

Chapter 2

Missing Socialism Again? The Malaise of Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Lithuania

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'1984: The Survival Drama'

- 1 During the show '1984: The Survival Drama' taking place in the territory of and inside the Soviet bunker . . . [later in this document referred to as the Show], Visitors, participants . . . become citizens of the USSR.
- 2 Participants will receive instructions and orders which must be carried out without objection.
- 3 In case of disobedience participants may receive psychological or/and physical punishments and may be excluded from the Show.

Verbatim from the English translation of *Confirmation (Terms of Engagement)* provided to participants before entering the Bunker.

'Come on, come on! . . . Move!', a burly guard, sporting the uniform of a Soviet military officer, boomed in Russian as we filed through a door opening onto a long flight of stairs of crumbling concrete. Comprised of some forty persons, our group hastily descended into the windowless Bunker. After the door slammed shut behind us with a creaky groan, we lined up for an inspection in the narrow underground hallway. A few light bulbs were glaring above our heads. Tugging on a leash wrapped around

a door handle, a ferocious German shepherd called Amur was barking breathlessly. The subterranean air was heavy with the smell of cigarette smoke, mould and damp earth. When Amur calmed down, the guard began the inspection. After examining our appearance from head to toe, he began intoning in Russian a long list of rules of conduct to be observed in the Bunker (see the opening quotation). Clad in lumpy oversized jackets of grey, black and blue, we were transformed into citizens of the USSR. The calendar was reset to 1984.¹ Our ‘survival drama’ (*išgyvenimo drama*) in Soviet Lithuania was about to begin.

The present essay is about the ‘survival drama’ in the Bunker (*Bunkeris*), an experiential-immersive theme park located underground in the vicinity of Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital. Guided by professional actors, visitors participate in – and ‘survive’ – a string of interactive performances of mock KGB interrogations, torture sessions, medical examinations, Soviet-era shopping, civil defence training and so forth. These enactments of socialism at the Bunker interest me as commemorative performances where the period of communist rule is represented using a rich repertoire of memorial media, ranging from visual imagery and discourse to acoustic and gustatory effects. While I pay close ethnographic attention to specific ways in which the Bunker performance as an embodied and sensuous act works to externalize memories of the Soviet era, my principal concern is with participants’ response to this subterranean sideshow of socialism. These reminiscing subjects interest me as morally engaged social actors who, provoked by the ‘survival drama’, connect with and contest the socialist era as a biographical and historical past. Their recollections also speak to complexities and complications of forgetfulness, or amnesia, in Lithuania’s post-socialist present.

I begin with a brief overview of the current landscape of remembrance (I call it *mnemoscape*) in Lithuania – a landscape replete with multiple referents to the history of this Baltic nation, both distant and recent. The essay then moves on to discuss some of the conceptual trends prevalent in anthropological memory studies recently undertaken in post-socialist contexts. Central to this discussion is a critique of the dominant paradigm of ‘nostalgification’, which governs much of the research concerned with social remembrance in contemporary Eastern Europe. Simply put, this section argues that there is more to post-socialist memory than ‘nostalgia’. Combining historical exposé, ethnographic description and theoretical commentary, the second part of the essay takes the reader back to the Bunker for more drama of socialist ‘survival’. Presented in this part are also three scenes from the performance, along with the commentary of my interlocutors – the principal *dramatis personae* of this

study. The closing section gathers together the key arguments of the essay into a conclusion.

Lithuania's Post-socialist Mnemoscape

Following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, in Lithuania, as in many other ex-socialist republics, erasing Marxist-Leninist history from memorial consciousness was among the most urgent tasks at hand. Vast panels portraying robust workers and peasants were promptly torn down, Lenin's voluminous writings vanished from library shelves and statues of distinguished comrades were removed from squares and parks of the newly independent country. By the mid-1990s, Lithuania's post-Soviet landscape was thoroughly cleansed of all referents to socialist history. After almost five decades of communist rule, this Baltic nation resolutely turned westward – to modern, capitalist 'Europe'. Although ideological insignia of the socialist past were decidedly out of public sight, socialism was not out of people's minds. Reordering immediate environments by erasing all referents to an undesirable past may aid forgetting, but it does not guarantee instant and complete amnesia. Letting go of the past is an inherently ambiguous and paradoxical process, one that hardly ever follows a straight trajectory towards a complete deletion of particular memories. Forgetting is often complicated by recurrent moments of recollection.

Far from forgotten, today socialism looms large in the memorial consciousness of many – certainly not all – Lithuanians. Visual arts exhibits, documentaries, scholarly researches, biographical writings, recuperated brands of Soviet-era consumer goods, as well as museum displays and experiential theme parks (the Bunker is one example) instantiate some of the public domains where socialism as a recollected past is made part of the present.² Persons representing different generations invoke socialism in their daily discourses and practices as they reminisce how 'good' or 'bad' it was. Meshing conflicting sentiments of yearning and desire, rupture and loss, disdain and contempt, recollections of Lithuanian history between 1940 and 1991 are at once nostalgic and traumatic, comforting and painful, reassuring and unsettling. I further elaborate on this argument below. Although prominently present, socialism of course is not the only past populating the mnemoscape of contemporary Lithuania whose neoliberal and 'European' future continuously folds itself back into multiple national pasts (cf. Huyssen 1995: 9). The years between 1918 and 1940, a time of geopolitical independence and the burgeoning capitalist economy, the era of colonial tsarist rule (1795–1918), the 'glorious' Commonwealth of

Poland-Lithuania (1569–1795), among other, even more distant pasts, are part of ongoing post-socialist remembrance.

Recently, many of these disparate pasts converged in a kind of competitive cacophony of memory at decade-long celebrations of the thousandth anniversary of the first mention of the name of Lithuania in an obscure Germanic manuscript in 1009. The numerous festivities organized to mark the momentous occasion included folk festivals, handicraft fairs and shows promoting ‘traditional’ cuisine. A significant component of the celebrations was an ambitious multimillion-dollar project to reconstruct a sixteenth-century palatial residence of royal rulers (*Valdovų rūmai*) in the centre of Vilnius, which is currently still incomplete. The recent proliferation of new monuments representing the nation’s long-dead kings, martyrs and bards also attests to the restored significance of the nation’s pre-socialist history.

In the broader context of the former Soviet bloc, Lithuania’s heteroglossic or multi-voiced mnemoscope is neither exceptional nor particularly remarkable. The emergence of similar complexity and ‘non-synchronicity’ of social recall – its temporal hybridity we might say (cf. Huyssen 1995: 8) – has been documented by researchers working in other East European settings as well (Verdery 1999). Socialism, however, has been the most privileged past in memory studies conducted in the region. Nostalgia has become the dominant conceptual paradigm.

