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## The construction of continuous *self* in the life stories of former Soviet officials in Lithuania

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the discursive strategies of representation of potentially stigmatized Soviet era experience and its integration into a coherent construct of positive *self* as shaped in contemporary discursive contexts of Lithuanian memory culture. The critical moral reflection of potentially stigmatized Soviet era experience in the life stories of Lithuanian former Soviet officials is explored as a different strategy to the 'pragmatic' normalizations strategy of representation of this experience and integration of it into positive image of present self.

**KEYWORDS** Life story; identity; normalization; Lithuania

Reconstruction of the continuity of the present *self* through 'biographical work' is one of the key functions of autobiographical stories created after historical upheavals: individuals recreate their life stories, often changing them over time, and find out about themselves in those stories and about the world after historical disruptions (Fischer-Rosenthal 1995, 260). In former communist countries, reconstruction of the continuity of the positive *self* was extremely problematic in the context of the hegemonic discourses at the beginning of the 1990s, emphasizing the discontinuity with the communist era. Many examples of biographical research in former communist countries revealed problems in the continuous representation of communist era experience in life stories. These problems also concerned the experience of late socialism: as is shown by biographical research in Estonia and Lithuania, this era was represented poorly, or even skipped, in many life stories constructed in the 1990s (Kõresaar 2004, 36; Marcinkevičienė 2007, 28).

However, in recent years there have been changes toward more diverse representations of the communist era in the public discourse of the former communist countries. Research conducted recently in post-Soviet Baltic countries indicates changes that are especially salient in autobiographical discourses. Positive representations of the Soviet era are characteristic of the Lithuanian and Latvian memoirs of former Soviet officials (Ivanauskas 2011; Rubavičius 2007a, 2007b; Kaprans 2011). Similar changes are also seen in the Estonian autobiographical discourse, where the domination of interpretations within the framework of the public 'discontinuity'

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discourse is shifting toward interpretations along the lines of a paradigm of everyday life (Jõesalu 2010, 293). However, recent research on Lithuanian memory culture also reveals the ambivalence, contradictions, and absence of a clear consensus in the memory discourse of the Soviet era (Christophe 2013; Safronovas 2011). The purpose of this article is to contribute to the research on the processes of changing Soviet era memory discourse by exploring how individual Soviet era memories – representations in autobiographical discourse – change in the varying and controversial contexts of the Lithuanian memory culture. The aim of this analysis is to highlight some discursive strategies employed by people in their life stories in order to integrate potentially stigmatized experiences into a continuous and coherent construct of the positive *self*. Controversial contemporary contexts of Lithuanian memory culture do not provide clear cultural models for making meaning of the Soviet era experience. This study addresses the following questions: what strategies do people employ for the representation of potentially stigmatized experiences in changing stigmatizing contexts? How do these strategies help to integrate potentially stigmatized experiences into the continuous construction of the present *self*? The article is based on the analysis of three typical cases. These stories exemplify the life stories of former Soviet officials of older generations. These three stories were chosen after analyzing 24 stories of former Soviet officials in total.

## The features of Lithuanian public memory culture

Life narratives express interaction between cultural discourse, material circumstances, and the experience of the individual (Bruner 2006, 102). As is formulated by sociologist Vladimir Andrie, 'We have to create a sense of shared cultural membership with our audience by constructing the self-account as fitting for the context of its telling and by drawing on shared cultural resources' (2000, 216). Many research studies reveal the complexity of the interconnections between public cultural frames and individual life narratives. In memory studies, the complexity and discontinuity of interaction between four different levels of memory – the organic-autobiographical, the interactive-familial, the institutionalized national, and the mass mediated-transnational levels of memory – are observed (Erl 2011, 315). Empirical research on the interaction between the individual level of memory and dominant discourse of memory culture also demonstrates the diversity of the relationship between these levels, sometimes revealing the strong domination of the patterns of hegemonic discourse in the individual memory while sometimes revealing the discrepancy between both levels (Christophe 2013, 115–116; Welzer 2008). Given the complexity of the relationship between individual and cultural memory, some researchers have come to the conclusion that the question of the interaction between different forms of memory can only be answered empirically, not theoretically (Christophe 2013, 116).

After reestablishing independence, the Soviet era was radically reevaluated in the Lithuanian memory discourse, as well as in the other postcommunist countries. The new interpretation of the Soviet period was based on the concept of a 'return to normalcy,' according to which the Soviet period was viewed as an anomaly; a break in the 'normal' development of society (Niedermüller 2004, 11–27). To a great extent, the 'return to normalcy' concept expressed the discourse understanding the Soviet occupation as cultural trauma; this view was expressed informally during Soviet era, and began to be postulated openly after the fall of the USSR (Aarelaid-Tart 2006, 57–58). In

the Lithuanian discourse of cultural trauma, the themes of alien, forced occupation, Stalinist repressions and the suffering of the victims, memories of the postwar period guerrilla resistance, and other forms of resistance to the regime, became topical. Furthermore, in trying to, at least symbolically, 'return' to a 'normal' society, great importance was given to the memories and myths of prewar Lithuania, approaching this period as a model for a 'normal' democratic society (Nikžentaitis 2013, pp. 523–528) and legitimizing Lithuania's belonging to the 'West' and 'Europe' (Klumbytė 2003).

The condemnation of Soviet socialism as an alien, forced occupation still remains indisputable in Lithuanian society (Christophe 2013, 117), and belongs to the hegemonic public discourse of the Soviet era memory.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the consensus about the general views on Soviet occupation, researchers have observed internal divisions in Lithuania's memory culture. These divisions started developing around the late 1990s, 'with deep lines of memory culture breaks lying under the surface of society's consensus' (Christophe 2013, 117). To a great extent these differences of memory discourse are related to political identities and spheres of power between two political forces – 'conservatives' and 'ex-communists' (Čepaitienė 2004, 2007; Christophe 2013, 2010; Safronovas 2011). Almost from the very beginning, attitudes toward the Soviet era became an important indicator differentiating the political identities of 'left' and 'right,' and these differences and contrapositions were expressed not only in political, but also in moral categories (Čepaitienė 2007). Though the ex-communists approved of the main statements of the anti-Soviet discourse, they implemented these sentiments in the memory culture more passively than the conservatives. The discourse of the ex-communists was mainly defensive; they attempted to show that the communists under the Soviet regime did not "collaborate with occupants", but that they 'worked for Lithuania' (Safronovas 2011, 356–357, Čepaitienė 2004). Meanwhile, representatives of the conservative political forces believed only disassociation and resistance to the regime were morally acceptable attitudes and behavior to exhibit during the Soviet era (Christophe 2013). In memory policy, the conservatives actively tried to implement an anti-Soviet narrative and to hegemonize this narrative (Safronovas 2011; Čepaitienė 2004).

Barbara Christophe notes that the two discourses mentioned above have relatively equal weight and there is no clear domination of one or the other. She finds this balance of power to be a specific characteristic of Lithuanian memory culture (2013, 117–123). This balance of power in supporting different interpretations of the Soviet era is partly determined by the peculiarities of the realization of the means of transitional justice.<sup>2</sup> In 1991, the Communist Party was condemned and forbidden, but the majority of its members had already created a new party by the end of the previous year. The new party was created on the basis of Lithuanian Communist Party after the separation of it from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in December 1989. Lustration involved only those members who had remained loyal to Moscow and did not support separation (Safronovas 2011, 358). Among them, several leaders of the Communist Party were sentenced to imprisonment but the main responsibility for the injuries committed by Soviet regime was left to the repressive structures.

