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Remembering Communism – Making Sense of Post-Communism. An Analysis of Discursive Strategies in Lithuanian Textbooks

In the following paper I will present some preliminary thoughts I have developed during one year of research on post-soviet history teachers and their role as an interface between individual and collective memory of the communist past. I will thereby pursue a four-fold agenda.

- In the first step, I would like to explore some of the central challenges facing memory research today, which entails casting a somewhat critical look on the approaches which currently dominate.
- In the second step, I will try to spell out what that could mean for memory studies on communism pointing mainly to the manifold tensions and contradictions involved in most post-socialist societies' endeavour to come to terms with that particular kind of past.
- In the third step, I will introduce history textbooks as a valuable though highly under-studied source of memory research. I will do so by elaborating on the hybrid nature of textbooks which are simultaneously two rather contradictory things. On the one hand, they are something like a tool for creating a coherent memory of the past. But on the other hand, they also as a rule reflect social processes of negotiation and contestation over sensitive issues of remembering.
- In the fourth and final step, I shall illustrate the theoretical and methodological thoughts I have presented so far, with an analysis of a single Lithuanian textbook. To be more precise, I shall look into the discursive strategies which the authors of that specific book applied which integrate the two contradictory strands of remembering communism and of making sense of post-communism into a more or less coherent narrative.

1. An agenda for memory research

Let me start with the question of what an innovative and comprehensive framework for future research on memory could look like. Without doubt, memory studies have been turned into a most productive scientific industry in recent years.[1] A broad range of issues has been covered across a vast geographical spectrum. Social memory has been studied from above and below. Research has been based on a great variety of different sources from written texts, artwork and visual documents to oral acounts, artifacts of the commodity culture and all sorts of practices like rituals of commemoration, festivals or monument building. Against the backdrop of these

1 For excelent overviews over reserch on memory cf. Erll (2005) and Olick/Robbins (1998).

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achievements, the task to define new and challenging horizons for future inquiries is by no means simple or trivial. As a rule, scholarly progress starts with a critical reappraisal of what has been done so far. When it comes to memory studies in general and to memory studies on Eastern Europe in particular, it is mainly one crucial weakness which comes to my mind as a point of departure for defining new fields of research. To date, authors frequently offer us rather one-dimensional snap-shots of what might be called memory cultures. At times, these cultures are too readily identified with one more or less dominant trend. Most prominently this is to be seen in efforts to come up with a typology of different types of post-socialist memory cultures (Troebst 2005). The distinctive features of these cultures are as a rule perceived to result from diverging attitudes towards communism. The main line of distinction is thus drawn between societies which are said to have reached a consensus on rejecting communism as an expression of foreign rule on the one hand, and societies which still tend to ascribe at least some positive achievements to the communist system on the other hand. In between these two extreme poles we find societies which are said to be either polarized or ambivalent with regard to an assessment of the communist past. Although these findings are without doubt based on solid evidence, my concern is that they prevent us from seeing other relevant aspects. Research that aims to categorize whole memory cultures according to binary oppositions will tend to emphasize coherence at the expense of ambivalences and tensions.

Perhaps now is the time to add slightly more complexity to these classifications, and to pose a new generation of potentially fruitful questions. It seems to me there can be no single memory culture nor can there be a single act of remembering which can escape tensions between rather contradictory experiences. In this sense, managing incoherence becomes the first and most important task in each act of rememberence. In other words, the aim to impose coherence on a rather inoherent past is what actually motivates memory work.[2] We can observe that on the level of the individual self as well as on the level of various collectives from social groups to whole nations. Both, individuals and social groups are faced with the difficult task of holding together the diversity of life experience. Both have to integrate the different identities they assumed under varying circumstances into a coherent image of themselves. Remembering is thus always a reaction to a crisis triggered by a vague feeling of inconsistency and discontinuity.[3] I guess when dealing with memory cultures we have to account for at least two different sources of tensions:

2 Cf. the groundbreaking work of Linde (1993) on the efforts of individual to integrate their multi-layered and at times rather contradictory past into a coherent account of their life.

3 Cf. the notion of "biographical work" as coined by Rosenthal in her work on the costruction of biographical narratives of remebering., a concept which can be easily applied to the memory work of social collectives like nations as well.