The Spectre of Nostalgia

In her recent commentary on the pervasiveness of the concept of nostalgia, Maria Todorova (2010: 1), paraphrasing Marx, has observed: ‘A specter is haunting the world of academia: the study of post-communist nostalgia’. Various manifestations of the socialist past in the contemporary European East have been theorized as objectifications of a longing or yearning for the ‘goodness’ of socialist times now irretrievably gone (Bach 2002, Berdahl 2010, Klumbyté 2009, Todorova and Gille 2010; see also Sarkisova and Apor 2008). Interweaving the biographical and the historical, in contemporary Eastern Europe the nostalgic recall of socialism – as a kind of individual and collective knowledge of the past – has been explored as a rich resource providing those remembering with important cognitive means with which to anchor themselves in the unsettling and disorienting milieu of the ongoing socioeconomic and political transformations. Otherwise put, nostalgic reminiscences have been investigated as important vehicles helping social actors distance themselves from the present, vehicles that are existentially

empowering and socially stabilizing – they take us back ‘home’. As etymologists instruct us, the noun nostalgia (from *nostos*, ‘returning home’ plus *algos*, ‘pain, ache, grief’), Greek in origin, refers to a melancholy desire, to return to the safety, comfort and predictability of metaphoric domicile, a trope that also conjures up an idyllic imagery of familial togetherness, well-being and coherence.³ ‘Home’, as Mary Douglas (1991: 290) has argued, works as an important organizer of social space and time, and as such provides ‘directions of existence’. Nostalgia, one can say, is a pre-eminently ‘homey’ or domestic concept.

To be sure, in today’s European East nostalgia in its many manifestations looms large in memories of socialism – a historical and biographical period remembered wistfully by many as a vanished ‘home’. This very metaphor was recently invoked by one of my interlocutors. During my research visit to Lithuania in 2010, a well-known intellectual in his seventies, who associated himself with political dissidence and ‘the social alternative’ (*socialinė alternatyva*) during the socialist era, to my great astonishment, launched into a lengthy diatribe describing how the Soviet state, while undeniably authoritarian and oppressive, managed to ensure that justice and equality prevailed among its citizens. ‘The home then had a good master . . . and now?’ he stated longingly (see also Lankauskas 2006).

But not all post-socialist memory is nostalgic, that is, about elegiac recuperation of, and escape to, a ‘better’ time past recalled through tropes of domesticity. Not all events and experiences are remembered because they are coveted. Unwanted or ‘unmemorable’ pasts are also integral to the commemoration of socialism. Nostalgia does not accompany every recollection and is not everywhere (cf. Nadkarni 2010, Pilbrow 2010). To claim that it does and is, as many theorists do, is to look for conceptual and analytical shortcuts. We seem to have forgotten that those remembering make socialism part of the present not only because they want it back but, paradoxically, because they do not. Representations of socialism for many East Europeans, especially those of older generations, serve as reminders of what ought to be erased from memorial consciousness. The presence of such memory works to negate that particular past as a time of profound disruption, destruction and trauma. This past in turn becomes an important temporal resource on which actors draw to make claims to ‘suffering’ and ‘victimhood’ in the post-socialist present (see below). Such dispositions towards relatively recent socialist history are not nostalgia – they are not about yearnings to return to and be at ‘home’. They are counter-, or at the very least, non-nostalgic recollections. Such reminiscences externalize socialism as a time of existential homelessness, we might say; they are not about possessing but about losing ‘home’. Seduced by the ‘goodness’ of

nostalgia, we seem to have overlooked ‘bad’ and ‘non-nostalgic’ memories of socialism.

But where is nostalgia’s persistent allure? Why has it acquired such conceptual dominance? How did post-socialist studies fall under its spell, becoming virtually ‘nostomaniac’, as Dominic Boyer (2010: 19) has aptly put it. Could it be that researchers – those of the ‘native’ kind who experienced socialism first-hand and those who learned about it from books in ‘the West’ – rush to equate most of the memory of socialism with nostalgia because *they* want to keep socialism remembered as a quaint, endearing and ‘homey’ past (cf. Gille 2010: 287)? Perhaps, the current supremacy of nostalgia in post-socialist studies can be attributed to the emergence of a kind of nostalgic scholarly industry that yearns for a well-defined temporal ‘other’ as an object of study. After all, the ‘nostalgification’ of Eastern Europe makes this part of the world appear more culturally ‘exotic’ and temporally out of sync with future-oriented visions of Western modernity. Nostalgia, thus, helps orientalize the European East (cf. Boyer 2010: 21–22).

There is at least one more reason, I think, for nostalgia’s ascendancy. As an analytical tool, it is a catch-all, feel-good (‘homey’) concept that can be conveniently bent and stretched to describe a wide spectrum of memorial practices, including those that have little to do with nostalgia. Because of its conceptual expansiveness, nostalgia ‘can be made to “happen” by (and to) anyone’, as Linda Hutcheon (2000: 191) has observed. Nostalgia is certainly ‘happening’ in post-socialist studies and is becoming one of those totalizing blanket terms that mean everything and nothing.

Circulating in social science discourses since the 1970s, nostalgia has received its share of criticism. Despite being dismissed many times over as analytically inept and superficial, and being negatively characterized as ‘affective, sentimental, ahistorical, conservative, consumerist, kitschy’ and even ‘morbid’, nostalgia perdures remarkably (Lowenthal 1989, Ladino 2004). Attempts have been made to break it down into more nuanced types or subgenres. Some nostalgias have been identified as ‘hegemonic’, ‘working class’, ‘mass’ (Stewart 1988), others as ‘imperialist’, ‘official’ and ‘colonial’ (Ladino 2004, Rosaldo 1989, Todorova 2010), still others as ‘structural’ (Herzfeld 2005) and ‘practical’ (Battaglia 1995); the list goes on.

Yet despite such endeavours to refine it conceptually through taxonomic classification and specification, nostalgia as an analytical device remains unwieldy and cumbersome. The trouble with nostalgia, even when it is broken down into more sophisticated ‘specialty’ categories, is that it tends to gloss over complexities, contradictions and ambiguities of memorial practices in social life. Otherwise put, nostalgia totalizes and simplifies;

it often conceals more than it reveals. It may help us build neat models of ‘positive’ memory – Boym’s (2001) oft-cited dualism of ‘reflective versus restorative’ nostalgia comes to mind – but it renders remembrance lifeless and provides us with an incomplete picture of the mnemoscope that we strive to understand and explain.

