lithuania, independence, memory, grand narratives, textbooks.

This article explores the social modes of remembering and interpreting the restoration of Lithuanian independence, as well as the period immediately before and afterwards, that prevail among young people, with a special focus on the discourse of history textbooks and its effects on young people. In general, during the years after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the fall of the communist bloc, there has been a significant amount of scholarship on social memory and political imaginaries of post-communist transformation, including its effects on youths. However, the Lithuanian scholarship on this subject has unduly ignored young citizens, born around the time of independence. Instead, it has mostly concentrated on the older generations and the effects that the occupation and post-independence transformations had on them. This lack of attention is even more paradoxical given the recent rise of far-right and ultra-nationalist sentiments among young people in Lithuania. As a result, an attempt must be made to elucidate several important trends in the narratives of Lithuanian independence and nationhood that prevail among the younger generation. Also, connections are sought with the broader spectrum of research on transformations in post-communist Europe, in particular post-colonial approaches, analyses of myth-making, nostalgias and reinventions of the self, and attempts at comparative textbook analyses in the region.

To begin with, the importance of memory is strengthened since it is the symbolic centre around which the social structure is constructed, as well as that which hides the very impossibility of the social (understood here as the sum of interpersonal and intergroup relations that provide the state

\* E-mail: [ignas.kalpokas@fc.vdu.lt](mailto:ignas.kalpokas@fc.vdu.lt)

with the feeling of an obvious, homogeneous, and integrated whole, in essence, the fabric of the state), thus covering the unavoidable lack that is at the heart of the social itself. Common memories justify and structure the social while also being its products; therefore, neither of the two could be analysed separately, but only through their constant interaction. However, there is never a democratic equality of memories within a state. Certain images and patterns of remembering, solidified into coherent narratives, occupy dominant positions, while others, depending on their degree of difference from the dominant ones, either are subordinated or become counter-narratives, i.e. proto-centres of resistance. In either case, these narratives explain the present, make it non-contingent, and justify the lives of those who subscribe to them. This is also why it is particularly rewarding to study stories of the past, narrated by those who are unable to remember the events themselves and, therefore, depend on mediations and interpretations.

The first part of the article introduces an approach to collective memory that is heavily based on psychoanalysis and the critical theories of hegemony. Collective memory is seen here as at once an unconscious urge towards stable signification and an attempt of the elites to establish meaning and preserve the status quo. This allows a better understanding of why some images are chosen and others are not, as well as how they are instituted as dominant ones. The second part employs an analysis of the discourse of Lithuanian history textbooks. The article traces the dominant images of self-victimisation, the formation of national enemies, and the quintessential mobilisation against the malevolent 'others' of the modern period, i.e. after the restoration of independence. Finally, the third part concentrates on the results of a qualitative survey of young people (born between 1988 and 1992) conducted by the author between February and April 2011 and intended to bring forward the dominant accounts of the events surrounding the restoration of Lithuanian independence. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in writing in order to bring forward more coherent and thought out accounts. These interviews clearly show a worldview based on dichotomies between the 'own' and the 'alien', as well as a widespread feeling of resentment and decay due to a loss of national unity and integrity.

## The imaginary institution

It is useful to begin the analysis of social memory with the French psychoanalyst thinker Jacques Lacan, for whom the subject and the social are based on a lack, an antagonism and are, therefore, fundamentally incomplete. For him, the ego is born in the mirror stage, i.e. the period of fascination with one's own image. This image, however, is taken for a reality; it stands in for the illusory wholeness that the subject will constantly strive for in the future. Therefore, the function of the ego is that of *misrecognition*, of bringing supposed coherence and mastery through imaginary identifications, of a refusal to accept the fragmentation and alienation of the subject. It is a key function of the ego to try to cover the lack, the displacement central to the subject and enable discourse as such (Lacan 1977). The realm of the imaginary, however, is still pre-linguistic. When one encounters language, one enters the symbolic order, which already makes the subject occupy certain pre-existing positions because the subject itself "is this emergence which, just before, as subject, was nothing, but which, having scarcely appeared, solidifies into a signifier" (Lacan 1994: 199). Among these positions there are none that would fit the subject completely, leaving an ineradicable lack or excess. What is more, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the symbolic order, i.e. the level of law, ideology, communication, language, and exchange of meaning is itself incomplete or partial. As a result, there is always something left over, something that resists symbolisation and is impossible to express, namely, the real. Therefore, the alienation of the subject is not alienation *from* something – alienation is the very essence of being, even though we constantly struggle for wholeness, unity, coherence, and fulfilment (Homer 2005).