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Firstly, all cultures of memory consist of different layers. Since Jan Assmann (1988 and 1992) and his groundbreaking work we normally distinguish between cultural, communicative and individual memory. Although manifestations of memory produced on each of these layers tend to be rather different in terms of the events that are perceived to be relevant as well as with regard to the meaning ascribed to theses events, they nevertheless inevitably affect each other.[4] Individual acts of remembering can not but rely on socially acceptable plot structures and on institutionalized criteria of relevance. To illustrate my point very briefly: Imagine a person who relates his or her life story. He or she will always do so with an eye on the social expectations of significant others. For the simple reason of reaching a mutual understanding that things could not have been different, he or she will recollect his or her past experience in a way that does not run counter to social norms. At the same time, various forms of social memory can only hope to become meaningful, if they resonate with the experience of those, whose memory they want to structure.

Instead of measuring the distance between different versions of the past or defining the degree and depth of social controversies on sensitive issues, the task of the day should thus be to investigate the dynamics of interaction between these different layers. In other words, we should be engaged with looking for the traces which narratives of memory articulated on one layer have left on narratives circulating on other layers. In a word, we should concentrate on those nodal points[5] which bind these sometimes competing narratives together.

Secondly, in the age of globalization all cultures of memories though heavily shaped by the nation state and its agencies are located in what Rudolf Stichweh (2000) calls global spaces of relevance. Versions of the past laying claim to a hegemonic position in nation state societies are thus always coined and articulated in the more or less reflexive knowledge that things may be perceived and assessed differently in other local spaces. Although national discourses may opt to openly reject concepts and ideas travelling in the trans-national spaces which emerge as a consequence of mutual observation these ideas and concepts will explicitly or implicitly serve as frames of reference in the attempt to produce a past not only meaningful to a national audience but related to global discourses as well. As ignorance is always punished with disregard, national discourses on memory which do not pay due tribute to global criteria of

4 It was mainly Harald Welzer (2002) who translated the distinction between cultural and communicative memory as elaborated by Assmann into a coherent design for empirical research on the forms of interaction between these two layers of memory.

5 The concept of nodal points isborrowed from the specific brand of discourse analysis as developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantall Mouffe. Cf. Torfing (1999).

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selection, will run the risk of becoming insignificant. And as the less powerful were always forced to pay more attention to what the powerful do than vice versa, we can assume Eastern European discourses on memory to be much more attentive to global standards than Western ones. Moreover we have to take into consideration, that the whole enterprise of constructing post-socialist cultures of memory takes place under the close surveillance of European or global agencies. These agencies are anxious to impose sanctions on every transgression of norms of remembering, which are defined mainly by hegemonic Western discourses.[6] The quest to render visible all the different forces and constraints which exercise an influence on the way the past is remembered and represented, becomes an especially fruitful approach.

To sum up – cultures of memory have always been complex and polyphonic, composed of different voices and shaped by various frames of reference. In the age of globalization this holds true even more so. If we take that seriously, memory research has to unravel this complexity. Each expression or manifestation of remembering, be this a life story account, a novel, a film or a textbook, can thus be turned into a window that opens up to the whole. From each of those sources we can catch a glimpse at the whole memory culture of which it is a part. Thus the processes of negotiation and contestation which are characteristic of that culture and which will inform every act of remembering, will reveal themselves to us. I guess this is in essence what Maurice Halbwachs (1985) actually meant when he said that remembering is always a social act. Dealing with different sorts of memory texts, we should thus strive to identify the traces different discursive streams relevant to the respective society left on them. We should pay attention to the tensions created by these sometimes highly contradictory streams. And last but not least, we should focus on the discursive strategies concrete producers of memory develop in order to handle these tensions.

6 One example would be the International Tas Force for Holocaust Education as a transnational NGO which tries to influence the development of memory cultures by monitoring and evaluationg the representation of the Holocaust.

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2. Remembering Communism and Making sense of Post-Communism

The argument I have sketched out so far leads me to my second point: The question of how and where we may expect those tensions and ambivalences that are characteristic of each memory culture to affect acts of remembering communism. To start with a rather general observation, I guess it is quite evident that the project of remembering communism is likely to cause some difficulties. This has to do mainly with the fact, that remembering always serves a broad range of functions which may turn out to be rather contradictory in the case of communism. Let me briefly look at the classical functions of remembering while paying special attentions to the particular problems involved in making sense of the communist past.