Furthermore, not unlike such much-maligned concepts as ‘tradition’, ‘community’, or ‘culture’, to mention a few, nostalgia unproblematically turns reminiscences into things. Otherwise put, it reifies social memory (cf. Berliner 2005). Yet as we know it is not a thing but a multi-voiced, or heteroglossic, process. Not unlike speech, to invoke Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), memorial discourses and practices are constituted through a multiplicity of competing genres. Nostalgia is just one of them. Genres and sub-genres of memory may be helpful heuristic devices, but they can (and do) quickly distract us from the complexity and complications of ‘really existing’ memory in social life. They tidy up or model memory into bounded units of analysis. It is not, however, the tidiness but messiness of memory that we need to describe and interrogate. It is therefore imperative that we push our theorizing beyond mere classificatory identification and description of genres (which is certainly important), and that we inquire more rigorously into their ‘untidy’, ambiguous coexistence – into how they overlap, blend and interlock, as well as how they complement and contest each other. As recent interdisciplinary memory research has shown, a particular past can be recalled in many ways – through a multiplicity of genres we might say – within the same collectivity and even by the same person. Laced with yearnings of return to a ‘better’ past, nostalgic reminiscences often compete with ‘counter-nostalgic’ remembrance of rupture, disjuncture, or loss in a complex polylogue (Scanlan 2004).

Besides, memories of all genres are fluid, so to speak – they do not stand still. This is especially true in contexts of volatile and unsettling change, such as the contemporary European East. Interrogating nostalgia in the broader context of other memory genres and making it concrete through the fine-grained detail of ethnographic description and analysis is one, and perhaps the only, way to gain a deeper grasp of how it works as a mode of commemoration. Kathleen Stewart (1988: 2) has written that nostalgia ‘is a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings and effects shift with the context – it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present’. As ethnographers striving better to understand what nostalgia – and memory more broadly – is, we need to pay closer attention to the context and especially to the reminiscing speaker – or, as I will show below, the performer – engaged with the past.

Memory in Performance

Memory acquires social significance when it is externalized and is represented by those remembering, that is, when it is pushed out from the hidden realm of consciousness into public domains of social life. A past is not a past if it exists only as ‘things inside our heads’ (Fentress and Wickham 1992: 1). To matter socially and culturally, a past must be ‘outside’. History books and biographies, films and photographs, retro songs and folk festivals, museums and memorials exemplify some of the sites of cultural recollection and representation of pastness. Rather than ‘seeking where memories are preserved in [the] brain or in some nook of [the] mind’ (Halbwachs 1992: 38), anthropologists look for their concrete cultural manifestations.

In ethnographic research, reminiscences become particularly interesting when they are represented in social interaction and are made accessible to the senses. Otherwise put, memory becomes socially alive and meaningful when actors can see, hear, or even touch, smell and taste it (see descriptions of the Bunker performance below). As a ‘dramatizing’ event (Myerhoff 1996: 397) that usually activates and engages many senses simultaneously, performance constitutes an effective site for animating the past and putting it on public display. According to Paul Connerton (1989: 5), recollection and performative acts are especially intimately interconnected: ‘if there is such a thing as social memory . . . we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies; but commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative’.

Distancing myself from theorists who see all social and cultural exchanges as constituted through expressive performative practice – Erving Goffman (1959) and other symbolic interactionists come to mind here – in this essay I take performance to be an intentionally enacted, purposeful social event unfolding in space and time that is marked off from habituated routines of daily social life (cf. Diamond 1996, McAllister 2006, Shieffelin 1985, 2005). I do not see all of social life as a theatre where actors wear masks and costumes and perform their selves as they interact with different others. To qualify as performance, a particular discourse or practice must be imbued with symbolism and charged with ‘extraordinary intensity and heightened significance’ (Fabian 1990: 16). Otherwise put, a performance must contain the betwixt and between (or liminal) dimension of ‘time out of time’ spent in a place located away from quotidian routes and routines. Besides, performative events usually are intended for others to see, that is, they address an audience (albeit the audience and performers sometimes coincide). A theatrical rendition of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, a Catholic mass, a Japanese tea-drinking ceremony, a gift-opening rite at a Christmas party

and a hockey game are some of the instances of what I would recognize as performance. In Victor Turner's (1988) terms, among key identifying features of performance are 'anti-structure' and reflexivity. An efficacious performance disrupts the patterned flow of the everyday ('structure'), provoking a critical reflection on and re-examination of social reality, whether it be past or present. Particularly powerful performances engender not only reflection but also action – they move participants to question and even remake that reality (cf. Bell 1997: 73).⁴

Because commemorative performances usually dramatize the past by orchestrating at once several senses (through a kind of synaesthesia, we may say), they are well equipped for dislodging memory from the confines of the mind and making it socially present 'outside'. Because recall in performance is multi-sensed, so to speak, it is also always embodied. Any performance is both a sensuous and bodily or somatic act. One is hardly conceivable without the other. As Lassiter (2002: 140) has observed, performed memory is 'a process of consciousness enacted, felt, and made real in the body' (cf. Climo and Cattel 2002, Connerton 1989, Diamond 1996).

Commemorative performance and its constitutive components interest me not as a static text to be seen and 'read' through interpretive analysis but as a dynamic and dramatic memorial process cohering around 'the cultural sentience of the body' (Stoller 1995:7). Without wanting to dismiss the dominant visualist and textualist paradigms as being of little analytical use, I call for a more somatic, so to speak, and sensuous perspective in the study of commemorative performance. Otherwise put, my approach is largely phenomenological, one that seeks to emphasize bodily modes of re-collecting, re-presenting and knowing the past (cf. Howes 1991: 3). To gain a deeper understanding of how these modes work, we need to be mindful of the broader social and historical contexts in which they unfold. 'All performance . . . is situated, enacted, and rendered meaningful within socially [and historically] defined situational contexts' (Bauman 1992: 46).

For an ethnographer interested in memory, commemorative performance is a particularly rich and rewarding site of investigation not only because of the wealth of the expressive symbolic media it mobilizes, but also because of its temporal reference to the past. Performances of this genre are about re-mem-bering, re-making, re-constructing and re-presenting, where the prefix 're-', meaning 'back, again, anew', acknowledges previously existing visual forms, discourse and practices (Diamond 1996: 2). To be sure, the lexicon of 're-' may be important in discussion of commemorative performances. But that is not the whole story. These social events can also dis-member, un-make, de-construct and mis-represent the past, as we shall see below. They are not merely about 're-'.