Meaning, therefore, holds on partial fixations, master signifiers that quilt the levels of the signifier and the signified, temporarily stopping the sliding of the latter, with the nation being one of them (as well as 'order', 'unity', 'liberation', 'revolution', etc.). It is the very partiality of this quilting, the incompleteness and openness of the social that allows a hegemonic practice (Laclau & Mouffe 2001), that is "the presentation of a particularity of a group as the incarnation of that empty signifier which refers to the communitarian order as an absence, an unfulfilled reality" (Laclau 2007: 44). The people are provided with *a* nation, *an* order, *a* revolution, *a* liberation etc., but by filling the signifier with a particular content, it is made to *appear as the one* (*the* nation, *the* order, etc.). We, therefore, should not consider 'society' to be a valid object of discourse: "[t]here is no single underlying principle fixing – and hence constituting – the whole field of differences /.../ [as] necessity only exists as a partial limitation of the field of contingency" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 111). The social is to be perceived as an articulation, not as a self-defined totality. Consequently, any binding structure of a collective entity, including society as a whole, exists not due to its universal or rational nature but by the merit of being opposed to nothingness. In this case, we find ourselves immersed in the pool of antagonisms and differential relations that exclude the possibility of a totalising unity of the particularities that are aggregated.

Notably, "[t]he institution of society is in each case the institution of a magma of social imaginary significations, which we can and must call a *world* of significations" (Castoriadis 2005: 359). The term 'magma', frequently used by Castoriadis, is highly characteristic in this context: magma does not have its constant form; it is a viscous and ductile though not entirely fluid substance in which different materials are constantly melted and diffused. Therefore, the need arises for a certain combination, contingent as it may be, to be *instituted* in order to provide it with this more or less stable partial fixation, something that is essential in order to have *any meaning at all*. Once such an anchoring point is established, the lack or antagonism, central to the constitution of the social, is *forgotten*, and unity is ascribed retrospectively (Edkins 2006). A narrative then comes in support, explaining the world, suturing and totalising the social. This narrative fills the new system with content and allows one to identify with it (László 2008).

However, perceiving the nation as a completely *imagined* community would also be only partially true. The nation is 'modern and constructed *but* built on prior associations, communities, and identities, which in turn were constructed, though at a different time and in a different way' (Sunny 2009: 280). The nation as an instituted structure draws its symbolic and imaginary basis as well as legitimacy from that which exists previously, though in a different form. Here the main questions are: (1) *which* forms, structures and connotations are taken and which are left behind, (2) *how* they are arranged and interpreted, (3) *what* connections, associations and/or causal chains are retrospectively ascribed to them. If a nation is imagined and established successfully, i.e. it becomes an institution, then this set of significations solidifies and starts acting *as if* it is natural and primordial, a basic and universal property of a given entity. In short, it is the tension between the political nomination and that which both limits and provides the basis as well as the material for such a nomination. In such a case, history and memory become objects of prime importance in defining what a particular society is and why it is like it is, what are its aims and dangers lying ahead, its boundaries and relations with the outside (Castoriadis 2005). Memory, in its collective mode, is not necessarily something that an individual has personally experienced; people internalise events or, rather, particular interpretations of events *as if* they had taken part in them (Berger 2009). Here one encounters a complicated interplay between the present, seen in the light of the past, and the past, seen in the light of the present.

On the one hand, memory could be seen as a mirror that shows difference and enables a person to perceive him/herself from the perspective of what no longer is (Nora 2008). Memory, then, allows the sense of continuity, which immerses the present in a continuum of history and provides the present with its creative and constitutive power, shared in groups, and usually heterogeneous, prone

to both internal and external contestation. On the other hand, hegemonic practices should not be underestimated, since they express cultural and political domination, or, at least, the stability of the *status quo*. In the case of hegemony, the Benjaminian *Jetztzeit*, the 'now-time', should be considered: history is then filled with this *Jetztzeit*, the organising structure through which we know history. It is "a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop" (Benjamin 1973: 262), a present in which history is written (or which writes history). Thus, nothing has happened 'then' or 'once upon a time'; everything is happening 'now', in the *Jetztzeit*. Therefore, the analysis of dominant narratives is particularly rewarding as it "provides an insight into political community, and the forms of temporality and subjectivity that necessarily accompany contemporary forms of political authority" (Edkins 2006: 101), especially concerning the meanings attached. They come from the current questioning and socio-political needs, as well as from the movement from potentiality to actuality, that is, from archives, libraries, museum vaults, etc., to the everyday discourse, gaining significance in the context of the present (Assmann 1995). Any supposed order and coherence, therefore, masks the fact that nothing in history is historical by itself, but has become such through interpretation. One needs to think of history as a contingent constellation of events and meanings, consisting of imaginary relations, and dependent on the perspective of observation.

There are several closely connected tendencies to be elucidated for this research. First, the tendency to essentialise, i.e. to reduce the whole ethnic group to a single trait or a single set of traits, is important. By doing this, it is particularly easy to construct the world of innocent 'us' and menacing 'them', of indigenes and aliens, of the titular nation as the 'chosen people' harassed by colonisers and the 'fifth column'. The tendency to totalise must also be mentioned, that is, to capitalise on differences by turning them, no matter how insignificant they may be, into absolute and irredeemable ones, thus enabling easier self-definition, even if with scarcely any positive content (Smith 1998). It might then be added that "*true* emancipation requires a *real* 'other' – that is, an 'other' who cannot be reduced to any of the figures of the 'same'" (Laclau 2007: 3). This combination of attitudes proved to be self-destructive because once there was no longer any evident threat left, disorientation prevailed: there was no possibility to define who we *are*, only who we *are not*. This disorientation only proves that "I cannot destroy a context without destroying at the same time the identity of the particular subject who carries the destruction" (Laclau 2007: 27).

