

# THE ALCHEMY OF CYNICISM: AUTHORITY, POWER, AND THE POST-SOCIALIST STATE IN LITHUANIA

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## ABSTRACT

I explore the state's presence by looking at people's understanding/experience of authority and power. I argue that 'cynicism' is the common structure of feeling embedded in perceptions and experiences of the state. It entails negativity, distance, and irony, rather than resistance towards the state. Cynicism has an effect on the lives people live and the communication they carry out with the 'state' whether in everyday conversations or at elections. Cynicism encapsulates criticism of the state officials, seeing them as self-interested, immoral, and unjust. It also manifests distrust of authorities and difference between the people and the power elites. Cynicism derives from various contexts: the experience of power as omnipresent, immutable, and threatening prevalent in the socialist period, beliefs in equality and loyalty to a collective which no longer inform social relations, mysterious post-socialist circulations of wealth from which people feel completely or partly excluded, experience of destitution and subalternity. This article rests on the research conducted in three village communities and the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas in 2003–2004.

KEY WORDS: socio-cultural anthropology, authority, power, cynicism, state, Post-Soviet Lithuania

## ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje tyrinėjamas Kauno ir trijų kaimų gyventojų valdžios suvokimas analizuojant požiūrius į autoritetą ir galią. Teigiama, jog cinizmas yra pagrindinė „struktūrinė jausena“, apibendrinanti valdžios/valstybės suvokimą. Jį išreiškia negatyvumas, nuotolis, ironija, o ne aktyvus pasipriešinimas. Cinizmas atsiranda kritikuojant valdžios atstovus kaip siekiančius naudoti tik sau, nemoralius, neteisingus, todėl nepatikimus. Jis identifikuojamas ne tik kaimo ar miesto žmogaus dialoguose, bet ir žiniasklaidoje, politinėje ir filosofinėje mintyje. Cinizmą sąlygoja įvairūs kontekstai: valdžios galios patirtis kaip nekinančios, nenusėjamos, bauginančios, kuri apibrėžė subjekto ir autoriteto santykį sovietmečiu ir bent iš dalies apibrėžia dabar; tikėjimas tokiais vertybėmis kaip lygybė ir lojalumas kolektyvui, kuris nebėra socialinio gyvenimo norma kaip buvo sovietmečiu; dažnai nesuvokiamu posovietinės gerovės pasiskirstymu ir patiriama marginalizacija. Straipsnis remiasi antropologiniais tyrimais, autorės atliktais keliuose Lietuvos kaimuose bei Vilniaus ir Kauno miestuose 2003–2004 metais.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: sociokultūrinė antropologija, autoritetas, valdžia, galia, cinizmas, valstybė, posocialistinė Lietuva.

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*Though Ioan was politically irrelevant, it was politics that sealed his fate. As rationing took hold in the early 1980s and work requirements and consumption regulations became more stringent, Ioan again took to acting out his drunken rage. One night he railed at length at state, party, and Ceaușescu without realizing that two security officials were in the bar. When someone warned him of their presence, he ran out in panic. Though repercussions were hardly likely, he hanged himself that night*

(David Kideckel *The Solitude of Collectivism* 1993:162)

*Menenius: ... you slander  
The helms o'th'state, who care for you like fathers,  
When you curse them as enemies.  
First citizen: Care for us? True indeed! They ne'er  
cared for us yet. Suffer us to famish, and their store-  
houses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury,  
to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act*

*established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and retrain the poor. If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.*

(William Shakespeare Coriolanus Act I, Scene I, 1966:56<sup>1</sup>).

However one labels the state – a ‘mask’ by Abrams, an ‘abstraction’ invoking Marx, a ‘fetish’ by Taussig, or a ‘fantasy’ following Lacan (see Navaro-Yashin 2002:186), the state appears to be an insurmountable presence in individuals’ lives.<sup>2</sup> I explore the state’s presence by looking at people’s understanding/experience of authority and power. I argue that ‘cynicism’ is the common structure of feeling embedded in perceptions and experiences of the state (cf. Žižek 1995, Navaro-Yashin 2002). It entails negativity, distance, and irony, rather than resistance towards the state. Cynicism has an effect on the lives people live and the communication they carry out with the ‘state’ whether in everyday conversations or at elections. Cynicism encapsulates criticism of the state officials, seeing them as self-interested, immoral, and unjust. It also manifests distrust of authorities and difference between the people and the power elites. Cynicism derives from various contexts: the experience of power as omnipresent, immutable, and threatening prevalent in the socialist period (see also Yurchak 2006), beliefs in equality and loyalty to a collective which no longer inform social relations, mysterious post-socialist circulations of wealth from which people feel completely or partly excluded, experience of de-stigmatization (Verdery 1996) and subalternity.

In this article the ‘state’ (*valdžia*<sup>3</sup>) refers to the political authorities. In several instances the ‘state’ (*valstybė*<sup>4</sup>) refers to a country governed by a political community. The term ‘political imagination’ is borrowed from C. Humphrey to refer to ‘the swirling diversity of other, more open, multi-sited and creative opinions and ideas [in addition to discourses of leaders] produced by all sorts of people’ (Humphrey 2002:259–260). ‘Power’ is the ability ‘to structure the possible field of action of others’ (Foucault 1984:428) and to carve out significance (Wolf 1990, Mintz 1985). ‘Authority’ is an individual or a group of individuals, as in the term ‘elites’ or ‘state officials,’ having the power to structure the possible field of action of others. ‘Authority’ stands for power itself.