As mentioned, commemorative performances (as any other performance for that matter) are sensuous and somatic acts that implicate participants' senses and their bodies, enabling them actively to engage with the past as social agents. Writing about cultural performance more generally, Turner (1988: 24) has observed that it 'represent[s] the eye through which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting "designs for living"'. In performances that take commemoration as their principal organizing theme, such 'sketching' concerns life's 'designs' both in the past and in the present. It is therefore essential that in our investigations of social recall we pay close attention to ways in which memory comments on times gone by and current. We should not forget to interrogate remembrance as a kind of social knowledge about life lived then and now. Memory makes sense when studied in and as history.

Performances are usually scripted social events but they never reproduce the script to the letter. Reproduction does not equal mere replication. No performance is enacted the same way twice. These events always leave room for interpretation, invention and improvisational 'sketching'. They may be about embodied representation but they are also about contestation.

Performances can be structured and circumscribed within the parameters of space and time but they are never completely 'fixed' (cf. Myerhoff 1996). They are emergent and contingent social occasions that often run the risk of slipping, tripping and even failing – 'there is always something aesthetically and/or practically at stake' (Schieffelin 2005: 129). Performances that explicitly engage with the past constitute especially fruitful settings in which to examine how memory slips, trips, or fails altogether, as well as how it reconstitutes and reasserts itself.

The underground space of the Bunker, or The House of Creativity as it was known during the Soviet era, and its 'survival drama' afford a productive ethnographic locus in which to explore such features of memory work in performance. The 'drama' enacted at this *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989) along with the commentary of its participants provide valuable material for a critical discussion of nostalgia and remembrance more generally after socialism.

'The House of Creativity': Dead and Alive

Constructed on the orders of Leonid Brezhnev's apparatchiks during the Cold War, the Bunker was a top-secret strategic object known by its code name the House of Creativity.⁵ Hiding behind the ironic misnomer – the austere, clandestine House was anything but creative – was an underground

structure of steel and concrete comprised of an intricate maze of windowless hallways and chambers, two levels deep and 8,200 square feet in size. The Bunker was built as a back-up radio and television station, engineered to withstand the blast of a nuclear bomb whose launch by capitalist America, the Kremlin's ideological arch rival, was seen as highly possible. Completed in 1985, shortly before Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* came into effect, the Bunker was equipped with Soviet state-of-the-art communication technology, had a direct line to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, contained autonomous systems of electrical power and heating, and permanently employed a dozen or so maintenance and security personnel, most of whom lived in an apartment block located within the Bunker's perimeter.

During the military crackdown on Lithuania's independence movement, *Sąjūdis*, in January 1991, Moscow sent its elite troops to the House of Creativity, believing that the leaders of the movement had used the broadcast centre to mobilize the nation against the communist authorities. In fact, the 'official' radio and television centre located in downtown Vilnius was used for this purpose. The troops stayed in the Bunker for several weeks, until the supplies of food and cigarettes ran out. Gone with the elite troops was also most of the communication equipment – dismantled, looted, damaged. According to Raimundas Dabužinskas, who was employed as a caretaker at the Bunker at the time, the same troops took part in the bloody confrontation with unarmed protestors on the streets of Vilnius on 13 January 1991, a violent event that left fourteen civilians dead and 164 injured.⁶

The Bunker was abandoned in the autumn of 1991, and two years later the Red Army withdrew from Lithuania, by then an independent ex-Soviet nation. Empty and desolate, the House of Creativity languished submerged in the ground until the Prison Department, in 1996, attempted to convert it into a high-security jail. The endeavour was unsuccessful, and the Bunker was forgotten for an entire decade. It began to stir again in 2007 when its underground spaces were transformed into a museum of socialism – a project conceived by Rūta Vanagaitė, an independent curator and producer, and financially supported by the Cultural Commission of the European Union.⁷

As 'European money' flowed, the defunct House of Creativity filled with countless Soviet-era artefacts collected in Lithuania, Russia and Belarus, which were used to reconstruct 'typical' interiors of a doctor's office, polyclinic, high-school classroom, general store, dining room of communist nomenklatura, canteen for 'ordinary' people, detoxification cell, KGB interrogation chamber, Lenin's Room and so forth. Some of the artefacts on display at the museum were purchased in flea markets, others were donated

by individuals looking to rid their private spaces of Soviet ‘junk’. The Bunker truly came to life after its displays became sites for interactive three-hour performances known as ‘survival drama’, intended to give visitors a taste of the ‘harsh’ daily life in the USSR.⁸ Today, for 75 litas (approximately \$31 US) the Bunker offers scheduled interactive performances throughout the year and accommodates special requests from groups and individuals interested in visiting the museum on their time. The Bunker’s cavernous underground space can also be rented for birthday celebrations, prenuptial stag parties, anniversaries and *cementovkės*.⁹

Layered with temporal referents to Lithuania’s recent Soviet history – the Cold War, the perestroika years, the time of surging mobilization for national independence – the Bunker is a place that both commemorates and condemns socialism. It is a metaphoric grave where Marxist-Leninist legacy, along with its terror, squalor and despair, lies dead and buried. This grim grave – paradoxically – is also a locus where socialism lives on as a setting of post-socialist consumption, entertainment and leisurely exploration. A betwixt-and-between place par excellence, today the Bunker deals in fun and fear, pleasure and pain, creativity and control – ‘a stock in trade of amusement parks’ (Wallace 1989: 163). A memorial locus of ‘pseudo menaces’ expressed through contrasting yet complementary extremes, it is a liminal zone of ‘dark tourism’, a zone out of ordinary time and place.¹⁰

I now return to the former House of Creativity for a more ethnographic and phenomenological exploration of the ‘survival drama’ – a performance of socialist remembrance and forgetting.

‘Dreadful Socialism’ as Our History

‘Next!’ the KGB interrogator exclaimed and took a long drag on his smouldering cigarette. Then he turned the dusty shade of the table lamp towards us, fully exposing its glaring light bulb. Dovilė cautiously stepped forward, approached his desk and sat down on the metal chair riveted to the cement floor. We stood motionless behind her in a straight line. His sagging face covered in grey stubble, cigarette ashes strewn on his well-worn jacket, the interrogator blurted out the first question:

‘Name?’

‘Dovilė Mockutė.’

‘Where do you work?’