As it was suggested, history and memory are neither conflicting, nor synonymous categories, but rather complementary ones. Their meeting point, the Benjaminian *Jetztzeit*, however, has a homogenising tendency as it aims to melt them together into an amorphous whole. Not only "much of what we remember about the personal past is suffused with others' memories – which are themselves suffused with *other* others' memories" (Freeman 2010: 263), but also a person internalises the 'official' discourse of history. This happens through monuments, museums, textbooks, films, speeches, commemorative events and other media (Kattago 2009), thus affecting and, to a large extent, deciding what is to become a part of collective memory. Consequently, it is relatively easy to treat imposed memory as one's own since the particularity of the event tends to be lost in favour of communal representation. Furthermore, meanings and narratives are shared and interchanged as "there is no speech without a reply, even if it is met only with silence, provided that there is an auditor" (Lacan 1977: 40). Individual memories are subordinated to collective ones and only become meaningful through them, because individuals themselves produce merely private fantasies rather than institutions (Castoriadis 2005). Here we must keep in mind the famous Lacanian formula that the unconscious is the *discourse of the Other*, as "we are condemned to speak our desire through the language and desires of others" (Homer 2005: 70). This notion derives its significance from the fact that, in the Lacanian theory, it is the unconscious that produces the conscious signification. Having said this, it is now possible to move to particular narratives and the analysis of the symbolic structures of this discourse of the Other that forms the feeling of sociality and communality.

## History as a unity of martyrs

This part concentrates on the discourse of Lithuanian history textbooks, particularly in dealing with the Lithuanian nation and state as such, as well as with the perception of the 'others'. Particular attention will be paid to the restoration of the Lithuanian state between 1989 and 1991. Textbooks here are treated primarily as cultural and political artefacts that do not represent the Truth (with capital T), but a pretension to truth – indicating a state's articulation of itself and its neighbours (Foster & Crawford 2006). As such, history oscillates between myth-making and myth-breaking, especially because national history – didactic, hero-worshipping, and serving as a rallying point – has an inherently mythical structure (Lorenz 2011). An attempt has been made to overview the textbooks most often used at schools by the respondents of Part 3. Of the currently used range of textbooks that were issued between 2008 and 2011, only those for last year students are considered, because the respondents finished school between 2007 and 2011. However, both the newer and the older ones manifest a significant level of ideological continuity.

In general, the importance of history and memory to the imaginary institution of society has already been outlined. There still is, however, a need to briefly concentrate on the myth of origin. If politics “is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognised as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them” (Rancière 2009: 24), then emancipation is the reconfiguration of the properties that helps introduce new subjects, to “render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who have been perceived as mere noisy animals” (Rancière 2009: 25). This is where the need to demonstrate how ‘we, Lithuanians’ emerged as speaking subjects originates. Mass demonstrations are among the clearest representations of this newly (re)discovered ability to speak, encountered in Lithuanian textbooks. ‘Masses’ and ‘unity’ are also important as the ‘*will of the people*’, which legitimates the new elite and the new order – a tendency observed not only in Lithuania but also throughout the whole former communist bloc (Pilbrow 2010, Höpken 2007). Images of collectiveness also indicate the process of sense-making, i.e. a retrospective structuring of the past in order to explain the present and the future, the effort to understand the *status quo* as natural and stable rather than contingent (Bain 2010).

Not surprisingly, dissent in Soviet Lithuania is portrayed in history textbooks as progressively gaining strength, a teleological process that had its sole logical culmination with Sąjūdis. Supposedly, it only sufficed for this movement to appear, and “[t]he ideas of Sąjūdis spread throughout the entire Lithuania in a very short period of time” (Kaselis et al. 2008: 253, author’s translation), a statement immediately illustrated with a photo of a large crowd with national symbols. This unity, however, did not necessarily include all the inhabitants: the ‘colonisers’ (Russians) and the ‘traitors’ (Poles demanding autonomy) were left out (Civinskis & Antanaitis 2001). This opposition between Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians is often recalled by associating the latter with anti-independence organisations (Kaselis et al. 2008). As the *Lithuanian* part of society woke up and became active (Civinskis & Antaitis 2001), the results followed immediately: the renunciation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was *enforced* by the Baltic republics (Kasperavičius et al. 2001), and “[f]rightened to arouse even deeper discontent in the society, the government was *forced* to tolerate the revived national symbolic; this resulted in an unprecedented sally of patriotic feelings” (Kaselis et al. 2008: 254, author’s translation and emphasis) and so forth.