He or she who remembers the past always pursues a more or less hidden agenda. Remembering is never a goal in itself. Recalling the past always aims at coming to terms with the present. The past thus has to be recollected and reordered according to the needs of the present. In the specific case of remembering communism, accomplishing this task might be rather difficult as there are at least two presents competing with each other: the year 1989 and the year 2009. If we take into consideration, that the social mood in almost all post-socialist societies changed drastically in between these years, if we compare the high hopes characteristic of 1989 with the bitter and harsh social realities in 2009, we can easily imagine that the communist past will be recollected quite differently depending on the question of which present we take as a point of departure. To put it differently, the task to create a coherent and at the same time meaningful link between the communist past, the year 1989 and the year 2009, prooves to be highly demanding in terms of reconciling rather contradictory experiences.

To illustrate my point, narratives which choose the year 1989 as a point of reference and which glorify that year as a heroic moment of liberation from national and ideological oppression, will probably end up reconstructing the communist experience as a period of endless suffering, of brutal repression and persecution. But at the same time, they will face some difficulties to integrate the insecurity and unpredictability felt by so many in 2009 into a comprehensive account. To say the least, in terms of managing incoherence such narratives would have to offer an answer to the pressing question of why the dreams dreamt in 1989 failed to materialize. Moreover, they would run the risk that such an explanation may contradict everything that was said before. But narratives which start by giving emphasis to the dark side of the present experienced in 2009 could not escape tension either. We have all come across accounts that are based on contrasting the injust and disturbing social realities of our days with

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a somewhat nostalgic view of the communist past painted in rosy coulors as an almost perfect age of social security and solidarity (Bacon 2003). Such stories inevitably suffer from one crucial shortcomming. Necessarily they have to ignore the unquestionable fact that communism imploded due to its internal weaknesses. Of course one can take rescue in conspiracy theories. With an eye to the notoriously dangerous and evil-minded West, one can blame outsiders for expelling us from the communist paradise. But such an account would do so at the clear expense of scarifying any notion of being capable to independent action.

Besides reconciling past and present, there is still another function memory has to adress, a function which is of special importance to all projects of remembering communism. He or she who remembers always strives to build up his or her own identity,[7] to create a sense of belonging to a community that shares his or her particular version of the past. For obvious reasons, post-socialist societies and individuals living under the post-socialist condition experience a particular pressing need to reflect on their identity (Obertreis/Stephan 2009). Identity as a concept assures us of continuity despite discontinuity. It endows the individuals or the collective with a sense of selfhood. It does so by pointing to some features which stayed the same irrespective of and untouched by dramatic changes. It is these features which are perceived to form the essence of who we are. At the same time, statements on who we are always involve statements on who we are not or from whom we want to be distinguished.

The implosion of socialism represents in a way a paradigmatic challenge to previous concepts of identity. The collapse of social institutions, the devaluation of daily routines and normative standards can not but affect the sense of selfhood. Rembering communism and reordering the past is thus always part and parcel of an effort to rebuild idenity in reaction to an identity crisis. On the level of post-socialist societies or nations as a whole, identity work first and foremost aims at positioning the collective self vis-à-vis the West. The breakdown of communism did not only leave the West as the true winner of the cold war. The Western way of ordering social relations was morever turned into a role model to which there seemed to be no longer any alternatives. Especially in post-socialist societies social progress was thus measured in terms of Westernization. Social institutions were judged upon according to the criteria in how far they came to resemble Western examples. As the West and especially Western Europe have a long tradition of treating the former socialist East as an epitome of backwardness (Wolff 1994), this is hardly a comfortable situation even for those societies

7 On the intimate link between memory and identity cf. Bruner 1998.

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which showed a clear commitment to Western values. In general we can distinguish between three different strategies in dealing with this imposition which actually represents a serious challenge to all concepts of identity.

One strategy openly rejects all ascripion from outside. All sorts of historical facts like having an authentic tradition of Western style feudalism, being on the right side of the catholic-orthodox divide and having resisted all sorts of Eastern empires in the name of truly European values are thus turned into proof of the historical Westerness of one's own nation (Christophe 2002). Having been absorbed into the Eastern world and having been forced to take part in the communist experiment which is perceived to be the last manifestation of true Easterness, appears to be a mere accident of history. As plausible as these claims may appear to members within the community, the sheer emphasis whith which they are put forward will meet with some suspicion in the real West. The acutely felt need to convince others of your belonging to the West will always reveal your inferiority complex towards those whom you expect recognition from. It thus will not really release you from the pain of being treated as backward and second-rate Westerners.