‘At a bank.’

‘Do you know where you are?’

‘In the Bunker.’
 ‘What bunker?’
 ‘Soviet bunker . . .’
 ‘Any relatives abroad?’
 ‘Yes.’
 ‘What?’

The exchange of choppy questions and answers continued in rapid succession for several more minutes, until Dovilė shifted uneasily in her chair, and cracked a smile. ‘I’ll show you smiling; I’ll show you joking! . . .’ the KGB apparatchik, visibly irritated, yelled at Dovilė, ‘suspected’ of being a ‘people’s enemy’ involved in anti-state activities. ‘Sing the Soviet anthem, sing it, can’t you hear me!’ he shouted, handing Dovilė a piece of paper with hand-scribbled lyrics of the anthem. Then he turned on the tape recorder placed on his desk, and the interrogation room filled with voices of a male choir solemnly singing in Russian: ‘*Soyuz nerushimyi respublik svobodnykh splotila navyeki Velikaya Rus!* . . .’¹¹ ‘Everyone sing, don’t just stand there . . . Aren’t you Soviet citizens?’ the agitated interrogator now screamed at the top of his lungs, banging his fist on the desk. Startled by the singing and commotion in the interrogation room, Amur, the guard dog, began to bark again. The Bunker was reverberating with a deafening cacophony.

At lunch, Dovilė, her friend Marija and I sat together. Above us, a banner extending the length of the wall proclaimed in Russian: ‘Proletarians of all countries, unite!’ On the long table covered in red cloth, there sat our Soviet lunch: a watery wiener, a slice of bread and a cookie; lukewarm tea was served in a crudely manufactured standard-issue glass, popularly known as *granyonnyi*, or ‘the edgy one’. After I introduced myself to Dovilė and her friend, we began to chat about our experience in the Bunker.

Both born in the mid-1980s and with childhood memories of daily life in Gorbachev’s ‘late socialism’, my interlocutors found the ‘survival drama’ instructive and illuminating, if unnerving. ‘The noise, the [KGB] interrogation, the ordering around, the icky food, the smell, the lights . . . Socialism! Dreadful!’ Dovilė concluded. ‘But it’s our history . . . We need to know it . . .’ ‘It’s important to remember it. Paganism, the battle of Žalgiris, tsarism, gulags, and KGB are all our past’, Marija concurred.¹² ‘Shut up!’ the guard exclaimed, overhearing our brazen conversation that broke the Bunker rules of conduct. Abruptly silenced, we turned back to our lunch.

I approached Dovilė and Marija again after we resurfaced from the Bunker – disoriented, delighted to see the blue sky above us. Dovilė pulled out a mobile phone from her purse and called her father to let him know that the ‘drama’ was over and that she had ‘survived’ it. An hour or so

later, Dovilė's father, Šarūnas, parked his shiny Mazda outside the fenced perimeter of the Bunker grounds and came to greet us. Clad in tight-fitting blue Levis and a Lacoste tee-shirt, a high-ranking executive at an insurance company in his fifties, Šarūnas did not approve of his daughter's visit to the museum of socialism and was quite incredulous when I told him about my research interests. 'You study how people remember socialism? Really?' he asked in disbelief. 'We need to move away from all this . . . I will never go to see this [Bunker]. History this, history that . . . Enough already! Let's think about the present, so much to do *now*.'

Dovilė's story might seem 'atypical'. In studies of post-socialist memory it is usually the older generations, persons who lived most of their adult lives under communist rule, who invoke it as a biographical and historical past worthy of remembering, in negative or positive terms (see, for instance, Klumbytė 2009, Skultans 1998). Young people are commonly discussed as actors who see little or no value in recollecting Marxist-Leninist history. In the case at hand, however, it is someone born during the 'late socialism' of the 1980s who insists on commemorating it as a significant component of 'our history'. For Dovilė and her friend Marija, to know this history well, and to display that knowledge to others, is to make claims of belonging to the imagined community of the nation (Anderson 1995) and to assert one's patriotic allegiance to it. Such claims also speak to the moral imperative to remember; they concern an obligation and responsibility to recall the national past (Blustein 2008: 15).

Both in their twenties, the two women represent a growing cohort of young Lithuanians who, in response to encroaching transnationalism and globalization, look for ways to reproduce and reinforce their national identities and loyalties (see Mantas's story below).¹³ Always containing many pasts, history is an invaluable symbolic resource in this endeavour. Dovilė's and Marija's remembrance of socialism, I suggest, is nationalist. They recall and discursively appropriate the socialist past – as the possessive pronoun 'our' suggests – as a significant constituent component in the nation's historical narrative. Their memorial engagement with the Soviet era is hardly suggestive of nostalgia.

The Dentist's Drill and Mnemonic Search

'When was your last check-up?' a Russian-speaking female actor impersonating a dentist clad in a white coat and oversize cylindrical hat asked Mantas, a shy, lanky young man. 'Six months ago . . . My teeth are fine, healthy', he responded promptly in Lithuanian. 'I'll determine how fine

they are, not you . . . Sit in the chair! The chair, I said!’ As Mantas slowly lowered himself into the wobbly reclining chair, the dentist powered up the drill and shone the overhead light into his mouth. Clutching the arm-rests tightly, Mantas was shaking. ‘Open wide!’, the doctor shrieked as she tried to poke the drill into his mouth, feigning a dental procedure. Several of Mantas’s fellow participants stood in the doorway of the dental office, watching anxiously. Suddenly Mantas pushed the zealous Soviet dentist aside and jumped out of the reclining chair. ‘Enough, little woman!’ (*Užteks, moteriške!*), he protested, heading towards the door, visibly upset: ‘What are you doing, citizen?’, the appalled medic exclaimed in Russian. ‘You signed the Confirmation [see the opening lines above] . . . Do what you are told, not what you please – or face the consequences!’, she threatened, the drill still abuzz in her right hand.

I met with Mantas in a stylish café in the Old Town of Vilnius several days after our visit to the Bunker. ‘How are your teeth?’ I asked. ‘All of them fell out, not surprisingly . . .’, he replied and laughed. A law student in his early twenties, born in 1989, Mantas found the Bunker ‘interesting’, albeit the performance, in his view, was somewhat over the top. Despite his run-in with the dentist, he appreciated the interactive component of the underground ‘drama’, although he noted that the boundaries between the performance and the audience could have been better respected. Because Mantas – unlike Dovilė who ‘had relatives abroad’ and was not ‘serious’ – answered the KGB interrogator’s questions to his satisfaction, he was almost ‘recruited’ to the Soviet secret police.