Although March 11<sup>th</sup> and the Act of Restoration of Independence should logically occupy the central stage, it is January 13<sup>th</sup> that provides the discourse with the most vivid images as well as with further accounts of unity and self-sacrifice: “Lithuania raised the single real power against new Soviet aggression – national unity and dedication. The nation once again united in the face of aggression, thousands of people flowed to Vilnius to lay their bodies in defence of the centre of the national life – the Supreme Council” (Kiaupa 2006: 282, author’s translation). Definitely, the events of January 13<sup>th</sup>

united *all Lithuanians*, and this is illustrated through the use of photos of people with flags in front of tanks, barricades and banners near the Parliament and elsewhere, not failing to emphasise the *unarmed* aspect of the resistance and the casualties. Therefore, “a unified position of the government and the people”, “effective and stalwart support to the government and the Parliament” (Varnienė 2000: 276, author’s translation) are central to the myth of origin.

Moving forward, it has to be admitted that dichotomy-based thinking, as well as ideas of a pure and victimised counterforce, are clear attributes of post-colonial imaginary (Ashcroft 2002). The emphasis on the *negative* thinking of the subalterns, on their tendency to define themselves *against* others dates as far back as the introduction of the term by Gramsci (1992: 54-55): “The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. [...] In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves”. For Lithuanians, therefore, the question of identity and belonging revolves around martyrdom and exclusion. Lithuanians see themselves as a people who, having lived in a multi-national environment, were exceptionally tolerant but constantly harmed, both physically and culturally, by their neighbours (Clark 2009). The heroic *struggle against* the Teutonic Knights, subjugation to the Polish influence, followed by the prolonged struggle and resistance against the Russians (or, later, the Soviets) form the backbone of the Lithuanian national narrative, and even upstage the more positive aspects. This forms the image of a ‘nation of innocent sufferers’, of perpetual noble victims, proud of their weakness, and constantly on the defence (Clark 2009).

An analysis of school textbooks shows that collisions and antagonisms permeate the entire conception of Lithuanian history. The first models for such thinking can be found as early as the formation of the Lithuanian state, which was seen as mobilisation against surrounding enemies (Varnienė 2000), and served as a model for future mobilisations. The status of the last pagans, resistance to Christianity and outside influence, accounts of constant plots and defamations by foreigners (Banys et al. 2006) create a self-image of an ‘entrenched’ nation from early on. Attempts are also made to ‘primordialise’ the nation, with chapters on the Lithuanian *nation* depicting periods as early as the 13th century (Kamuntavičius & Kamuntavičienė 2001). It is certain that this is hardly a phenomenon unique to Lithuania: such primordialisation is common in post-communist school curricula and mostly aimed at solidifying the often fragile bonds of national commonality (Höpken 2007, Vodipovec 2009). If *the nation* is seen as having already existed since times immemorial, favourable conditions are created for stressing the interventions and negative influences, first of all, of the Poles, who inherit the status of *the enemy* from the Teutonic Knights, even more vicious for being silent and deceitful. These interpretations vary from explicit claims, e.g. “Conversion to Christianity created a new enemy of Lithuanian statehood – Poland” (Kamuntavičius & Kamuntavičienė 2001: 87, author’s translation), also expressed through depictions of a whole series of plots against Lithuania, to more implicit ones, concentrating on favourable conditions for the *penetration* of Polish influence. Thus, the union with Poland is seen as a period of resistance against foreign (Polish) influence, when Lithuanians “persistently struggled for their independence” (Kamuntavičius & Kamuntavičienė 2001: 87); it was only due to this heroic resistance that Poland *failed to incorporate* Lithuania (Mackevičius et al. 2008).

Another period of heroic resistance supposedly came after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, once again accompanied by a change of the enemy – now incarnated by the Russians. Here we once again encounter efforts to attribute nationhood retrospectively: the Lithuanian nation is seen as already having existed before the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so it only needed someone “to arouse the Lithuanian spirit” (Kaselis et al. 2008b: 132), to encourage the *national consciousness*, as if these people had always been Lithuanians, just without knowing it, or had forgotten it and only had to remember. So it is not surprising that whole chapters are dedicated to the “Lithuanian national *rebirth*” (Civinskis & Antanaitis 2001: 75), although it later appears that it is the *formation* of the nation that is described. A similar pattern has been observed by, for example, Vodipovec in the analysis of Slovenian history textbooks (Vodipovec 2009), where a nation is seen as an objective given,

devoid of possible conditioning. Furthermore, the resistance to Russian imperial policy is portrayed as a well-organised, heroic and all-encompassing struggle leaving no place for contingency (Brazauskas et al. 2005), which naturally led to independence (this being a more-than-clear model for future anti-Soviet dissent). Furthermore, the authors do not fail to emphasise ethnic antagonisms: “Lithuanian commerce and industry was in the hands of foreigners”, especially Jews, therefore, “[u]nder such circumstances, the activists of the Lithuanian rebirth, concerned with national and economic issues, did not restrain from anti-Semitic articles in Lithuanian press” (Brazauskas et al. 2005: 150); therefore, even anti-Semitism appears to be justified as the defence of national interests.