This article rests on the research conducted in three village communities and the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas in 2003–2004. The villages are in the eastern and southern parts of Lithuania with 30 inhabitants in the smallest village, 115 inhabitants in the second largest village, and over 705 inhabitants in the largest one. I rely on 89 unstructured interviews collected in three village communities, 87 interviews conducted in a city of Kaunas (several in suburbs of Kaunas and Vilnius).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Mathew Horsman and Andrew Marshall 1994 “After the Nation-State: Citizens, Tribalism and the New World Disorder.” London: Harper Collins Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> See Gupta (1995) for the state’s presence in everyday life in India and Navaro-Yashin (2002) in Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> *Valdžia* is a Lithuanian term used by many informants. It means: (1) right or power to subject to one’s will; political rule; (2) the state, government (colloquial); (3) agency with a higher power; (4) a ruling person/people (figuratively). *Modern Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*. 2000. Keinys, S. et al., ed. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas. (*Dabartinis Lietuvių kalbos žodynas*. 2000. Vyr. Red. St. Keinys. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas).

<sup>4</sup> *Valstybė* means: (1) an organized political community having the highest power; (2) a country governed by such a community. See *Modern Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language*. 2000. Keinys, S. et al., ed. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas. (*Dabartinis Lietuvių kalbos žodynas*. 2000. Vyr. Red. St. Keinys. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas).

<sup>5</sup> The names of the individuals are changed and the village names are not given following the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association.

### Post/socialist Power and authority

#### May, 2004. Kaunas. On a bus

I was on a bus deep in my own thoughts. The bus was going down Vydūno Avenue, it passed 'Telekomas,' the phone company. Suddenly my attention was grabbed by an ad on the back of another bus in front of me. On one side of the ad there was a smiling policeman with his arms crossed. Below the image was a question, 'are you afraid of anything?..' I couldn't understand the other side of the ad well. The bus turned and disappeared from my sight. It seemed that they were advertising the internet, but I was not sure. I regretted that I did not have my camera with me and that I had looked too long at the policeman trying to figure out why he was in the ad. Everything lasted about a minute. I hoped that I would see the ad again, but I didn't, and I never met anybody else who had seen it.

Advertisements provide good data because advertisers appeal to common knowledge. In this case, I think, the common knowledge was the experience/understanding of authority which could be invoked by the image of a policeman and the question 'are you afraid of anything?' A smiling policeman, not a very common image, was a means to attract the observer's attention and astonishment. Thus, an individual would notice the advertisement, would be surprised by the juxtaposition of a smiling policeman and the question about one's anxieties, and then probably learn how to overcome his/her anxieties by studying the second part of the advertisement. However, at least in my case my attention was fixed on the policeman and I even failed to understand what was being advertised. Seeing the policeman and the question 'are you afraid of anything?' created all kinds of associations. I thought it was absurd to place an image with a policeman and such a question on an advertisement because, my thoughts flew ahead, in post-socialist public spaces, presumably informed by the rule of law, a policeman should not be staring at you with the question whether you are afraid of anything. His smile was friendly, but it also could be understood as ironic because of the question about anxieties and because a 'smile' is 'privatized' in post-socialist times – it is primarily observable in private spaces, such as private restaurants. I understood the question as an attempt to invoke anxieties of authority that were prevalent in Soviet times. Then anxieties were fostered by a specific understanding of power as omnipresent, immutable, unpredictable, and threatening (cf. Yurchak 1997). It was reinforced by the official state-sponsored culture of seriousness, to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) terminology. A monopoly on power belonged to the party-state, 'all-powerful, pervasive, and coercive, with violence against the citizen always a possibility' (Verdery 1996:219). As humorist Jaroslav Hašek wrote in the essay 'Mister Inflexible' about a traveller on a train to Prague and a tax collector, people may have felt guilty, even if they had not done anything wrong: 'This glance [of a tax collector] pierced the soul in such a way that even a person who had nothing to declare felt guilty somehow.'<sup>6</sup> Reinterpreting Kideckel's (1993) example cited in the epigraph, understanding/experience of power as threatening may have sealed an individual's fate, as it did in the case of Ioan who hanged himself, even if repercussions were hardly likely. Similar power may have been invested in authorities, such as policemen. Therefore, the advertisement appeared to me as an example of an improper way to construct a public and post-socialist space.

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<sup>6</sup> See Hašek, Jaroslav, "Ponas Nepalenkiamasis". *Šluota*, 12/23/1983, p. 12.

Perceptions of power as immutable, unpredictable, omnipresent, threatening<sup>7</sup> and invested in authority who could personally interpret it and use it partly explains the overarching pessimism and complaining recorded in the following discussion. This pessimism is exemplified in the anecdote about a Soviet pessimist and a Soviet optimist in the epigraph to Yurchak's article on power, presence, and the anecdote (1997):

- What is the difference between a Soviet pessimist and a Soviet optimist?
- A Soviet pessimist thinks that things can't possibly get any worse, but a Soviet optimist thinks that they will.

Post-socialist anecdotes also record similar pessimism and also fatalism:

Here come G. W. Bush, the Queen of England and Adamkus [the President of Lithuania] to God, and they each ask how long they have to wait until their countries have no problems. Bush is told – 40 years, the Queen of England – 50 years, Adamkus – I will not live to see it [God will not live to see it].

Anthropologist Romas Vaštokas<sup>8</sup> remarked that in the United States or Canada there prevails a mechanistic approach according to which individuals have power to manage their lives and social world. In Lithuania, however, the explanation for everything is *likimas* ('destiny'). 'Destiny' entails the powerlessness of the subject and the power of the authority. In this context authority can influence an individual's life and it is expected, imagined, assumed to exert various influences, not the contrary. Thus, the well-known words by John F. Kennedy – 'ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country,' which, according to Vytautas Landsbergis, one of the major political figures of post-Soviet history of Lithuania, are 'a genial phrase very appropriate to present-day Lithuanians'<sup>9</sup> can be rendered meaningless for many who seek, as Humphrey remarked, order not *in* themselves, but *for* themselves, that is, 'from powers [*власти*]<sup>10</sup> conceived as above; and, therefore, if the local polity does not provide order, they seek it from higher levels, culminating in the symbolic reification of an ultimate power' (Humphrey 2002:29).