With virtually no experience of the ‘actually existing socialism’ and with only vague recollections of the fall of the USSR, Mantas had a keen interest in the years of communist rule, an interest fuelled by the many stories told and retold by his maternal grandmother. Identified as a socially pernicious ‘bourgeois element’ by the Soviet Lithuanian state in 1949, she and her husband, well-to-do farmers from northern Lithuania, were exiled to a village in the Irkutsk region.¹⁴ Mantas’s mother was born in Siberia shortly after her father died in a logging accident. In 1958, his grandmother and mother, still an infant at the time, returned to Lithuania from the forced exile. As we sipped coffee, Lady Gaga’s latest hit blasting in the background, Mantas recounted:

My grandmother still talks and talks about Siberia . . . about how much they suffered there: about the food-ration cards, medicinal herbs, folk songs, backbreaking work in the snow-bound forests, Arctic cold during the long winter, pesky mosquitoes in the summer, clandestine Catholic baptisms, weddings, and funerals . . . She shows us photos, illegal hand-written

newsletters . . . At times it feels that I myself have gone through Siberia (*per Sibira perėjau*). When my granny saw the Bunker on TV, she said that I should go and get a taste of Soviet life for myself . . . She was growing tired of telling stories about the exile.

For Mantas, the Bunker offered a glimpse of the ‘harsh’ life in Soviet Lithuania and generated a slew of new questions about socialism. He wanted better to comprehend how the state could be so violent towards its own citizens, why they did not rebel against its injustice and brutality, why his grandparents were deported but other farmers were not. He emphasized several times that it was his responsibility to understand this as a Lithuanian (cf. Dovilė’s and Marija’s remarks above). At the time of our interview, Mantas was planning to join a ‘patriotic’ study tour, known as ‘Mission Siberia’, offering young Lithuanians a more hands-on, in situ experience of the history of Stalin’s gulags. He did not expect ever to find his grandfather’s grave but hoped to get ‘at least a bit closer to him’.

Mantas’s story instantiates one of the paradoxical features of social memory: one need not experience a particular past to remember it. Inherently intersubjective and dialogical, social memory works well vicariously, so to speak, via other persons’ recollections and through public representations of history (performative enactments of pastness are especially effective in this regard). One can remember past events without ever being part of them. His grandmother’s narratives depicting daily life in Siberian labour camps, complemented by the Bunker performance, makes the socialist past a vivid ‘memory’ in his consciousness. Indeed so vivid that at times it seems to Mantas that he had ‘gone through Siberia’ himself. His remembrance is both biographical and historical, meshing reminiscences of personal daily experiences in Siberia with memories of national trauma and suffering. Motivating him in this memorial pursuit is not nostalgia but a desire to piece together a familial past that was shaped by socialism in profound existential ways. Mantas’s vicarious memories of the Soviet past is a kind of quest, pursuit, or search of pastness – a Proustian *recherche* of a lost time – rather than a restoration of, or nostalgic reconnection with it. Placing himself in the narrative of the nation’s destiny, Mantas seeks to transform remembrance of catastrophic rupture into reproductive continuity and in doing so makes a ‘cosmological argument’ linking the familial, intergenerational and national, and more expansively, connecting the dead and the living. To paraphrase Bruce Kapferer (2012: 69), remembrance of state-inflicted ‘evil’, paradoxically, becomes a possibility for imagining ontological coherence and order as a person and member of the nation (Casey 2000: 15, Huyssen 1995: 3).¹⁵

Mantas's recollection can also be seen as 'pragmatic' in that it is purposefully mobilized to accomplish specific tasks (Lambek 1996: 240). He strives to 'remember' socialism in order to know his family's life history and, through it, himself. Such knowing in turn defines him as a Lithuanian. Not unlike in the case of Dovilė and Marija, Mantas's memories of the Soviet past link up with issues of national identification and belonging. They point to 'the . . . reciprocal relations between the social and the intimate, and the centrality of memory . . . to creative refashioning of the self' (Antze and Lambek 1996: xx).

Shopping Soviet Style and the Memory of 'Bygones'

'Available today are shampoo from the GDR, condensed milk, Vietnamese lip balm; sardines, women's underwear, dry fish, instant Indian coffee are also available . . . We might get toilet paper next week. Sausage can be purchased, but only 300 grams per customer . . .' a grouchy clerk at the variety store (he was also the guard who conducted the inspection at the beginning of the show) was informing a crowd of restless shoppers matter-of-factly. When they surged forward in an attempt to take a closer look at the half-empty shelves, the clerk intoned: 'Citizens, back up . . . Don't lean on the counter, we'll call the militia . . . you're breaking social order.' Holding onto his wife's arm, one frustrated shopper, Pranas, a stocky, balding man in his early seventies, exclaimed in heavily accented Russian: '*Stolichnaya* [vodka]? . . . Available?' 'Let's see . . . Man, come round to the back door [of the store]. We'll discuss it there,' the clerk urged Pranas, and rubbed his thumb against his index finger energetically, hinting that vodka was available, provided the customer was willing to pay for it more than its set retail price.

The clever clerk was asking for a bribe. Pranas, taken aback, exclaimed: 'That's not how it was! No one asked for bribes so openly back then. You guys, don't remember or what?' he challenged the actor impersonating the clerk. A nervous laughter swept through the store. The 'drama' was momentarily suspended, its authenticity in question. The performance 'slipped' from the past into the present; the past became the present. Its script disrupted in a brief moment of contestation, the show transformed into a show-down. In an attempt to repair the stalled performance, an elderly woman at the back of the store exclaimed: 'They showed it right . . . It was sometimes even that open. Perhaps you never took or gave bribes?', she now challenged Pranas. His wife, Genutė, weighed in with an objection: 'This is not an accurate enactment!' (*netiksliai suvaidinta*). In no time the escalating dispute was

silenced by the self-important store clerk. We moved on to Lenin's Room, back to the USSR.

On that hot July day, I did not have a chance to interview my fellow 'Soviet shoppers' – Pranas and Genutė – after the show, as they rushed back to their summer cottage (*sodas*), just several kilometres down the road from the Bunker, where a wilting kitchen garden was awaiting a good watering. 'Call us!' Genutė urged me, writing down her mobile phone number in my day book.