A second strategy holds the promise to ease at least some of this pain. It is mainly based on disenchanting the West. Those who claim to be the real West are blamed on various grounds to have betrayed the values in which their identity is rooted – be it by turning a blind eye of indifference to their brothers in spirit who had been abducted by a greedy East, be it by giving priority to material interest instead of living up to higher values or be it by falling prey to bad habits like corruption and a ruthless drive for power which are said to have been hallmarks of Eastern communism. The consequenes to be drawn from these arguments are twofold. Firstly, the much appraised West appears to be in essence nothing new but actually only a somewhat more sophisticated repetition of what one already knows. Secondly, those who are as a rule treated as aspiring members of the West who still have a lot to learn, suddenly turn into the only true followers of Western traditions and values.

Obviously both strategies run the risk of contradicting each other. There is, however, a third strategy which might help to reduce tension between competing claims. It starts with the statement of the rather general truth that the downfall of communism did not only affect the identity of the former East but the West as well (Coker 1998). Attention is thus drawn to the hardly deniable fact that the West defined as a combination of liberal democracy and market

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economy was dependent on the binary opposition between East and West during the Cold War. With the demise of the East – the argument continues – the meaning of the West is inevitably called into question. The quest to redefine Western identity thus appears to be the task of the day, a task which requires an open dialogue on equal footing between all those who lay claim to being Western.

I guess it is evident, that all these strategies though they do not necessarily exclude each other, will lead to different reconstructions of the communist past. Similar to the effects caused by various attempts to reconcile this past with competing moments of the post-socialist present, they will thus contribute to the emergence of tensions and ambivalences inside narratives of remembering communism. A particularly promising way of studying various representations of the communst past seems therefore to be an approach which explicitly foregrounds these tensions and explores the strategies developed in order to manage incoherence.

3. Textbooks a sources for memory research

Before I try to demonstrate how fruitful such an approach can actually be by analysing a Lithuanian textbook, let me briefly spend some thoughts on the advantage of using textbooks as a source for memory studies. As I have already emphasized in the beginning, textbooks are of a rather hybrid nature (Klerides 2010). On the one hand, they embody something like the officialized version of history, the currently canonised one. It is via textbooks that state elites promote privileged versions of the national experience and thus attempt to form a particular kind of national consciousness (Schissler/Soysal 2005). On the other hand, it is obvious that there is rarely a clear cut consensus from which the state can draw. Textbooks are not only taken to the public space of the classroom, where they may be debated, contested or sedimented as a part of everyday experience. They are moreover produced in social contexts which are to various degrees characterized by open debate and processes of negotiation.

Firstly, textbook authors produce their versions of the past under the influence of public discourses led in various arenas. Scientific debates in professional historiography may have an impact as well as the stories and plot structures offered in newspapers, TV programms, novels, films ect. To make things more complicted, this influence is to be felt not only on the level of conscious decisions. Cognitive schema, ways of reasoning and making evaluations may assume such a degree of taken for grantedness that they are reproduced in a rather unconscious way.

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Secondly, in most societies textbook authors nowadays work and write under the pressure to be commercially successful. Especially in comparatively small countries – such as Lithuania – the textbook market represents one of the most attractive segments for publishing houses. As a rule, textbooks reach a mass ciculation which is several times higher than that of other print media. They are terefore perceived to be a source of rather stable profit. We can thus expect the interest in commercial success to act as a certain constraint on authors and publishing houses. Textbooks which are too far removed in content and evaluative standards applied will probably run the risk of alienating their potential audience. As a consequence, textbook producers will be well advised to pay due tribute to mass expectations. At the same time, this may at times be difficult to achieve – especially when different social groups are known to have rather opposing views on relevant issues. To illustrate my point with reference to the issue of remembering communism and making sense of post-communism in Lithuania– public opinion polls have shown, that 34% of the respondents characterized the years between 1990 and 2004 as the most unfortunate period in Lihuania's history.[8] The Soviet period was ranked second with 30% respondents, the period under Tsarist Russia third with 23% respondents. At the same time, Lithuania has gained some prominence for a high degee of social polarisation between opposing camps of voters who took sides either with postcommunists or with nationalistic conservatives who are themselves deeply divided with regard to the question of how to account for the Soviet period in Lithuanian history (Christophe 1997). To write textbooks which reflect the memories of different social groups and of conflicting claims thus turns out to be a rather difficult thing to do.