Finally, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century enemies also flourish, both on the Polish and the Russian side with Poles acting against Lithuanian independence, conducting “routine aggression against Lithuania” (Kiaupa 2006: 214), leaving Lithuanians, who had only good intentions, as the noble victims. The loss of the Vilnius region is converted into victory as only “after the Western countries intervened, the Lithuanian army had to cease fighting”, therefore, “[a]lthough victory was achieved, the Vilnius region [...] was incorporated into Poland” (Kaselis et al. 2008a: 12, author’s translation). The last struggle is, naturally, against the Soviets. It begins with the guerrilla war, seen as a heroic struggle, the gradual decrease of fighters and intensity perceived as crystallisation of the hard core of true devotees; during this struggle, “unduly zealous officials of the occupational regime and *traitors* were *destroyed*” (Kaselis et al. 2008a: 213, author’s translation and emphasis), thus constructing a new, inner, enemy – traitors – and dehumanising them, having them not *killed*, but merely *destroyed*. Furthermore, the Lithuanian armed resistance is shown as a unique phenomenon (Kaselis et al. 2008a). Once again exceptionalism through resistance is sought, and comparative martyrology prevails. As was the case in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resistance to the Soviet occupation is also portrayed as a consciously teleological process, a constant struggle between ‘us’ and ‘them’, attributing this struggle to the society as a whole. Certainly, such dichotomisation is not a new phenomenon and dates back to Herodotus himself (Lorenz 2011), but in this case it is both consistent and expressly pronounced.

All things considered, the martyrology, self-victimisation, and emphasis on the own vs. alien distinction, as well as on a supposed founding and legitimising consensus of the people could be seen as exceptionally important traits of Lithuanian history textbooks that affect the worldview of those studying them. Students are provided not only with particular images (as is the case with unity at independence) but also with models of self-perception and of interpreting the world, therefore, establishing schemes around which the entire reality is constructed (as in the case of aliens and enemies), something that has a tendency to correspond with the responses analysed. Even though textbooks should not be treated as the only contributing factor and other possibilities and influences cannot be discarded, the tendencies in educational policies are still illustrative.

## Nostalgia, resentment, and decay

The following analysis concentrates on written responses regarding the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990 and events immediately before and after this landmark date, as well as on the understanding of nationhood and nationality. These responses were gathered by the author in a qualitative survey of young people born between 1988 and 1992 (conducted by the author from February to April 2011). Hence, they were either not yet born when independence was restored or not yet conscious enough to possess first-hand experience of the events concerned, therefore, they have to rely on other people’s memories. The respondents were social science or humanities students, meaning that they undertook an extended history course at school and sat the standardised national history examination. No two respondents had studied at the same school and they were originally from six different Lithuanian cities and towns.

An attempt is made to understand the perception of inter-group dynamics and relations with the outside, imagination of communal bonds, motivation, and the feeling of (dis)continuity reflected in the responses. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in writing – a conscious choice in order to obtain responses that would be as little spontaneous as possible. Respondents were given an initial set of identical questions that they had to answer in two weeks and then a second set based on previous responses, again for two weeks. Respondents, therefore, had the possibility to think about their answers carefully, to edit their previous thoughts, and to crystallise their statements in the comfort of their homes and without being observed or pressurised. Such submissions can be treated as being closer to what is considered by the respondents to be a suitable representation, devoid of occasional slips and lapses signalling non-appropriated and disorderly memories, than it would be in the case of the more spontaneous oral responses.

Considering the Sąjūdis period, the restoration of independence and the tragic events of January 13<sup>th</sup> (the latter apparently being most vivid), there is a clear tendency to adopt the ‘official’ discourse, within which clear-cut distinctions are established and images of unity dominate. Only several people conveyed more ‘authentic’ stories of their family’s experience and did not simply recount the dominant images. As one of the respondents wrote when asked about her family’s experiences:

*My parents met each other while working in Ukraine and returned to Lithuania around 1988. They were anxious and did not know what to expect. The tension was especially high during the January 13<sup>th</sup> events and afterwards. My mother was pregnant, therefore, nobody even spoke about going to protect strategically important objects, and my father stayed with her. Priorities are simply rearranged in such moments and all the talk about patriotism is just words. Even the parents of my father – who were especially patriotic – called to persuade him not even to think to stand guard anywhere. Being a father now was the first priority, over the love for his homeland.*

Similarly, according to another respondent answering the same question, on January 13<sup>th</sup>:

*My father wanted to go to Vilnius, but my mother didn’t let him do that, so he only went to the Telecom. But I also remember equally well that my mother talked of calling some of her friends that night and the reply was something like “why don’t you let me sleep, who cares that something is happening out there”. So I imagine that people were equally divided, some were passionate about what was happening while others were indifferent.*

What becomes clear is that the more one attempts to fathom out these personal narratives, the more the uniform official discourse begins to crumble, at least in certain respects, especially as far as absolute unity and integrity is concerned. Another person generalised the stories told by her grandmother, an active participant in the events of the period:

*In these years, it was the same as before: there were many people in important positions, who, being party members, used to betray those who strove for independence, but later they suddenly became committed patriots. According to my grandmother, talks about independent Lithuania and even one’s private position favouring the independence used to create tension and controversies among the colleagues.*

Here there is a noticeable challenge to the widespread accounts of ‘silent resistance’, of unconditional, albeit covert, support for independence (an insignificant amount of ‘collaborators’ notwithstanding) that made the Sąjūdis and restoration of independence the only logical conclusion. The retrospective attempt of many post-communist subjects to style themselves as having been secret

dissidents who privately opposed the system, made in order to regain a meaning of their lives under new political circumstances (thus, often unconsciously, rearranging their pasts in the light of the present) is also challenged (Noble 2010).