### **Imagining the post-socialist 'state'**

#### **Wealth, collective, and equality**

In post-socialism wealth has made power visible. By addressing wealth, informants attempted to understand the circulation of power, re/emergence of hierarchies and authority regimes, and

<sup>7</sup> Under socialism, submissiveness, passivity and acknowledgement of authority coexisted within other relations to power. According to Yurchak (1997) the relation of a "normal" subject to authority was pretense and misrecognition. A normal subject was the one "who had learned from experience that he or she could lead a "normal" enough life – safe, self-manageable, enjoyable – away from the official sphere, provided he/she took no active interest in it, i.e., did not get too involved in it either as a supporter or a critic" (Yurchak 1997:164). A "normal" subject experienced "official ideological representation of social reality as largely false and at the same time as immutable and omnipresent" (Yurchak 1997:162). He simulated support while not being interested in power and manipulating it to lead their "normal" lives (see Yurchak 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication, summer, 2005, Vilnius.

<sup>9</sup> See Landsbergis, Vytautas, "Lietuva – serganti mama". [www.delfi.lt](http://www.delfi.lt). 09/13/2005. 10:39.

<sup>10</sup> In the plural *власти* refers to the "authorities", and with the epithet Soviet (*советская власть*) it refers to the Soviet regime (see Humphrey 2002:28).

changes in social relations. Wealth was indexical of the transgression of the values of equality and loyalty to the collective which informed social relations in socialism. It was also a sign of corruption, immorality, unaccountability and self-interest of authorities. Perceptions and experiences of authority and power were embedded in cynicism, which was the prevailing emotional relation of a subject to the 'state.' Cynicism penetrated criticism of authorities, portrayals and images of the 'state,' and understandings of power and politics.

Among the largely invisible methods of accumulating wealth and amassing a fortune in post-socialism, taking a state office is an acknowledged venue to prosperity. Expressed in the popular idiom as 'getting to the trough,' a state position means that one gets connected to the various venues of wealth, power, and prestige. According to most people, 'state officials do nothing' and observe only their own and their family interests. Daiva, a former accountant now employed as a janitor at a village school, claimed that parliamentarians:

(...) created a very good life for themselves. They have cars, apartments... They do not have to pay for anything. They live well. Plus they have much property and land. Up to the chin. That's why they go to the Parliament. They know that they will live well and their children will benefit from that.

In considering giving their vote to a politician, people may think of the size of a politician's family, with the attitude that the whole family is going to benefit from the office. During the presidential elections of 2004, several people remarked that they were not going to vote for Kazimiera Prunskienė, leader of the Union of Farmers' Party and New Democratic Party (*VNDP*), because she has three children and seven grandchildren. When I was confused about what such responses meant, Ona from the smallest village explained that Adamkus will cost less to the state (*valstybei*) because he already has all privileges as a former President, and because he has no children who could benefit from his position. In several other conversations the fact that Adamkus was an 'American' (Adamkus emigrated from Lithuania in 1944, from 1949 he lived in the U.S.A.) was also important because 'Americans,' in general, are considered to be rich, and having no need to line their pockets in Lithuania.

Knowledge about the prosperity of the elites derives to a large extent from the media. People respond to newspaper articles and radio/TV news. During the period of my research, news about increasing rents for the Independence Act signatories or coverage about the 'Rambynas' cheese factory and the salary of the director there were very often commented upon. Motiejus from the largest village suggested that 'The director of the 'Rambynas' cheese factory gets 300,000 [litai]. Look, in my opinion, he should get 10,000 per month. And the other would go to people who deliver milk.' Stasė from the same village also remembered hearing on TV about the 'Rambynas' cheese factory director's salary. She asked why, then, they give people only 20–30 cents for a litre of milk. 'Where is their conscience? Wouldn't 100,000 be enough? Why it is 300,000? People say God will punish him.'

Responding to media accounts, people speculated about the private businesses the former Parliament or government members have, about politicians' houses (popularly called 'castles'), about any other property they obtain, about restitution of their rights to land, other exclusive rights, such as rights to big loans, also the vacations the politicians take, restaurants they visit, and parties they attend. Expressing sensibilities about consumption and spending, informants often wondered how much it costs for politicians to live their 'expensive' lives. Nijolė, a history teacher of a high school

in Kaunas who claimed to belong to the ‘middle class’ gave a portrait of one party member who was accused of corruption, with some other politicians, by the Special Investigation Service of the Republic of Lithuania (*Specialiuju Tyrimu Tarnyba*):

Nobody believes him. I will tell you one thing. He was a teaching fellow at the Vilnius University. Then he was writing a dissertation and lived in a dormitory. [...] And then we hear that he has a house. [...] You cannot build a house from the salary of a teaching fellow in Lithuania. Even if you have a PhD and even if you are an associate professor. My husband’s coworker worked in Africa, the other was in the United States for several years. When they came back, they bought unfinished houses. Parents have to support you or you have to get money from somewhere, not from the salary of a teaching fellow. It’s an absurdity. His parents are villagers. They didn’t earn anything to build him a house in Vilnius. You also have to have in mind *where* the house was built [in Vilnius houses are more expensive than elsewhere in Lithuania]. [...] So, how then?... That’s how these big houses are built around Vilnius. From tainted money.