The law of lustration for members of the repressive structures was used as recently as 1999. However, it was difficult to prove involvement in the secret services, because

some of the Committee for State Security (KGB) documents were missing. Further, after the ex-communists returned to power again in 2000, lustration went slowly; around 2007 it came to the standstill and has since become the object of political discussions (Safronovas 2011, 360). In 2012, the remaining KGB documents began to be published, but they were not detailed enough to use as evidence to prove the responsibility of specific individuals. Instead, the responsibility was shifted to one demonized repressive structure. This shifting of responsibility led to the creation of the narrative of the 'criminal KGB,' which satisfied both conservatives and ex-communists and allowed them to construct a community of victims encompassing almost the whole nation.

Together with the failures of transitional justice, the peculiarities of the laws of citizenship also exerted an influence on de-sovietization in post-Soviet Lithuania. Unlike Latvia and Estonia, citizenship and all political rights were granted to all residents of Lithuania from the beginning, including those who came from Russia and other parts of Soviet Union during Soviet era. This helped many supporters of the previous regime remain in powerful positions. For example, in 1992, ex-communists won elections to parliament. Opinion polls also show support for the ex-communists' restrained assessments of the Soviet era in Lithuania more than in other Baltic countries: in 1993 Lithuanian inhabitants assessed both the economic and political aspects of the Soviet period more positively than Latvians or Estonians (Rose and Maley 1994, 27, 35).

The positive and neutral viewpoints of the Soviet era emerged in the public discourse in the second half of the 1990s as the alternative to the dominant anti-Soviet discourse. These newly emerged viewpoints were based to a large extent on the symbolic division of the communist era life into the everyday life and politics, which is typical for memories of the postcommunist countries. Thereby, other ways of representation of the Soviet era were made possible than those of period's stigmatization and vindication. (Kõresaar, Lauk, and Kuutma 2009, p. 29) In academic discourse, after the wave of denunciation of Soviet crimes appeared, there were more full-scale studies of the history of Soviet period, where the topics of culture, economy, everyday life, 'collaboration,' and other issues began to be discussed in a more balanced way; these discussions were also reflected in the media (Čepaitienė 2004, 90).

Alternative attitudes also appeared in the discourse of memoirs, where a growing diversity of representation strategies, mostly in respect to the period of 'late Socialism,' emerged. At the end of 1990s, many memoirs of the former Soviet intelligentsia – representatives of Soviet art, science, and culture were published. In these memoirs, some aspects of Soviet culture and everyday life were represented positively or neutrally, and conformity with the regime was normalized. In so doing the 'pragmatic' pattern, emphasizing utilitarian motives (self-expression, professional advancement, etc.), prevailed and 'oppositional' aspects of pragmatic conformism were stressed as well, and equated with 'silent resistance.' 'Pragmatic' conformism was considered to be the most suitable attitude toward the regime (Gasiliūnas, Sprindytė, and Tamošaitis 2006).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a 'wave' of memoirs of the representatives of previous Soviet *nomenclatura* also emerged. In these memoirs, alternatives to anti-Soviet discourse strategies of representation of the Soviet era were expressed more clearly and the ex-communists' version of Soviet era history was formulated

most coherently (Rubavičius 2007a). The prototypical version of this normalization logic is aptly illustrated by the title of the book by the former leader of the Communist Party, later the President of Lithuania, Algirdas Brazauskas – *Even then We Worked for the Benefit of Lithuania* (2007). According to the logic of normalization, Soviet officials are depicted in memoirs as active agents in bringing about important social, economic, and cultural changes for Lithuanian society (Ivanauskas 2011, 48). The achievements of the modernization and urbanization of the Soviet era are highlighted in an attempt to dignify the activities of the Communist Party and stress the merits of the representatives of the *nomenklatura*. Regarding the issue of collaboration, only responsibility for direct repressions is acknowledged clearly. Further, responsibility is attributed not to specific individuals, but to two institutions: the KGB (Soviet intelligence agency, sometimes demonized as ‘Moscow’) and the institution of the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania (appointed directly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; acted as Kremlin’s instrument of control) (Rubavičius 2007a). Accusations about the collaboration of the local party leadership are dismissed as absurd with the argument that the community of ‘collaborators’ could be expanded to all communists, or even the whole nation.

The anti-Soviet public discourse, mostly supported by conservative political forces,<sup>3</sup> blames for crimes and damage performed by Soviet regime both representatives of the repressive structures and the leadership of Communist Party and other active Communists. Though the moral assessments formulated in this discourse should reduce the group of ‘non-collaborators’ to a small group of resisters and victims of oppression, the limits of the group of ‘collaborators’ are not clearly defined in this discourse and the responsibility of specific people is not mentioned (Ivanauskas 2011, 46; Christophe 2013, 122).

The anti-Soviet discourse, as mentioned, still retains features of a hegemonic discourse. This narrative dominates the official memory politics of state institutions (Nikžentaitis 2013, 526). The remaining hegemonic power of this narrative is also demonstrated by the fact that until now, people who positively view the Soviet era are stigmatized and excluded symbolically from ‘the community of good citizens’ (Klumbytė 2010, 296). However, the stigmatizing and excluding power of the anti-Soviet discourse seems to be diminishing. This trend is demonstrated not only by the presence and power of the discourse presenting alternative patterns for the interpretation of Soviet era experiences, but also in the ambiguity, inconsistency, and vagueness characteristic of some basic categories and judgments of the anti-Soviet discourse itself. Researchers of the current Soviet era memory culture argue that ‘the phenomena of “collaboration,” “resistance,” and “conformity” and their forms are not determined clearly’ (Čepaitienė 2007, 46), and the boundaries of the groups of the ‘right people’ and ‘collaborators’ are shifting constantly (Christophe 2013, 122). Christophe finds ambivalent viewpoints and ambiguous interpretations in the ‘hybrid’ discourse of history textbooks, which reflects both the official hegemonic versions of memory culture and society’s conflicts and debates, and the autobiographical narratives of history teachers (2012, 2013). It could be concluded that the ambivalence and ambiguity is a specific characteristic of the Lithuanian memory culture today, giving more space for the representation of diverse Soviet era experiences in collective and individual memories, including those ‘taking advantage of’ the former regime (Christophe 2013, 116–122, 128). In the autobiographies, ambivalence is also used as

an intentional strategy for the representation of diverse and contradictory Soviet era experiences (Christophe 2013, 133–134).

### **Normalization and nostalgia as means of reconstructing a continuous post-Soviet self**

By definition, identity implies coherence and continuity. Many scholars consider managing continuity and coherence as the main objective when producing and interpreting life stories (Linde 1993; Elliott 2006, 39–49). As Andrle states:

Normal functioning requires that we appear to have a past, a life story to tell; that we appear to be able to give short excerpts or more extended versions from our life story as appropriate; and that these versions are sufficiently coherent to make their subject continuous despite changes, and morally adequate despite difficult choices. (2000, 216)

Normalization is one of the most common methods of making meaning of experiences of the previous era after radical historical changes, especially when attempts to construct continuous identity take place in the context of perceived potential stigmatization. For the analysis of post-totalitarian normalization, the distinction between 'pragmatic' and 'necessary' normalizations of post-totalitarian discourse introduced by the social psychologist Dan Bar-On is important. (1999, 254–278). The 'necessary' or 'soft' normalizations are characteristic to all discourses – all social roles in interaction 'need the suppression, avoidance, even deception and we could not function, pragmatically, without these levels of normalization' (1999, 264). Although all human discourses are normalized to a certain degree, according to Bar-On, the normalization existing in the post-totalitarian discourse means 'vulgar pragmatism,' in which normalization has been overused and manipulated, which is different to 'critical and ethical pragmatism,' in which normalization has been limited to its necessary level (1999, 264). He considers 'pragmatic normalization' to be a characteristic feature of post-totalitarian discourses.