Two weeks later, Genutė, Pranas and I sat under a sprawling apple tree at their *sodas*. In the kitchen garden, a water sprinkler was stuttering, squeezed in between lush lettuce, dill, potatoes and beets – staples of their suburban subsistence economy. Pranas was pouring beer into plastic tumblers lined up on a folding table. 'To help memory flow better . . . it's a serious matter', he explained. Pranas and Genutė were pensioners. In the 1960s they met at a state-run footwear factory in Vilnius, where they worked for over thirty years. Their only son, a recent economic émigré, lived with his family in Ireland.

My hosts told me that they were reluctant to spend a whole afternoon away from their peaceful cottage, enduring 'some survival drama'. But the July day was oppressively hot and the Bunker, a short ride away through the forest, beckoned with its cool, underground spaces. It surely provided some respite from the heat, but the 'drama' was a disappointment, as they told me repeatedly. The couple was critical of the Bunker performance, finding its dramatized representations of daily socialist life inaccurate and exaggerated. Genutė stated:

What kind of spectacle is this? An affectation of a show . . . [*išsidirbinėjimas*]. We spent a heap of money [150 lt; approx \$62 US] to see this! And they didn't even get it right . . . Ridiculous! [*Juokinga!*]¹⁶ Those who did not go against the authorities under the Russians did not see such scary, spooky stuff . . . Life then was hard but we lived it, raised our son . . . managed with what we had. We had family, friends, the workers' collective . . . we knew how to 'spin' [*suktis*].¹⁷ If you knew how to work the system, if you were strong, you did OK. They [authorities] pulled the wool over our eyes [*mulkino*], we knew that . . . It was not easy, I don't want it back. Let bygones be bygones . . . [*kaiip buvo, taip buvo*].

Pranas lamented that as retirees on meagre pensions that added up to 1200 litas per month (approximately \$490 US) between them, they struggled, but they now lived in 'a free Lithuania, without the Russians . . . Better'. 'Perhaps too much freedom! Look how many of us have emigrated to the West. We lost our son, grandson. They are now "Irish", imagine! But it's better for them there I think . . . The son works as a roofer, sends us some money occasionally . . . We constantly think about how it is for them there,

how it will be,' Pranas stated, his fourth beer glass already empty. He also added that grocery stores were now full, unlike 'back then'. Although he and his wife could afford only basic necessities for daily use, he felt 'good' seeing that it was no longer as in the Bunker variety store. For him, the perceived consumer abundance, albeit much of it off limits, was an indication of Lithuania's new-found prosperity and positive post-socialist change.

Pranas and Genutė remembered socialism as a biographical past shaped by the invasive Soviet state. In their retrospection this past is recalled not as a good life but as a life lived well – with dignity, pride, a sense of purpose, with social savvy and skill. Both regarded themselves as successful citizens of socialism because they knew how to 'spin' their way through it, seeing all the while its fakeness or 'inauthenticity' as a sociopolitical and economic order. Effective 'spinning' required a great deal of cultural knowledge, as well as substantial investment in social networks and their constitutive informal contracts (family, friends, the workers' collective), as sites for storing and reproducing valued social capital. It is this knowledge of how socialism worked, or more precisely, how people positioned themselves in, and how *they* worked, socialism that Pranas questions at the Bunker store: 'No one asked for bribes so openly back then,' he critiqued the standoffish clerk. It was not so 'scary, spooky', Genutė stated, throwing the authenticity of the performance into question. Both critique the performance not as a *re-* but as *mis-*representation and, drawing on their knowledge of socialism, rewrite its script. Pranas and Genutė's narrative is both memorial and moral – one that recounts a story about a struggle in, and competent mastering of, a system.

Again, I am reluctant to conceptualize my interlocutors' memorial commentary as nostalgia. Provoked by the Bunker performance, and subsequently prodded by my interview questions, my informants recall the Soviet-era vividly but express no yearning for it. Although for both socialism was once a metaphoric 'home' where they strove (and succeeded) to live well in the face of pervasive economic and social constraints imposed by the state, they conveyed no desire to return to it. Instead of unproblematically 'nostalgifying' such reminiscences, I propose to think of them as memory of 'bygones' (cf. Genutė's phrase cited above: *kaip buvo, taip buvo*). Such memory is not about going back and metaphorically reinhabiting a particular idealized past, but about a past once inhabited and now gone. This past is retrieved without the affective entailments of 'homecoming' that inform nostalgic recollections. The memorial relationship with this past is one of temporal distancing rather than approaching, of rupture rather than continuity. Recall Šarūnas's stance towards the Soviet era as 'forgettable' or 'unmemorable' biography and history, and his insistence on the need to focus on the present. While for Pranas and Genutė that present is about

their pitiful pensions, for Šarūnas, a successful insurance company executive, it is about promise of profits.

Pranas and Genutė's principal concern is the neoliberal and increasingly transnational present they inhabit and negotiate in 'free' Lithuania today, some two decades after socialism's demise: making ends meet as impoverished pensioners, tending to their kitchen garden as an important seasonal source of home-grown nourishment, thinking about 'how it is and how it will be' with their son and his family who emigrated to Ireland in search of employment. For these retirees, socialism is more of an afterthought, or 'after-memory', so to speak – a life once lived and decidedly gone, if not entirely forgotten.

By Way of Conclusion

Taking the sensuous performance of the *1984: Survival Drama* at the Bunker as its principal ethnographic site, this essay has examined one of many representations of Lithuania's Soviet past at the current moment of post-socialist change – a moment in the nation's history informed by futuristic visions of 'Europe' and neoliberal modernity. Made present in different cultural forms, socialist recollections represent only one memory in the multi-voiced (or heteroglossic) mnemoscape of contemporary Lithuania. In the public domain, socialist remembrance coexists and competes with reminiscences of other, more distant pasts: 'paganism, Žalgiris, tsarism, gulags . . .', to cite Marija again.

I have attempted to show that commemorative performance as an embodied and sensuous act constitutes a productive 'dramatizing' event for examining how memory is externalized, displayed, disputed and reconfigured by its participants. Although scripted and locked in space and time, commemorative performance – as a dynamic, processual and interactive social occasion – can engender rupture and 'slippage'. Such moments of malfunction are especially conducive to examining how recollections of a given past are negotiated and contested (recall Pranas and Genutė's questioning of the representation of bribing practices in the Soviet command economy of shortage).