Claims about dishonesty and corruption usually imply a general moral condemnation rather than an accusation of illegality (cf. Humphrey 2002:177). However, considerations of various ‘illegalities’ as well as criminality (see discussion below) also occur. For example, Ruzgys, a large-holding farmer and a businessman, argued that in the early 1990s ‘the state provided conditions for illegal privatization.’ By *illegal* he meant that many people were excluded from the process, they ‘privatized among themselves and shared the money they got.’ The popular saying is that there was not *privatizacija* (privatizing), but *prichvatizacija* (appropriation), where *prichvat* – is the stem of the Russian *npuxвaтумь* ‘take, capture, appropriate.’ The farmer argued that ‘those who are rich now... they started with privatization. It was not fair. There is a reason why people say *prichvatizacija*.’<sup>11</sup>

Informants speak of accumulation of ‘millions’ during privatization, and about deception and stealing. People invoked the dissolution of kolkhozes, when ordinary people were assigned ‘crippled cows,’ while kolkhoz leaders appropriated everything else. They also often remembered the distribution of vouchers. Many argued that they did not know how to use vouchers and sold their vouchers at a low price.

Unequal distribution of rights was stressed in assertions about land privatization. Nijolė claimed that the political elites cannot complete the reform of land restitution. ‘It is because they share land among themselves. They keep searching in archives, maybe it does not belong to you, maybe to somebody else, maybe some kind of a gentleman (*ponas*) can appropriate it. Especially by the sea, or by the lakes, in beautiful places. That’s the situation.’ Zita, a housewife, in her late 40s, from Kaunas, argued that her family situation was special and that they were told that only a separate law would solve the case. Zita disappointedly asserted that, if a law was needed for a Parliament member, it would certainly be passed and he would receive compensation [for the property which could not be restituted in her case]. ‘My grandparents bought that land, it was their property and they paid off loans for it. It was theirs. It is so painful. Others take what they want and as much as they want,’ claimed Zita, having in mind the Parliament members. According to her, ‘during privatization there was extensive corruption. [...] There was no justice. No justice... in free Lithuania.’ Other informants also thought that the elites promote and establish laws which guarantee their rights and exclude other people:

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Verdery (1996, 2003), Wedel (2001, 2002), Stark (1992), Humphrey (2002), Stark and Bruszt (1998) for discussions of privatization in the former USSR and Eastern Europe.

Yesterday on TV they showed an interview with a Parliament member. He said: 'As a Parliament member I can help myself, how could it be different?' However, we [people] cannot establish the rights to our land. [...] We do not have all the documents. But the political elites can [in any case] [a retired woman].

People consider wealth to be limited, possibly drawing on the Soviet period experience of accumulating scarce goods and of usually their rationed distribution because of which they were being able to buy only 1 kilogram of oranges when oranges emerged in the stores. During the research period the enrichment of some was believed to produce the poverty of others. Pranė, the eldest woman of the second largest village, claimed that 'they [the political elites] have millions. [...] They can raise their salaries so much because they take from the people. Nobody else gives them anything. And it is still not enough. They take money from beggars.' Zigmas, a power plant worker from Kaunas, wondered about the income declaration of Landsbergis, the Sąjūdis leader and a long-term Conservative Party leader and currently a EU Parliament member. Zigmas wondered how Landsbergis could have made 19 million litai in five years. He assumed that decently one cannot accumulate such money and concluded with the rhetorical question 'how can people live well, if every politician makes ten million?'

Understanding wealth as limited, people greet various spending actions of the state officials with cynicism and suspicion. The new cars for government officials, new furniture for the President's office, renovation of the Parliament halls, hiring of new security usually are noted and re-provingly commented. In conversations informants (mostly women) criticized the renovation of the President's residence kitchen. According to a housewife from Kaunas, in her late 40s, 'it should be strict. Ready [for every President's family to live]. Another woman shouldn't come and redo the kitchen again. You come and go. It's not for your whole life. For several years. I hated when she [President Paksas's wife] started to redo the kitchen.' On the other hand, saving is always popular. President Adamkus was praised by several people for his decision to spend less money than was initially planned for the inaugural ceremony.

In dialogues about the state officials people touch upon visible stratification and usually also the invisible powers which led to it. Making judgments and assigning values they give supremacy to equality and collective solidarity. According to Humphrey (2002), the pre-eminence of equality as a value in Russia derives from Soviet-period values and ideologies. In Soviet Russia 'equality' was symbolically transformed and fed into the communitarian morality (Humphrey 2001:342). Furthermore, there was equality of many in poverty which included the quality of sacredness (Shcherbinins 1996, discussed in Humphrey 2001:342). The value of equality was co-opted by the early Soviet elite and had resonance in multiple spaces of the Soviet Union, including Lithuania in mid as well as late Soviet times.

In Lithuania, beliefs that people are equally entitled to the rights, privileges, and resources of society most likely also derive from nationalism of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Nationalist leaders advanced economic arguments resonating in informants' memories for expectations of a 'better life' (see Klumbytė 2004, 2006). As an ideology about a collective (in which it parallels socialism) comparable to kinship and religion (see Anderson 1983, Schneider 1968, Herzfeld 1997), nationalism was used by the liberation movement leaders to promise well-being for the newly imagined nation and nationals. Ideas about equality in postcolonial contexts give beliefs of equality wider resonance. For example, Verkaaik (2001) reports that in Pakistan Muhajirs, a term used in Pakistan for those whose families migrated from India in the years after independence in 1947, believe that the Pakistani state

is a creation for *all* South Asian Muslims, however, it is captured by one ethnic group – the Punjabis. Thus, equality is a ‘commodity’ of global flows of political discourse.

The value of loyalty to the collective also informs ideas about the state officials. According to Humphrey in the Soviet Union by the 1930s the word *коллектив* (collective) was used to ‘express the character of the whole USSR and whole Party’ (Humphrey 2001:343). The collective was a stable group of colleagues, united by labour and a common goal. According to Kharkhordin (1999), the Soviet version of the idea went beyond that of any old co-operative. It nurtured the meaning that by joining together the members gain a kind of immortality. Each member was to feel responsible for the whole, and purges were the means to create a collective revolutionary body. In the Soviet period this vision of the collective was established in relation to working collectivities in Russia (Kharkhordin 1999).