Bar-On also maintains that the 'pragmatic' and 'soft' normalizations are connected to the different attitudes to totalitarian past, including strategies of normalization when coping with a potentially stigmatized experience. His research demonstrates the existence of attitudes other than the 'pragmatic' adjustment to normality toward people's own experiences in the totalitarian past – that is, the attitude of critical consideration of previous behavior in the light of today's democratic norms and values.

The attitude toward the totalitarian past, including critical moral reflection, is also connected to a different level of psychosocial adaptation in democratic society and to the processes of reconstruction of social responsibility in post-totalitarian societies (Bar-On 1999, 254–264). The most common strategy of psychosocial adaptation in democratic post-totalitarian societies is defined as 'the adjustment' of behavior to the requirements of democratic society and the ability to act effectively under multi-contextual demands (Bar-On 1999, 257). This ability to act effectively in new democratic reality does not require the critical reflection on one's own past in the totalitarian system, while reconstruction of social responsibility includes the critical moral reflection on own past behavior, emotions, and attitudes which "helps the individual learn from past experience." (Bar-On 1999, 257) Furthermore, in respect of the reconstruction of social responsibility after

totalitarianism, it is not enough only to be able to admit the facts from the past: 'To reflect means ... to regain one's attributional flexibility of social responsibility, one's internal moral dialog, not merely to admit it, even in the public. The act of confession is a means for reaching this goal, but not the goal itself' (Bar-On 1999, 259). Additionally, critical reflection of one's own experience in a totalitarian system is also connected to the processes of identity construction: 'reflection is not just a cognitive or psychological construction but also a moral and social construction in which not just facts are established but selves are constructed as well' (Bar-On 1999, 258). Bar-On defines the 'adjustment criteria' and 'reflective criteria' as criteria for the identification in the discourse of the two aforementioned types of attitudes toward previous experience (1999, 281). The 'adjustment criteria' correspond to the aforementioned 'pragmatic' normalizations, and the 'reflective criteria' correspond to the 'necessary' normalizations (1999, 254–278).

Nostalgia is another common strategy for establishing a positive continuous self after deep transformations of society. Fred Davis states that nostalgia is a yearning for continuity of a self (1979, 34). As Maya Nadkarni has noticed in the analysis of postcommunist nostalgia in Hungary, 'nostalgia for the everyday life of Kadar's Hungary offered one of the few safe discourses available for talking about the previous era. Because it evaded being harnessed for explicitly political ends, it provided a powerful tool for structuring collective and individual identities' (2010, 205).

Postcommunist nostalgia is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon that is not easy to define or identify empirically in life stories. Here, nostalgia is understood as a cultural praxis that is always reflexive – its subjects are always aware of the irretrievability of the past and selectivity of a nostalgic memory (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004; Nadkarni 2010)). Nostalgia expresses present feelings and concerns and, in terms of identity construction, nostalgia can be an essential constitutive part of the individual's present self and their present projections of social history (Klumbyté 2009, 97).

Neringa Klumbyté reveals an important aspect of the role of nostalgia in reconstruction of a positive self-identity in life stories in an analysis of the connection between post-Soviet marginalization and nostalgia for the Soviet past. She argues:

Nostalgia is a restorative discourse, through which an individual reclaims one's own dignity and respect by transposing himself or herself onto an idealized chronotope of the Soviet past ... Nostalgia is also a way to claim recognition and inclusion in a post-Soviet mainstream society, which very often denies equal citizenship to those who long for Soviet time. (2009, 93)

This reconstruction of dignity and continuous identity through nostalgia in life stories legitimizes the part of Soviet experience and memory that is negatively assessed or ignored in contemporary public. It is the apolitical character of nostalgia that enables people to speak 'safely' about their Soviet era experience – 'not to talk about the past while talking about it' (Nadkarni 2010, 205).



## Data and methods

This article is based on the analysis of written life stories of Lithuanian people that were sent in response to the life history competition 'My destiny and the destiny of my kin in the maelstroms of history' that took place between 2010 and 2011. The Department of Sociology of Vilnius University and *Versmė* Publishing House organized the competition and the author of this article was involved. Competitors were to describe their own life stories and the lives of people close to them in the context of historical events. The set of autobiographies (117 life stories)<sup>4</sup> reflected varied social and demographic diversity. The authors of the life stories came from a variety of different social, educational, and geographic backgrounds. More than half of the authors (74) were representatives of an older age generation born between 1924 and 1944. Thirty-three authors represented people born between 1945 and 1957 and the rest of the authors were from younger generations.<sup>5</sup> This analysis covers the life stories of the oldest generation.

Twenty-four life stories were chosen to represent the biographical experience of those during the Soviet era that could be considered to be potentially stigmatized in current discursive contexts. The criteria for the identification of potential stigmatization are based on the interpretation of the term 'political conformism' in the Lithuanian scholarly discourse. Political conformism means participation in implementing the regime's political power and encompasses activities such as voluntary participation in public political undertakings, active direct support of the regime through creative works and products, membership in the Communist Party, heading the central nonpolitical institutions, working for the political and party authorities, power structures, or work as a KGB agent (Klumbys 2004, 24, 2009, 53–55). Taking high-level positions at institutions that implement policies of the regime, which inevitably involves the other activities previously listed, is defined as the highest level of political conformism (Klumbys 2009, 56). The highest level of political conformism, as well as collaboration with power structures, within the anti-Soviet discourse generally is stigmatized as 'collaboration.' Therefore, the selection criterion for life stories was the respective institutional position of authors within the field of political power. The stories selected were those of people who were officials in high-level positions at country-level institutions, employees in local party and administrative structures or power structures, or leaders of local institutions<sup>6</sup> during the Soviet era. Two stories of representatives of the second generation of the former members of repressive structures of Stalinist era were also selected in order to represent contexts of unambiguous stigmatization in all public discourses.

All of the authors were members of the Communist Party. A diversity of professions as well as of geographical locations was reflected in the sample. Most of the authors were retired when they wrote their autobiographies.

The analysis of these life stories focused on the continuity of the narrators' presentation of *self* in the story that is on the presence or absence of incoherence and contradictions in this presentation and connections of this coherence or incoherence to the character of presentation of the narrator's potentially stigmatized Soviet era experience. The analysis of the life stories was based on insights from the field of interpretative analysis of biographic narrative interviews. The techniques of narrative analyses (especially the distinction between narration and argumentation modes in life narratives) as described by Fritz Schütze and Gabriele Rosenthal (Schütze 1983;

Rosenthal 1993) are employed. Such segments of the life narratives as *self-characterizations* (Andrle 2000, 219), *codas* (Labow 2006, 79), and the final segments of the whole story (resolution including the final *coda*) were investigated more in-depth. It was assumed that, in the written life stories, the final resolution and coda of the whole narrative usually contained in the author's summary of their present *self*, which also includes connections to the past.

The strategies of normalization in the life stories were classified according to the representation of different contexts of stigmatization in public discourse (unambiguous stigmatization or presence of alternative discourses. The contexts representing different attitudes toward the totalitarian past (as defined by Bar-On) – the presence or absence of the attitude of a 'critical moral reflection' of past experience – were also considered. Thus, the stories containing the critical moral reflection of the experience of conformity with the Soviet regime and the stories representing strategies based on 'pragmatic adjustment' were identified at the start of the analysis and both groups were analyzed separately. Within these groups, the prevailing patterns of normalization of potentially stigmatized experience were identified empirically. The cases analyzed in this study represent typical patterns in the narrative strategies of normalization (Creswell 1998, 119). Besides typical features, all the cases analyzed here also contain some unique traits.