However, less authentic accounts were more common, which showed that when a certain structure is instituted (and 'official' memory is an instituted symbolic structure), often it is society that serves the institution, rather than vice versa (Castoriadis 2005). These accounts varied from open disinterestedness, such as:

*I forgot the stories because I never listened to them seriously” (interestingly enough, a response from a daughter of a signatory of the Act of Restoration of Independence) or “It’s a pity, but I have never asked how my mother felt and what she thought during that terrible period when you didn’t know what was going to happen*

to undoubtedly sincere, but obviously standardised ones. Even those who previously gave more personalised accounts (and had expressed doubts about the widespread images of unity), appear to have a tendency to perceive the images that coincide with the dominant representations more vividly, for example:

*My grandmother used to take me to demonstrations, I remember us going down the [Gediminas] Avenue to Seimas with flags. Probably it was 1991-1992. I remember a lot of people with flags. As I was very little, I almost did not understand what was happening, I only remember banners, flags; I know that I felt pride in carrying a small Lithuanian flag in my hand.*

Other responses were even more generalised and standardised. Interestingly enough, even the parents, who had directly participated in the events, apparently tend to communicate the dominant images to their children, considering them the 'right' thing to tell. So we encounter utterances that seek their claim to justice, sincerity and truthfulness in relation to other utterances, model utterances that have evaluative power (Bakhtin 1992):

*During the Sjqūdis period and several years afterwards, the national feeling was especially strong; as my parents say, “the entire Lithuania lived with a single idea, with a single aim”; the strongest desire of the whole nation was independence. However, after some time, this spirit waned, personal prosperity more and more upstaged the interests of the state; people probably got accustomed to the good life, to new conditions of Freedom, and forgot the ideas of Sjqūdis.*

This image of initial unity, idealism, and dedication, followed by disintegration, demoralisation and decay was clearly dominant. According to the same respondent:

*The thoughts people had before and immediately after 1990 were pure and unspoiled by the question “what’s in it for me?” which is so common nowadays. Then people were united, they cared about the fate of the country, and discontent was very rarely expressed by emigration.*

What can be recognised here is a short-lived Golden Age or the Garden of Eden before the Fall, the original sin of the new Lithuanian state being greed. It is only after this Fall that decay prevailed. Such narratives signal the general attempt to formation of (one-sided) “selves” to cope with the new world, either through a flood of textbook images and narratives cementing the present via the past (Pilbrow 2010, Foster & Crawford 2006) that are later fused with other secondary sources and early childhood memories where they are available, or through the adults' own attempts at sense-making that are later conveyed to their children.

Again, one of the respondents, when asked about the major changes that had occurred, stressed that:

*Sąjūdis had united a lot of people, in whose hearts hope and a feeling of community were born, and this led the nation to independence. The Baltic Way also, I think, is a good example of how not only one, but three nations that have the same aim can unite. And now, honestly, we don't have anything that would prove that we care about who we are and how we understand ourselves. The present economic migration shows that the system of core values has changed, and nationhood has been left far behind material prosperity.*

A change of values and interests is, therefore, evident. The nation is seen as having lost its central value as it has been emptied of its unified/unifying content:

*Before independence, the nation consisted of people, who lived in Lithuania and had a common aim to preserve Lithuanianness and to restore the state, and those who lived abroad, created communities, and desired independence. I don't know what the nation is today.*

One could easily notice that the general feeling is that of communal bonds being broken, not only due to the domination of self-interest, but also due to the general loss of a common aim; once the need for resistance was gone, only a void remained. Furthermore, one could notice a certain reductionism equating the national bond with governmental policies and well-being in general, when asked about the present understanding of nationhood:

*The state is not attractive due to its policies in most areas, so it is not surprising that some people see no sense in identifying themselves with the country. What patriotic feelings can you talk about when people can't live decently on their salaries and public benefit is a second-rate issue for the government.*

Correspondingly, according to another person:

*When thinking about the contemporary understanding of nationhood, I only see the image of parents with babies leaving for Ireland or England, or of a poor worker who buys canned food for a month's work in Norwegian construction sites.*

Therefore, the contrast between, on the one hand, unity and integrity, strong patriotism, altruism, and, on the other hand, the desire for material goods, individualism, disintegration, and disinterestedness is obvious. Once again it is the struggle to cope with change that has permeated social memory. Also, as Anna Saunders had elucidated in her study of youth in the former East Germany, those teenagers who had only little experience of socialism had a much rosier image of it than older youths (Saunders 2007). It might be the case that here also widespread societal dissatisfaction that young people encounter is contrasted with vague memories and standardised social remembering that creates the image of an ideal world. It is an attempt of the subject – or, more precisely, a social attempt of multiple subjects – to achieve imaginary coherence and mastery of themselves. Therefore, at least in one sense post-communist nostalgia and nostalgia for original unity do have important functional similarities.