In Soviet Lithuania an individual also had meaning primarily in terms of a collective or social group, such as a *kolkhoz* community, factory work groups, or kindergarten collectives. In the early 1990s people clung to the collective not only for immediate economic benefits, but also because it was the only site for organizing the local economy as a whole, it was ‘somewhere to go to,’ and membership still implied rights, even if these were hazy and disputed (see also Humphrey 2001:348). The vice-director of the interior decoration enterprise in the largest village remembered how people used to come every morning for several months and stand by the closed doors of the *kolkhoz* expecting work. While for the vice-director it was a meaningless undertaking, for the workers it was a meaningful action; accomplishing it they could connect to social life in terms of work, security, and rights.

As Hannah Arendt (2004) notes growing equality can give rise to opposite processes, such as social discrimination and exclusion. In Soviet contexts, ideologically promulgated egalitarianism and ‘state-dictated homogeneity’ (Humphrey 2002:188) coexisted with hierarchically articulated inequality. A collective internal inequality was accepted, for the collective engendered certain characteristic ranking practices simultaneously proclaiming a certain equality (Humphrey 2001:344). Ranking within the collective was ‘reinforced throughout the Soviet period by education policies emphasizing modernization and technical knowledge, such that the individual who recognized her own progress by virtue of her training simultaneously acknowledged the rightfulness of benefit distinctions on this basis in social groups’ (Humphrey 2001:344). As a result parallel ‘political emotions’ could be identified: disapproval of those who undermined the collective, on which people’s lives rested, and admiration of those who exposed the repressive character of collective, of required loyalty and restrictive commitment (see Humphrey 2001).

In post-socialist spaces, undermining the collective is commonly disapproved of; many people long for dependence on the collective and loyalty which was the underlying criterion of inclusion in the collective. Thus, the new practices of exclusion (such as non-usefulness at work) are not understood well (see Humphrey 2001:347). The retreat of loyalty and collective dependence are observed as disintegration of sociability, emergence of materialism (*sumaterialėjimas*) and, in general, decay of social relations.

### **Reclaiming dependence**

Informants claimed that the elites are alienated from the ‘people;’ they do not represent and understand the ‘people’ and do not recognize the problems ‘common people’ have. Juozas, a former director of an Institute and a CP member, argued that ‘the state does not know people’s concerns.



They don't want to know.' Petras, a large-holding farmer, in his 50s, pointed out that 'the elites live a different life, they have different benefits, higher salaries, exclusive privileges... transport, apartments, hotels.' According to Albertas, a Kaunas resident, the state officials should 'pay more attention to the common worker [*darbo žmogui*]. Not to themselves, but to others... They have enough already. They should let common people earn money.' Nijolė, a high school teacher, maintained that 'the elites care about their wealth, their salaries, their vacations... I tell you, if a doctor earns six hundred [litas], if a teacher earns six hundred [litas], this is not normal in the state. That's why all intellectuals leave [the country]. They don't see any other way out. They have to live and raise their children.'

Sensibilities about representation emerge in protest actions. Kotryna, a retired factory worker, in her early 60s, from Kaunas, remembered how she participated in the action the 'The Beggars' Ball' ('*Ubagų*<sup>12</sup> *balius*') organized by Vytautas Šustauskas, the leader of the Lithuanian Freedom Union, Kaunas mayor in 2000 and a Parliament member in 2000–2004, often titled the 'King of the Beggars' and/or a windbag politician (*bačkos politikas*). Kotryna and Šustauskas travelled with other people to Vilnius where they joined the 'Ball of Vienna in Vilnius' ('*Vienos pokylis Vilniuje*'),<sup>13</sup> the annual charity ball of the elites. Šustauskas's action was a protest against the rich, fetishization of wealth and conspicuous spending that the 'Ball of Vienna in Vilnius' symbolized for him and his followers. The fact that it was a charity action was downplayed. Kotryna recalled:

He [Šustauskas] organized the ball of the poor. [...] When we came to Vilnius... it was a tragedy. We saw how nicely dressed Adamkus and Adamkienė [the presidential couple] walked onto the stage, Landsbergis, everybody. And we, our delegation... [was not allowed] There were three lines of policemen. Poor Šustauskas was not allowed in.

Kotryna was not going to Vilnius to protest. She thought that she could participate in the 'Ball of Vienna in Vilnius' and remembered to take a dress, a hat and shoes for the ball. Kotryna recollected:

We went to the ball, but found ourselves at a demonstration. Later a musician came, we danced on the street, and nobody [the police] intimidated us. [...] After that his authority [Šustauskas] rose in our eyes. When the police stopped us coming from Vilnius [...] and wanted to arrest Šustauskas, people from all the buses, there were seven buses, pushed the police cars into a ditch.

Kotryna continued with pathos and, I think, with an attempt to impress me with her knowledge of how 'things should be.' She reasoned:

They [the political elites] do not represent our nation as they should. They should represent a lower stratum, a poor stratum... [...] Take, for example, heating. They don't give a damn. It is important that *they* live well and have warm houses. People are suffering in hospitals, day care centres, unheated homes... that load of care is not lifted. They watch only their interests. Integrating to the European Union they should represent a lower stratum, the retired, and a higher stratum, scholars, doctors... They should think of all the people of Lithuania.

<sup>12</sup> The term "ubagas" means: 1) a beggar; 2) a cripple; 3) a poor person; 4) a helper of a priest. See: *The Dictionary for the Lithuanian Language*. [www.lkz.lt](http://www.lkz.lt).

<sup>13</sup> 'The Ball of Vienna in Vilnius' is a charity action started in 1999. See: <http://www.vienos-pokylis.com/index.php>.