Among the 24 stories analyzed, there were 6 stories where the experience of engagement with the Soviet regime was critically reflected upon from the point of view of contemporary democratic moral values and ideologies and where the issues of 'collaboration,' 'opportunism,' and 'responsibility' were discussed. Normalizations in the other 18 stories analyzed only corresponded to the 'adjustment' criteria: these stories represented 'pragmatic' normalizations, as defined by Bar-On. In 16 of these stories, the normalization strategies of the experience of conformity with the Soviet regime mostly followed the patterns of the alternative discourse of ex-communists. The two remaining stories reflected a different stigmatizing context: the experience of their authors is stigmatized unambiguously in all public discourses. Though all discursive strategies of coping with dilemmas produced by unambiguously stigmatizing people's experience in the anti-Soviet hegemonic discourse are used in all groups of stories, some of them are more salient in the stories representing particular contexts. As examples of the larger sample, this study analyzes three stories representing patterns of construction of continuous identity based on different normalization strategies characteristic to the contexts investigated. With respect to the discursive contexts, two cases reflect the situation when there are alternative models of normalization in public discourse and one case reflects the contexts of unambiguous stigmatization. The names of the authors are pseudonyms.

### **'Pragmatic normalization': Julius's story**

The story of Julius (born in 1937) was, to a great extent, adjusted to the schemata of hegemonic anti-Soviet discourse. The potentially stigmatized life experience was normalized according to the schemes of the opposite 'ex-communist' discourse, and the Soviet era experience was presented by separating the political and everyday spheres. The author's life experience was presented as depoliticized in the everyday mode of narration, while the themes relevant to the dominant national narrative were more frequently presented in the mode of argumentation, revealing the narrator's

present position or illustrated by the stories and characters of other people. The terminology in the narrative was inconsistent: sometimes the exalted rhetoric of the ideology of Lithuanian nationalism ('our holy land,' 'Revival,' and so on) was mixed with phrases of Soviet ideology when speaking about everyday life.

The leitmotif of Julius's narrative experience of the Soviet era is the advancement of a man, born to a very poor family, to a higher social position. Julius became a forester, later advanced to a middle-ranking position in the Ministry of Forestry, and also worked in the Council of Trade Unions. After the restoration of independence, he continued in the Ministry of Forestry until his retirement. The theme that seems to be relevant for Julius is the transition out of poverty; poverty dominates his childhood memories and also frequently appears in later periods. The story of advancement from poverty to a higher social and economic status seemed to be the main construct organizing the presentation of the narrator's Soviet era experience. However, this construct is latent to a great extent, while the greatest part of the story presents the themes of the dominant anti-Soviet narrative.

The sequence of life events in the story was frequently interrupted by themes of the dominant anti-Soviet narrative. More attention was paid to themes corresponding to the national narrative than to personal experience. For example, references to school contains only 'patriotic' episodes, such as a time when he accidentally saw a bunker of partisans, a memory of singing patriotic songs, or a discussion of the stories of teachers who, as he found out later, were involved in the resistance. The theme of 'collaboration' with the communist regime was thematized only as a theme of belonging to the Communist Party, and was normalized according to the 'national-communist' pattern of 'work for the benefit of the nation.' This normalization was explicitly formulated in a 'national-communist' justification of membership of the Communist Party: 'if not us, then the newcomers, Russians, would have taken higher Soviet posts.' This pattern of normalization was also expressed in the positive character of a 'national-communist,' 'patriotic' leader of the branch in which the narrator worked,<sup>7</sup> who appears in the story just after the episode of the author's joining the Communist Party and in many other episodes of the story about professional work. The story listed a number of aspects illustrating the content of this character's 'work for the benefit of Lithuania': he 'trained own professionals,' 'not always obeyed the requirements of the Communist Party,' 'admitted ex-deportees to work,' and so on. However, Julius did not mention any aspects of resistance to the Party's requirements in his own professional activities. He presented his own professional work in a depoliticized way, depicting the political sphere as peripheral. Thus, the image of Julius as a 'national-communist' was also contradictory.

The story of the post-Soviet era was also constructed within the frame of a hegemonic anti-Soviet narrative, presenting the identity of 'a patriotic Lithuanian nationalist' and, in this case, the presentation of life events corresponded to this identity. His post-Soviet life continued with his participation in the popular movement for independence and various activities associated with 'work for the nation' (mostly as work for the protection of the nature and reconstruction of ethnic heritage). However, his story of life in the post-Soviet period also seemed to have signs of normalization: only the events consistent with the anti-communist discourse were highlighted and presented in detail.

The resolution and coda at the end of the whole narrative revealed the author's attempts to come to terms with the discontinuities produced by the normalization of

the story according to the schemes of the anti-Soviet discourse. Although, in parallel with the anti-Soviet discourse, the author relied upon the patterns of discourse of ex-communists, he also used additional strategies to help to make meaning of the controversial experiences of the past and present and to build a coherent self-image. The coda of the life story contained categorical criticism of present society and positive judgments about Soviet times that were explicitly formulated only in this part of the story. The ambiguity and ambivalence in this part of the story also revealed the lack of consistency in the terminology of the story: it included enthusiastic support for the independent state expressed in the exalted rhetoric of nationalist ideology as well as swinging criticism of contemporary society, expressed in the angry rhetoric and use of some terminology from the Soviet era. The content of the criticism toward contemporary society was consistent with typical themes of postcommunist nostalgia; the themes of poverty and wealth inequality, which was relevant to the author's experience, were particularly stressed. Most of the criticism toward the current times was expressed through nostalgia about the hopes and goals of 1988–1991. In his criticism, the author displayed the popular pattern of argumentation for overcoming the contradictions of the postcommunist experience, which has been identified by Christophe as being present in the Lithuanian public discourse and history textbooks. Anti-capitalist and anti-western resentment is commonly expressed in instances like this. The split between rich and poor is emphasized and assessed as unjust and unfair to the ordinary people, who bravely took part in the mass movement of 1989–1991 and do not deserve the unjust 'nomenclature capitalism.' Instead, the cynical and greedy rulers, as opposed to the ordinary people, are blamed for the injustice (Christophe 2010, 13–14). This strategy also 'redirects the 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' (Christophe 2010, 14). The story of Julius expressed this 'redirection' of nostalgia, which was also reflected in the statement summing up the criticism of the present – 'this is what we fought for.' However, potential nostalgia for Soviet times was only explicitly expressed once in the story, with reference to better access to education in Soviet times:

If I brought the times when our family was short of bread to the current times, I would definitely have no access to studies. I could not afford being a forestry officer whom my mother wanted me to become so much. I could not afford textbooks, notebooks and other learning supplements that pupils can hardly carry in their bags now. (Julius [1937] 2011, 20)

Though nostalgia and the anti-western argumentation helped to solve contradictions raised by controversial contemporary experiences, the narrator also probably understood that this nostalgia does not correspond to the present *self*-image of 'patriotic Lithuanian nationalist'. As if in an attempt to mitigate his positive judgment of Soviet times, to a certain extent, he treats his advancement during the Soviet era as accidental: 'My wife and me, we were the lucky ones. We both were younger children in our families and we both completed education.' The coda of the story also contains other attempts of the author to overcome the inconsistencies and contradictions of the self-image of 'patriotic Lithuanian nationalist' as presented in the normalized story. Here, he attempted to transfer the image of contemporary 'patriotic self' into the Soviet era. This was demonstrated in the final summary of the story: here he formulated a claim concerning his anticipation of regaining independence that seems false as it was not confirmed by any facts of the life experience:

We lived through a very interesting time. War, Soviet terrorism, kolkhozes, the Revival. In Soviet times I believed that the rebirth would come. I thought I was born in independent inter-war Lithuania, and I would die independent, too. My dreams came true. (Julius 1937, 21)

There was one more group of arguments in the final part of the story that showed the author was not certain about the sufficiency of the strategies used for constructing the continuity of *self* in the story. He tried to justify the connection of contradictory past and present ‘political selves’ without critical reflection on past behavior and expressed support for the argumentation that only behavior in the present period matters for the present image of a person. This argumentation was expressed in his opinion about two contemporary leaders: a former leader of the Lithuanian Communist Party and a former activist of oppositional culture:

Many people assess the Sąjūdis<sup>8</sup> leaders Algirdas Brazauskas and Vytautas Landsbergis differently. I dare call them leaders, as they both deserve that. They both toiled honorably for Lithuania’s sake, but only in a different way .... Those two men are the same to me. They have paid their duty to the Motherland by liberating it from the Soviet heel. (Julius 1937, 21)

Hence, the story of Julius demonstrated the pattern of ‘pragmatic’ normalization, largely oriented to public relevance, where the presentation of life experience is, to a great extent, adjusted to the schemata of the hegemonic anti-Soviet discourse. This adjustment resulted in some incoherence and discontinuities in the presentation of *self* in the story. By separating the political sphere from the ‘nonpolitical’ everyday life, Julius also rejected part of his experience of conformity with Soviet regime, which was normalized in accordance with the ‘national-communist’ pattern of the discourse of ex-communists. This pattern, however, is of little help in representing the personal experience of conformity and of integrating it into a positive and coherent *self*. This was especially shown in the final part of the story, where the author’s feelings of discontinuity and the incoherence of his image of the positive present self were indicated.

### **Critical moral reflection and revealing the ambivalence of the soviet experience: Vytautas’s story**

The story of Vytautas (born in 1942) demonstrated his attempt to reflect critically on his experience of the Soviet period by applying contemporary moral and ideological criteria and the principle of ambivalence as the main framework for making meaning of his experience during the Soviet era. The main part of the story was written in the narrative mode, and explicit argumentation appeared only in the abstract at the beginning and in the final summary of the story. Schütze considers that narrations transmit former experience, whereas argumentations represent the perspective of the present (Schütze 1983; Rosenthal 1993). Though there were a lot of implicit arguments expressed through narratives in Vytautas’s story, this indicates that, to a great extent, the life story was primarily based on the author’s experience.

The problem of establishing connections between the two periods of life separated by anti-communist turn as a historical ‘break’ was explicitly formulated by Vytautas as the main aim of the story, and was reflected in the title of the story – *In the break of regimes and systems*. His main concern, established at the outset of his story, seems to be the issue of collaboration that is avoided on ‘pragmatically normalized’ stories.

From the angle of collaboration, Vytautas reflects on the problem of continuity between the Soviet and the post-Soviet era experience:

Did people like me, educated differently by the parents and the Soviet system, collaborate? Did we believe in the bright future of communism? Did we consciously, ideologically contribute to the development and consolidation of socialism? And where are we now, after the restoration of independence? How do we express our patriotism, Lithuanian belongingness, the desire to strengthen the state? Is everything fading away after the euphoria and enthusiasm of standing in the Baltic Way?

I think I'll try to answer some questions by telling about myself. With some others – it's much more difficult. We were under devastation of the totalitarian system, combined with a well thought-out upbringing. Time has shown that it was temporary, false, misleading, and alien.

Yes. We did collaborate. Helped to create a regime based on the unfortunate ideology. No. We were committed to the pursuit of our professions. Professionally, inquiringly, dutifully. (Vytautas [1942] 2011, 1–2)

Both strategies of the representation of the Soviet era experience analyzed here – critical reflection upon a potentially stigmatized experience in terms of contemporary moral values and the revelation of the ambivalence and ambiguity of the Soviet era experience – are interconnected in the story. The principle of ambivalence in the story was selected consciously, and it allowed the author to freely narrate the ambiguous and contradictory (from the viewpoint of contemporary contexts) experience, without reticence on the problems of guilt and responsibility.

The ambivalence of the life experience of former Soviet officials in the Soviet era was revealed in the story while also revealing the insufficiency of categorical judgments of hegemonic discourse. Vytautas pointed out that life in Soviet reality was more complicated, and, therefore, categorical judgments based on 'black or white' were too narrow. The ambivalence and controversy of life during the Soviet era was narrated also with the help of positive 'others'. In this context, the image of the author's father appeared to be very important. This image of a positive 'other' served to reflect on both types of experiences and attitudes – opposition to and collaboration with the system. Vytautas described his father as a progressive, interwar farmer and the noncommunist 'kolkhoz chairman' of the postwar period. His father served in the Red Army during the war, but 'was never proud of military awards.' He communicated with the Soviet authorities in the postwar period and, simultaneously, helped partisans and relatives in exile. In Vytautas' story, the father's character, representing ambivalent experience, served as an important model of positive identification and one of the principal tools to articulate the ambivalence of Soviet time. At the same time, legitimizing the father's position of collaboration fulfilled the need to secure a positive image of the family. The father's image allowed him to show the ambiguity and ambivalence of collaboration while in the position of the chairman of the collective farm (Vytautas also held this position for some time), and belonging to the Communist Party:

My father had agricultural knowledge and, therefore, was appointed by the authorities to chair the collective farm. There were partisans in the surrounding forests and one of our relatives was among them. Ideological chairmen would have problems, but partisans didn't touch my father. My father's career ended after two years and we came back to our native village. (Vytautas [1942] 2011s, 6)

The quoted fragment illustrates the professional nature of the chairman's work, the 'nonideological nature' of the father, and his relationship with partisans who are treated as heroes in the contemporary discourse. The insufficiency of unambiguous evaluations of Soviet era experience was also revealed through a number of other characters and stories. For example, Vytautas relays a story about a Russian military officer who participated in the deportation of the Vytautas's relatives and, according to his father, was wiping tears as 'most army men were normal and understanding people.' Vytautas also describes a postwar Party instructor who was 'a brave and sincere person,' a skilled agricultural professional, and many others. These stories display a popular interpretation pattern, particularly with regard to postwar times, in which the moral values of people, professional work, support of 'ordinary people,' and even the ability to maneuver between two fighting forces – anti-Soviet partisans and Soviet power structures in order to avoid victims – was regarded by people as more important than political or ideological positions (Christophe 2012, 15–17).