To sum up, textbooks and textbook authors are as a rule faced with a quite demanding challenge. In order to be effective, they have to strike a balance between becoming an arena of political contestation over sensitive issues of the past and providing a forum for the representation of various discourses on the one hand, and the attempt to close debates over meaning in the name of reaching a social consensus on the other hand. There is thus ample opportunity for the occurrence of tension and ambivalences inside textbook narratives which may easily fail to contribute to reconciliation.

What does all this mean for strategies of textbook analysis? To me it is quite clear that an approach, which concentrates on rendering visible these possible tensions and ambivalences, will be best suited to the task of using textbooks as a source for memory studies. Actually such

8 quoted in Donskis (2007).

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an approach could profit a lot from a definition of textbooks as national autobiographies (Jeismann 1982) . Although this formula was already coined decades ago, its potential for guiding research has by far not been exhausted. What I mean by saying this is that the methodological insights gained in the field of interpreting biographical narrativ interviews are yet hardly applied to textbook research. To do this would mean at least two things:

Firstly, we should look at what Fritz Schütze (1983) has called pragmatic embedding. In essence, this means to compare what is written in the mode of explicit arguing with what is written in the mode of narrating and making more implicit evaluative statements. I guess this is a highly useful analytical step which could help us to kill two birds with one stone. As a result we will not only come across the tensions and ambivalences I have talked about so much. We would also be able to reconstruct the sometimes blurred line between what a given society constructs as being so natural and taken for granted that it does not need to be explained and those problematic issues which require further elaboration.

Secondly, we should pay attention to strategies of managing incoherence. It is not by accident that many approaches regard this to be the main task in making sense of life story interviews (Linde 1993). As a rule, creating coherence is a social obligation that mus be fulfilled in order to appear as a competent member of a paricular culture. Which accounts count as coherent depends, however, on culturally specific beliefs of the world. As a consequence, an analysis of the strategies applied in order to manage incoherence can provide us with some insights into hegemonic discourses in a given society.

4. Remembering Communism and Making Sence of Post-Communism in the Lithuanian Textbook Laikas

At that point, I would like to add some empirical flesh and bone to the rather general remarks I have made so far. I shall therefore look into the discoursive staretgies applied in one particular Lithuanian textook in order to create a link between the communist past and the post-communist present. For two reasons I decided to take Laikas (2007), which means time in Lithuanian as an example.

On the one hand, this book, which was published in 2007, was very successful on the market. Lithuanian history teachers explained to me that they appreciate this book especially for the clarity and directness of it's positions. To look for tensions and ambivalences in that particular

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book thus appears to be quite a challenge and would lend more credibility to the general argument.

On the other hand, the life story interviews which we have already conducted reveal that Laikas must have been quite effective in shaping the individual memory of history teachers. Even those who have difficulties in subscribing to the somewhat conservative and nationalistic views of the book, nevertherless mention exactly those topics whih are given high priority in the book in their life stories – like the war on partisans in the forties and fifties, the repression of religion in the sixties and seventies and the omnipressence of the KGB during the whole Soviet period.

At first glance, the narratives offered by Laikas would seem to reinforce all the prejudices and stereotypes regarding the way a country like Lithuania will handle the memory of its communis past. Just to remind you very quickly – Lithuania was the first of the former Soviet republics to declare its independence. With the demise of socialism, political power was taken over by a nationalistic umbrella movement called Sajudis which rallied behind the demand to restore independent statehood and enjoyed broad public support right from the beginning. As is to be expected without having read a single line, the textbook I want to analyze now externalizes the communist past as an alien phenomenon imposed on the nation by foreign power. The story of Soviet Lithuania is thus mainly told as a story about national oppression. According to an underlying dichotomy of Europe and Asia, the essential message to be brought home is that a civilized and European Lithuania suffered greatly under a barbarian and Asian Soviet Empire. Consequently, the period between 1989 and 1991 is turned into one of the most heroic moments in Lithuanian history; a moment, when the majority of the population came to overcome all the fear and apathy, all the opportunism 50 years of Soviet rule had raised in them; a moment – when the dream dreamt by many was realized thanks to the joint and powerful action of a people, which lived up to the highest moral standards and did not even shrink back from taking dreadful risks in the name of freedom and redeeming national pride compromised by so many years of foreign domination.