Asking for recognition and representation is reaching out for the familiar state of before which provided security and benefits for people like Kotryna. In so doing people re-create the role for the state (see also Verdery 1996). Reaching out for restatization (Verdery 1996) materializes in protests against reforms and against the circulation of wealth. In addition to cynicism directed at the state officials, protests also express desires for well-articulated authority and rules as well as expectations of state intervention and regulation.

Appeals to authority are often delivered in moralizing rhetoric which links state and subject with ties of mutual dependency, responsibility, respect, and loyalty. Thus, socialism produced not only a moralizing state in the form of various authorities, but also moralizing subjects, dependent, powerless and simulating respect and recognition as well as capitalizing on the ideology of provision or welfare. A moralizing subject very often addresses the state through the media. For example, in the article ‘Why does the government [*valdžia*] of Lithuania denigrate [*tyčiojasi*] its citizens?’<sup>14</sup> a single mother of two students complained about her salary, which was not enough for the major needs of a family. She wrote that she bought a computer a year ago and later the required programs. According to the knowledge she had from different state institutions, such as the Tax Inspectorate (*Mokesčių inspekcija*), she had to be compensated for the computer and the programs. However, she complained, recently she found out that part of the expenses were not going to be covered because the Ministry for Finance and the Tax Inspectorate changed the regulations. The woman claimed to have borrowed the money she expected to receive back as compensation. Moreover, she stated that, even if she sold the already used computer, she would get only part of the money back. Her sons ‘because of the painful denigration by the state officials (*valdžios*) will suffer great moral harm.’ The woman writes: ‘My sons, when they learned about this slap [in the face], were very disappointed. They will have to give away the computer which they need for their studies so much. They stated that they are not going to live in a state where citizens are deceived so impudently [*akiplėšiskai*], and will leave it when they have the chance.’ In a similar way, the other article ‘The habit of government [*valdžios įprotis*] – to promise, and then to poke fun at people [*išsityčioti*]<sup>15</sup> wrote about the government’s promise to raise pensions of the people who became disabled on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1991 when Soviet troops attacked the TV tower, as well of families of the deceased. However, pensions were not increased. One of the participants of the January 13<sup>th</sup> events argued that the decision of the Parliament not to raise the pensions was very disappointing. He argued that people need money for medicine, not for anything else.

Articulated in the vocabulary of ‘major needs,’ such as a computer for studies, the moralizing subject in the first example promised to punish the state by leaving it, to break the existing loyalty and solidarity. The subject also fashioned herself as a victim who was tortured by state officials by variously humiliating her and even ‘physically’ (the slap of the state) abusing her sons. People who address the state in this way make their powerlessness and dependence on the ‘state’ and authority explicit. As argued above, they seek order *for* themselves, not *in* themselves, from authority invested with power above them. They also aim to reclaim their dependence and the ‘state’s’ role guaranteeing this dependence.

Among the multiple other ways of becoming visible in the eyes of the ‘state’ prominent are struggles to reconstitute the gaze over their own bodies (cf. Dunn, forthcoming, Petryna 2002).

<sup>14</sup> See Mendelienė, Daiva, “Kodėl Lietuvos valdžia tyčiojasi iš savo piliečių?” *Lietuvos rytas*. 02/04/2005. No.29. P.4.

<sup>15</sup> See “Valdžios įprotis – pažadėti, o po to išsityčioti”. *Lietuvos rytas*. 12/20/2004. No. 295, p. 2.

People aim to get diseases attached to their names in order to qualify for state subsidies. A certified sick body becomes a way to communicate individual concerns as well as a medium to interact with the 'state.' One informant, in his 40s, told the story how he was able to make his mother 'unable to take care of herself' by using his connections and money to get false diagnoses for her illness. As 'unable to take care of herself,' his mother qualified for hospital care and sanatoriums (for acceptance to which he also had to use connections and money) and became eligible for benefits which allowed the son to cope with the burdens of care.

Reclaiming 'dependency' on the state coexists with alternative accommodations. Some explore new possibilities by establishing small enterprises, engaging in agriculture or vocational training. Saulė, a 40 year old teacher from the largest village, got enrolled in a new program at the university to make herself more competitive in the job market. Unlike many others, she felt that 'her life does not depend on the state [the term used was *valstybė*, not *valdžia*]. We choose our way and know well where we go, what we do, the state has nothing to do with that. If I am here [a teacher at school], it means that I am not good for anything else. If I was able to, I could go somewhere else.'

### **The relationship of difference and distrust**

Some pollution beliefs illustrate that the political elites and people exist as separate categories. To cross from one group to another is to become dehumanized, exposed to power and danger, to get polluted (cf. Douglas 1984):

There was one man. He used to arrive here when the movement for independence started. He was such a poor guy, in cheap clothes, very sincere. He promised to do everything. Now he works for the state. He has a castle, a huge house. His brother works for him, a sister also... He has a lot. And village people? We do not see them, they don't come. Nobody cares [Jadvyga M., a retired woman, a former kolkhoz worker].

Corresponding to others' ideas, Egidijus, in his 50s, from the largest village, claimed that the state (*valdžia*) is something dirty. Egidijus, a CP member in Soviet times, argued that he will never join any party because they drag out all the muck and because politics is dirty. Similar attitudes towards the state were also recorded by a Kaunas resident, in his mid 70s, in an ironic letter complimenting his son on the son's habilitation. The letter said that, if he were alive, the grandfather would be happy for his grandson who was awarded a habilitation PhD degree (*Habilituoto daktaro laipsni*) and who brought honour to the family, and had not done something stupid like joining the Seimas. Ona, a retired pensioner from the smallest village, said she would never wish that her son become a Parliament member. She reasoned that 'in a state office you cannot be a human being [*žmogus*].' Similar cynical attitudes have been recorded in Turkey (see Navaro-Yashin 2002). Navaro-Yashin's informant Saniye thought that 'Being a statesman is for the liars, for the tricksters, for those who are out for self-interest, for money, for fame. That's not for me!' (Navaro-Yashin 2002:170). For Saniye, power was about looting resources that were meant for the people, or about striking it rich after occupying a seat in a state office for some time (Navaro-Yashin 2002:170).