The experience of involvement in the Communist Party, *Komsomol*, and his father's service in the Red Army was presented as 'collaboration' to some extent. Vytautas did not legitimize his joining the Communist Party and did not justify membership by 'national-communist' or other similar arguments. Rather, he confirmed his ideological indoctrination which was, however, normalized as 'naive: "I naively thought by myself: In what way is it possible not to be with the current powerful might"' (Vytautas [1942] 2011, 12). However, the disapproval by his father, which the author described right after the story about joining the Party, again revealed the ambivalence of Soviet life, demonstrating loyalty of his family to oppositional to Soviet regime prewar traditions and values, thus also revealing the complexity of choices between loyalty and disloyalty to the regime as well as entanglement of loyal and disloyal social belonging during Soviet era:

So far, painful memories and a scar in the heart are left. When my district government appointed me to the position of the 'kolkhoz chairman,' my dad asked me whether I belonged to the Party. He knew that without it a person would not be appointed to such a position. I affirmed it. A cruel answer. 'My son, a tree was growing and one branch withered. It was cut off. You're now that branch in our family.' All the time we communicated after that, I felt coldness. It still hurts me. (Vytautas [1942] 2011, 12)

The continuity of *self* of Vytautas was to a great extent based on the narrative of his professional work during the Soviet era. Vytautas worked as a stock-raising professional (later, as a kolkhoz chairman and director of a huge stock-raising farm). His professional experience was structured within the framework of a collective story of *communist-era professionalism*, similar to the stories analyzed by Vladimir Andrlé in research conducted in the Czech Republic; these stories were used as a mean to avoid potential stigmatization in the life stories of men and women who had successful careers under communism; (2000, 223–24);. It was not by accident that Vytautas' story began with an episode about choosing a profession, and the motif of continuing successful professional activities was one of the most important factors describing his present life and identity in the final coda of the story. The story of *communist-era professionalism* was told by depicting characters who were good professionals. In the story of the author's professional career, positive characters were hard working, highly skilled professionals, who may or may not have been Party members, thus showing the distinction between political and professional spheres. Value was especially given



to the professionals who were most efficient and innovative at work. Again, an important role was given to the image of his father. This image served to express, *inter alia*, the conflict between a professional career and the political sphere, which also played a significant role in the story of Vytautas's professional activities:

It was hard for my father to run the kolkhoz. I know it very well, because I've tried that 'managerial bread' myself. Operational activities were clear and pleasant for him. But then ... there was Party's policy that should be pursued. That was a problem. There were many inexperienced Party activists trying to dictate their rules at the sittings of the board. He said he could hardly stand throwing one of such 'experts' out of a window together with the frames. (Vytautas [1942] 2011, 7)

To a large extent, the story of the author's work in the Soviet period was presented as a struggle for high quality, professional, effective work; it contained many stories about overcoming the obstacles emerging from the Party leadership and Soviet staff members (including the non-communists), who were dishonest in their work.

Similarly to the Czech stories analyzed by Andrlé (2000, 223–225), the story of Vytautas questioned the anti-Soviet dominant discourse, both by segregating professional activities from the political sphere, and by providing examples of highly skilled communist professionals, thus disclosing the exaggeration of the negative influence of the political dimension on the professional sphere in the anti-Soviet discourse. Characterizations such as 'He was a communist, but a straight person and a competent professional' (Andrlé 2000, 225) were also present in the story. However, the story as a whole did not unambiguously support the argument that 'one had to be politically astute to sustain conditions for doing a job well' (2000, 225). The connections between the political and professional sphere in the story of Vytautas were presented as more complicated and ambivalent. Though the image of the representatives of political institutions as impeding professionalism dominated, there were also noncommunist staff members who were dishonest. In line with the schemata of the anti-Soviet discourse, the author associated this dishonesty with the Soviet system, which destroyed the prewar habits of honest work. Moreover, the *leitmotiv* that links the stories of *communist era professionalism* to the prewar period (consistent with the models of anti-Soviet discourse) was expressed in the image of his father, who also transmitted to Vytautas the *habitus* of honest and innovative work from the prewar period. While narrating the story about his professional activities, the author emphasized the continuation of this *habitus* as a milestone in constructing the continuity of his own *self*. Therefore, Vytautas' story of *communist era professionalism* combined arguments from different discourses – some arguments challenged the stereotypes of anti-Soviet discourse, while others seemed to be consistent with them. Thus, in the story of *communist era professionalism*, the narrator also argues for ambivalence as an interpretative principle.

The narrative of the movement for independence was also presented clearly, and the continuity of professional work experiencing new opportunities played an important role in the narrative of the post-Soviet period.

Thus, the continuity and coherence of Vytautas's identity was constructed through the continuity of the 'professional self,' by discussing and mitigating the categorical judgments of the anti-Soviet public discourse by revealing the ambivalence of life in the Soviet era, and by establishing the connection to the prewar period of independence in line with some anti-Soviet discourse themes. The open reflection of the



potentially stigmatized Soviet era experience of conformism helped to integrate this experience into the more coherent *self*. The presence of the reconstruction of social responsibility that is connected to the moral reflection of the experience of the totalitarian era that looks problematic from the point of view of contemporary values and norms (Bar-On 1999, 257) can also be seen in this story. Although Vytautas did not put himself among those most responsible for ‘helping create the regime’, (Vytautas [1942] 2011, 2) his reflections indicated that he would probably behave differently if he lived in a totalitarian system now or in the future. This was also implied by the conclusive assessment of the main benefits of independence for him in the life story, where the moral aspect is emphasized: ‘Above all, the feeling that someone is behind you and above you has disappeared. Totalitarianism was ruining personality’ (Vytautas [1942] 2011, 34).

Objective ambivalence, as a principle of interpretation of the Soviet era experience, enabled the author to identify certain benefits of the Soviet era for him, namely (like in Julius’ story), good educational opportunities. However, there was no nostalgia in Vytautas’ story, as it does not contain disenchantment with or criticism of the present (the author compared the Soviet era access to education with that in prewar Lithuania). Yet, unlike in Julius’ story, Vytautas presented controversial experiences and interpretations intentionally within the interpretation space allowed within the framework of ambivalence. Ambivalence, as a tool of interpretation, encompasses both positive and negative assessments, thus helping to lessen and reconcile the contradictions between them.

### **Blame, guilt, and dispute of public discourses: Elena’s story**

The third story of Elena (born in 1940), portrays a version of unambiguous discursive stigmatization. The story demonstrated the thematization of experiences related to the most difficult memories, those creating the greatest tension in remembering post-Soviet society – blame and guilt. The author of the story is the daughter of a man who participated in carrying out Stalinist repressions in the postwar period. In Lithuanian memory culture, Stalinist repressions and their executors are viewed in a categorically negative light and this negative evaluation belongs to the hegemonic part of the public memory culture. Therefore, unlike in the case of ‘collaboration,’ there is an unquestionable and unambiguous interpretation model prevailing in Lithuanian memory culture with regard to this type of experience. Former members of the organizations that carried out the Stalinist repressions, as well as their family members and relatives, usually tend to conceal or deny such experiences in the biographical interviews conducted in between 2001 and 2002<sup>9</sup> (Šutinienė 2003, 60–61). In the stories written in 2010 and 2011, two representatives of the second-generation have thematized this experience of their family members; however, one of them chose a strategy similar to denial – she reported about her father’s participation in repressive structures, but refused to interpret or discuss said participation, saying ‘it is too early to speak about this complicated period.’ To defend her own positive image and that of her family, another second-generation representative, Elena, chose strategies that dispute the public discourse and the strategy of nostalgic criticism of the present.

The story of Elena revealed the significance for her identity of a sense of stigmatization and exclusion, created by the present discursive contexts. In general, the story was constructed as a ‘counter narrative’ (Andrews 2005, 110) and was organized

around the stigma of her father's experience. Approximately half of the story consisted of direct argumentation polemicizing with the statements of the dominant anti-Soviet discourse and criticizing present society; indirect argumentation was also expressed to a large degree. The narrative of life experience presented was fragmented, with few facts and an inconsistent time line.