As I have already said, all this hardly comes as a surprise and even would not be worth mentioning if not for the cracks and fissures which upon closer examination open up inside this narrative. Actually, the authors must have realized that told in this way, their story faces at least two dilemmas which they would have to deal with.

Firstly, it produces exclusion of all those longing back to the good old Soviet days – mainly

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becaue of widespread frustration with the current state of affairs.
Secondly, like all eschatological visions of history such an account is likely to lose credibility as soon as people feel that they did not end up in the paradise they have been promised.
To my mind, the way the book tries to react to these two challenges is what deserves our attention and allows us to understand something really fascinating about the Lithuanian culture of memory. Actually, the whole book is dedicated to answering the question of why the Lithuanians did **not** get the Lithuania they dreamt of in 1989 and which they defended so braveley in the face of Soviet tanks in 1991. The answers given can be roughly divided into two. Both of them potentially lead to two rather contradictory accounts and thus create a demand for managing incoherence.

The first answer takes issue with the ordinary Lithuanian, who is openly blamed not only for the readiness with which he adapted to a living under the Soviet System, but for his failure to *"a master of his destiny*" (Laikas2007: 264) in present times as well. Between the lines, the question of what happened in in the years from 1989 to 2009 is thus restated in a slightly different mood. The real miracle one has to come to terms with, is no longer the harsh and dissapointing reality of 2009, but the exceptional moment of 1989. Whereas the Lithuanian of the year 2009 is described in clear analogy to the Soviet citizen as an individual which is without much initiative of himself helplessly relying on a state he is always ready to cheat whenever there is an opportunity, it is the heroic protagonist of the year 1989 whose sudden appearance on the stage of Lithuanian history demands explanation. In the quest for an explanation, the textbook quickly identifies the former Anti-Soviet dissidents as the real heroes who can claim the merit of having eased the birth of the Lithuanian nation. It is they who "*took the most courageous steps*"(Laikas 2007: 208) and who by the sheer example of their fearlessness pushed the people to go further and to leave behind them all the fear. In vivid contrast to this positive image, Sajudis, the Lithuanian mass movement which was founded in the heydays of perestrojka is described as a very much ambigious actor. It is constantly stressed that the movement like the majority of the population did not dare to speak openly about independence for quite a log time. Even when it comes to mentioning the unquestionable merits of the movement, which is for example said to have have "*invigorated the feelings of unity and pride among the Lithuanians*" (Laikas 2007: 209), Sajudis nevertheless appears to be an actor, whose deeds mainly pertain to feelings and not to actions. All this stands in sharp contrast to the dissidents who are credited again and again with the ability to act and to take risks for their physical well-beeing. This small bunch of morally

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unquestionable people thus seems to embody the bad conscience of the sometimes all too opportunistic ordinary Lithuanians, who immediately fell back into their bad habits as soon as the dissidents disappeared from the stage of Lithuanian politics.

To sum up, this part of the narration creates the image of a deeply divided society with the main line of division running between a minority of brave and courageous dissidents who embody all the positive features of the Lithuanian national character on the one hand, and a majority of people whose Lithuanian backbones had been broken by 50 years of Soviet rule. 1989 then appears to be one of those rare moments when a minority succeded against all odds in offering guidance to a majority. The overall tone of the account is thus marked by mild resignation. It seems to be beyond doubt that one can not expect such a moment to linger on.