There is, however, another interrelated tendency in the narratives of change. It could be called 'nostalgia for antagonisms'. Paradoxically, even those who previously had given 'personalised' accounts of the events and refuted the dominant images of unity move to this 'depersonalised' plane when describing the most important differences between 'now' and 'then':

*Before independence it was easier to identify with your nation because it was possible to contrast the own and the alien. Therefore, the aims of the nation, most probably, were articulated more clearly: to oppose the existing order and to enable the creation of our own state.*

Also in a similar manner, the changes in the understanding of nationhood were expressed as follows:

*The previous understanding of nationhood could be represented by the events of January 13<sup>th</sup>: the nation unites in order to defend itself from the aliens. The nationhood of today is the parade of March 11<sup>th</sup>: shaved heads, radical slogans, and even louder criticism in the public sphere. The nation does not have a single programme.*

This adds another dimension to the feeling of disintegration: the need to unite against something, i.e. the need of an enemy. Though the alien of the dichotomy is in most cases clearly equated with 'Soviet', further replies tend to broaden this category. Thus, an account that begins as expected could later move to a new plain:

*After the restoration of independence, there was an ebb that could be related to the feeling of security [...] Furthermore, when the borders were opened, an interest in other nations and their fashions arose: Coca-Cola diminished the popularity of Lithuanian kvass, Czech beer became the first preference, linen became less important than jeans, holidays abroad became more prestigious than those spent in Lithuanian resorts.*

So the alien also encompasses the global dimension, often implicitly portrayed as a threat in an attempt to reimagine the new reality in old categories:

*Until the break, the national feeling was cherished, while now the importance of the nation, its position as a fundamental basis of human life, is forgotten [...] National peculiarity is being lost, we look up to the European nations, try to copy them, to catch up with them, but it should not be like this, every nation is unique and has to preserve its uniqueness.*

The nation is, therefore, imagined as a walled community, which in its ideal condition is self-sufficient. Indeed social memory here works as a force that creates and objectifies groups and categories – me/you, us/them – and establishes a system of orientation (Noble 2010). Such memories also display a structural similarity with the textbook discourse: the 'other' is the fundamental category that both threatens and guarantees the existence of the nation and, accordingly, the national subject.

The images of a fight being conducted are also similar whatever substance the alien category assumes, allowing some respondents to say that no changes in nationhood have taken place:

*The aims and activities of those who fight for a Lithuanian Lithuania remained similar: first of all, legal argumentation that Lithuania had never lost its statehood, that the Soviet annexation was illegal, and that the people feel free inside, followed by the instigation of emotions and consolidation of society by exalting the peculiarities, traditions, language and customs of the nation by any means possible [...] Now I see a modern fight and struggle for the same nationhood, for the same understanding of identity.*

Therefore, Lithuanians are seen as being constantly on the defence, either against malevolent plots, or against powerful outside forces and influences that tend to pose danger to the nation, especially to its monadic ideal. It is also worth mentioning that the Western influences are seen as both positive and liberating when contrasted with Soviet practices and negative when contrasted with the own culture:

*People started to value their nation, its history, values, to be proud of themselves, and of the nation itself. Political changes further strengthened this, as people believed in a different future, were tempted by the Western lifestyles that became available. The majority of people started criticising the previous Russian system and the Russian nation. I think that the national feeling of that time, of the nation being an intrinsic value, now has sharply and painfully declined, people no longer care which nation they belong to, what its values are, how one should cherish the national sentiment. This, I think, is highly affected by the openness of borders, and the fact that nations mix all around the world as people no longer identify themselves with a nation or a state. They live where they feel more comfortable.*

That is, the destructive potential of outside influences is evident in both cases. Interestingly enough, sometimes this search for dichotomies appears to be in contrast with the conscious position of a respondent, i.e. a person might first employ the dichotomy between the own and the alien, and emphasise unity against something, but later add that:

*A primitive account of nationhood dominates: making distinctions between the own and the alien, limiting traditions to cuisine, community-building through mass events, using national symbols without inquiring what they are reduced to, grounding Lithuanianness in falsified history, etc.*

Here it is possible to speak of the pervasiveness of the dominant modes of thought and schemes of interpretation, their ability to penetrate a subject's worldview without him/her even knowing it. Therefore, schemes and simplifications tend to prevail in everyday perceptions. Also clearly perceivable is the textbook discourse of the constant need of arousal of nationhood and the permanent need of defence from plots and influences in order to keep the ever-existing nation pure.