In terms of her current economic, social, and symbolic status, the author seemed to be a 'winner' who expressed satisfaction with her present life and the opportunities provided by the new system. In her case, the protest-triggering feeling of exclusion seemed to be related to the stigmatization of her family's Soviet experience in present contexts. Another biographical context likely to determine the sense of exclusion in present society was the experience of work in the local *Komsomol*, Party authorities, and other Soviet institutions that required a certain degree of political loyalty. In this case, the feeling of stigmatization may have also been enhanced by the memories of stigmatization personally experienced by Elena, the daughter of a *stribas* (a Lithuanian word derived from the Russian word '*istrebitel*,' a member of the postwar local structures involved in repressions).<sup>10</sup> Her experience of being stigmatized was related to the environment in the local area where she was working in the 1950s. In this period, people in local communities still remembered the postwar repressions, and the members of repressive structures, commonly called '*stribai*' by locals, were condemned: 'The phrase '*stribas*' daughter' was the lash discouraging from any initiative'(Elena [1940] 2011, 17).

Like other stories from people of her generation, Elena's story was to a primarily narrated within the framework of the anti-Soviet discourse. The story aimed to combine both – consent to the principal statements of the anti-communist discourse and opposition to the particular schemata and statements of this discourse. As a result, the story contained many contradictions and direct arguments often contradicting the implicit ones. This dual nature was also a characteristic of the present self-image that Elena had. In the self-characterization developed in the story she presented herself as a winner, who expressed satisfaction with her present life. At the same time, the sense of marginalization was expressed in the characterizations of other people, whom she described as wantonly wronged by the elite, humiliated, helpless 'worthy and decent' men, whose (and her own) dignity she protects by means of protest and nostalgia.

The main theme of direct dispute against the public discourse that Elena used to defend the positive image of her family was judging the activities of partisans who fought against the Soviet occupation in the postwar years (officially called *bandits* in Soviet times) and the *stribai* who were involved in carrying out the Stalinist repressions (officially called *people's defenders*). These issues are also debated in the present public discourse, questioning the unambiguous hero-izing of the partisans, but do not provide justification for executors of the Stalinist repressions (Veidas 2007; Pocius 2009). Elena, in contrast, invoked the argumentation of the official Soviet discourse where participants in the anti-Soviet resistance were portrayed in a negative light as 'bandits,' while members of the repressive structures were seen as heroes. In doing so, she also employed the rhetoric of the official Soviet discourse (*defenders of people, bandits, The Great Patriotic War*, and so on). These changing and ambivalent present contexts of Lithuanian memory culture enabled the author not to ignore her father's complicated experience and, in order to maintain the positive identity of her family, to use the official Soviet discourse schemes that are denied in the public discourse and

omitted from it. In German discursive contexts, which are unambiguously negative about national socialism, representatives of the second- and third- generations of Nazi families do not contest the judgments of the public discourse but, advocating for the positive image of their families, try to marginalize and blur the participation of their family members in these activities (Welzer 2008). Elena had no intention of critically reflecting on or judging her father's experience (she did not raise the question of her father's role in the repressive structures), but unconditionally defends him. The questions of guilt and responsibility are insufficiently debated in the public space. In Lithuania, as in other postcommunist countries, the effect of 'transitional justice' 'spares society the much needed self-examination of the past and past behavior' (Kiss 2009, 138).

The other part of the argumentation was the criticism of present society, describing the decline, instability, and disillusionment of the present. Considering that Elena's story was largely constructed within the framework of the anti-Soviet discourse, nostalgia for Soviet times was implicit in her story, whereas nostalgia for the 'singing revolution' of the 1988–1991 (which, according to Christophe (2010, 14), 'redirects nostalgia which frequently leads to a glorification of the Soviet past to the miracle year of 1989'), was expressed explicitly. This nostalgia reflected the same pattern of argumentation as in Julius' story. In Elena's story, the same feelings and claims as characteristic of Soviet era nostalgia (Klumbytė 2009, 109) were transposed mostly to nostalgia for, in her words, the 'unfulfilled ideas and dreams' of the 'singing revolution.' Feelings of marginalization, as well as an appeal for respect, dignity and recognition, were expressed more in Elena's story than Julius's: she frequently defended the dignity of 'decent and honest' people who 'believed in the bright idea of liberation' but who now are 'helpless,' 'neglected,' and 'humiliated and despised in public institutions.' In parallel, the contraposition between 'ordinary men' and 'the mighty' was emphasized. Value was attached not only to the experience of the 'singing revolution,' but also to the Soviet era experience: in her story 'ordinary, decent men' now wantonly wronged by the cynical authorities were those who 'honestly worked all of their lives' in Soviet times, too. Anti-capitalist and anti-western attitudes were also strongly articulated in the following argumentation: 'All the ideas and dreams have been suppressed, blanketed, blown away, and killed by a rapidly sprouting capitalism. Material things penetrating from the space of a better, easier, different political system have become the core axis of life and the center of forces.' (Elena [1940] 2011, 23). However, this argumentation is also ambivalent in that implicit nostalgia for Soviet times was accompanied in the story by mistrust of both political systems.

In terms of the integration of Elena's Soviet era experience into the continuous construction of *self*, this argumentation is of little help. Although projecting present disappointments onto the hopes of the 'singing revolution' contributed to the reconstruction of the positive image of the present *self*, fragmentary nostalgia for Soviet times manages to integrate into this image only a small part of the Soviet experience. The small degree of integration is due to the fact that Elena's opposition to dominant anti-Soviet discourse attitude contrasts not with the interpretation of socialism, but with 'unfulfilled dreams' of the 'singing revolution.'

The author's former loyalty to the Soviet system was also thematized in a form of protest, by openly opposing the anti-communist discourse, which considers only resistance attitudes to be acceptable. She described her 'Soviet-friendly' position in

a demonstrative and sarcastic manner, and thus expressed her protest against the negative valuations of such a stance and the defense of her positive identity: 'Always busy at work and social organizations, without having the slightest idea of choosing a path of moral resistance' (Elena [1940] 2011, 24).

Unable to reconcile the conflicting discourse positions (and her two 'ideological selves'), the Elena declared all political systems and ideologies as erroneous, thus relativizing the evaluations of her own and of her father's experiences: 'History will put all the finishing touches. It is just. But ideology is a real prostitute' (Elena [1940] 2011, 12). Elena tried to reconstruct her identity by denying both the past and current political and ideological systems. Therefore, continuity of the *self* through continuity of life experience was constructed only within the sphere of family life, separating this sphere of life from social and ideological identifications. Yet, even when representing this experience, the author paid greater attention to the history of earlier family generations, while the history of her own and of her family's life was presented only fragmentarily. Her family history and memories of her childhood and youth were presented in the narrative mode, while her later experiences, including her work for the Soviet authorities, was only briefly reported. The family story was often intertwined with explicit and implicit protest-triggering argumentation. In family and personal life history, an important role was given to 'fate,' which evidences the author's refusal to be considered in the role of an active subject (Schütze 1983).

The author's confusion in the face of irresolvable controversies, at the same time, reflected her position of helplessness and of being a victim of changing political systems and ideologies. Although this position was not consistently maintained throughout the story, it suggests an important principle, which structured the presentation of the author's experiences, and, to a certain extent, her family's experiences, and was reiterated in the argumentation. For example: 'Nobody cares of you, and never did. No matter whether Utopian socialism ideas were flying in your backyard or it was full of promotional promises carpeted by ideological kites' (Elena [1940] 2011, 25). These feelings were also reflected in the fate *leitmotif* in the family history. Mistrust and detachment from all political systems and ideologies were explicitly formulated in the final summary of the story: 'There were no great disappointments in my life. Maybe it's because I didn't have vain illusions. I am proud of, trust in and rely upon my family only. If you don't have a firm foundation, all ideologies you believed in wear off, all honors and awards turn sour.' (Elena [1940] 2011, 26) However, this summary also expressed contradictions of the construction of the present *self*, as her own family life, though declared as most important, was thematized in a fragmentary way in the story.