As I have already mentioned, this is only one of two rather contradictory attempts to come to terms with the dilemmas produced by an openly anti-communist account of the past. A second strategy starts with a very much critical appraisal of the current situation. Again the Lithuanian society is described as being deeply split, but this time not into an opportunistic majority and a courageous minority but simply into rich and poor. Moreover, this time the textbook sees no way of accepting this division as an expression of how things simply are. Quite the reverse – the split is openly rejected as being unfair and unjust – mainly because it runs counter to what one would have expected if only differences in moral standards would have played a role. For the authors the current distribution of life chances appears to be almost absurd. It is mainly the fact that former members of the old nomenclature made a fortune instead of paying the moral bill for the sins they have committed during Soviet rule, which disturbs them. And this feeling of moral indignation leads them to condemn a social order which gives priority to norms of efficiency over norms of moral conduct. What we face here, is a clear anti-capitalist and anti-western ressentiment which has its origin in a sharp critique of nomenclatura capitalism but then spills over to other aspects as well. Thus we learn for example that with the expansion of the free market many people left their honourable jobs as teachers or artists just to take part in the hunt for profits in the tyical post-socialist bazar-economy. We are told, that those who grew rich were simply "*touched by success*" (Laikas 2007:264). As a consequence we are left with the feeling that the distribution of wealth is anything but fair and just. All these complaints are again and again rehearsed and summed up in the question "*Is this really the Lithuania we dreamt of when we took part in the mass demonstrations in 1989*"? (Laikas 2007: 265) The authors leave no qestion mark behind this question. For them it is quite obvious that history

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missed the chance of rewarding the righteous and punishing the sinners. This time it is the ordinary Lithuanian who can claim membership in the honourable category of those who did not get what they deserved. This part of the narration moreover offers at least some consolation to all those who suffer from a loss of social solidarity and feel an authentic nostalgia for belonging to a common we, which is so much missed today. At the same time, it redirects this nostalgia which frequently leads to a glorification of the Soviet past to the miracle year of 1989 which is turned into an epitome of national and social unity.

With these observations my mission is almost accomplished. What I wanted to show is that Laikas is actually quite reflective of conflicting claims about the communist past and the post-communist present. Despite all the clearness of its anti-communist stance, it constantly oscillates between two rather contradictory positions. On the one hand, it puts all the blame for the obvious shortcommings of the present day on the ordinary Lithuanian who is harshly reproached with his still very much Soviet way of acting and thinking. On the other hand, it reproduces the somewhat typical Soviet us-and-them divide, constructing a clear line of division between us, the morally pure and innocent ruled and the cynical and greedy rulers.

I would like to conclude with one last quote from the book, a quote which – to my mind – gives us in a nutshell an example of how these tensions and ambivalences I have tried to reconstruct are expressed in one single narrative. The quote is taken from the introductory paragraph of a chapter on Post-Soviet Lithuania and goes like this:

> In 1989-1991 the singing revolution in Lithuania ended with the restoration of independence. The empire of the USSR fell apart. The Iron Curtain was destroyed. The first Lithuanians who saw the affluent world of the West experienced a shock. Some women cried and ran from one shop to the other. They could not obtain anything because they had no money. (Laikas 2007: 260)

When I introduced these sentences to a group of Lithuanian students during a focus group discussion, the first reaction I got was open laughter. Upon my request, they explained to me, that it is the strange combination of events taken from the realm of big politics and everyday-life which appeared to be rather funny to them. I guess we can all get the point if we try to imagine that these statements would serve as a script for a video-clip showing in rapid sequence the tumbling down of the Berlin wall, images of Lithuanian mass demonstrations and of the crying Lithuanian women running along a Western shopping mall. However, we soon came to realize that this textbook quote is not only funny, but evokes a broad mixtures of

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rather contradictory feelings as well. Some of the students admitted that they feel at the same time indignant and ashamed upon listening to these sentences. They were indignant because their parents who had to queue up in lines for products during Soviet times were once again excluded from affluence under the post-socialist condition – this time due to a lack of money. To them it was rather unfair that the same Lithuanians who had bravely contributed to the destruction of the Soviet Empire and the Iron Curtain and who have thus done something really great for the whole of Europe, should find themselves in the humiliating and inferior position of the poor and somewhat backward Eastern relative of the rich West. At the same time, at least a small minority of those Lithuanian students to whom I talked confessed that the quote triggers a vague feeling of shame in them. Although they had great difficulties in explaining that feeling, in between the lines they gave to understand, that to them the crying Lithuanian women do not seem to bear very much in common with the heroic Lithuanians who faced Soviet tanks in 1991 without fear. Crying denotes a very much passive attitude towards reality which thus does not seem to fit very well to the usual national self-image.

To conclude with a very much personal statement – I guess what we need in order to come to terms with the difficult task of linking the communist past with the post-communist present is exactly these kind of accounts which open up rather contradictory interpretations and appeal to a broad range of conflicting emotions. Simple black-and-white schemes seem to be hardly applicable to the rather complex realities we face today.

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