Saulius, a historian and a professor from Kaunas, claimed that hatred and spite for the state (*valdžiai*) are omnipresent. However, according to him, they coexist with high popularity among students of the law school and the disciplines directly related to power and state positions. Saulius's view was reaffirmed by Raminta who was a recent graduate from high school. Raminta applied to

various departments at several universities to study law or ‘anything else to earn good money.’ According to Saulius, *valdžia* is evil and strange, but one of the best ways to live well.

The relationship of difference between the state and the subject is circulated by the media, intellectuals and politicians. Headlines, editorials and leading articles of the mainstream newspapers, such as *Lietuvos rytas*, often structure the state in a similar way as the people mentioned above. Vytautas Radžvilas, an associate professor at the Vilnius University and a visible public figure in his essay ‘Feast by the trough’ invoked Plato’s state and its opposition – the pig state. Radžvilas commented that ‘Obviously such a [pig] state exists not only in the imagination of this theorist. We have at least one real example. It is Lithuania.’ He critiqued parliamentarians for moral and intellectual decay, illiteracy in ‘all senses of the term,’ and incompetence. Radžvilas argued that for Parliament members ‘The Parliament is the place where they come not to work, but to stuff their pockets by taking advantage of their position.’<sup>16</sup>

In a ‘bestseller’<sup>17</sup> on the state ‘The Ship of Fools’ Vytautas Petkevičius, a well-known writer, active Sąjūdis participant and a Parliament member in 1992–1996, writes that the major aim has been achieved – there is no state (*valstybės*) which could defend people and everyone struggles only for oneself (Petkevičius 2003:9). The state (*valdžia*) betrayed its people one more time: at various points in time it has been Polonized, Russified, Americanized, and now Europeanized (Petkevičius 2003:13). He calls Prime Minister Brazauskas corrupt and discusses politicians’ relations with the KGB, thus, defining them as betrayers of the nation-state. According to the author, Lithuania is under the rule of one party – the Party of the Crooks (*sukčių partija*) – with many names (Petkevičius 2003:299). Petkevičius, like other politicians, intellectuals or villagers, in his cynical commentaries about the ‘state’ does not compromise about statism (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2002). Even if he does not take it seriously and keep an ironic distance, he is still worshipping the state (cf. Žižek 1995).

Most post-socialist and postcolonial societies are noteworthy for citizens’ distrust, and, thus, lack part of the social capital which is the key to making democracy, at least as perceived by Putnam (1993), work. Giordano and Kostova (2002) claim that in Bulgaria ‘Negative opinions of the power elite, depicted as a distant and alien clique run by string-pulling lawyers, are widespread.’ As in Lithuania, in Bulgaria one can hear that ‘politicians are all alike; you can’t trust them’ (Giordano and Kostova 2002). Verkaaik (2001) claims that in Pakistan ‘Muhajirs have grown deeply disappointed with and distrustful of the state. [...] The state has been captured by social groups who, through secret and invisible means, hold on their particularistic sense of loyalty and use state power to enhance their self-interests’ (Verkaaik 2001:364).

Distrust as part of cynicism towards the state underlies commentaries on all kind of projects of the elites. During my research the most prominent project was joining the EU. Many people approached joining the EU as an elite project which was expected to primarily benefit the elites them-

<sup>16</sup> See V. Radžvilas “Šėlsmas prie lovio”. [www.delfi.lt](http://www.delfi.lt). Elta news. 01/21/2005. 12:25.

<sup>17</sup> The book was called a “bestseller” in the media. See, e.g., Aldona Svirbutavičiūtė “Durnių laivo” autoriui gresia dar dvi bylos” (“The author of “Durnių Laivas” will face two more lawsuits”). *Lietuvos žinios*. 05/21/2004. No. 116, p. 1. <http://www.press.lt/cgi-bin/Article.asp?Lang=L&ID=568707>. I bought the book at the library of the Parliament and was told by the sales clerk I was lucky to get one of the last copies because the book was popular. One parliamentarian assured me that 50% of what was written was true. During the research several informants mentioned the book as an authoritative source. The book also became known because of several lawsuits for libel including libel against V. Landsbergis-Žemkalnis, the father of V. Landsbergis.

selves. A recently retired pensioner, a 63 year old man, was afraid that because of the corrupt elites, the promises bound to the EU will not be delivered. He claimed that ‘there is no honesty among the elites. Maybe just among some... On the other hand, there are a lot of honest people [not the elites]. [...] On the radio they announced that someone was willing to seize funds from the EU... Well, you see, it is hard to accept this. I don’t want much from the state. I get a pension, it is enough for me what I have...’ Others also thought that money flows which were discussed during the referendum campaign will not reach people. A woman, in her late 60s, thought that ‘nothing good will happen... nothing. You can see that they all have their mouth open like ravens. They already have appropriated a lot. There was some money for agriculture allocated, it has disappeared somewhere.’

Algimantas, in his 50s, a funeral home employee, similarly distrusted the political elites and argued that ‘The referendum [for joining the EU] was throwing dust in everyone’s eyes. Everything was agreed upon, decided and ordered in advance [he was referring to the signing of the Accession Treaty in Athens on 16 April 2003 by Prime Minister A. Brazauskas and the Minister for Foreign Affairs A. Valionis]. Everything was settled and signed.’

Juozas and Violeta, a family from a town near the largest village, former CP members with high standing, compared Moscow and Brussels:

*Violeta:* Well, is it free [Lithuania]? Well, they used to take hams to Moscow, now they gratify Brussels.