The case of Elena illustrated a strategy of representation of past experience under the impact of unambiguous postcommunist stigmatization, when 'stigmatizing aspects of life, although in some cases constituting small fragments of peoples' past lives, became the defining biographical pole, around which all other events were "(re) constructed"' (Miller 2003, 111–112). Elena chose the strategy of defending her own and her family's positive identity by disputing the discourses stigmatizing her family's experience. However, this strategy, in the same way as the direct adjustment to the schemata of the anti-communist discourse, was of little help in representing the ambivalent Soviet experience and integrating it into a positive and coherent *self*. Although the varying and ambivalent contexts of Lithuanian public memory culture

allowed the author to thematize guilt-related experiences more freely and to rely upon Soviet-time models of interpretation not recognized in this culture, they do not help much in reconciling contradictions when trying to construct coherence.

## Conclusion

In contemporary Lithuanian memory culture, especially at the official level, the domination of the stigmatizing Soviet era discourse still persists. However, there are also features indicating the decrease of its stigmatizing power. This is reflected in the ambiguity, vagueness, and ambivalence, characteristic of some forms of this discourse, as well as in the positive and neutral interpretations of Soviet era experiences in autobiographical discourses. This article explored how former Soviet officials of the older generation use autobiographical discourse to integrate their potentially stigmatized experience, shaped by the controversial contexts of Lithuanian memory culture, into a continuous construct of the positive self. The article was based on the analysis of three typical cases selected from 24 life stories written as a response to the 2010–2011 life history competition 'My destiny and the destiny of my kin in the maelstroms of history.'

The analysis demonstrated that older people who have experience of cooperation with the 'system' inevitably have to resist the stigmatization of their experience created by the negative assessments of the Soviet era in the anti-Soviet discourse. The stories of former Soviet officials reflected both the lasting stigmatizing impact of the anti-Soviet discourse, creating discontinuity with their past experience, and the influence of changes of public memory discourse that enable to establish a more continuous relationship with this period. The life stories in question were constructed more or less in the frame of the anti-Soviet discourse and this is also characteristic of the recently written Estonian autobiographies of the older generation (Jõesalu 2005, 2010). In addition, in all stories, strategies of direct and indirect resistance to the anti-Soviet discourse were used, and diverse discursive strategies of normalization were employed. The patterns of 'pragmatic' normalization prevailed in the life stories, in a similar way to the discourse of the memoirs of former '*nomenklatura*' and intelligentsia in Lithuania (Rubavičius 2007a, 2007b) and of former Soviet officials and intelligentsia in Latvia (Kaprans 2011). However, the life stories also showed that there are some new strategies of representation of the potentially stigmatized Soviet era experience that, so far, have been absent from the autobiographical discourse of Lithuanian former Soviet officials. In terms of constructing the continuity of the present *self*, the strategy of critical moral reflection upon the potentially stigmatized Soviet experience helps to thematize this experience more freely and comprehensively, as well as to integrate it into a more coherent present self-image, than the strategies of 'pragmatic' normalization. Still, the strategy of 'critical moral reflection' is far less common than that of 'pragmatic normalization.' Psychological research suggests that the level of adaptation in a democratic society, which includes critical reflection on and learning from past experience, is not easily achievable for a post-totalitarian individual: in this transition, 'one has to relearn or reinvent the flexibility to doubt and ask questions' and 'resume the social responsibility,' as well as 'to unlearn the rigidity and the shrinking of social responsibility' (Bar-On 1999, 255). One of the most important factors influencing the development of more critical attitudes toward controversial

issues of the past seems to be the 'memory work' in public discourses (Alexander 2004; Cohen 2001).

Last but not least, the life stories provide insights into the autobiographical strategies which disclose the ambivalence of life in the Soviet times, thereby contributing to a more liberal thematization of the diverse Soviet experience, and to conciliation of controversies that are difficult to avoid. In both cases of 'pragmatic normalization' controversies between the presented images of the Soviet and post-Soviet 'selves' appear to be more persistent. Revealing ambivalence as an intentional model of interpreting Soviet era experience (together with the critical moral reflection of stigmatized experience) aims to conciliate these controversies. Such findings add an empirical argument to the existing research suggesting that conscious ambivalence in the Lithuanian autobiographical narratives can serve as an effective tool, creating the space for voicing inherently controversial Soviet-time experiences in which 'there is no need to be reticent about guilt' and 'alternatives for guilt-attracting behavior can be identified' (Christophe 2013, 133).

## Notes

1. According to Foucault, some discourses are hegemonic and so rooted that they are invisible, taken for granted, and not scrutinized (Foucault 1998, 12–15).
2. Transitional justice is 'the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.' (UNSG 2010):
3. Hegemonic anti-Soviet discourse is created and supported not only by the right wing political elite; the post-Soviet public includes many former dissidents and political prisoners, many intellectuals and the younger generation, as well as the new elite, among others (Klumbytė 2009, 95).
4. This collection of autobiographies can be found at the Department of Sociology, Vilnius University.
5. The limits of the cohort generations used in the analysis have been defined by the sociologist Sigita Kraniauskienė on the basis of empirical biographical research of generations' identity and the classical theory of 'political generations' by Karl Mannheim (Kraniauskienė 2004). Similar generational limits have also been identified by the Estonian sociologist Aili Aareleid-Tart, comparing the Estonian political and historical timeframe (which is comparable to Lithuania) and the calendar lifetime of a generation. The only difference is that in case of Estonia the *Republican and Stalinist Generations* include only people born before the Soviet time (1920–1939) (Aareleid-Tart 2006, 29; Johnston and Aareleid-Tart 2006).
6. The sample did not include the life stories of people whose activities during the Soviet period could be attributed to 'activist conformism' activities, which the scholars described as a lower level of political conformism; it covers all the items listed above in the definition of conformist activities, except working at the institutional power positions (Klumbys 2009, 55–56). The activist conformism in the form of the Communist Party membership is mentioned most often in the life stories. During the late Soviet period the overall level of public conformism was increasing and the distinction between the activist conformists and the rest of the society remained but still was gradually weakening. With respect to the party membership the 'most important distinction, *us – them* was drawn between communists who were close to the power centres and those who were at a distance from them' (Klumbys 2009, 56), 'belonging to the Communist Party even if condemned, was not considered as betrayal, but as careerism' (Klumbys 2004, 24) and in the post-Soviet discourses was generally not stigmatized. Therefore, the life stories of the 'ordinary communists' or the ones who otherwise participated in the 'activist conformism' undertakings, but did not have higher institutional positions have not been incorporated into the sample.

7. Characterizations of other persons in the life story usually tally with the narrator's self-characterizations – either as direct opposites or as positive identifications (Andrle 2000, 219).
8. Sąjūdis is the political organization which led the struggle for Lithuanian independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
9. In the study conducted in 2001–2002, the memory of Stalinist period among representatives of older generation in local communities of Lithuanian periphery was investigated. The aim of the study was to identify the interpretative patterns of reminiscing of this period and attitudes toward the moral issues of 'memory work' among three groups of representatives of the older generation with different biographical experiences: The formerly repressed people, the people related to the execution of repressions (members of repressive structures or family members of the same generation), and 'ordinary' people not connected directly to both groups. Some former members of the repressive structures totally refused to tell their life stories, some used to omit this period or denied their belonging to the structures. Those who recognized their participation refused to speak about it in detail.
10. In Lithuania the '*istrebiteľ*' battalions were organized in 1944 and in 1945 and renamed as '*liaudies gynėjai*' – 'defenders of people'; they primarily participated in NKVD operations against partisans and in carrying out deportations.

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