In conclusion, several general trends could be identified. First of all, there was a tendency among the respondents to prioritise general dominant narratives of unity, pathos, and unselfish idealism in describing the restoration of independence, as part of them simply relied on pre-prepared images, while others, even after remembering episodes that did not exactly fit into the grand narrative, later also moved to well-established images. Secondly, this initial unity and unselfishness is contrasted with disintegration and decay that followed. This decay is associated with a decline of moral standards, of economic conditions, of the general will to contribute to the well-being of the nation, etc. Nostalgia and resentment are, therefore, clearly felt. Finally, this disintegration is almost universally equated with the loss of the possibility to define the nation *against* something. The dichotomy between the own and the alien is seen as vital with the category of the alien often encompassing not only the Soviet (which is obvious) but also the global dimension. Therefore, the inability of the nation to stand united against the global influence and to preserve its uniqueness is also seen as a part of the decay.

## Conclusion

Czesław Miłosz, the Polish-Lithuanian Nobel laureate, once wrote: "In a certain sense I can consider myself a typical Eastern European. It seems to be true that his *differentia specifica* can be boiled down to a lack of form – both inner and outer. His good qualities – intellectual avidity, fervour in discussion, a sense of irony, freshness of feeling, spatial (or geographical) fantasy – derive from a basic weakness: he always remains an adolescent, governed by a sudden ebb or flow of inner chaos. Form is achieved in stable societies" (Miłosz 1981: 67). He was undoubtedly correct. However, the problem is the attempt to *impose* form upon oneself and on others. Eastern and Central Europe is, in more than one respect, the *Heart of Darkness*, where the imaginary and the symbolic collapse, and one is left with (*The horror! The horror!*) of the Real. There is not a single piece of land in the region that had not been, at one time or another (or simultaneously), occupied and subjugated. Therefore, it is impossible to

speak of any stable system of significations that a modern nation could be built upon. It is on these ruins of signification that an effort is made to create a stable system of meanings in order to avoid the ultimate horror of the Real. It is, therefore, not surprising that particular narratives are invented in order to explain the present as non-contingent, and to establish meaning in general.

As it has been indicated, meaning – and particularly social meaning – rests on the ability of dominant groups to fill empty signifiers with meaning. In this case, ‘the nation’, ‘order’, ‘unity’, and ‘liberation’ have to be stressed. As such they have to cement the citizens of the state into the people. Memory, therefore, plays a crucial role, as the past has to be constantly seen from the perspective of the present, i.e. retrospectively ordered and in some cases forgotten if necessary. As a result, memory and (popular) history should be seen as reflecting the present and not the past: it all happens in the Benjaminian *Jetztzeit*. Notably, the need to define the nation *against* other groups arises when there is no positive content left. It is no coincidence that even the preamble of the Lithuanian Constitution defines the Lithuanian nation as ‘having for centuries persistently defended its freedom and independence’. Also, as seen in the analysis of history textbooks, the entire Lithuanian history is narrated through the paradigm of suffering and malevolent enemy plots. Such is the attempt at legitimisation of the present (‘unity’ in the face of threat) and collective sense-making (‘them’ as delimiting the borders of ‘our’ community and having deprived us of the full enjoyment of ourselves). Consequently, it is only through ‘them’ that the Lithuanian nation is perceived, so *we are who we are not*. Meanwhile, the image of initial unity which supposedly characterised the origins of the new state, needed for boosting legitimacy, provides the state with a foundation of a new symbolic system almost from thin air. This is a material incarnation of social contract in absence of anything better. It explains to the people why they are who they are, and why they currently live in a certain country, which is as it is. It is the moment of full sovereignty, a state of exception, out of which a new order had appeared, and this order was supposedly given birth not by a multitude, but by a people, thus implying a ‘common will’. Not surprisingly, this moment of unity is not only a moment of creation, but also a moment of *negation*, of refusal, of rising against the other. The other is, therefore, vital, and its disappearance could result in the disintegration of communality as such or at least in its *perceived* disintegration.

Finally, the respondents’ perception of the past (and present) is evidently in line with the basic line of official textbook narrative with even family memories and personal narratives often being subjugated to it. Notably, initial unity, unselfishness, and sacrifice are contrasted with the current materialism and pragmatism. This could be seen as part of the wider societal attempt to cope with change and to explain why the present is not an ideal world, and why the post-communist transformation has been more difficult than initially expected. In this sense, a parallel between the nostalgia for communism and the nostalgia for antagonistic unity could be drawn. Also, there are two important consequences of the negative creation of unity, present in the official and textbook discourse. First, it is the ‘entrenched’ identity postulating the constant need to defend and protect the essentialised and primordialised image of the nation, and the constant need to search for new enemies in order to protect such identity. Second, it is the perceived disintegration because of the increasing difficulty to maintain a negative enemy-centred identity in the modern world. Therefore, there is a pressing need to search for new strategies of identity-formation that would concentrate on who we *are* and not on who we *are not*.

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**Ignas Kalpokas** is a Master's student in Social and Political Critical Studies at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania. His research interests include the investigation of interrelated concepts of sovereignty, the state, and political identities, as well as the formation and maintenance of (national) identities, with the theoretical framework being mostly continental philosophy.