In an effort to argue for a more thoughtful and nuanced theorizing of remembrance of the socialist past, throughout this essay I have been disinclined to conceptualize my interlocutors' engagements with that past in terms of nostalgia. I have referred to their recollections as *recherche*, proposed to think of them as pragmatic recollection (Dovilė, Marija, Mantas), and tentatively termed them as memory of 'bygones' (Pranas and Genutė), all the while remaining reluctant to 'nostalgify' them. It has not been my intent

to consign nostalgia to the dustbin of analytically useless concepts – much socialist remembering can certainly be identified and insightfully investigated as nostalgic. Rather I have suggested that nostalgia is in need of a good refinement, sharpening and deconstructing, procedures that would help us move away from totalizing arguments, neat dualisms and tidy typologies.

As Pranas stated, remembering socialism is ‘a serious matter’, but it is also a complicated one – selective, strategic, multi-directional and often-times messy. To be sure, not everyone is engaging with this past. Some of my interlocutors position themselves firmly in the present (recall Šarūnas’s dismissive remarks regarding history; cf. Pranas’s and Genutė’s comments) and see little or no social value in recollecting socialism or indeed any other period in the nation’s history. *Now*, not *then*, is the principal referent in their temporal anchoring. Others, however, view socialist recall as a significant cognitive and moral resource for biographical and national self constitution (notably Mantas’s story).

I have used the Bunker as a *lieu de mémoire* through which to inquire into remembering and forgetting of socialism in contemporary Lithuania. Yet this *lieu* is not merely about memory, amnesia and their associated complications. A popular destination of ‘dark tourism’, the former House of Creativity and its sensuous show are also about what can be called memorial entertainment, or perhaps more pithily, mnemotainment. The Bunker experience is ‘mnemotaining’ not only because of its dramatic performance of socialism as packaged and commercialized history, but also because of the setting in which the drama unfolds. In other words, the Bunker is intriguing as a performing place eliciting a wide range of responses from those who experience it (Coleman and Crang 2007: 10).

Finally, reinvigorated remembrance of the era of communist rule in Lithuania, as in many other locales of the former Soviet bloc, suggests that the category ‘post-socialist’ continues to make sense (Humphrey 2002). Temporally we may conceptualize Eastern Europe in terms of *post-* or *after* socialism, but the Marxist-Leninist era is not exactly *past* because it is still (or again) very present in different domains of social life. Socialism is at once in and out, going and gone, dead and alive – persisting in an ambiguous interplay of remembrance and amnesia.

Notes

1. The reference is, of course, to *1984*, George Orwell’s science-fiction novel of dark satire, published in 1949, in which he describes how an authoritarian, invasive state comes to dominate and control the daily lives of its citizens.

2. For a more detailed treatment of such sites of socialist memory, see Lankauskas 2006. The Bunker has been recently discussed in Klumbytė 2009: 92–96. Yet another interactive site commemorating Soviet history, a defunct 1960s military base known today as ‘Soviet Spirit: An Exposition of Militarism’, located in northwestern Lithuania, still awaits ethnographic scrutiny; for a video with English subtitles, see <<http://www.zemaitijosnp.lt/en/>> (accessed 14 April 2011).
3. For a helpful discussion of the etymology of the word nostalgia and its different uses through history, see Davis 1979: 1–7.
4. For a thorough and lucid discussion of performance theory in anthropology, as an offshoot of the larger body of the social theory of practice (or praxis), see McAllister 2006: 43–49, 67–80.
5. The phrase refers to a kind of communal retreat intended for seasonal use by Soviet aesthetic elites, such as actors, writers, and visual artists (*kūrybos namai* or *дом творчества* in Russian).
6. See Delfi TV: *Nepapasakota istorija: kas vyko slaptame bunkeryje 1991 m. sausį?* [An Untold Story: What Happened in the Secret Bunker in January 1991?]; <http://tv.delfi.lt/video/nVEEcjC/> (accessed 17 April 2011); on the January events, see also Smith et al. 2002: 111–126.
7. A member of the European Union (EU) since 2004, Lithuania has been a beneficiary of Brussels’ generous funding set aside to promote innovative ‘cultural projects’ (*kultūriniai projektai*) among the Union’s junior members. The establishment of the Bunker museum was part of the broader pan-European initiative of ‘Culture Live’ and ‘Vilnius, the Cultural Capital of Europe, 2009’.
8. The ‘drama’ was directed by Jonas Vaitkus, produced by Rūta Vanagaitė. For video footage of the museum and excerpts of the ‘drama’, see Delfi TV: *Atgal į praeitį: socializmo muziejus po žeme* (I and II) [Back to the Past: An Underground Museum of Socialism, Parts I and II]: <<http://tv.delfi.lt/video/y6714FAQ/>> and <http://tv.delfi.lt/video/5E7kgqOJ/> (accessed 17 April 2011).
9. Borrowed from Russian (*цементовка*), this colloquial word refers to social events that usually entail copious consumption of food and alcohol, and are meant to improve sociability and bonding (‘cementing’) among friends, classmates, colleagues, or co-workers.
10. On significance of liminality in tourist experience, see Tucker 2002.
11. The first lines of the Soviet anthem: ‘The indestructible Union of free republics, joined forever by the Great Rus!’
12. In today’s Lithuania, ‘the pagan times’ are recalled by some – in primordialist, essentializing terms – as a timeless era of harmonious and prosperous social life. Lithuania was among the last in Europe to convert to Christianity, in 1386. The battle of Žalgiris, or Grūnėwald, is remembered today with considerable national pride as a military event where the joint army of the Lithuanian-Polish state defeated the Christianizing Teutonic order in 1410. The tsarist period (1795–1918) is usually recollected as a time of Russia’s colonial domination and oppression.

13. For a more detailed discussion of the emergence of Lithuanian ‘neo-nationalism’ among younger generations, see Lankauskas 2010.
14. Located in south-central Siberia, north of the Mongolian-Russian border, the Irkutsk region was notorious for its political prisons and camps of punitive hard labour, or gulags. Between 1944 and 1953, some 118,000 Lithuanians were deported to Siberia as political or ideological ‘enemies’ of the Moscow regime (Rudienė and Juozevičiūtė 2009).
15. For a collection of essays examining the intersection of historical events, memory and kinship, see Carsten 2007 and Skultans 1998.
16. Marx’s famous dictum – history repeats itself as farce – comes to mind here.
17. *Suktis*, or ‘spinning’, refers to one’s resourcefulness to make do with limited material means in the command economy of shortage. Extensive use of social networks of family members, friends, and co-workers was key for successful ‘spinning’ – a kind of habitus, in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, combining structure and action in mutually reinforcing ways. This practice was grounded in a system of dispositions, which ‘designate[d] a way of being, . . . a habitual state . . . , a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination’ (1989: 214).

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