*Juozas:* Well, but if you take ham...

*Violeta:* You got everything. We got houses... five room houses... [Juozas as an Institute director was able to successfully bargain with ‘Moscow’ over building of houses for employees].

*Juozas:* They used to build a house [*alytnami*] and invite people to work: ‘Come to work – you will get a house in a year.’ And they did. [...] Moscow respected Lithuanians. If they get – they will not make it disappear.

*Violeta:* And that dependence. I don’t know... But now, when you see, all this, Jesus Christ! Now... I say I think of the EU as a swear-word. Because bureaucrats cover their crimes or plans, or fraud [*aferas*] under the ‘EU’ [She meant that they cover their plans by arguing that these are the EU requirements].

In their cynical commentaries about the ‘state’ and state officials people express concerns about the new circulations of wealth and power from which they usually feel excluded. Cynicism derives from the informants’ experience of poverty, marginalization, and insecurity (see Klumbytė 2006). It is also motivated by beliefs in values, such as equality and solidarity to the collective, which no longer inform social relations as they did in Soviet times. In dialogue with the ‘state’ informants try to restore the role of the state as the provider and the moral relationship between state and subject. Their commentaries illustrate their passivity and the suppression of their agency which is indicative of beliefs in the omnipresence and the immutability of ‘post-socialist’ power.

## Conclusions

As in socialism, in post-socialist spaces people experience the omnipresence and immutability of power, which is reflected in their ideas and feelings of exclusion from the circulation of wealth, distribution of rights, privileges, and resources. In socialism an individual may have felt cynical towards the ‘state’ because of its manifold presence in everyday life through the organization of work, regulation of collective life, or distribution of entitlements. The retreat of the state (or what

Verdery (1996) called ‘destatization’) from individual life is the dissolution of the former presence. It is not, however, the dissolution of the state. The ‘state’ is present in the circulation of wealth and policies of privatization, agriculture, education, medical care which affect individual lives. Imaginings of the post-socialist ‘state’ are articulations of this presence. They are attempts to understand power and strategizing to influence the state by joining protest actions or becoming ‘sick’ to get benefits. The rhetoric of these strategies is grounded in moral arguments about welfare and accountability. Reclaiming dependence on the state is not only informed by socialist subjectivities. It is a post-socialist hybrid practice which derives its rationale from different times and spaces. The cynical and strategizing subject in a small village of Lithuania is also a global citizen while he or she participates in globally circulating discourse on the state, authority and power. Like Chileans (see Paley 2001), Pakistanis (see Verkaaik 2001), Turks (see Navaro-Yashin 2002), or Russians (see Ries 1997) an informant in Lithuania will express his/her cynicism by criticizing the state officials as self-interested, immoral, unjust, thus, not to be trusted, and by articulating the ‘state’ as a polluting and malevolent realm of power.

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## CINIZMO ALCHEMIJA: AUTORITETAS, GALIA IR POSOCIALISTINĖ VALSTYBĖ LIETUVOJE

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### S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje tyrinėjamas Kauno ir trijų kaimų gyventojų valstybės / valdžios suvokimas analizuojant požiūrius į autoritetą ir galią. Kaip ir sovietmečiu posovietinėje Lietuvoje žmonės jaučia neribojamą ir sau nepalankią galią, kuria disponuoja valdžios atstovai. Sunkiau gyvenantys kaimo ar miesto gyventojai jaučiasi likę nušalyje nuo pinigų, teisių, privilegijų ir išteklių srautų. Sovietmečiu valstybė ir ją įsmeninanti valdžia galėjo būti suvokiama neigiamai dėl jos kišimosi į kasdienį ir socialinį gyvenimą. Nors antropologai kalba apie tokios valstybės suirimą, jos pasitraukimą iš žmogaus gyvenimo, tačiau, kaip teigiama šiame straipsnyje, valstybe ir valdžia tebeįvardijama daugybė kasdinių situacijų. Valstybė suvokiama per naujas švietimo, žemės ūkio, medicinos ir kitas reformas. Valdžios ir valstybės įsivaizdavimas yra būtent naujų posovietinių subjekto – valstybės / valdžios santykio – formų artikuliacija. Įvardydamas šį santykį žmogus bando suprasti galias ir autoritetų hierarchijas, bandydamas daryti įtaką per protesto akcijas, balsavimą ir pan., jis siekia palenkti autoritetus ir jų galias į savo pusę.

Straipsnyje teigiama, jog cinizmas yra pagrindinė „struktūrinė jausena“, apibendrinanti valdžios / valstybės suvokimą. Jį išreiškia negatyvumas, nuotolis, ironija, o ne aktyvus pasipriešini-

mas. Cinizmas atsiranda kritikuojant valdžios atstovus kaip siekiančius naudoti tik sau, nemoralius, neteisingus, todėl nepatikimus. Jis identifikuojamas ne tik kaimo ar miesto žmogaus dialoguose, bet ir žiniasklaidoje, politinėje ir filosofinėje mintyje. Cinizmą sąlygoja įvairūs kontekstai: valdžios galios patirtis kaip nekintančios, nenusipėjamos, bauginančios, kuri apibrėžė subjekto ir autoriteto santykį sovietmečiu ir bent iš dalies apibrėžia dabar; tikėjimas tokiomis vertybėmis kaip lygybė ir lojalumas kolektyvui, kuris nebėra socialinio gyvenimo norma kaip buvo sovietmečiu; dažnai nesuvokiamu posovietinės gerovės pasiskirstymu ir patiriama marginalizacija.

Ciniškas, manipuliuojantis ir moralizuojantis žmogus yra ir globalus pasaulio pilietis, kadangi jis kalba diskursu, atpažįstamu Pakistane, Čilėje, Turkijoje ar Rusijoje.

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